

12 OPTIONS FOR THE SCOPE OF THE NEW PRE FIRST WORLD WAR GALLERIES
REGARDING FRONTIER VIOLENCE

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REPORT

The purpose of the Australian War Memorial

The governing legislation of the Australian War Memorial is the *Australian War Memorial Act, 1980*. The full text of the Act is available at

<https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2016C01079>.

The functions of the Australian War Memorial are outlined in Part II, Section 5, which is copied here in full:

(1) The functions of the Memorial are:

(a) to maintain and develop the national memorial referred to in subsection 6(1) of the *Australian War Memorial Act 1962* as a national memorial of Australians who have died:

(i) on or as a result of active service; or

(ii) as a result of any war or warlike operations in which Australians have been on active service;

(b) to develop and maintain, as an integral part of the national memorial referred to in paragraph (a), a national collection of historical material;

(c) to exhibit, or to make available for exhibition by others, historical material from the memorial collection or historical material that is otherwise in the possession of the Memorial;

(d) to conduct, arrange for and assist in research into matters pertaining to Australian military history; and

(e) to disseminate information relating to:

(i) Australian military history;

(ii) the national memorial referred to in paragraph (a);

(iii) the memorial collection; and

(iv) the Memorial and its functions.

(2) The Memorial shall use every endeavour to make the most advantageous use of the memorial collection in the national interest.

The powers of the Memorial are outlined in Part II, Section 6, which is copied here in part:

(1) Subject to this Act, the Memorial has power to do all things necessary or convenient to be done for or in connection with the performance of its functions.

(2) Without limiting the generality of subsection (1) the powers of the Memorial include power:

(d) to collect, and make available (whether in writing or in any other form and whether by sale or otherwise), information relating to Australian military history;

The relevant definitions are given in Part I, Section 3:

active service means active service in war or in warlike operations by members of the Defence Force.

Australian military history means the history of:

(a) wars and warlike operations in which Australians have been on active service, including the events leading up to, and the aftermath of, such wars and warlike operations; and

(b) the Defence Force.

Defence Force includes any naval or military force of the Crown raised in Australia before the establishment of the Commonwealth.

Historical summary of the Australian frontier wars

The term “frontier wars” refers to the wars, conflict, and violence that occurred between Indigenous Australians and British- and Australian-born settlers, British soldiers, and colonial police. These clashes occurred in different regions at different times over more than 140 years, from 1788 until the 1930s.

When British settlers arrived at Sydney in 1788 they treated Australia as if it was *terra nullius*, a Latin term which means “land belonging to no one”, that is, a country with no system of land tenure. The British claimed ownership of the land in the name of the Crown, as it was deemed to be without a sovereign power recognised by European powers. British settlement in Australia was not universally violent, and in some regions there was little conflict, with Indigenous Australians and settlers finding ways to coexist and share resources.

It is impossible to know the exact numbers of casualties caused by frontier conflict, but historians have generally accepted that at least 20,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and as many as 2,500 colonists died in these clashes. Some historians consider this Indigenous death toll to be a conservative figure, and it should be noted that it does not include those who died as a result of introduced diseases.

A map in *An Atlas of Australia's Wars*, published in 2001, depicted 33 sites of significant actions across all states and the Northern Territory as part of frontier violence. Recent research by the University of Newcastle, Australia, titled *Colonial Frontier Massacres¹ in Australia, 1788–1930* records a total of 305 massacres with 8,178 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims and 146 colonists victims of massacres. The map's authors note that their list is not a complete account of frontier massacres in Australia, because some incidents went unrecorded.

¹ A ‘massacre’ is defined in The University of Newcastle project as the deliberate and unlawful killing of six or more defenceless people in one operation.
<https://c21ch.newcastle.edu.au/colonialmassacres/introduction.php>

The frontier wars are significant to Australian national history in two important ways. Firstly, armed conflict and violence were among the means by which British institutions and cultures were established in the six colonies that would federate to become the Commonwealth of Australia. Secondly, the issues surrounding the frontier wars and their aftermath remain part of debates about Australian history and identity.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the belief that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dispossession was the natural process of social Darwinist principles helped entrench the myth that local inhabitants did not resist the takeover of their ancestral lands.

Thus the influential historian Ernest Scott, one of the first scholars devoted to the study of Australian history, stated in 1910, “Australia is the only considerable portion of the world which has enjoyed the blessed record of unruffled peace.” Among academic historians, this view changed little over the next 50 years. In 1968 the anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner coined the phrase “the Great Australian Silence” to describe the way in which historians had written Indigenous Australians out of Australian history, ignoring archival evidence that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples had “fought a very vigorous if unavailing battle” in defence of their lands.

Two early publications to address the issue were Henry Reynolds’ *The Other Side of the Frontier* (1982) and Richard Broome’s chapter on frontier wars in *Australia: Two Centuries of War and Peace* (1988), an Australian War Memorial bicentenary publication.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s the issue of frontier wars was at the centre of what became known as Australia’s History Wars. Most participants in the debate did not question the existence of frontier conflict in Australia but rather focused on the nature and extent of the violence. Aspects of this debate included argument over the use of the term “war”, the estimated numbers killed, and whether frontier massacres amounted to genocide.

There is now widespread acceptance by historians that conflict and violence between settlers and Indigenous Australians was warfare, and can be termed “war”. Australian military historians have used the term “war” to describe frontier conflict for decades, and frontier wars have been incorporated into larger studies of Australian military history. This is

seen in the work of eminent historians such as David Horner, Jeffrey Grey, John Connor, Craig Wilcox, Chris Clark, and John Coates.

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[REDACTED] Emeritus Professor David Horner is a Vietnam veteran and has a distinguished publication record of studies of the Australian Army and Australia's military history generally. The late Professor Jeffrey Grey taught and researched at the Australian Defence Force Academy for nearly thirty years. The late Lieutenant General John Coates was a former Chief of the General Staff, and later authored *An Atlas of Australia's Wars*, which was commissioned by the Australian Defence Force. John Connor, Craig Wilcox, and Chris Clark have all worked at the Australian War Memorial at one point in their careers, and Clark is also a former Army officer.

Military historians have demonstrated that frontier conflict clearly fits the definition of war as outlined by nineteenth-century Prussian military theorist General Carl von Clausewitz: "an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will", or "an act of violence pushed to its utmost limits".

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Military historian John Connor argues that British and Australian colonial governments did not consider these conflicts as wars at the time because "to do so would undermine the basis on which the British had occupied Australia". By declaring Australia to be Crown land, Aboriginal people automatically became British subjects. Sometimes, however, the nature of the fighting was laid bare in official documents. In 1825, Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, Earl Bathurst, informed New South Wales Governor Darling that he was authorised to "oppose force by force, and to repel such [Aboriginal] Aggressions in the same manner as if they proceeded from subjects of any accredited State".

Those in the Australian colonies also understood frontier violence as warfare or military operations. In the 1790s, the second governor of New South Wales, John Hunter, discounted fertile areas on the Hawkesbury River for settlement because they could not be defended against Aboriginal attack. During the 1820s and 1830s, George Arthur, governor of Van Diemen’s Land (Tasmania), referred to “a warfare of the most dreadful description”, and “our continued warfare”. In Queensland in 1852, a newspaper’s editorial noted “the actual state of warfare”. In 1879, another Queensland newspaper declared, “we are today at open war with every tribe of wild blacks on the frontiers of settlement”. Frontier violence was sporadic and drawn-out, but it was recognised at the time as warfare.

In 1992, the landmark High Court decision in the Mabo case overturned the application of the legal doctrine of *terra nullius* to Australia. The implication of this decision is that frontier wars cannot be defined as periods of civil strife between subjects of the British Empire; rather, they were conflicts between colonisers and the traditional owners of the land. Frontier conflict occurred in different regions at different times. The following table (adapted from John Coates, *An Atlas of Australia’s Wars*, pp. 12–13) provides an approximate summary.

Region	Period
Sydney and surrounding districts	1788 – c. 1820
Outback New South Wales	1820 – c. 1840
Tasmania	1804 – c. 1832
Victoria and southern South Australia	c. 1834 – c. 1850
South-western Western Australia	1829 – c. 1850
Brisbane and surrounding districts	1840 – c. 1860
Central Queensland	1850s and 1860s
Northern Queensland	1860s – c. 1900
Northern Western Australia	1880s – 1920s
Northern Territory and central Australia	1880s – 1930s

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The Memorial posted a response to the question “Will the Australian War Memorial tell the story of colonial conflicts?” in a blog post in December 2013. The Memorial published this statement as a media release in January 2014. It reads in part:

“Today, the Memorial’s Council continues to adhere to [Charles] Bean’s concept of honouring the services of the men and women of Australia’s military forces deployed on operations overseas on behalf of the nation.

The “Frontier Wars” were a series of actions that were carried out by British colonial forces stationed in Australia, by the police, and by local settlers. It is important to note that the state police forces used Indigenous Australians to hunt down and kill other Indigenous Australians; but the Memorial has found no substantial evidence that home-grown military units, whether state colonial forces or post-Federation Australian military units, ever fought against the Indigenous population of this country.

The protracted conflict that occurred during the colonial dispossession of Indigenous Australians is a tragic fact of Australia’s history, even if some details remain disputed owing to the paucity and unreliability of the records. The story of Indigenous opposition to European settlement and expansion is one that should be told, but which cannot be told by the Memorial. As defined in the Australian War Memorial Act 1980, the Memorial’s official role is to develop a memorial for Australians who have died on, or as a result of, active service, or as a result of any war or warlike operation in which Australians have been on active service. The definition does not include internal conflicts between the Indigenous populations and the colonial powers of the day.

[Then Memorial director] *Dr Nelson agrees that our nation needs to reflect on the fact that the story of colonial conflicts has not been told in a national institution; however, the Memorial, concerned as it is with Australians serving overseas in peacekeeping operations or in war, is not the appropriate institution in which to do so. The institution best placed to tell those stories is the National Museum of Australia and perhaps some of the state-based institutions most likely to have artefacts or relics that exist from this period in our history. Dr Nelson has proposed to the National Museum of Australia that it consider presenting the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians through the course of the nineteenth century in a comprehensive way. Violent confrontation was one part of a broader history.*"

This is the most recent written statement readily available to the public. It is unfortunate that the title refers to "colonial conflicts", as the Memorial has included colonial wars (the Mahdist (Sudan), Boxer, and Boer Wars) since the 1952 Act. [REDACTED]

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The definition of the Defence Force given in the *Australian War Memorial Act 1980* includes any colonial naval and military force of the Crown raised in Australia before the establishment of the Commonwealth. Naval and military development in Australian colonies followed different historical trajectories. As far as is known, the volunteer militia, artillery, and other units of the second half of the nineteenth century did not take part in frontier violence. Other forces raised in the colonies, however, did take part in frontier violence, and some were clearly military in nature. Below are five historical examples of colonial-raised forces that did take part in frontier violence.

- (1) Macquarie's use of "Associations", New South Wales, 1816
- (2) The Black Line, Van Diemen's Land (present-day Tasmania), 1830
- (3) Battle of Pinjarra, Western Australia, 1834
- (4) Waterloo Creek massacre, New South Wales, 1838
- (5) Native Police, Queensland, 1848–c. 1910

A fuller description of these colonial-raised forces that did take part in frontier violence is at Attachment A.

Frontier wars in the Memorial's galleries

Frontier violence has been acknowledged in the Memorial's galleries at least since 1986. In some cases, this is by reference to connections between frontier violence and soldiers of twentieth-century conflicts. For example, the First World War Gallery features the story of the Aboriginal man Private William Punch, who was the sole survivor of a frontier massacre as an infant. Private Punch served in the AIF, was wounded, and died of illness in 1917. Frontier violence was mentioned in the temporary exhibition *For Country, for Nation*, and the recently closed Soldiers of the Queen gallery.

The temporary exhibition *For Country, for Nation*, recently returned from a three year tour of all states of Australia, made explicit reference to frontier conflict. Many of the Indigenous service people quoted in the exhibition made links between their own service and their ancestors' struggle against British colonisation. These stories are told in the companion volume edited by Dr Lachlan Grant and Michael Bell, published by the Memorial in 2018.

The term "Colonial Galleries" refers to the two galleries that dealt with Australian military history before Federation in 1901. The Soldiers of the Queen gallery gave visitors an overview of the British military in Australia, the New Zealand Wars, and the development of Australian colonial militaries and navies. It featured displays on the two minor overseas deployments of this era: Sudan in 1885 (to which NSW sent troops) and China in 1900 (to which NSW, Victoria and South Australia sent a combined naval contingent). The second colonial gallery, Australia in the South African War, displayed material relating to the largest deployment of colonial troops, to the South African (Boer) War, 1899–1902.

The artwork *Ruby Plains Massacre I* ([AWM2016.718.1](#)) was first displayed in 2019 in the Soldiers of the Queen gallery. The lithograph *Mounted Police and Blacks*, by Godfrey George Mundy, 1852 ([ART50023](#)) and the *Warriors of NSW* ([ART50114](#)) print have been on display in the Colonial Galleries on and off since 1986. These artworks refer to frontier violence in Australia. The Colonial Galleries were demounted in June 2020 in preparation for

Development Project works on the lower level. Both galleries required renewal, with Soldiers of the Queen having opened in the late 1980s, and Australia in the South African War in about 1990.

In June 2017, Dr Thomas Rogers joined the Memorial as a historian. His book *The Civilisation of Port Phillip* (2018) considers the violence of settlement in the state of Victoria in the 1830s and 1840s. His expertise filled a knowledge gap at the Memorial relating to colonial military history and the South African (Boer) War as well as frontier conflict.

In November 2017, the Memorial unveiled a commissioned collaborative painting on the theme “defence of Country” by senior male artists from each of seven art centres in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands of central Australia. *Kulatangu angakanyini manta munu Tjukurpa [Country and Culture will be protected by spears]* ([AWM2017.912.1](#)) hangs in the Orientation Gallery and refers to traditional defence of Country, as well as twentieth- and twenty-first century Indigenous military service.

Over the last few years, the Memorial’s *Wartime* magazine has featured articles on frontier violence in Australia and New Zealand, as well as book reviews of titles on the topic (see, for example, *Wartime* 76, *Wartime* 85, and *Wartime* 89). *Wartime* 97 (Summer 2022) had the theme “Wars of Empire”, and featured two articles on Australian frontier conflict, and one on Australian involvement in the New Zealand Wars.

In November 2020, Dr Stephen Gapps won the inaugural Les Carlyon Literary Prize for his book *The Sydney Wars*. The Memorial awards this prize in memory of the late Les Carlyon, historian and writer and former member of the Council of the Australian War Memorial. The panel of judges considered literary merit as well as the contribution of the work to the understanding of Australian experiences of war and conflict. The judges, including Les’ widow Denise Carlyon, herself a skilled researcher, found that in *The Sydney Wars*, Gapps had “successfully pulled together a complex topic drawing heavily on archival sources”.

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Examples of comments raised include:

What of the Frontier wars? Truly hidden...

While this is not specifically raised as a topic for discussion today – but if we are talking about World Wars I and II, I believe there should be space to talk about the wars that preceded these. To date the Australian War Memorial has not yet properly addressed Australia’s Frontier Wars. I believe that the history of the Frontier Wars in Australia should be the biggest priority area for the redeveloped Australian War Memorial.

I believe that there is strong community support for there to be prominent and appropriate recognition of the tens of thousands of First Nations Australians who died defending their lands. Will there therefore be a dedicated memorial within the AWM to present the truth about the Frontier Wars?

Summary of general enquiries and media commentary

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An example of the sentiments expressed in this correspondence is this Letter to the Editor of *The Canberra Times* 6 June 2021:

Memorial has a duty to tell truth on Frontier Wars²

This week I received my monthly email informing me as to what is on in June at the Australian War Memorial. Prominence was appropriately given to a piece acknowledging and honouring the service and sacrifice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander soldiers. These men were respected and treated as equals by other soldiers, but those who returned were spurned by officialdom and deprived of most of the benefits and recognition granted to other returnees.

² <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7284053/memorial-has-a-duty-to-tell-truth-on-frontier-wars/?cs=14244>

This shameful attitude is still evident, in a more subtle but very real way, in the refusal of the current crop of bureaucrats, pressure groups and politicians to extend the coverage of the memorial to include the very real Frontier Wars that commenced in 1788 and continued right up to a time within living memory – at least 31 and maybe up to 300 Aboriginal people were killed by a police-led gang at Coniston in the NT in August 1928.

If there is to be any progress toward genuine reconciliation between us, all non-Aboriginal Australians must face up to the full truth of our appalling treatment of the original inhabitants of this continent. One way to do that would be to include an honest account of that history as part of the Australian War Memorial, instead of spending \$500 million making it into an obscene showcase of military hardware. It is a memorial, not a museum, and it has a sacred duty to tell the whole truth.

James Gralton, Garran

And this opinion piece by Stan Grant in the *Sydney Morning Herald* 28 March 2019:

What is a nation? A nation is a thing of the soul, a spiritual principle. That's what the 19th century French Historian, Ernest Renan, wrote, in an essay that for me, remains among the most profound words written about nationhood.

A nation, he said, was not defined by race or religion or language or borders; it was a collective will. A nation is ultimately a story; a story that binds people in ways that law cannot.

I have thought about that this past week as people have taken up positions over whether the Australian War Memorial needs an upgrade. It is a lot of money, [topping half a billion dollars](#). More than 80 venerable Australians – from politicians, to historians and authors – have signed [an open letter](#) arguing the money can be better spent.

Undoubtedly so. Other national institutions go poor, not to mention how veterans and their families could benefit from such a cash splurge. But there's something else to consider here, a bigger story about our nation, about what we choose to celebrate or commemorate, what we choose to define us.

I recall the first time I visited the memorial as a young boy and being overwhelmed by the solemnity; I felt like I was in a cathedral – a truly sacred place.

Anzac Day during my lifetime has been revived as a centrepiece of our national story. The ode For the Fallen and its incantation "lest we forget" has become a secular liturgy. Visiting the War Memorial or commemorating Anzac Day, acknowledging the sacrifice and service of Australians does not feel like glorifying war. It is central to national identity.

The world over, conflict forms the bedrock of national myth. Indeed, the very idea of the role of modern nation states emerged out of the end of the Thirty Years War of 17th century Europe and the Treaties of Westphalia.

There are those who would rather the money be spent acknowledging Indigenous Australia – I am all for that – but remember the War Memorial and Anzac Day speak to Indigenous traditions too.

On Anzac Day I can honour the service of my grandfather – a Wiradjuri man – a Rat of Tobruk – and his brother, who died on the fields of France in World War One. Aboriginal men who signed up to fight for our country even when it did not fully recognise their citizenship. I can think of my cousin a serving army officer and a veteran of the Iraq war.

Indeed, Anzac Day connects me to my fellow Australians in ways that our fraught Australia Day celebration of January 26, cannot.

Given this money is to be spent, let's recognise the conflicts in our history that still largely go unspoken. Let's think about how we can acknowledge the wars fought on our soil when courageous Indigenous patriots defended their lands from the British. The frontier wars are our story – all of us. They should form the story of Australia just like Gallipoli, Tobruk, El Alamein, Kokoda.

We still shy away from what the Australian anthropologist, Bill Stanner, called the "secret river of blood" consigned to the "locked cabinet of Australian history". It need not be this way.

This does not need to be a "black armband" litany of horror, but a truth telling that sets us all free.

Wars were fought here and my family was indelibly shaped by them. In the 1820s the Wiradjuri confronted the British settlers – in their eyes no doubt invaders – on the open plains west of the Blue Mountains. The battle of Bathurst was described at the time in the Sydney Gazette as an "exterminating war".

After several years the Wiradjuri survivors trekked over the mountains to sit with the governor at a feast in Parramatta and talked peace. This should not go untold. It must not be about clinging to vengeance and resentment but acknowledging a shared history that could – told honestly and well – bring us closer together, just as the story of Gallipoli has fostered friendship between Turkey and Australia.

I had ancestors who fought the British in Bathurst and a hundred years later their descendants, Wiradjuri men, signed up to fight alongside the sons of settlers as Australians. What a profound story of reconciliation.

It is a sign of the ideological identity-driven politics of our time that there are those who support the War Memorial renovation and embrace our military history as defining the Australian identity but won't recognise the frontier conflicts of our own country and there are those who rail against the Memorial and Anzac Day as valorising war, yet argue passionately to commemorate Aboriginal sacrifice.

Sadly, I don't think it is in Brendan Nelson's plan to spend any of the \$500 million to include the fallen of the frontier wars in the memorial's roll of honour and this week I have been reminded again just how far we are from telling the story of our nation: this "spiritual principle", this "thing of the soul".³

³ [500 million war memorial upgrade should recognise unspoken conflicts \(smh.com.au\)](https://www.smh.com.au/national/500-million-war-memorial-upgrade-should-recognise-unspoken-conflicts-20220818-p5c98g.html)

In April 2021 the Director was interviewed by Ms Rachel Perkins who was making a documentary now titled *The Australian Wars*. The three part documentary focusses on the history of frontier wars in New South Wales, Tasmania, Queensland and Western Australia. The Memorial has seen previews of the documentary which include a small segment of the Director's interview in the third part of the documentary and some external shots of the Memorial. A preview is planned to be held at Australian Parliament House on 12 September 2022 and the first part of the documentary is scheduled to be shown on SBS on 14 September.

National precedent projects

Over the past ten years there have been numerous Museum and cultural sector projects reflecting the increased acknowledgement of frontier wars across Australia. Precedent projects include:

- 2021, Temporary exhibition – Secret Stories of Dyarubbin, State Library of NSW
<https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/dyarubbin>
- 2021, Temporary exhibition – Unsettled, Australian Museum, Sydney
<https://australian.museum/exhibition/unsettled/>
- 2020, Temporary exhibition – Eight days in Kamay, State Library of NSW
<https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/stories/eight-days-in-kamay/>
- 2020, Permanent gallery redevelopment – Hyde Park Barracks, NSW
<https://hydeparkbarracks.sydneylivingmuseums.com.au/story/frontier-violence/>
- 2020, Temporary Exhibition – Endeavour Voyage: The untold stories of Cook and the First Australians, National Museum of Australia
<https://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/endeavour-voyage>
- 2020, – Permanent galleries and schools resource – Cultural Collisions exhibition, Boola Bardip, Western Australian Museum, WA
<https://visit.museum.wa.gov.au/boolabardip/education/cultural-collisions>
- 2019: Temporary Exhibition – Yurtu Ardla, South Australian Museum, SA
<https://www.artlink.com.au/articles/4752/yurtu-ardla/>
- 2018, Temporary exhibition – The National picture: The art of Tasmania's Black War, National Gallery of Australia, ACT <https://nga.gov.au/nationalpicture/>

- 2018, Temporary exhibition – Colony: Frontier wars, National Gallery of Victoria, VIC <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/exhibition/colony-frontier-wars/>
- 2013, Permanent gallery – First Peoples, Museum Victoria, VIC <https://museums victoria.com.au/bunjilaka/about-us/first-peoples/>
- 2012, Schools resource – Contact: Various views, Australian National Maritime Museum, NSW <https://www.sea.museum/learn/school-excursions/teacher-resources/encounters-2020/teacher-resources-primary-3---6/learning-materials---contact>
- 2008, PM writer’s award – *Ochre and Rust: Encounters on Australian Frontiers* by Philip Jones, senior curator Anthropology, South Australian Museum <https://www.adelaide.edu.au/adelaidean/issues/29582/news29603.html>

The Australian Government has announced its commitment to establish a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural precinct in Canberra on the Land Axis at the southern foreshore of Lake Burley Griffin. This cultural precinct will be named Ngurra and will comprise a National Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Centre and a National Resting Place to house and care for repatriated limited provenance ancestral remains and any associated cultural material on their journey back to Country. [REDACTED]

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National Collection relating to frontier violence

The first artwork acquired by the Memorial relating to frontier violence is a print purchased in 1985. It depicts the Slaughterhouse Creek massacre of 26 January 1838. There are currently 62 artworks by 58 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists relating to frontier violence in the collection. National in scope, this collection includes works from every state. Surviving objects relating to frontier violence are very uncommon, and considered desirable by a variety of collectors. This rarity (particularly of provenanced objects, rather than type examples) is reflected by the Memorial’s rather limited collection. The key items held are; REL46702, a pair of gilded brass shoulder scales as worn by members of the Military Mounted Police (NSW) circa 1840, and AWM2018.838.1 and .2, a pair of 19th Century brass breast plates (also referred to as Gorgets or “King plates”) presented to Aboriginal people.

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⁴ Council Paper: Commemoration of Peacekeepers, March 2013, p. 2

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Historical examples of colonial-raised forces
Attachment B: National Collection relating to frontier violence
Attachment C: Reading list – Frontier Wars and Indigenous Service

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Attachment A

Historical examples of colonial-raised forces

The definition of the Defence Force given in the *Australian War Memorial Act, 1980* includes any colonial naval and military forces. Naval and military development in Australian colonies followed different historical trajectories. As far as is known, the volunteer militia, artillery, and other units of the second half of the nineteenth century did not take part in frontier violence. Other forces raised in the colonies, however, did take part in frontier violence, and some were clearly military in nature. Below are five historical examples of colonial-raised forces that did take part in frontier violence.

1) Macquarie's use of "Associations", New South Wales, 1816

In 1800, Governor John Hunter established two "Loyal Associations," – one in Sydney of 50 men, and one in Parramatta of 40 men. These property-owning free men were armed and drilled by garrison soldiers. The leaders and second-in-command of the associations were given "provincial commissions" as captains and lieutenants (commissions were only effective in the colony of New South Wales). Raised in response to the fear of a convict uprising, the incoming Governor Phillip King maintained these volunteer militias, due to his fear of an uprising of Irish republicans, many of whom had recently been transported to the colony as convicts. In May 1801, Governor King declared that Aboriginal people in certain districts could be shot on sight by colonists.

Though raised to combat the threat of republican-inspired convicts, the associations were also deployed in times of increased hostilities between Aboriginal people and settlers. In 1816, Governor Macquarie called for more associations to be raised in the Nepean and Hawkesbury River districts, in response to Aboriginal warriors committing "atrocious Acts of Barbarity on the unoffending Settlers and their Families" in these districts.

2) The Black Line, Van Diemen's Land (present-day Tasmania), 1830

While the colony of Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania) saw skirmishes between settlers and Aboriginal people from the beginning of settlement in 1804, fighting intensified in the mid-1820s with the arrival of more free settlers, who took over the island's central grassy

woodlands to graze sheep and grow crops. In November 1828 the Governor of Van Diemen's Land, George Arthur, declared martial law in the "settled districts" – essentially a wide corridor of land between Hobart and Launceston. Legally, martial law meant that anyone found in the act of sheep-stealing could be apprehended by a civilian. In reality, this meant that settlers could kill Aboriginal people without fear of legal ramification.

Intent on removing Aboriginal people from the settler polity, in October 1830 Arthur developed plans for an operation known as the "Black Line": a line of men (mostly soldiers and convicts) would march south and sweep all the Aboriginal people in the settled districts into the Tasman peninsula. Arthur envisaged that the Aboriginal people would then be allowed to live on the peninsula, where they would no longer be a threat to the colony's sheep flocks.

The scale of the Black Line was enormous. More than two thousand colonists, including military, police, settlers, and a large number of conscripted convicts, took part in the Black Line. This number represented about 10 per cent of the settler population. The colony spent more than £30,000 on the operation, about half of the total revenue for that year. The plan was a failure – after six weeks of marching, the men had captured one boy and one elderly man. Two Aboriginal people were reported killed in the operation. The rest of the Aboriginal population had evaded the line. Since the forces assembled in the line included police, settlers, and conscripted convicts under the command of British regular soldiers from the garrison, this force can be defined as colonial-raised and military.

3) Battle of Pinjarra, Western Australia, 1834

The Governor of Western Australia, Captain James Stirling, RN, led an armed party to a Pindjarup Noongar encampment on the Murray River, 85 km south of Perth, in October 1834. The attack, made in response to the earlier killings of a garrison soldier and a settler's servant by Noongar warriors, resulted in the deaths of one of the settlers' party and an unknown number of Pindjarup people.

The armed party was unusual because it included many of the new colony's officials. The party consisted of the surveyor-general, J.S. Roe; the police superintendent, Theophilus Ellis; a leading settler, Thomas Peel; five mounted police officers; eight soldiers of the British

21st Regiment; and eight civilians. Ellis was speared and later died of his wounds, while a police constable was wounded. Different sources suggest that between 15 and 80 Pindjarup people were killed, and this number probably included women and children. The events at Pinjarra are sometimes referred to as the Pinjarra Massacre due to the disparity in death toll, and the fact that not only warriors were targeted by the settler party.

The armed party was officially sanctioned, included military elements (eight regulars from the garrison), and was a colonial-raised force, raising the question of whether such *ad hoc* forces constitute colonial-raised military forces.

4) Waterloo Creek massacre, New South Wales, 1838

The Waterloo Creek massacre has been depicted in the Memorial's permanent galleries. *Mounted Police and Blacks* (AWM [ART50023](#)), a lithograph drawn by a colonial memoirist, was on display in the Memorial's Soldiers of the Queen gallery from the late 1980s until the gallery was demounted in 2020. The attack depicted in the lithograph is known as the Waterloo Creek (or Slaughterhouse Creek) massacre, an attack carried out by British soldiers in a colonial police unit, the New South Wales Mounted Police, on or about 26 January 1838, 50 years after the first British settlement in New South Wales. The dress uniform shoulder scales of this unit, dating from the 1840s, were on display beneath the lithograph (AWM REL46702). These scales are the earliest known Australian military uniform items to feature Australian native fauna: the kangaroo and emu.

This “collision” between soldiers and warriors, as described by contemporary British sources, occurred when mounted police under Major James Nunn battled with Gomeroi warriors near the Gwydir River in northern New South Wales. A mounted policeman was wounded, and one soldier estimated that 40 to 50 Gomeroi were killed, though the exact death toll is impossible to know with certainty. Three soldiers gave testimony to the official inquiry into the killings; each gave a different version of events. Commanding officer, Major Nunn, saw four or five bodies, but only witnessed the first round of firing. Lieutenant Cobban saw four or five bodies as a result of the first round of firing, and three or four bodies as a result of the second firing. However, he was not with the main body of the men at the second firing, being on the other side of the river. Sergeant John Lee estimated that 40 to 50 people had been killed in the second firing. He was in the thick of the fighting, and his account provides an

insight into the nature of the event: “the confusion was so great and the scrub so thick, that I had enough to do to take care of myself and my horse.” Seeking to explain why the shooting had gone on for so long, he testified: “it was impossible for the party to act in a body; every man had in fact to act for himself.”

5) Native Police, Queensland, 1848–c. 1910

Native Police forces were formed in several colonies in the nineteenth century. Based on the sepoy armies of the British Empire in India, Native Police forces consisted of white officers and Aboriginal troopers. Troopers were deployed far from their traditional Countries, so it is incorrect to say that troopers were deployed “against their own people”. The Native Police force of Queensland was the largest, operated for the longest time (at least 50 years), and played a major role in the dispossession of Aboriginal people. In other colonies, native police forces were usually established after settlers had moved into an area. In Queensland, however, the Native Police was often the first representative of the settler polity met by Aboriginal people. Queensland’s Native Police force was infamous for its brutality, which some Queensland settlers remarked on at the time. In 1861, for example, one Queensland politician accused the force of pursuing “a wholesale system of extermination”.

Historians have argued that the Native Police force should be understood as a military force. The Governor of New South Wales initially gave instructions to raise the Queensland force in 1848 (Queensland became a separate colony in 1859). In these instructions, the governor called for a “Corps of Native Police” to be raised and deployed “beyond the Settled Districts”, that is, along the frontier between settlers and traditional-living Aboriginal peoples. The term “Corps” in official instructions suggests a military bearing. The force patrolled from temporary camps that regularly moved northwards and westwards as settlers pushed further into the new colony. With the force operating at the frontline of settlement, rather than following the trails of settlers, the use of temporary patrol bases similarly suggests a military force.

Attachment B

National Collection relating to frontier violence

Art Collection

The first artwork acquired by the Memorial relating to frontier violence is a print purchased in 1985. It depicts the Slaughterhouse Creek massacre of 26th January 1838 which occurred when New South Wales Military Mounted Police, under the command of Major James Nunn, set out in response to violence on the Liverpool Plains. The purchase was supported by the Australian *War Memorial Acts, 1952 and 1980* which both included reference to pre-Federation military history. Since then a small holding of colonial depictions of frontier violence has been actively sought.

In 2009 of more than 35,000 artworks in the collection only 11 were created by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists. Since then 138 artworks by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists have been added to the collection through an active and strategic program of acquisition. This program has included the management of 9 First Nations Service Commissions, 7 of which provided core stories for the Memorial's temporary and touring exhibition *For Country, For Nation*, in 2016. The program has also seen (from 2015) the acquisition of artworks that interpret the subject of frontier violence including the purchase of *Ruby Plains Massacre 1* a painting by senior Kukatja/Wangkajunga artist Rover Thomas about the "killing times" in the East Kimberley.

In 2016 the Memorial approached Anangu Elders of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands to request a commission of a major new painting to explore the themes of connection to Country, protecting Country and keeping Country safe. *Kulatangu angakanyini manta munu Tjukurpa* [Country and Culture will be protected by spears] at the time was the largest collaborative work produced on APY Lands and involved over 40 male artists of all ages. The aim of the commission was to prominently locate Aboriginal Australian history and culture as central to the national story as told at the Memorial.

In 2018 Dr Brendan Nelson, then Director, instructed the Memorial's Art section to locate a collection of important paintings by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists that address

and depict frontier and colonial violence. Wally Caruana, former Senior Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art at the National Gallery of Australia, was contracted to undertake research to identify a number of key artworks in private collections and potential commissions that refer to significant dates, events and sites of frontier conflict. In Caruana's report priority was given to works by artists who have a direct connection with the event: descendants of victims and survivors of the frontier violence.

Following review in 2018 the subject of 'frontier violence' was added to the Memorial's Collection Development Plan 2019-2022. The Art section has continued to acquire and commission frontier war works with a dedicated budget. Artist Punata Stockman Nungarrayi has completed a painting commission drawing on her family history in relation to the Coniston Massacre in 1928. Punata's father, Kumuntjayi (Billy) Stockman Tjapaltjarri (Anmatyerr 1927-2015), was a baby in a coolamon when his group was attacked and his mother and uncle were shot by Constable Murray's revenge party.

As of June 2021 there are 62 artworks by 58 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists relating to frontier violence in the collection. National in scope, this collection includes works from every state. The interpretation of frontier violence in the development of the art collection has not been taken in a literal military sense, or drawn upon specific military histories. Instead allowing this theme to be interpreted in the context of the artist/s' own Country, cultural history and ancestry. Collecting has also been undertaken to allow the impact of colonisation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's dispossession to be acknowledged throughout the galleries not just in the colonial period.

Military Heraldry and Technology Collection

Surviving objects relating to frontier violence are very uncommon, and considered desirable by a variety of collectors. This rarity (particularly of provenanced objects, rather than type examples) is reflected by the Memorial's rather limited collection. The key items held are; REL46702, a pair of gilded brass shoulder scales as worn by members of the Military Mounted Police (NSW) circa 1840, and AWM2018.838.1 and .2, a pair of 19th Century brass breast plates (also referred to as Gorgets or "King plates") presented to "Sailor Boy, Chief of the Ural Tribe" and "Billy Goat, King of Bumbarlo" acquired in 2018. Neither plate has a definite story, although "Bumbarlo" is thought to refer to the area now known as Bombala in

the Monaro region of NSW. “Sailor Boy, Chief of the Ural Tribe” is believed to be the Indigenous man Ural, who in 1875 assisted the South Australian Government vessel *Flying Cloud* to navigate the Roper River in the Katherine region of what is now the Northern Territory. This voyage was undertaken in support of a punitive expedition against the indigenous population following the killing of two white men at Roper Bar in June of that year.

Other than these few provenanced items, the Memorial’s collection of firearms relating to the colonial and pre-Federation periods contains representative examples of weapons such as the Baker Rifle, the Constabulary Pattern 1840 Carbine and the various service-pattern muskets and rifles used by the armed forces of the Australian colonies. There is, however, no representation of Indigenous weaponry (ie spears, clubs, shields or firearms) of the period.

Research Centre Collection

The Research Centre holds limited material relating to the frontier wars in Australia, with the most significant holdings being books that address the subject in part or full and a number of theses. This is because prior to 2018, the Research Centre did not collect material relating to the frontier wars. Nonetheless, the Research Centre library includes authoritative works on the subject matter such as *An atlas of Australia’s wars* (2006) by John Coates (R 355.00994), and *The Australian frontier wars, 1788-1838* (2002) by John Connor (355.00994 C752). The Private Records collection holds an interesting contemporaneous account of a mass poisoning of a group of Indigenous Australians in Adelaide River, Northern Territory, in PR03991, the collection of Robert Henry Catlin (Private, b. 1988 – d. 1915). Catlin wrote this in a letter dated 6 April 1914, prior to his enlistment, while living in the area. While Catlin writes sympathetically about the incident, he seems to assume the poisoning was an accident. The repeated use of poison against Indigenous Australians makes this seem unlikely. Another Private Record, PR86/062, the collection of Maurice ‘Bunny’ Austin (Brigadier, DSO, OBE) includes research material relating to the frontier wars. MSS1767 is John Connor’s Masters thesis ‘Armed conflict between Aborigines and British Armed Forces in Southeast Australia, 1788-1831’ (1999), examining ‘traditional Aboriginal warfare’, how the British fought on the frontier, and the Aboriginal development of ‘Australian frontier warfare’, and forerunner to his influential 2002 book, mentioned above. MSS1799 and MSS1817 are

two theses written by John F McMahon. MSS1799 is his 1995 Masters thesis, 'The British Army and Counter-insurgency campaign in Van Diemens Land with particular reference to the Black Line', and MSS1817 is his 2004 PhD thesis 'External and Internal Security in the Australian Colonies from their Founding to the End of the Macquarie Era', covering the period 1788 to 1821 and including discussion of aggression between colonial settlers and Indigenous Australians.

Photographs, Film and Sound Collection

The Photographs, Film and Sound collection does not currently hold any material directly relating to frontier conflict.

Attachment C

Suggested reading and viewing on the topics of frontier violence and Indigenous military service

Films

Coniston, dir. Francis Jupurrula Kelly and David Batty, 2013, 55 min. Part documentary, part dramatisation, this film tells the story of the 1928 Coniston massacre from Central Australian Aboriginal perspectives.

First Australians, dir. Rachel Perkins, 2009, seven 60-minute episodes. Details the history of contact between Indigenous peoples and settlers.

Jandamarra's War, dir. Mitch Torres, 2011, 55 min. Dramatised documentary telling the story of Jandamarra, an Aboriginal resistance leader in northern Western Australia during the 1890s.

National studies

Attwood, Bain, and S.G. Foster (eds). *Frontier Conflict: The Australian experience*. National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 2003.

Broome, Richard. "The Struggle for Australia: Aboriginal–European Warfare, 1770–1930", in Michael McKernan and Margaret Browne (eds), *Australia: Two Centuries of War and Peace*. Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1988, pp. 92–120.

Coates, John. *An Atlas of Australia's Wars*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne, second edition, 2006, pp. 4–12.

Connor, John. *The Australian Frontier Wars, 1788–1838*. University of NSW Press, Sydney, 2002.

Reynolds, Henry. *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia*. Penguin, Melbourne, 1981.

Reynolds, Henry. *Forgotten War*. NewSouth, Sydney, 2013.

Reynolds, Henry. *Truth-Telling: History, Sovereignty and the Uluru Statement*. NewSouth, Sydney, 2021.

Stockings, Craig, and John Connor (eds.). *Before the Anzac Dawn: A Military History of Australia to 1915*. NewSouth, Sydney, 2013.

Local studies

Tasmania

Boyce, James. *Van Diemen's Land*. Black Inc., Melbourne, 2009.

Brodie, Nick. *The Vandemonian War: The Secret History of Britain's Tasmanian Invasion*. Hardie Grant, Sydney, 2017.

Clements, Nicholas. *The Black War: Fear, Sex and Resistance in Tasmania*. University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 2014.

New South Wales

Gapps, Stephen. *The Sydney Wars: Conflict in the Early Colony, 1788–1817*. New South, Sydney, 2018.

Gapps, Stephen. *Gudyarra: The First Wiradyuri War of Resistance — The Bathurst War, 1822–1824*. New South, Sydney, 2021.

Lydon, Jane and Ryan Lyndall. *Remembering the Myall Creek Massacre*. New South, Sydney, 2018.

Milliss, Roger. *Waterloo Creek: The Australia Day Massacre of 1838, George Gipps and the British Conquest of New South Wales*. McPhee Gribble, Sydney, 1992.

McBride, Laura and Dr. Mariko Smith. *Unsettled*. Australian Museum Trust, Sydney, 2021.

Victoria

Rogers, Thomas J. *The Civilisation of Port Phillip: Settler Ideology, Violence, and Rhetorical Possession*. Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2018.

Critchett, Jan. *A "Distant Field of Murder": Western District Frontiers, 1834–1848*. Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1990.

Queensland

Bottoms, Timothy. *Conspiracy of Silence: Queensland's Frontier Killing Times*. Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2013.

Richards, Jonathan. *The Secret War: A True History of Queensland's Native Police*. University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 2008.

Western Australia

Owen, Chris. *"Every Mother's Son is Guilty": Policing and the Kimberley Frontier of Western Australia, 1882–1905*. University of Western Australia Press, Perth, 2016.

Green, Neville. *Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia*. Focus Education Services, Perth, 1984.

South Australia

Foster, Robert, and Amanda Nettelbeck. *Out of the Silence: South Australia's Frontier Wars in History and Memory*. Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 2012.

Nettelbeck, Amanda, and Robert Foster. *In the Name of the Law: William Willshire and the Policing of the Australian Frontier*. Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 2007.

Northern Territory

Bradley, Michael. *Coniston*. UWA Publishing, Perth, 2019.

Lewis, Darrell. *A Wild History: Life and Death on the Victoria River Frontier*. Monash University Publishing, Melbourne, 2012.

Reid, Gordon. *A Picnic with the Natives: Aboriginal–European Relations in the Northern Territory to 1910*. Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1990.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander military service

Beaumont, Joan, and Allison Cadzow (eds). *Serving our Country: Indigenous Australians, War, Defence and Citizenship*. NewSouth, Sydney, 2018.

Cadzow, Allison, and Mary Anne Jebb (eds). *Our Mob Served: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories of War and Defending Australia*. Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2019.

Gordon, Harry. *The Embarrassing Australian: The Story of an Aboriginal Warrior*. Lansdowne Press, Melbourne, 1962. [Biography of Capt. Reg Saunders, MBE].

Grant, Lachlan, and Michael Bell (eds). *For Country, For Nation: An Illustrated History of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Military Service*. Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 2018.

Hall, Robert A. *The Black Diggers: Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in the Second World War*. Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989.

Hall, Robert A. *Fighters from the Fringe: Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders recall the Second World War*. Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1995.

Jackomos, Alick, and Derek Fowell. *Forgotten Heroes: Aborigines at War, from the Somme to Vietnam*. Victoria Press, Melbourne, 1993.

Kartinyeri, Doreen. *Ngarrindjeri Anzacs*. Aboriginal Family History Project, South Australian Museum and Raukkan Council, Adelaide, 1996.

Riseman, Noah. *Defending Whose Country? Indigenous Soldiers in the Pacific War*. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln (Nebraska, USA), 2012.

Riseman, Noah, and Richard Trembath. *Defending Country: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Military Service since 1945*. University of Queensland Press, 2016.

Scarlett, Philippa. *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Volunteers for the AIF: The Indigenous Response to World War One*. Indigenous Histories, Macquarie, ACT, fourth edition, 2018.