Barriers and Bastions:

Fortified frontiers and white and black tactics

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A. On ground realities of Aboriginal wars of resistance

For over 40 years, there have been numerous forays into the topic of Australian frontier violence and Aboriginal resistance. The works of Henry Reynolds, Ray Evans, Bill Thorpe and Timothy Bottoms all highlight the vast extent of frontier violence. Recent studies by Robert Orsted-Jensens and Ray Evans now evidence that the toll was much higher than we fathomed – perhaps in the range of 65,000 casualties for the Colony of Queensland alone.[1]

Despite this, debate still rages over the exact nature of these conflicts.[2] Part of the problem seems to be that Aboriginal resistance does not readily match the usual understandings of guerrilla warfare.[3]

This essay takes the unusual stance of tackling the dilemma from the 'bottom up' - exploring how frontier violence and resistance wars were actually *experienced and 'lived'* by both whites and Aboriginals, and then attempting some reconstruction of the 'rules' by which it operated. The purpose of this to arrive at a more accurate understanding of frontier warfare, and to demonstrate its *reality* - which is often lost in the on-going debates about its nature and severity.

B. A fortified Australian landscape?

The period of frontier violence in southern Queensland totaled around 35 to 40 years, which raises the question of how this era was endured 'on the ground' – as an on-going, daily reality - and whether it found some sort of expression in the material culture and social life of time. Mirani Litster and Lyn Wallis have noted the difficulty in locating ruins or any other material remains of resistance conflict and massacres. [4] On the other hand, Nicholas Gruguric has built an entire thesis around the range of 1840s-1880s defensive architecture that can still be seen on the former South Australian and Northern Territory frontiers.[5] Dr Catherine Keyes from the University of Queensland's Architecture and Environment Centre is currently

[1] See Robert Orsted-Jensen, 2011, *Frontier History Revisited – Colonial Queensland and the 'History War,'* Lux Mundi: Brisbane

[2] Jeffery A. Grey, 1999,'The Military and the Frontier, 1788-1901,' in Jeffery Grey, *A Military History of Australia* New York: Cambridge University,' 31

[3] Grey 1999,'The Military and the Frontier, 1788-1901: 25

[4] Mirani Litster & Lynley A Wallis, **'**Looking for the proverbial needle? The archaeology of Australian colonial frontier massacres,' *Archaeology in Oceania* Oct 2011, Vol.46: 3, pp.105-117.

[5] Nicholas K Gruguric, Fortified Homesteads: The Architecture of Fear in Frontier South Australia and the Northern Territory, ca. 1847–1885 *Journal of Conflict Archaeology* Vol.4: 1-2 Feb 2008, pp.59-85.

investigating the same phenomenon across northern Australia, finding some evidence for a connection between the preference for houses on stilts and the need to survey surroundings in case of Aboriginal attack.[6]

In other words, Australia undeniably had fortifications erected specifically to counter Aboriginal incursions. Bourke began as *Fort Bourke* – a stockade the explorer Mitchell built expressly against possible Aboriginal attack. There was similarly at one time a Fort Dundas, Fort Wellington and Fort Essington in the Northern Territory; Fort Richmond and Fort Cooper in Central Queensland,[7] and Somerset and Fort Coen in Northern Queensland.

Nicholas Gruguric argued that such structures tell us more about settler fears and "myths" of Aboriginal aggression than they do about actual attacks,[8] yet we know from early accounts that places such as Fort Coen – a stout log hut - served as "fortified headquarters" for parties of prospectors. Fort Coen was not only manned (in this case, by four people) but witnessed the death of white parties, "…a third man escaping… to the fortified hut at Coen, pursued for some distance by scores of natives."[9]

Aside from forts, it seems that domestic architecture of the frontier was often defensive. Indeed, where settlers recount the structure of their early homes, they repeatedly describe how they fortified their homes "against Aboriginal inroads." Invariably they describe defensive elements such as barricaded doors and loop-holes for positioning guns. We strike this everywhere from Kyogle (north NSW)[10] to Scone;[11] and from Ipswich[12] to near Toowoomba where John Campbell built a stone kitchen "doubling as a blockhouse in case of

[6] Catherine Keyes, per comm, Aug 2014
[7] *The Queenslander*, 14 April 1932 p 4
[8] Nicholas K Gruguric, Fortified Homesteads: The Architecture of Fear in Frontier South Australia and the Northern Territory, ca. 1847–1885.
[9] Around the Campfire: the Old Life, *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 15 February 1951 p 7
[10] A Tale of Old Wyangarie Blacks on the Warpath, *The Richmond River Herald and Northern Districts Advertiser* 26 September 1930 p 1

[11] A portion of "Bell's Line" and an Early Australian Family Belmont, Corinda, Pickering and Milgarra Estates *The Scone Advocate* 23 July 1954 p 6

[12] Domestic Intelligence Ipswich. *The Moreton Bay Courier* 23 August 1851 p 2 There were also sentry boxes at Ipswich when the town was founded – see Leon Sattherswait, *Ipswich Heritage Study Vol. 1 Final Report* Ipswich Heritage Consultancy Team Uni of Qld Archaeological Services Unit 1992 Repot No 200, 2-8.

attack."[13] Even in Brisbane, the stately Newstead House (Breakfast Creek) that was the Colonial Resident's home (Captain Wickham's) had a subterranean area ("hidden room") excavated into the ground "just in case there was trouble with the blacks."***[14]***

C. Settler and Aboriginal fears in southern Queensland

Today, with vast urban sprawl across southern Queensland and a minute Aboriginal population, it is almost impossible to imagine why the region's first settlers would be so anxious. This has made the rationale and context of frontier violence puzzling to modern Australians. It may also explain why it is sometimes dismissed as a myth.

Reconstructing the world of frontier warfare needs to take into account that between the 1840s and 1850s, all of southern Queensland had only 1000 to 2000 European inhabitants – far outnumbered by the Aboriginal population. The latter stood between 3000 and 8000 according to Simpson, Eipper and other contemporaries. In other words, from the 1840s to 1860s, Brisbane was a small town in a sea of Aboriginal groups. Outlying stations or settlements – especially in what is now the Sunshine Coast - were very few and very scattered.

The testimony of early settlers who lived through this period such as Chas Melton was that these were the "hungry Forties" and "the fighting Fifties"[15] on account of the numerous "disabilities" settlers endured from "the blacks." Melton felt the peaceful, dainty world of his old age (1890s-1910s) was surreal compared to the traumatic, rough-and-ready environment of his youth, where the "principal topic of conversation" was "the depredations of the blacks"

[13] Maurice French , M., 1989, *Conflict on the Condamine: Aborigines and the European Invasion: a history of the Darling Downs Frontier Vol.1* Toowoomba : Darling Downs Institute, 97

[14] Anon, *Early Brisbane History Vol. 1*, Zillmere Local Studies mss, n/d p. 20.

[15] 'Nut Quad' Depredations of the Fifties, *The Brisbane Courier* 8 July 1911 p 13

and "thousands" of Aborigines inhabited the "wilds" of what is now the Pine and Caboolture districts.[16]

Certainly it seems that in this 'wild west' society, whites often avoided going out at night out of fear of Aboriginal attack,[17] or halted at the nearest hotel if the sun was low "as the blacks were often bad."[18] It was a world where even women practiced regularly at targets with firearms;[19] and where most homes had a "small armament of repeating rifles and revolvers,"[20] which residents spent much of their free time servicing:

> (There was)…. always the danger of being speared by some blackfellow ambushed under cover, so we had to be ready to protect ourselves and try and keep our powder dry. If it got wet in the weapon it had to be withdrawn and dried in the sun, and the gun, rifle or revolver thoroughly dried before it was replaced. We spent much time making shot and bullets, cleaning up the old muzzle loaders and shooting at marks. We found the long barreled colt revolver the most reliable. We made the shot with a bit of iron about a foot long with a small hole in the end made from an old saddle tree, using the melted lead from tea chests, dropped through the hole into a bucket of water.[21]

On the Sunshine Coast and Wide Bay "no one (felt) safe without a rifle or revolver,"[22] and it was common – as elsewhere on the frontier – for settlers to take turns holding all-night vigils. Pioneer women such as Mrs Reid of Gayndah recalled she "never slept (fully) one night out of it during that time"[23]

Aboriginal people undoubtedly experienced many more times this level of anxiety, but sadly their record – being largely oral – is mostly lost. However, in the early 1980s, elder June Bond retold the story one of her elders – Mrs McGowan – told her of how difficult life was when she was young (1870s-1880s?):

> …..around the North Coast area, there used to be a lot of shooting. That was one thing that Mrs McGowan told me that they tried to get away from. When they left there,

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[16] When Woolloongabba was Wattle Scented – Old Pioneers and Predatory Blacks, *The Brisbane Courier* 18 June 1921 p 16

[17] Woman's World. Gold Wedding, *The Brisbane Courier* 6 February 1919 p 11

[18] Early Brisbane in the Fifties and Sixties – an Interesting Reminiscence, *Brisbane Courier* 18 January 1919: 12.
[19] Rosa Campbell-Praed, 1902, *My Australian Girlhood: sketches and impressions of bush life* - "Extract autobiography" in *The Penguin Anthology of Australian Women's Writing*, Penguin Australia 1988, 352
[20] A. C., Twenty Years Ago, *The Queenslander (Brisbane)* 19 December 1885 p 4
[21] Mr and Mrs Marmaduke Curr and Family, Pioneers on Burdekin. Abingdon and elsewhere. *Townsville Daily Bulletin* 11 March 1931 p 9
[22] Hector Holthouse, *Gympie Gold* Angus & Robertson, 1973, Sydney 5
[23] A Burnett Pioneer, *Maryborough Chronicle, Wide Bay and Burnett Advertiser* 28 July 1916 p 4

> people were being shot out for land. She walked her and her grandmother from Nambour right up to the back of Barambah Station and when she got there they met my own grandfather and his brother-in-law.[24]

In the Gulf Country, where frontier conflict is closer to living memory (as late as the 1910s-1920s), these years are called *Wanngala* ("Wild Times"). Elders describe how their parents needed to be on constant alert to dash into areas of thick vegetation, and utilized controlled fires to signal each other or cover their movements.[25]

D. Defensive elements in early homesteads and huts

In 1842, Governor Gipps imposed a 50 mile limit radius around Brisbane. Any holdings beyond this point, and especially the buildings erected beyond this area, were effectively illegal and occupying the wilds – the "unsettled" Aboriginal territory.

Governor Gipps' rule was eventually ignored, but squatters' runs were certainly the outposts of settlement. By default, they were bastions and fortresses of some sort. A quick perusal of the earliest recollections describing these "first buildings" between north Brisbane and Wide Bay makes it clear that they often operated as the armed forefront of settlement. Their windows were more akin to "port holes" that shut like the hatch of a ship.[26] Their walls were generally pierced with augur holes to shoot "the blacks if they made a raid."[27] At Helidon and on the Darling Downs, homesteads were generally built with their back to a hill (apparently to give good vantage for sighting and shooting), enclosed by a ring fence, and equipped with some sort of alarm system such as gunshot signals, or lights and boards wired for signalling, [28] and most of all bell towers. Both William Draper towards Goodna and James

[24] http://library.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au/sitePage.cfm?code=oral-bond-transcript
[25] David Samuel Trigger, *Whitefella Comin': Aboriginal Responses to Colonialism in Northern Australia* Cambridge: Cambridge University 1992: 17.
26 Domestic Intelligence Ipswich, *The Moreton Bay Courier* 23 August 1851 p 2

27 Nut Quad The Contemplation of Contrasts, *The Brisbane Courier* 8 July 1911 p 13

[28] William Draper, The Hermit Convict, *Brisbane Courier* 18 Feb 1871: 3.

Tyson on the Darling Downs describe the latter. [29] Tyson gives the impression these were once fairly common:

> Bells were erected at many isolated homesteads. The jingler was rigged at the top of a high pole, like a school bell. During the day, the station hands would be scattered about, some a good distance away; but there was always someone on watch. When there was danger of an attack he rang the bell, and all hands downed tools and rushed to defend the place. Sometimes it was necessary to ring the bell at night, but it was never used otherwise than as a call to arms.[30]

Station owners also felt compelled to put up beacons on nearby mountains to give warning when Aborigines were about. This was to warn stockmen and shepherds to keep cattle and sheep out of their way.[31]

According to its creator, the first structure in Kin Kin was built as "a citadel":

> We built it of slabs…. Taking into consideration the treacherous reputation of the natives…. we built it very strongly, and loop-holed the doubly-thick slabs, so that, should occasion require it, we might be enabled to shut ourselves up in it as in a citadel, and defend it against their attacks.[32]

Hector Holthouse similarly describes the first Imbil homestead as consisting of "round timber logs… top and bottom saplings… with a lot of big auger holes… to shoot through if the blacks made a raid."[33] Yandina Creek Station also once had auger holes.

Most of the early homesteads occupied a raised position, and were cleared all round. This was a deliberate measure, as this account (from the Northern Rivers NSW but still pertinent) explains:

> The manager of Wooroowoolgen, of the Richmond River, while rising along a rise one morning; chanced to look up … Perched like crows among the limbs (of the trees), were a score of naked blacks. All were armed, some sitting and some standing, and every one as still and quiet as an ebony statue. What their object was he did not

[29] William Draper, The Hermit Convict, *Brisbane Courier* 18 Feb 1871: 3; E.S. Sorenson, 'On Darling Downs – Blacks and 'Bell Stations' – Stories of James Tyson, *The Australasian (Melbourne)*, 15 February 1936, p 4

[30] E. S. Sorensen, On the Darling Downs: Blacks and Bell Stations – Stories of James Tyson, 1936, p.4

[31] N. MacQueen, *Back Creek and Beyond: Millmerran's story of change 1881-1981* Toowoomba: Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education 1981, 16-18.

[32] 'Beseiged' *The Queenslander* 6 December 1919, p.5

[33] Hector Holthouse, *Gympie Gold* Angus & Robertson, 1973, Sydney: 5-6

> stop to enquire. He rode straight home, and gave the order for the immediate ring barking of several hundred acres around the homestead.[34]

What is worth noting is not only the frequency and military foresight of these bastions, but the fact that their heavily fortified nature was considered the *common and essential state of affairs* at this time. In fact, Hector Holthouse tells us that "most" early homesteads in the early Mary Valley and Sunshine Coast were fortified.[35] A description from the time (1851) from Ipswich notes barricaded hut doors porthole-like windows which – the author casually adds – "are *usually made in huts on the frontiers*, for the purpose of resisting the assaults of the natives" (emphasis mine).[36] Equally, Mrs Ogilvie near Gayndah described how homesteads "in those days" were generally "loop-holed for emergencies of this nature" (i.e. Aboriginal attack). She too described barred doors and barricaded windows.[37]

As noted earlier, Nicholas Gruguric was of the opinion that this abundance of fortified huts merely indicated the level of white paranoia, which he viewed as extreme and unwarranted, yet the settlers themselves record putting their forts to active use. For example, the 'architect' of the Kin Kin 'citadel' soon had a number of incidents which he graphically details:

> I took aim through one of the loop-holes and fired. It so happened that two of the blacks were in the line of fire, one behind the other. My bullet thus passed through both of them, and they fell dead on the spot. Before I could seize another weapon, the third savage had "treed." and, although I let drive at him twice, he dodged from tree to tree, and got away into the scrub. After this I had peace until the evening, when the whole mob sallied forth with the evident, intention of attacking me on all sides at once.[38]

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[34] E S Sorensen, The Romance of Old Homesteads, *The Richmond River Herald and Northern Districts Advertiser* 9 Feb 1912 p 8

[35] Hector Holthouse, *Gympie Gold*: 5

[36] Domestic Intelligence – Ipswich, *The Moreton Bay Courier* 23 August 1851 p 2

[37] Death of an Old Identity: the Late Mrs Andrew Ogilvie, *Maryborough Chronicle, Wide Bay and Burnett Advertiser* 30 October 1914 p 8

[38] 'Beseiged' *The Queenslander* 6 December 1919, p.5

E. Squatters as the 'first line of defense' (or offence?)

When, after repeated and unsuccessful attempts (repelled by Aboriginal hostility), the first house was finally built in Sandgate, it was on a hill and lined with gun slots. Its owner (Mr Louden) slept with his gun and shot at any Aboriginal who came too close.[39] Soon after, the Native Police Barracks was built down the beach. When the first families came to settle Bald Hills, they likewise took up a raised area (for vantage), and recalled that they had equipped their embattled huts:

> …(with) apertures for directing fire against the blacks …(and) in sight of each other for fear of blacks molesting the settlers, who kept clear of the dense scrub …. for the same reason.[40]

Such measures imply that squatters had been inadvertently given the job of conquest and defence. In the example above, the head of police regularly rode out to inspect how the embattled Bald Hill settlers were surviving – promising them back-up from the Native Police if required.[41]

It is no coincidence that in 1844, the *Sydney Morning Herald* described all the stations east of the Dividing Range in Queensland as being "like besieged fortresses"[42] on account of their on-going engagement in the worst affrays with Aboriginal warriors. In fact, the pioneers beyond Brisbane could be regarded the unpaid forces of conquest, bereft of uniforms or medals.

When Sorensen surveyed the oldest homesteads between northern NSW and central Queensland around 1910, he found this brutal task of the first pioneers was commonly acknowledged and still quite visible wherever he went:

> In the rich districts, where the aborigines were numerically strong, nearly every homestead has its history of sieges, of raids and robberies, murders and dispersals. Here and there the graves of murdered men and women are pointed out to the visitor; at some places, like Hornet Bank, on the Dawson, there is a little cemetery. 'And what

39 German Station from 1838 Old Memories, *The Queenslander* 10 January 1925 p 11

40 "Wyampa," The Genesis of Bald Hills, *Courier Mail* 12 May 1934 p10
41 Moreton Bay, *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal* 14 November 1857 p 3
42 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 Sept 1844, p.2

> happened,' asks 'the visitor, 'after the murders?' A long mound, heaped over with dead wood, is shown him. It is the grave of slaughtered blacks. I was shown one near Killarney, on the Warrego, where 57 had been buried — all thrown into one big trench.[43]

What brings this reality particularly home is the fact that the Commissioner for Lands – Dr Simpson – who was in charge of the Border Police – designated the heads (squatters) of new stations as his supervisors for district policing. He took pride in one he considered "the strongest Bench in the District" for police jurisdiction. He reported that for the Darling Downs alone he had five Border Police horses transferred from policing to what he called "ordinary" constabulary, directly attached to other squatter-run 'Benches' at Ipswich and Cressbrook.[44]

An even more frank admission about the role of armed squatters in such 'policing' comes from Bill Gray, an early settler of the MacIntyre and Lockyer districts. Around 1920, he recalled:

> These battles (with Aboriginals) have principally been with the settlers; it is very seldom that soldiers or police have been brought into action; and from the blacks' method of warfare, it is difficult for them to do so, and in all new districts there seldom is protection from government till the third year….Every man here is obliged to be armed, and never thinks himself perfectly safe unless he is, *so that actually we are in a state of silent warfare in all new districts, and the colonial government are perfectly aware of this* (emphasis mine)...[45]

Gray also provides us with some notion of how squatters organised themselves to conduct their progressive invasion of the surrounding countryside:

> …Those stations were separated about ten miles from each other, for it was the custom to form their homesteads close together for protection for one another from attacks of the blacks… Whenever the blacks committed any murder or killed any cattle, there was word passed along from station to station, and the stockmen would

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[43] E S Sorensen, The Romance of Old Homesteads, *The Richmond River Herald and Northern Districts Advertiser* 9 Feb 1912 p 8

[44] *The Simpson Letterbook:* 12 Feb 1847; 26 Feb 1847.

[45] W Gray, 'The Early Days of the Big River and McIntyre and Severn,' n/d (c.1920?) in Frank Uhr Notes mss

> collect at some appointed place, and follow up the tracks of the miscreants until they came up with them, and then the blacks were killed without mercy…..[46]

Gray adds that such punitive attacks were usually conducted as dawn raids on Aboriginal camps:

> They came upon them in their camp within about five miles… and at daylight the next morning they opened fire, and killed every one they could get a shot at, whether man, woman, or child. They let none escape that it was possible to get a shot at.[47]

Squatters' reminiscences and statements at trials frequently describe such raids on camps, usually at dawn, and involving a dozen to score of armed men – various station heads and their servants.

Apart from 'dawn raids' – whether pre-emptive or punitive – squatters relied on groups of "armed men" (their staff or servants) riding around the runs on a regular basis "on the lookout for cattle-spearing."[48] They also operated a system of continual communication (via messaging and tracks) between head stations and outstations. Outstations sometimes served as tentative forays into the rougher, more dangerous areas of a new run, which may explain why outstation hutkeepers and shepherds were the most usual targets (and casualties) of Aboriginal resistance. If a raid threatened, squatters recalled: "it was customary … for the shepherds to strike camp, and make the nearest track for the homestead."[49]

The Border Police and later the Native Police seem to have been called upon only if the squatters' own efforts were not proving effective. In such cases the two supported each other and added an extra layer of "protection…. (to) prevent further outrages."[50] A good example of this comes from the fictionalized but fact-based story of an Irish pioneer of central

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[46] W Gray, 'The Early Days of the Big River and McIntyre and Severn,' Notes mss
[47] W Gray, 'The Early Days of the Big River and McIntyre and Severn,' Notes mss

[48] E S Sorensen, The Romance of Old Homesteads, *The Richmond River Herald and Northern Districts Advertiser* 9 Feb 1912 p 8

[49] Isaacs River – Old Timer, Tales from Far Countries by Men who have been there, No II – Early Queensland in *Evening News (Sydn)* 7 Marc 1903: 4s
[50] Ibid; Moreton Bay, *Freeman's Journal (Sydney)* 9 October 1851 p 11. This situation of squatters banding together to go on killing sprees, assisted by Native Police is referred to elsewhere also, for example in A. C., Twenty Years Ago. (written expressly for the Christmas 'Queenslander' *The Queenslander (Brisbane),* 19 December 1885 p 4

Queensland. She tells how her husband "Darcy O'Neill" (evidently not his real name) called in the Native Police after a couple of their outstation shepherds were killed:

> I'll not stand any more of their games. I'll send for a detachment of the native police and give them a jolly good lesson that they'll not forget in a hurry.' …He fulfilled his threat promptly. Half-a-dozen black troopers (apparently delighted to have the task of hunting down their kinsfolk), with a smart officer at their head, arrived one night, and before we were up in the morning had ridden forth on the warpath, accompanied by my husband and …and every spare man and gun within fifty miles of us. The party was 'out' for three days, and D'Arcy returned with a satisfied air. I did not ask too many questions, and he did not think it good for me to hear too much; so I never knew exactly what happened. 'They have had a lesson,' said he to Kitty, with a stern smile, whereby I gathered that the expedition had been a success. 'I don't think they will meddle with the sheep or spear the shepherds any more—just yet.'[51]

F. Reconstructing Aboriginal defense and tactics

If Aboriginal resistance was driven by such objectives, how was being 'at war' experienced as a day-to-day reality for the Aboriginal population along frontiers between Brisbane and Wide Bay? Obviously, much as settlers created wooden 'citadels,' Aboriginal groups retreated to bastions of their own. It seems that islands, mountains and 'impenetrable scrubs' generally performed that function, as settlers' accounts attest. During these 'wild times' Aboriginal groups camped mostly at such sites and rarely at more open and vulnerable locations – again and again, references to Aboriginal camps mention them being in "impenetrable scrub" or a similarly difficult location.

The Bunya lands (densely-forested hills of the Blackall Ranges and Bunya Mountains), Bribie Island and Fraser Island were repeatedly described as their "strongholds."[52] Squatters noticed that it was from here that offensives were launched.[53] They were also said to

[51] A. C., Twenty Years Ago, p 4
[52] To the Editor of the Moreton Bay Courier, *The Moreton Bay Courier* 17 October 1857 p 3; see also *Brisbane Courier*, 8 November 1932, 15
[53] 'The Strongholds of the Aborigines,' *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal* **,** 20 September 1851 p *7*

strategically utilize "broken and unfrequented country,"[54] or creeks and swamps to frustrate and bog their would-be pursuers.[55]

Within Aboriginal strongholds, settlers reported finding 'stockpiles' of weapons and food and even 'bush pens' – holding yards for sheep and cattle.[56] It seems the layout of camps was also altered to deal with the new threats. Consider, for example, this 1886 exhibit in Brisbane of an "uncivilized blacks' camp":

> …. The weapon or article of European manufacture is the tomahawk of iron, doubtless plundered…. Other signs of the dawn of civilization are bullock-bones about the camp. .... In accordance with another practice, *the gunyahs are so situated that an enemy cannot approach from any quarter without being seen by the occupants of at least two gunyahs.* ... (There are) cattle spears, to be dropped on beasts from boughs of trees over-hanging their tracks... (italics mine)[57]

Beyond this, Aboriginal groups developed a host of military tactics to deal with their new predicament. The most common was to turn inter-tribal gatherings to a new purpose: plotting strikes against the settlers. From inter-tribal gatherings (as noted earlier) messengers were sent running out to other groups or camps, if further levels of co-ordination were required.

Smoke signalling was also used. Fred Walker, the head of the Native Police, found it was the main "code" used by the raiding groups to "communicate with their detached mobs" and to decide "the locality of meeting places."[58] Answering smoke-signalling, groups from even hundreds of kilometres away could turn up "almost simultaneously" at assigned spots.[59]

The other main tactic, as already discussed, was to attempt to either destroy or scatter squatters' livestock, flocks, crops and stores. Another was to frighten or harass white

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[54] To the Editor of the Moreton Bay Courier, *The Moreton Bay Courier* 17 October 1857 p 3; see also *Brisbane Courier*, 8 November 1932, 15

[55] Moreton Bay. Fine Press. *Colonial Times (Hobart,)* 20 April 1852; Moreton Bay. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 September 1844 p 4

[56] For example Sydney Herald 14 June 1840 in Geoffrey Bloomfield, *Baal Bellbora: The End of the Dancing*, 1981, 32. Sheep pens were also observed at camps of Aboriginal raiders at Wide Bay, Gatton, the Darling Downs, Victoria and Tasmania.

[57] An Interesting Model, *The Brisbane Courier* 8 March 1886 p 2

[58] William Clark, Explorer Walker – Organiser and First Commandant of the Native Police, *The Brisbane Courier* 28 December 1912 p 10 See also: Paper Yabber and Bush Telegraph - Aborigines as Friends—and Foes *The Sydney Morning Herald* 4 April 1942 p 7.

[59] J C Bennie, 'The Bunya Mountains – Early Feasting Ground of the Blacks, *The Dalby Herald*, 1931, p 2

travellers and drays off roads and passes. This served to halt or at least weaken communication, supply and transport in and out of Aboriginal territory. Horses were a particular target, as Aboriginals understood their importance as a means of escape, as a military advantage (the mounted rifleman) and as a vehicle for message delivery. For this reason, horses were quite often driven off or killed.[60]

Less often, but more dramatically, Aboriginal raiders would rely on a show of strength: "many hundreds" would converge on an outstation hut or homestead and attempt to evict or kill the occupants, sack or destroy the contents, and burn the structures. Outstations were targeted for prolonged sieges, presumably because they represented the 'advance front' of settlement. We have a good description of such an attack at Kin Kin:

> Suddenly, without warning,, a spear came hurtling through the air. It was certainly not intended to hit me,… (but) I at once armed myself….. Feeling that I was no longer safe outside my fortress, I prepared for a siege. … There were three rifles, a shotgun, and two revolvers … ample ammunition..… .All that night and the next day they made desperate attempts to carry the hut by storm….. the whole mob sallied forth with the evident intention of attacking me on all sides at once. … A spear with a bunch of burning bark smeared with kauri gum came flying at the roof. … [61]

This style of full-scale attack involving large numbers is described in many early sources and was probably a continuation of traditional styles of warfare, which similarly involved very large numbers. The attack on Yandina noted earlier involved some four or more tribal groups. In fact, if the opportunity arose, the Aboriginal assailants preferred to line up and fight as was their traditional style: with warriors of their main alliances, and with war champions, youths, then seasoned warriors coming past in waves, interspersed with formal challenges (one-on-one tournament) between opponents' champions.[62] Thus rather than engagements with whites being always furtive 'hit-and-runs', early sources repeatedly describe pitched battles. When Aboriginal groups were surprised whilst stealing sheep or

[60] Pioneers on Burdekin. Abingdon and elsewhere. *Townsville Daily Bulletin* , 11 March 1931 p 9 See also John Campbell, *The Early Settlement of Queensland; William Wilkes, The Raid of the Aborigines* Bibliographical Society of Queensland Brisbane 1936, 19

[61] 'Beseiged' *The Queenslander* 6 December 1919, p.5

[62] C C Petrie *Tom Petrie's Reminiscences,* 44-48, 160-164.

cattle,[63] or when surprised by the squatters' dawn raids on their camps, we find the warriors lining up and "giving fight" rather than fleeing.[64]

This may be why squatter and Native Police dawn camp raids were often described as 'battles' although in reality they ended as massacres. James Davis, a convict escapee who lived with the Sunshine Coast Aboriginals, related that in his personal experience, warriors were obliged by custom to stand their ground when violently attacked, regardless of the context.[65] Similarly Leichhardt noted after visiting Baroon: "the black with his weapons is no coward. Calmly he meets his enemies."[66]

Conclusions

The tumultuous world of Australian frontier warfare is still imperfectly understood. Nevertheless, there seems considerable evidence that many settlers living on the peripheries of the southern Queensland frontier lived in a state of perpetual defense/ offence in their relationships with Aboriginal groups. They appear to have worked together with other squatters in a systematic manner, and with police and military forces if required, to secure their properties against Aboriginal attack and expand their mode of settlement deeper into Aboriginal lands.

The brutality of the frontier may be better understood by appreciating Aboriginal resistance, and the degree to which Aboriginal successes frustrated settler plans. Both whites and Aboriginals were impelled to create strongholds to better safeguard their positions during the decades of frontier warfare, but Aboriginal strongholds were more often natural bastions, whereas squatters' strongholds were their homes. Aboriginal resistance tactics relied heavily on their economic sabotage of squatters' livelihood, combined with force of numbers, surprise, intimidation, payback and sleuth. Squatters' success depended on maintaining lines of communication/ supply with other white landowners or communities, and the ready availability of considerable amounts of firearms and horses. The latter gave squatters the

[63] Domestic Intelligence Ipswich, *Moreton Bay Courier*, 23 August 1851 p 2

[64] Collins, P., 2002, *Goodbye Bussamarai: The Manandanji Land War, Southern Queensland 1842-1852* St Lucia: Uni of Qld, 25.

[65] Simpson – Davies Minutes & Evidence to the Select Committee into the Native Police Force, Qld Legislative Assembly 1861 in Langevad, *Some Original Views Around Kilcoy*: 12

[66] T A Darragh & Roderick J Fensham (eds), *The Leichhardt diaries Early Travels in Australia during 1842-1844*, Memoirs of the Queensland Museum Culture Vol 7 (1) Brisbane 2013, 3

capacity to inflict devastating killings (massacres) – usually in the form of dawn attacks on camps. These seem to have been conducted only as the perceived 'need' arose, but resulted in further retaliations.