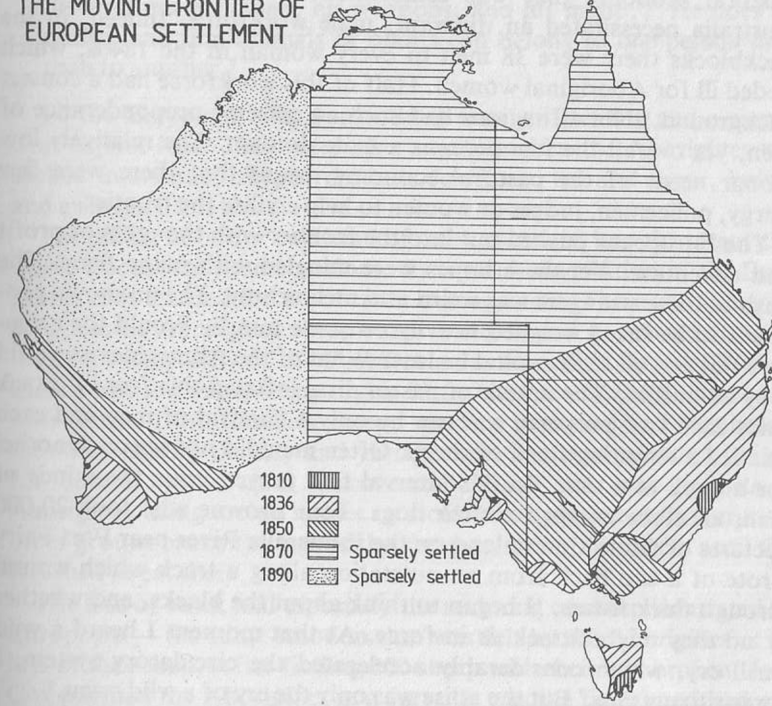
3 Resisting the Invaders

The Aborigines in the interior were not entirely unprepared for the invasion of their lands, Accurate and detailed information about the European explorers travelled up to 500 kilometres along the traditional lines of inter-tribal communication. Distant communities heard of the movements of pale, ghost-like strangers, equipped with odd implements and weird animals, which they later knew to be drays and horses. Some of the tribes, even before they laid eyes on the strangers, had received items of metal and glass and fallen victim to European diseases.[1] Had they known the implications the arrival of these strangers would have for their future, they may have met the intruders more frequently with violence and less often with curiosity.

The European explorers had a clearer idea of the chain of events they were setting in motion. In 1835 Major Thomas Mitchell wrote: 'As I stood, the first European intruder on the sublime solitude of these verdant plains . . . I felt conscious of being the harbinger of mighty changes; and that our steps would soon be followed by the men and the animals for which it seemed to have been prepared.'[2] The irony was that the Aborigines had often helped the European explorers and the first settlers as they bumbled through the bush loaded down with equipment and plagued by inexperience.

As time passed the Aborigines realised that the Europeans were permanent intruders who aimed to use their land. At Burrumbeep, Victoria, in 1841, Timberroon of the Bullucs stamped on the ground and yelled at George Robinson: 'Country belonging to me; country belonging to me. My Country'. Similarly, Edward Curr was confronted on the Murray River in the 1840s by an elder of the Moitheriban tribe who spat at him and shouted that the water, the fish and the ducks all belonged to his tribe.[3] Each confrontation was a dramatic clash between the Aboriginal people who saw the land religiously, as an intimate part of themselves and all life, and the Europeans who saw it economically, as a commodity to be taken, exploited, bought and sold. This clash was enacted again and again as the frontier of settlers moved across the southern and eastern parts of

THE MOVING FRONTIER OF EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT



Australia between the years 1820 and 1870.

Unfortunately, the Aborigines were unable to change the course of European history as it crashed in upon them. In 1822 the British government, 20,000 kilometres away, made a fatal decision. It dropped the duty on Australian wool to one-sixth the rate of that on German wool to encourage wool production in Australia, and to reduce imports from Germany. This led to a rapid expansion of flocks and the inflow of over 200,000 British immigrants to Australia between 1832 and 1850. The frontier of European settlement moved rapidly and inevitably across most of south-eastern and southern Australia. In a fantastic land grab which was never again to be equalled, about 4000 Europeans with their 20 million sheep occupied over 400 million hectares of Aboriginal land stretching from southern Queensland to South Australia by 1860.[4] The Aborigines were quickly outnumbered in their own land.

The Aborigines might have fared better if Australia had been settled by God-fearing farmers and their families, who would have spread across the land more slowly and perhaps with less violence. The

pastoral economy that was established in most of south-eastern Australia necessitated an itinerant, male workforce. Indeed, in the backblocks there were 38 men to every woman in the 1840s, which boded ill for Aboriginal women. Half of this workforce had a convict background.[5] Not all regions had such an extreme preponderance of men, yet overall the frontier was a male domain. The relatively low labour needs of the pastoral economy meant that there were few clergy, policemen, judges or women to help civilise the frontier.

The Europeans pushed out into the frontier with thoughts of profit and adventure. Yet these hopes were mingled with many fears. The bush to these strangers was weird and melancholy. The unknown problems to be faced weighed heavily on some minds. Would their venture fail and all their capital be lost? What of the Aborigines — would they be hostile? The nature of pastoralism inflated this fear of attack since each vast property was run by only a handful of men and each minded a tempting flock of sheep. Often men did not see one another for a week at a time. In this interval fear preyed upon the minds of men, all alone except for their dogs. Tom Browne who took 20,000 hectares of Gunditjmara land on the Eumeralla River near Port Fairy wrote of a trip back from an outstation along a track which wound through thick ti-tree. 'I began to think about the blacks, and whether or no they might attack us in force. At that moment I heard a wild shrill cry, which considerably accelerated the circulatory system. I sprang to my gun.' But the noise was only the cry of a wild swan.[6]

Settlers soon faced Aboriginal hostility. As the sheep moved over the land eating the grasses and trampling the watering places, the land was changed and the native game chased out. The Aborigines were always able to get some traditional foods, but the European presence made hunting difficult. The Aborigines also lost access to their sacred places when pastoralists drove them away to ensure that cattle would not be disturbed. Aboriginal anger arose at this disruption to their traditional life.

As their own food supplies were disrupted, Aborigines began to turn their attention to the European sources of food. At first they often asked for food, but as the patience of even the most generous stock owner dried up, the Aborigines took food off the hoof by stealth, and roasted their mutton chops over a fire in secret. They sensed that the Europeans did not approve of these actions, but to them it was a proper use of nature's abundance. As Yagan, a Victorian Aborigine, stated in 1843:

> The wild black fellows do not understand your laws, every living animal that roams the country, and every edible root that grows in the ground are common property. A black man claims nothing as his own but his cloak, his weapons, and his name . . . He does not understand that animals or plants can belong to one person more than to another.[7]

To the Europeans this was nothing short of stealing and a significant capital loss. They were also angered when the Aborigines ransacked unattended shepherds' huts for flour, tea and sugar, knives, and even guns left there.

The taking of one or two head of stock escalated into the removal of whole flocks from some stations. By careful observation of the Europeans, they learned the art of stock management. There are numerous instances of Aboriginal sheep yards being found in remote areas. In the 1840s Billy Billy of the Pyrenees area, obviously thought William Clarke had too many sheep on his 73,000 hectare run so he started his own station from Clarke's sheep, 'made a bushyard and shepherded the sheep during the day and yarded them in the usual way at night' for several years until discovered.[8] There are also reports of Aborigines using stolen horses in stock management. More crudely, other groups broke the legs of the sheep to immobilise them until they returned to eat them.

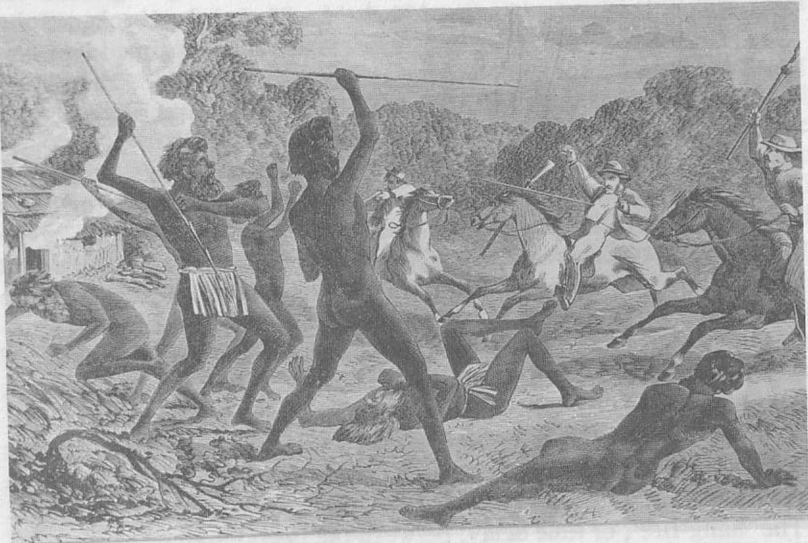
The loss of stock and especially the maiming of sheep infuriated the Europeans — the same emotion that was felt by the Aborigines at the loss of their land. After finding 100 sheep with their legs broken, John Cox pursued the Aborigines in a fury: 'It was the first time I had ever levelled a gun on my fellow man. I did so without regret or hesitation in this instance . . . I distinctly remember knocking over three blacks, two men and a boy, with one discharge of my double barrel'.[9]

Increasingly the frontier bristled with guns and spears. Shepherds were seen carrying rifles instead of crooks in their hands, they often had pistols in their belts as well. Huts were built with slit windows to help repulse Aboriginal attacks. George Carrington wrote of his first night alone in his shepherd's hut: 'I lay now broad awake, and the perspiration streamed from every pore. My hearing seemed unnaturally sharpened . . . all around the hut I fancied I heard the cracking of dry sticks and of rustling grass.'[10] His fear and that of others was not misplaced, for at first Europeans were outnumbered and 'outgunned'.

Until the 1850s most guns were fitted with flintlock firing systems which were notoriously unreliable. A primary charge ignited by a moving flint exploded a secondary charge which propelled the bullet. The 'hang-fire', or time delay, between the first charge which gave off a flash, and the second which propelled the bullet, not only gave the enemy time to duck, but also made it very difficult to hit moving

targets. Wet weather affected the powder, causing misfires, but even in dry weather misfires averaged one in every six shots. These guns had to be loaded with two sets of powder and a ball, and then rammed. Even an expert took 20 seconds to reload and fire. Even when used by a marksman, these firearms were wildly inaccurate beyond a range of 50 metres.[11] On the other hand the Aborigines' spear and club throwing all but equalled the speed and accuracy of the legendary English bowmen. As Gideon Lang wrote in 1865: 'A blackfellow, with some eight or ten spears in his hand and some paddy-melon sticks, will throw them all while a white man is reloading after firing two shots; and I have known one man to be pierced in the thigh by two spears successively, thrown at seventy yards off.'[12]

At first in the outback the Aborigines enjoyed superiority in numbers and weapons, and also in tactics. Huntsmen, who for thousands of years had developed superb skills to surprise animals, had little difficulty in creeping up on Europeans, many of whom had been townsmen. As well as stealth, and ambush, the Aborigines had other tactics such as firing huts and grass to drive out the shepherds and gain the advantage. The Europeans did not clearly outmatch the Aborigines in weaponry until the 1870s when breech-loading repeating rifles made them invincible and changed the Aboriginal resisters into the vanquished.



A deadly encounter
S. Calvert, Mitchell Library collection

Fear bred violence as over-anxious Europeans shot first and asked questions later. It was here that those with convict backgrounds were an inflammatory element, for these men had generally less compunction about shooting Aborigines on sight. When Edward Curr remonstrated with an ex-convict shepherd who had just shot down an unarmed Aborigine, the shepherd replied: 'as many of them as comes here when I am alone I'll shoot'.[13] The violence took sexual forms as well. Some shepherds and squatters held Aboriginal women captive, although other women provided sexual and domestic services more willingly. Reverend Threlkeld at his Lake Macquarie mission in 1825 wrote that he was tormented 'at night [by] the shrieks of girls, about 8 or 9 years of age, taken by force by the vile men of Newcastle. One man came to see me with his head broken by the butt-end of a musket because he would not give up his wife.'[14] Some of the worst abuses occurred in Tasmania, where Aborigines were allegedly flogged, branded, castrated and mutilated by convicts.[15] Yet those with convict origins who were tough types, or who had been brutalised by abject poverty and punishment, were not the only deadly enemies of the Aborigines. Ordinary men under pressure of fear and the desire to dominate opened fire on them as well.

The Aborigines in their turn responded with violence. At first revenge was taken specifically on those Europeans thought responsible for the transgressions against them, in accordance with Aboriginal (and also European) law. However, as the violence escalated Aboriginal revenge became more generalised. Many Aboriginal bands allegedly stated that that they would attack, kill and drive out all Europeans in their area. What had been specific reprisals for individual criminal acts, had become a war for the land within a year or so of first contact.

Aboriginal raids on the pastoral properties became widespread and European property losses were enormous. At this stage stock were killed as a military strategy, as well as for food. Some properties lost thousands of sheep in a year, in very swift and effective guerrilla raids. Huts were looted and burned, vegetable plots raided and fired, and many stations were completely abandoned. George Mackay's experience at the Ovens River near Beechworth in 1838 was not unusual. His first efforts at settlement failed as he and his neighbours were driven from the area by Aboriginal attacks. He returned six months later only to have a servant killed and his huts and stores destroyed. Four horses (each worth a shepherd's yearly wage) were killed, and all but seven of his 3000 cattle driven off and lost.[16] Many areas of southern Australia were similarly affected in the early years of their settlement. Major Thomas Mitchell wrote while travelling in the Dar-

ling River region in 1845 that the 'humiliating proof that the white man had given way, were visible in the remains of dairies burnt down, stockyards in ruins, untrodden roads.'[17] Even if the pastoralists were not driven off by the Aborigines, they found it difficult to employ workers and had to pay high wages to those willing to face the dangers. Even people in towns were fearful. One town, Gilberton in Queensland, was allegedly completely abandoned, due to fears of Aboriginal attacks.[18]

Aboriginal military tactics varied, but were all rooted in their long experience as hunters and gatherers. They generally swept down on the shepherds and the flocks, or on the homesteads, from refuges in the bush, struck fast and hard and then withdrew with their booty to elude any Europeans who might pursue them. Generally they vanished into the depths of the bush to eat mutton and celebrate their victory with a corroboree. However, some fought pitched battles with the Europeans, like the six-hour effort between George Faithful and the Aborigines near Benalla in 1838. This fight followed an earlier conflict in which 14 of Faithful's men were overwhelmed and killed. In the second battle Faithful reported that the Aboriginal women and children ran boldly forward, even between his horse's legs, to collect spears for their warriors to re-use.[19]

The Europeans hit back, not only by attacking Aboriginal warriors, but by the slaughter and massacre of Aboriginal women, children and the aged. The Liverpool plains area of northern New South Wales witnessed a series of dreadful massacres of Aborigines in 1838. Captain Nunn and his 23 troopers cut down at least a hundred (possibly three times as many) Aborigines at Vinegar Hill on the Namoi River to revenge the deaths of several shepherds. Six months later at Myall Creek station, about 30 were roped together, shot, stabbed and their bodies burned by a party of 12 stockmen, 11 of whom were convicts or ex-convicts. Seven of them were later hanged for the deed, which surprised their contemporaries, since few other Europeans had ever been similarly punished for murdering Aborigines. Shortly after this massacre, 200 Aborigines were slaughtered at nearby Gravesend. White vigilante groups in the area at this time were riding hard, apparently bent on clearing the area of all Aborigines. Government inquiries into these incidents caused the minority who practised premeditated murder to act more stealthily and switch to distributing poisoned flour. A sizeable number of Aborigines suffered agonising deaths in this way. Some knew to swallow salt water at the first sign of illness to vomit up the poison.

The frenzy on both sides seemed to be greatest when women and children were killed. When the Frazer family of nine were massacred

by the Aborigines at Hornet Bank near Taroom in Queensland in 1857, armed groups of Europeans scoured the district for six months and killed several hundred Aborigines of all ages. W.H. Corfield who saw the dead and mutilated Strau family at the Normanby River, Queensland in 1874 wrote: 'If at any time I felt a compunction in using my rifle, I lost it when I thought of the murders of Strau, his wife and daughter, and the outrages committed on them.'[20] Similarly, Aboriginal men were enraged to bloody vengeance when they returned to camp and found their women and children dead. Indeed, far more Aboriginal women and children were killed than European, although this was partly because there were so few European families on the frontier.

The list of massacres and slaughter could go on if one could stomach it. What was happening was that people of both races were being brutalised by a ruthless battle for the land, begun by Europeans. The Europeans were more efficient at massacre, because of their guns, their horses and government troopers.

In many parts of southern and eastern Australia before the 1850s, Aboriginal communities fought successful guerrilla campaigns against the invaders of their lands. In Van Diemen's Land in the 1820s, the east coast people were decimated in a protracted war against the settlers. Along the Darling River in the 1830s, the tribes and the fierce climate kept the pastoralists and their flocks at bay. Those in regions of dense bush or mountains were the more successful. They hung on, defending their land and peppering the intruders, sometimes for a decade or more, while other groups in more open country were overwhelmed in one or two years. In the 1840s, the Gunditjmara people of the Port Fairy region used the volcanic scoria country as the base for their guerrilla raids as it was impenetrable to most Europeans on foot or horseback. They were only routed when caught in open country after a resistance of several years. In South Australia the Milmenrura people of the Coorong region carried out an effective resistance in the early 1840s. They raided stations and settlements, often in groups of 300 warriors, firing pastures, dispersing and destroying stock. Several detachments of the military had to be sent against them. Similar fighting raged in the south Queensland region in the 1840s. Aboriginal doctors no doubt used their own methods to try and defeat the Europeans: in the Loddon district in Victoria Edward Parker was told in 1840 that a great plague, the Mindi, would descend on the whites and destroy them. So intense was the resistance and destruction in some areas, that alarmed Europeans referred to the 'Black War' on the frontier.[21]

Yet the Aboriginal strengths of tactics and fighting abilities were

not matched by organisational skills. The needs of small scale inter-tribal skirmishes in traditional times had not necessitated a special military section in Aboriginal society complete with leaders and support systems. Also traditional tribal isolation and the lack of strong traditional inter-tribal military links meant that for most of the time the Europeans fought individual tribes. Thus each battle was really the Milmenrura versus the British, or the Gunditjmara versus the British, and not the Aborigines versus the British.

However, there is scattered evidence which may be consolidated in the future, which suggests that the Aborigines were beginning to adapt their traditions to the needs of the military struggle with the Europeans before they were overwhelmed. A number of military leaders have been identified, significantly including people from outside the tribe. The Gunditjmara at Port Fairy were led by men with the European names of Jupiter, Cocknose and Bradbury, the last of whom was from New South Wales. In Tasmania a woman named Walyer, who had earlier lived with European sealers, taught some Tasmanians to use guns and led them against the Europeans. Similarly a group of five Tasmanians, who had been brought to Port Phillip, led the local Westernport people in raids that extended to the Dandenongs. There is other evidence that Aboriginal tribes combined in several areas to resist the Europeans.[22]

After an initial period of fierce resistance Aboriginal groups were defeated. The increasing number of Europeans on the frontier was an important factor in the shift of power. Also each tribe was weakened by European diseases, deaths in the fighting, and hunger due to the disruptions of hunting patterns in wartime. Their early successes led the government to intervene more vigorously against the Aborigines and to abandon the policy of treating the Aborigines as British citizens. Instead they sent in the military and the police to help the European settlers and, on several occasions, declared martial law with fearful results for the Aborigines. The declaration of martial law in the Bathurst area in 1824 followed the deaths of seven shepherds and resulted in vigilante groups of settlers and troopers killing many Aborigines, including 100 in a single massacre in a swamp. Forty-five heads were retrieved from this encounter, boiled down and the skulls shipped to England. Many killings followed the free reign given to Europeans when martial law was gazetted in Van Diemen's Land in 1828.

The most fearful government decision was the creation of an Aboriginal fighting force to be used against the Aboriginal resistance. It was euphemistically called the 'Native Police Force', because a more military label would have tacitly admitted there was a war

against sovereign Aboriginal tribes, not an action against 'criminal' black citizens. The 'Native Police Forces', which helped end Aboriginal resistance, were established in Port Phillip in 1842, in New South Wales in 1848 (officially in 1855), and in Queensland in 1859. They marked the absolute rock bottom of government Aboriginal policy. Not only was violence against the Aborigines being institutionalised, but several hundred Aborigines were being encouraged to hound and kill other Aborigines in the service of colonial expansion.

Young Aboriginal men joined these forces for a variety of reasons. In Port Phillip the official view was that the 'Native Police Force' would not only help end the frontier conflict but would civilise those Aborigines in the force. Therefore the intending troopers were promised uniforms, wages and education. On that basis Billibellary, an elder of the Yarra Tribe, encouraged about 30 young men to join. Once he realised the murderous nature of the force he tried to persuade them to leave. In the other colonies, where humanitarian pretensions were absent from the forces' objectives, Aborigines were attracted by the uniforms, horses, guns, money and promise of excitement that went with the life of a trooper. Perhaps they thought they might even gain women through their position as troopers, whereas in traditional society they were monopolised by the older men. Some no doubt sought access to the power and prestige the Europeans possessed. Having the use of guns and horses were important here, and they did seem to gain some measure of respect from Europeans, especially the relieved pastoralists they came to help in the frontier conflict. But above all, many became troopers because it seemed to be a means of surviving in a world rapidly disintegrating into chaos.

The 'Native Police' became an important factor in the final defeat of the Aboriginal resistance. Unlike the Europeans, they were able to pursue the Aborigines deep into the bush. There, beyond the control of their European officers, who in any case cared little, the troopers killed many Aborigines. Few prisoners were taken in the bloody encounters which were euphemistically reported as the 'dispersal' of Aborigines. In Queensland, where the force lasted until the 1890s, the troopers carried the new and deadly breach-loading Synder rifle in the final years of the fighting.

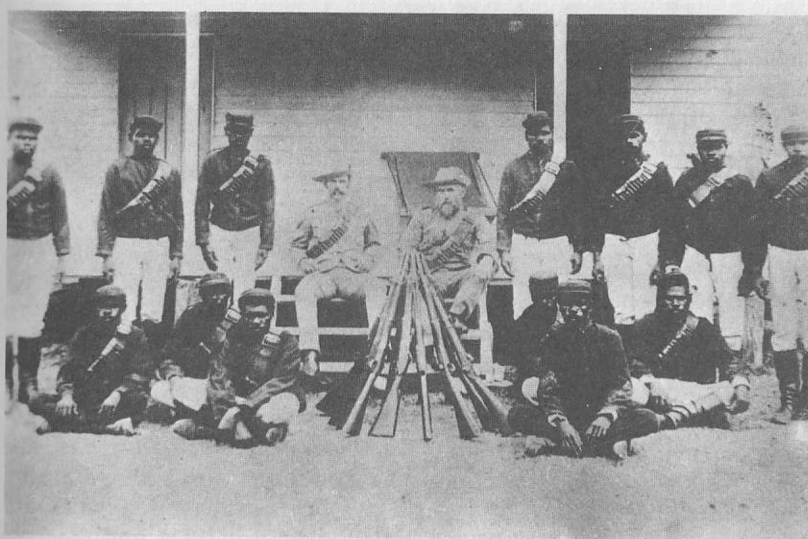
Aboriginal troopers expressed confused loyalties. A significant number were said to have re-enlisted time after time — perhaps they had nowhere else to go. Of course many troopers never accepted European values or perceptions. Some deserted, despite the unofficial penalty of execution, and some actively fought with their own people against the settlers. Others remained in the force but passively resisted their officers who often treated them harshly. A number of observers

reported that European officers were shot at by their own men when an opportunity arose.

It is very likely that a number of these young men began to internalise European values and lose their Aboriginal identity. After all, new identities are formed when old ones are not sustained. They were young men far away from their own communities and traditions, who were being moulded into European-like troops by drill and regimentation, the bearing of new names and the wearing of new clothes. As the sociologist Peter Berger has said of social roles: 'the role forms, shapes, patterns both action and actor. It is very difficult to pretend in this world. Normally, one becomes what we play at.'[23] Although the young men might have joined the force to get material things or to survive, their being in it and staying in it changed them. Some observers claimed they spoke gleefully at the end of an action about how many 'niggers' they had shot, which suggests that they were adopting the language and viewpoints of the European colonisers. Buckup, of the Port Phillip 'Native Police', on arrival at Tom Browne's station at Port Fairy, dismounted, saluted, and said to Browne in white terms: 'Believe the blacks been very bad about here.'[24] He and the other troopers dealt a decisive blow to the Gunditjmara resistance.

Overall, the troopers were young men lost between two worlds, trying to cling to their traditional ways, but faced with change and being trapped in a war of nightmare killings. It now becomes clear why they aided the destruction of the Aborigines. Since they were recruited in areas far from where they served, traditional inter-tribal enmities encouraged the young troopers to see most other Aborigines as the Europeans did, as enemies to be pacified or eliminated. Also, as these young men were often brutalised by the force and the wars in which they found themselves, killing came even easier to them. Some no doubt began to internalise European views of Aboriginal resisters as being worthless and dangerous. Above all these young men, confused and bewildered by the destruction of their traditional society, and adrift from the rules of traditional behaviour and morality, took any course that meant survival, even if this included the job of killing Aborigines. Ironically, life in the force was so hard, and disease and alcohol had such a debilitating effect on them, that few troopers had long lives.[25]

In the battle between Europeans and Aborigines for the land, a racist ideology provided support for the former and grounds for further violence. Many Europeans regarded the Aborigines as 'savages'. The eighteenth century notion of a Great Chain of Being which ranked all creatures in a hierarchy of ability and development gave some support to this idea. The Aborigines were slotted in at the bottom of



'Native Police', Coen, North Queensland about 1890
John Oxley Library collection

the human section. An early 'scientific' theory, phrenology, used arguments about head and brain size to 'prove' European superiority and thereby to justify the dispossession of the Aborigines.

It is impossible to determine what proportion of Europeans on the frontier were violent towards the Aborigines. Probably it was only a minority although their efforts were destructive enough. The majority took little interest in the Aborigines, beyond trying to keep them off 'their' runs. John Hepburn, a Port Phillip squatter from 1838 to 1859 was perhaps typical: 'after all my residence amongst them I never learnt a word of their lingo'.[26] Such men accepted most of the racist assumptions of the day and believed that the Aborigines were inferior and would inevitably fade away. They believed it was better for their profits and progress to let matters take their course.

However, a minority of well-meaning Europeans were interested in or concerned for the Aborigines. Edward Curr, a young well-educated squatter on the Murray around 1840, formed close friendships with the Bangerang people. He admired their physical and intellectual abilities, learned his bush craft from them, and often hunted with them. Thomas Chirnside, who settled at Mount William near the Grampians in 1839, was less friendly but allowed the Aborigines to continue to use their land and even gave them some flour and mutton, in return for the safety of his sheep. In the early 1840s, Dr Richard

Penny and David Wark pestered the government into giving them medical supplies so that they could help the Ngarrindjeri and other peoples of the Coorong region in South Australia. A significant number of Queensland pastoralists refused to use the services of the deadly 'Native Police' and even warned the local Aborigines of their impending arrival. Overall, there were many exceptions to the rule of violence.[27]

The policy of the colonial governments was also mixed. The resort to martial law, punitive expeditions and the 'Native Police' were complemented by more protective measures which aimed to save the Aborigines. However, these protective policies generally failed and tended to be perverted into devices of control rather than protection.

The frontier war in Tasmania during the 1820s had culminated in a plan to round up the surviving Aborigines and place them in an isolated area out of the settlers' way. Even at the outset the motives were a mixture of protecting the Aborigines and ensuring the unimpeded progress of the settlers.[28] The surviving Tasmanian Aborigines were taken to Gun Carriage Island in 1831 and then to Flinders Island in 1832 where eventually over 200 of them were confined. Conditions there did little to protect the Aborigines. The Black Tasmanians reportedly moaned and shook when they first saw Flinders Island. Instead of the paradise they had been promised, it was a windy sterile Bass Strait island. After suffering miserable and brutal treatment for some time their conditions improved. Early visitors to Flinders Island witnessed several corroborees which suggested that the Aborigines were beginning to feel at home. However, in 1835, the missionaries George Robinson and Robert Clark arrived and the Aborigines experienced new difficulties-namely bombardment from Christianity and the work ethic. The Aborigines were forced to wear European clothes and caps, to listen to countless sermons and answer endless and tedious questions about God, the Devil, heaven and hell.

Flinders Island was becoming a hell for them. By 1842, 150 of the 200 Aborigines on the island had died from disease and despair. Robinson recorded their deaths very methodically, filling in the spaces on the graveyard blueprint. In 1847 the government, which was worried that it was presiding over the demise of a people, finally decided to return the remaining 44 people to the mainland and settle them under the control of Robert Clark at an old penal station at Oyster Bay near Hobart. With few facilities and hounded by lusty sailors and groggy ex-convicts, the Aborigines struggled on. Walter Arthur, who had been raised among whites, tried farming but despair and lack of government help eventually got the better of him and he drowned while drunk in 1861. William Lanney died in 1869 aged 34, leaving

Tasmanian survivors at Oyster Cove, 1859
National Museum of Victoria

Trugernini living on alone at Oyster Cove. She was the last of the Tasmanians except for a few families who survived with white sealers on Cape Barren Island near Flinders Island.[29]

In the other colonies, protection policies also failed to help the Aborigines, despite elaborate efforts which stemmed from the 1837 British government select committee's appeal for the protection of native races in the empire. Indeed, these efforts worked rather to protect the lives and interests of the Europeans from the Aboriginal resistance.

In 1838 the British government, influenced by the Exeter Hall humanitarians, bypassed the squatter-influenced New South Wales Legislative Council to establish an Aboriginal Protectorate in the Port Phillip District. George Robinson (fresh from his Tasmanian 'triumphs') and four others were appointed as protectors, and the project began with great hopes and the considerable outlay of £20,000 in the first four years. The protectors were to move about with the Aborigines, learn their language, and endeavour to protect them from cruelty and injustice and to guard their property. This last provision was absurd in the light of European land-grabbing. In a short time the protectors who had families were forced to establish home-stations at which they rationed the Aborigines and established farms and schools.

However, this high-minded attempt was doomed. The protectors fresh from England were inexperienced; the finance available was inadequate (especially after 1842 due to drought, economic recession and government disillusionment with the experiment); the settlers were generally hostile because the 1840s was the peak of the frontier war in Port Phillip; and above all, it was not realistic to expect former semi-nomadic people to take up a settled life quickly.

Above all else, the Port Phillip Protectorate failed because the Aborigines showed little interest in it, preferring their own way of life to a European one of Christianity, farming and western education. An old Aboriginal man complained angrily to Protector Parker that the Europeans had firstly stolen their country and now they were 'stealing their children by taking them away to live in huts and work, and "read in book" like white fellows.'[30] He need not have feared at this stage, because the Aborigines and their children resisted the whites' attempts to change them, and only remained at the stations while rations were available. Often they would stay away from the protectorates for months at a time, only returning when more rations arrived.[31]

The Port Phillip Protectorate and the less elaborate ones in South and Western Australia were sincere but ill-advised attempts to save the Aborigines by giving them rations and providing a refuge for them. They perhaps achieved some good despite the meagre expenditure and their hasty closures in Port Phillip in 1849 and in other colonies by 1857. Thereafter occasional rations and a blanket a year per Aborigine was all the help many Aborigines received from colonial governments. However, in general the policy of appointing protectors was directed to controlling the Aborigines as much as to protecting them. For instance, the Western Australian protectors soon became little better than policemen who prevented the Aborigines from entering towns where they might cause trouble, or offence by their nakedness; who induced the Aborigines to work; and who helped suppress the Aboriginal resistance with the aid of the two policemen who accompanied them. Protector Symmons reported happily in 1855 of a 'general abstinence from aggression, friendly subservience to the wants and wishes of the settlers and submission to the constituted authorities on the part of the Aborigines . . .'[32]

It is now beyond doubt that the Aborigines strongly resisted the invasion of their lands, and that Australia's frontier history is a bloody one. However it is impossible to say precisely how bloody, given the historical investigation which still has to be done, and the numerous unrecorded or covered-up killings that can never be known. On the European side it seems that about 64 people were killed in Victoria, 22 in the south-west of Western Australia and possibly 500 or 600 in the

drawnout and ferocious fighting in Queensland over a moving frontier spanning 60 years.[33] Throughout the whole of Australia European deaths were probably somewhere between 1000 and 1500. The number of Aboriginal casualties is less certain, but some estimate that more than 10 Aborigines fell for every European.[34] This would place the number of Aboriginal casualties at about 20,000, yet it could be much more. The number of Aborigines throughout Australia before the Europeans came was about 300,000.

As the frontier period drew to a close, many Europeans cast a veil over this aspect of their history and simply wrote of the glorious pioneering efforts of the Europeans. The Aboriginal resistance was relegated to a casual remark about 'treacherous' Aborigines being simply one more obstacle that the gallant Europeans pioneers overcame. Indeed, the Aborigines were eventually written out of frontier history, and the misdeeds of the Europeans whitewashed. Thus in Australia we have had two frontier histories. Firstly there was the history of the winners which is represented by the report in the Melbourne *Age in* 1896;

> The favourite theory at Exeter Hall is that the disappearance of the native races is due to the cruelty and malignity of the white settlers. Those who are acquainted with the history of this colony from its first settlement are aware that no such charge can be alleged against the Victorian people, and that the black race has decayed, and is rapidly dying out from causes quite outside the power of the white man to control.[35]

Secondly, there is the view of the losers, represented here by Dalaipi, a Queensland Aborigine, who in the late nineteenth century said:

> We were hunted from our ground, shot, poisoned, and had our daughters, sisters and wives taken from us . . . What a number were poisoned at Kilcoy . . . They stole our ground where we used to get food, and when we got hungry and took a bit of flour or killed a bullock to eat, they shot us or poisoned us. All they give us now for our land is a blanket once a year.[36]

The second version is much nearer the historic truth.

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RICHARD BROOME

ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIANS

Black Response to White Dominance 1788–1980

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