Aboriginal ‘resistance war’ tactics – ‘The Black War’ of southern Queensland

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ABSTRACT

Frontier violence is now an accepted chapter of Australian history. Indigenous resistance is central to this story, yet little examined as a military phenomenon (Connor 2004). Indigenous military tactics and objectives are more often assumed than analysed.

Building on Laurie’s and Cilento’s contentions (1959) that an alliance of Aboriginal groups staged a ‘Black War’ across southern Queensland between the 1840s and 1860s, the author seeks evidence for a historically definable conflict during this period, complete with a declaration, coordination, leadership, planning and a broader objective: usurping the pastoral industry.

As the Australian situation continues to present elements which have proved difficult to reconcile with existing paradigms for military history, this study applies definitions from guerilla and terrorist conflict (e.g. Eckley 2001, Kilcullen 2009) to explain key features of the southern Queensland “Black War.”

The author concludes that Indigenous resistance, to judge from southern Queensland, followed its own distinctive pattern. It achieved coordinated response through inter-tribal gatherings and sophisticated signaling. It relied on economic sabotage, targeted payback killings and harassment. It was guided by reticent “loner-leaders.” Contrary to the claims of military historians such as Dennis (1995), the author finds evidence for tactical innovation. He notes a move away from pitched battles to ambush affrays; the development of full-time ‘guerilla bands’; and use of new materials.

FULL TEXT:

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REFERENCES

A = The Australian
BC = Brisbane Courier
BFP&MJ = Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal
BFP&MJ = Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal
C = The Courier (Brisbane)
Cap = Capricornian (Rockhampton)
CC = Cornwall Chronicle (Launceston)
CM = Courier Mail
CQH = Central Queensland Herald
CQH = Central Queensland Herald (Rockhampton)
CQH = Central Queensland Herald (Rockhampton)
CT = Coburg Leader
CT = Colonial Times (Hobart)
CT = Colonial Times (Hobart)
E = Empire (Sydney)
FJ = Freeman’s Journal (Sydney)
GAA = Geelong Advertiser & Intelligencer
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Patrick Collins. Bussamarai was a powerful resistance leader whose influence spread across five Aboriginal nations. Like the legendary Pemulwuy, Yagan or Jandamara, he fought for the survival of his people, the Mandandanji of southern Queensland. Their homeland bordered northern New South Wales and its infamous sites of Aboriginal massacre and frontier warfare: Myal Creek, Slaughterhouse Creek and Waterloo Creek. Black war the destruction of the Tasmanian Aboriginals. By RUNOKO RASHIDI. Dedicated to Dr. Gracelyn Smallwood. The Aboriginal inhabitants of the island were Black people who probably went there by crossing an ancient land bridge that connected Tasmania to the continent of Australia. The Black aborigines of Tasmania were marked by tightly curled hair with skin complexions ranging from black to reddish-brown. They were relatively short in stature with little body fat. They were the indigenous people of Tasmania and their arrival there began at least 35,000 years ago. Aboriginal people did not have distinct ideas of war and peace, and traditional warfare was common, taking place between groups on an ongoing basis, with great rivalries being maintained over extended periods of time. The aims and methods of traditional Aboriginal warfare arose from their small autonomous social groupings. Poster issued in Van Diemen's Land during the Black War implying a policy of friendship and equal justice for white settlers and Indigenous Australians. The frontier wars were particularly bloody and bitter in Queensland, owing to its comparatively large Indigenous population. Queensland's Native Police Force was formed by the Government of New South Wales in 1848, under the well-connected Commandant Frederick Walker. Major massacres.