THE QUEENSLAND VOLUNTEERS, THE QUEENSLAND RIFLE ASSOCIATION AND QUEENSLAND’S FRONTIER WAR

ILLUSION AND REALITY

Bill Casey

The Queensland Rifle Association (QRA), founded in 1861, supported the nascent Queensland Volunteers. The Volunteers papered over Queensland’s defence deficiencies, a task made easier by the lack of a credible threat to the colony. While external but illusory threats were made real, more substantial internal threats were made illusory. The key was Britain’s opinion. A tyranny of precedence exercised formidable power over the Australian colonists. This was glaringly apparent in Australia’s frontier wars. Newspapers and government records detail the Europeans killed during Australia’s frontier wars, not the Indigenous deaths. Illusion undermines the frontier war’s historical reality. The Volunteers and the QRA never participated in the frontier war, but analysing their objections to the conflict restates the frontier war as factual, and conducted with government knowledge.

Throughout the nineteenth century, British imperialism absorbed passing “theories” like Social Darwinism to justify the dispossession of Indigenous lands. Dazzling with the sheen of the modern, such theories merely mirrored colonial vanity. The game was to divert attention from the land grab of a whole continent.

A significant part of the diversion in colonial Queensland involved defence. As in the other colonies, illusory, external threats to the new colony were made real, while more substantial internal threats were made illusory, or significantly downplayed. The key was Britain’s opinion. If Britannia thought the Russians were coming, so did Queensland. If London considered that the French were planning to invade, Queensland needed to be wary. Britain’s opinion mattered more than local assessment, more than public opinion, more than reality. Beside the tyranny of distance, a tyranny of precedence exercised a decisive power. This was glaringly apparent in the frontier wars. In 1863, the Colonial Secretary in London informed the Australian colonies that they were ‘free from formidable native tribes.’ This contrasted with Britain fighting fierce Maori in New Zealand and war-like Zulus in South Africa. Without a British declaration of war in Queensland, local officials avoided the term ‘war.’ Colonial subservience is therefore one reason why an illusion of peaceful settlement took hold.

Another reason was that there appeared to be relatively few deaths. A rough estimate of Europeans killed during Australia’s frontier wars can be gleaned from newspapers and government

1. Secretary of State for Colonies to Governor Bowen (Queensland Legislative Assembly, Votes and Proceedings, 2 Part 1 Session, 1863), 695.

Bill Casey teaches Australian Studies for The University of Queensland Science Faculty’s International Programmes, and is an MPhil student in the School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics at UQ.
records. Not the Indigenous deaths. They are the unnamed, the unnumbered, the dishonoured; their remains lie scattered, burned, hidden. In the very unlikely event of the Indigenous death tally being a fifth of an estimated 20,000, the 4,000 would be greater than the combined Australian death tolls in the Boer, Korean, Vietnam, Gulf, and Iraq Wars. Research into the frontier war therefore has an added burden beyond historical analysis—the burden of showing how the force of illusion has undermined the frontier war’s historical reality.

Since the Second World War, Indigenous and non-Indigenous historians, archaeologists and anthropologists have re-contextualised frontier conflict. An earlier orthodoxy had Eurocentric civilisation conquering Antipodean savagery, superior technology triumphant over Stone Age implements. Revised understandings pit numerically superior colonists against Aboriginal communities decimated by European diseases. Among many works, Clive Turnbull’s Black War, Henry Reynolds’ The Other Side of the Frontier, Raymond Evans’ Race Relations in Colonial Queensland, Jonathon Richards’ The Secret War, and Marcia Langton and Gordon Briscoe’s commentary in the 2008 television series, The First Australians, reassert the vigour, and the cost, of Aboriginal resistance. Dissenting views, like Keith Windschuttle’s The Fabrication of Aboriginal History, significantly reduce estimates of Indigenous deaths on the frontier. By ignoring Aboriginal oral evidence, and relying solely on written archival material, Windschuttle disputes the likelihood of unrecorded murders of Aboriginal people by settlers or authorities.

The early colonial Queensland Rifle Association (QRA) and the Queensland Volunteers augment our knowledge of the frontier war and reassert its social reality. Until this research, historians have not commented on the suggestion that Queensland Volunteers serve on the frontier. The suggestion provides a measure of the anxiety that Aboriginal resistance created in colonial Queensland. In 1860, William Thornton, MLC, thought Queensland’s frontier conflict hardly rated with the New Zealand Wars; by 1865, Governor Bowen considered the two conflicts presented similar dangers to settlers. This study reaffirms the conclusions of Evans and Richards in their works above: that the Queensland Parliament, despite being aware of the consequences, allowed state-sponsored frontier violence to continue.

In late June 1860, the Queensland Parliament announced a select committee inquiry into the new colony’s Native Police force. The following month, Parliament proposed £3000 for arms for the new Queensland Volunteers. At that time, the volunteers were the colony’s sole defence force. When the Second New Zealand War had broken out, Britain shipped most of the remaining Imperial troops in Australia across the Tasman. Queensland felt ‘particularly vulnerable as it lacked an Imperial garrison and a volunteer corps.’ In early September 1860, Governor Bowen appointed Lt-Col. Maurice O’Connell as Commandant of the Volunteer Rifle Brigade. Within days the Courier published a letter from “Rough Reality,” a working-class critic of the volunteers. ‘This Jimcrack movement won’t do,’ warned “Rough Reality,” ‘this move to save the waste lands and waste the people of the land.’ “Rough Reality” assumed volunteers on the frontier would shoot (waste) Aborigines. He had linked the volunteers, the Native Police and the Aborigines to the land issue.

11. The Moreton Bay Courier, 1 September 1860: 2.
“A Volunteer” took “Rough Reality” to task. There were ‘sixty or seventy stalwart lads at drill, all of whom are working men—any of whom I would back to give “Rough Reality” the best thrashing he ever had in his life, and who mean to give any foreign aggressor a similar entertainment …’ “Rough Reality” had ‘base cowardly doctrines,’ ‘enough to make an honest Englishman sick!” “Rough Reality” was a ‘traitor,’ ‘a downright poltroon,’ trying to ‘mask his cowardice by a very silly attempt to connect the volunteer movement with the land question.’ For good measure, “A Volunteer” added that “Rough Reality” was ‘a barefaced impostor’ and a ‘mean spirited wretch.’

Despite the protests, “Rough Reality” was not the first to connect the volunteers to the frontier war. A volunteers’ meeting in Ipswich had done the same: ‘Paradoxical as it may appear, we believe that more blacks and whites have perished in these districts from bad shooting than from good. Emboldened by the harmlessness of firearms in the hands of many of the whites, their [the Aborigines’] audacity increased, and natives who would have run away at the report of a fowling-piece soon acquired sufficient pluck to become assailants.” Better shooting would therefore kill more Aborigines, and supposedly deter Aboriginal reprisals.

The volunteer issue interested many Brisbanites, churchmen included. Presbyterian minister Charles Ogg also suggested Volunteers serve on the frontier. Wrote Rev. Ogg, “The aborigines of Queensland are at the bottom of the scale of human beings … in a state of unbroken barbarity …” Having warmed to his topic, Ogg proposed ‘every man capable of bearing arms in the bush ought to be enrolled,’ that the ‘home government [lend] us a few companies of riflemen, who could be scattered along the coast,’ and that Native Police and volunteers show, ‘by a display of strength, that it is useless for them [Aborigines] to think of escape when they have perpetrated their deeds of darkness.’ That his “cure” might worsen the situation, or that the colonists’ “displays of strength” and armed reprisals might also be “deeds of darkness,” were tragic ironies outside Ogg’s scope.

Ogg saw danger on every hand: ‘foreign foes’ would ‘make use of the blacks,’ an educated Aborigine would use a rifle ‘for the destruction of his benefactor,’ with the result that ‘civilization would be hemmed in between two foes.’ He advised colonists to ‘let the state of matters in New Zealand teach us a lesson … I know one station which was guarded by one good shot, whose duty it was to keep riding round the boundaries of the run, and were all stations to have a few volunteers enrolled for this special duty … the interior could be kept in perfect safety until the return of the police …’ For Ogg, the cost of freedom was constant vigilantes.

The Rev. J. D. Lang went a step further than Ogg, and rationalised the violence. At a January 1856 meeting of Brisbane’s Friends of the Aborigines, Lang said that colonists were ‘certainly debtors’ to the first Australians, since colonists ‘had seized upon their land and confiscated their territory.’ In doing that, he did not think they had done anything wrong. ‘God in making the earth never intended it should be occupied by men so incapable of appreciating its resources as the aborigines of Australia.’ Lang’s comment made the Aborigines’ “Friends” indistinguishable from their enemies.

Another Friend of the Aborigines was Congregational minister Rev. J. W. C. Drane. Unlike Lang, he condemned, not condoned. He deplored the Guardian’s call on 6 November 1861 to ‘hunt down and shoot the blacks.’ Drane’s adversary was the Guardian’s editor, Dr. William Hobbs, Governor Bowen’s physician and ‘a social Darwinist’ who had ‘devoted a series of long editorials to the Aborigines in an attempt to establish their inferiority before the law.’ Hobbs presented a view, ‘popular among Queensland squatters, that no white man who shot an Aborigine, in self-defence or in sport, should be exposed to trial or sentence.’ The Guardian wanted revenge for the Nogoa massacre where Aborigines murdered

14. Northern Australian, as per The Moreton Bay Courier, 3 August 1859: 2.
nineteen colonists, including cricketer Tom Wills’ father. Rev. Drane responded, ‘The blacks have as much right to live here as ourselves and justice is as much their claim as ours … though degraded and uncivilized they have a right to be treated as men and women … God is no respecter of persons; neither ought British law to be, as applied to the Aborigines around us.’

For nineteenth-century colonists it was easier to protest against violence than to see that Aborigines were already civilised.

The Courier had been strenuously campaigning for government to replace the ‘wretched abortion now honoured by the appellation of the “Native Police Corps”.’ Queensland had inherited the Native Police on separation from New South Wales. The Courier proclaimed that the question was ‘whether an effective organisation cannot be formed irrespective of the blacks altogether; whether a border force of whites cannot be constituted which would be no more expensive to the country and far more effective in its operation …’

Letters from squatters and ‘One who has seen too much of the Native Police’ hoped that a ‘European Force could be established of a far more reliable and effective character than the one now cherished.’

Rightly or wrongly, the perception grew that volunteers might patrol the frontier, and during the May 1861 Inquiry, Maurice O’Connell faced specific questions about volunteers and civilians working with the Native Police. An alternative view was that volunteers might replace the Native Police if the Inquiry abolished the force. Either way, the recently formed adjunct of the volunteers, the QRA, could train marksmen for the frontier. The QRA had two stated purposes: it would encourage ‘rifle practise throughout the colony,’ and it would support the military volunteer movement.

Ironically, the Brisbane Volunteers thought war with the Aborigines would amount to little. At the volunteers’ first meeting, William Thornton, MLC, had said ‘he certainly did not expect the aborigines of Queensland would ever make such a stand as the New Zealanders could do …’ Most colonists agreed, and this smug assessment of Aboriginal resistance explains the increasing despair and hostility as the frontier war escalated.

Five years later, in 1865, Governor Bowen bewailed ‘Queensland’s warlike Aborigines.’ In the following year, he stated, ‘I would require at least 10,000 Imperial troops to control 2,000 Aboriginal warriors.’ In a letter to the Secretary of State for Colonies, Bowen included a briefing note that compared Queensland’s situation to New Zealand. Prepared by A. W. Manning, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, the note made two points. Firstly, ‘The hostile aborigines in the interior of Queensland are more numerous in most points in proportion to the few scattered settlers than are the Maoris [sic] in proportion to the British population of New Zealand.’ Secondly, ‘The entire cost of the Mounted Native Police (a force somewhat resembling the Cape mounted police) and of the internal defence of Queensland generally, is borne by the colonists, who do for themselves what has always been done chieflly by the mother country in the two other colonies (the Cape and New Zealand) where the aborigines are numerous and hostile.’ Bowen’s pleas to London went unheeded. Whitehall had already dispatched ‘a force of 10,000 imperial troops’ to fight the ‘insurgent Maori [sic].’

In 1863, the Secretary of State for Colonies had informed Bowen, ‘Responsible government [means] that the Imperial Government has no further responsibility for maintaining the internal tranquillity of

24. Qld. Despatch series 1, no. 30, vol. 1, Bowen to Secretary of State for Colonies, 18/5/1865 and enclosure: minutes of meeting of Executive Council, 10 May 1865, 165.
26. A. W. Manning, Clerk of the Legislative Council, to Governor Bowen, for attention of Secretary of State for Colonies, Queensland (Queensland Legislative Assembly, Votes and Proceedings Part 1, 1866), 759.
the country … Its obligations towards the defence of the Colonies … is limited to the contingency of war and the danger of war. In the absence of a formal declaration of hostilities, and without the requested Redcoats from Mother England, Queensland’s government allowed settlers and the Native Police to forge their own ways of ‘maintaining the internal tranquility.’

By 1874, the Courier was lamenting the ‘guerilla war’ that ‘no one attempts to justify … on legal grounds. There is no legality in it … we are always fighting with the blacks on the frontier and they with us … In this frontier war—for that it really is … [a] native police officer must be a law to himself, the rifles and carbines of his men being his executioners.’

Before, during, and after the 1861 Inquiry, there were numerous formal, informal or social links between the volunteers, QRA members and the Native Police. Maurice O’Connell was President of the new Rifle Association; its patron was Governor Bowen. Some Native Police officers received supernumerary ranks in the volunteers. The recipients included the current Native Police Commandant, Edric Morrisett, and Lt. John O’Connell Bligh, a future Commandant. Bligh was Maurice O’Connell’s cousin. Maurice O’Connell figured prominently in other connections to the Native Police. While Commissioner of Lands at Port Curtis (Gladstone), he supervised a Native Police detachment for four years, and he testified in two Parliamentary Inquiries into the Native Police (1858 and 1861).

In 1858, O’Connell supported Frederick Walker, the former Native Police Commandant. According to O’Connell, Walker ‘had worked a change and improvement in the aborigines [the Aboriginal troopers] I was hardly prepared to think they were capable of.’ Walker had been sacked for drunkenness. He poached several Native Police troopers and the Courier reported that he ‘had been employed by some squatters to organise a sort of guerilla force at their expense to wage warfare against the blacks.’ His business flourished until the New South Wales government complained. O’Connell’s testimony accelerated Walker’s rehabilitation and he was hired to search for the lost explorers, Burke and Wills. In both Parliamentary Inquiries, O’Connell argued that one of the prime aims of the Native Police was ‘to render each individual member of the force as expert in the use of the weapons entrusted to him as he is capable of becoming.’ The QRA’s objective was strikingly similar.

O’Connell, as President of the Acclimatisation Society, accepted plant specimens from Native Police officer Lt. Frederick Wheeler. Wheeler was stationed at Port Curtis when O’Connell supervised the Native Police contingent. Contemporary accounts, as well as recent publications like Jonathon Richards’ Secret War, paint Wheeler as a barbaric murderer. He is held responsible for Indigenous deaths at Fassifern, a massacre at Caboolture, and in 1876, the murder of an Aboriginal boy at Banchory station, Clermont. While on bail, he absconded, and died in Java in 1882. Bail was supposedly provided by the presiding judge, and QRA Vice-President, Justice Alfred Lutwyche.

Until the Native Police’s abolition in 1910, former or future Native Police officers joined rifle clubs, competed in QRA competitions, won prizes and helped administrate rifle shooting in Queensland. The most notable was George P. M. Murray, Brisbane’s Police Magistrate in the late 1890s. Murray, a Native Police officer from 1857 to 1866, joined the first Wide Bay Rifle Club as early as 1858, and was a leading figure in the Queensland Scottish Rifle Club.

28. Secretary of State for Colonies to Governor Bowen, 695.
29. The Brisbane Courier, 5 November 1874: 2.
30. The Moreton Bay Courier, 6 March 1860: 2.
32. Select committee on the murders by the Aborigines on the Dawson River (NSW Legislative Assembly, Votes and Proceedings vol. 2 no. 2, 1858), 853.
34. Select committee on the murders by the Aborigines on the Dawson River, 861.
35. The Brisbane Courier, 8 June 1864: 2.
36. The Courier, 1 September 1862: 2; The Courier, 4 October 1862: 2.
Despite links with the Native Police, there was never any QRA policy to support the Native Police, to support the frontier war, or to condone violence of any kind. The QRA had no policies other than encouraging the volunteers and the sport of rifle-shooting. However, the QRA’s many connections with the Volunteer Corps, the Native Police and with prominent squatters and Parliamentarians make it seem more complicit in frontier violence than neutral—context turns the QRA’s silence into tacit acquiescence.

The perception ignores the background of the QRA membership. The colonial QRA contained the bulk of Brisbane’s educated, liberal, conservative elite. These men joined the volunteers and the rifle association out of a strong sense of civic duty. That duty encompassed the rule of English law, which they considered the basis of civilized society. The reality was that the QRA contained two of the era’s most vocal opponents of the Native Police, Maurice O’Connell and Charles Lilley.

O’Connell damned the management of the Native Police in the two Parliamentary Inquiries. He proposed that its violent excesses be curbed by legislation, training, structural reform, military discipline and recruitment of trained troops, either men from the British cavalry or the Irish constabulary. O’Connell argued strongly that the force was inefficient, responsible for atrocities and needed comprehensive reforms. At both inquiries he offered a plan for reconstructing the force. His plan included a military band and a budget of over £40,000.40

O’Connell’s testimony resurfaced in 1868 in London’s Colonial Intelligencer.41 Attributed to ‘a correspondent in Queensland,’ phrases echoing O’Connell’s included: ‘the natives are employed to destroy natives, and in a time of peace the work is going on as bravely as if an open war had been declared on every black skin in the colony,’ and ‘if the native police there had been properly organised for the purpose of extirpating aborigines, they could not accomplish that object more effectually.’42 The article also raised O’Connell’s doubt to the legality of a force ‘constituted under an Act of the Legislature of NSW, which Act, as far as can be ascertained, has not been re-passed since the separation of Qld from the parent colony.’43

Debate continued for decades over the legality of the Native Police, and whether the force was separate from, or part of, the regular Queensland Police. In 1884, the Police Commissioner stated, ‘We have in Queensland a native police force quite separate from the ordinary police, and maintained solely for the ‘purpose of dealing with offences committed by the natives.’44 Historian Raymond Evans noted ‘such an accepted concept of distinctiveness’ gave the Native Police ‘an unspecified extra-legal dimension, which the Police Act did not seem to encompass.’45 MP John Douglas told Parliament in 1880 that ‘The officers … were not justified under the civil law in acting as they did, and they did not exercise that discretion which military law demanded …’46 Despite such comments, Parliament made no effort to reform the force.

The constitution of the Native Police is mentioned, though not explained, in the obscure §33 of the 1863 Queensland Amendment to Laws relating to Police Force (Qld, 27 Vic No 11, §33 – There shall continue to be a Native Police force, etc.). The legality of the general order to disperse was an entirely different matter. On at least two occasions, Lt. Wheeler defended his actions by referring to the general order: ‘his instructions compel him to disperse blacks wherever they may have congregated,’47 and, ‘It is the general order that whenever there are large assemblages of blacks, it is the duty of an officer to disperse them.’48

40. Select committee on the Native Police Force, 488.
41. Colonial Intelligencer, March 1868, as per The Brisbane Courier, 16 June 1868: 3.
42. Select committee on the Native Police Force, 489.
43. Select committee on the Native Police Force, 488; The Brisbane Courier, 16 June 1868: 3.
44. D. T. Seymour, to Govt. Resident, Northern Territory, 4 December 1884: QSA. Col/ A409, in letter no. 8551 of 1884, as quoted in Evans, Race Relations, 60.
45. Evans, Race Relations, 62.
46. QPD, XXXII (1880) 669–670, as quoted in Evans, Race Relations, 62.
47. The Courier, 4 October 1862: 2.
48. Select committee on the Native Police Force, 17.
The general order originated prior to separation; Commandant Edric Morisset wrote it at Wide Bay, Queensland, in January 1858. It is among other Native Police regulations included as an appendix to the 1861 Inquiry. The general order says simply, ‘It is the duty of the Officers at all times and opportunities to disperse any large assemblage of blacks.’\(^49\) Who could tell which legislative instrument authorised this general order? If the *Riot Act*, why was it not mentioned in §33? Since the general order had been inherited from New South Wales, surely it had to be ratified by Queensland’s Executive Council? Apparently, it had not.

Apart from impeding Indigenous trade, the general order effectively outlawed Aboriginal cultural practices. No matter the intent of the assembly—corroboree, funeral, initiation ceremony or otherwise—Aborigines were not to congregate. The general order rebutted officialdom’s assurances that Aborigines were British subjects, and opened the door to state sanctioned violence and death for Aboriginal people in Queensland.

The *Courier* had censured MLCs Gore and Watts for ‘placing on record the inimitable theoretical absurdities that the blacks were not British subjects—not entitled to the protection of British law and that they must be treated as inhabitants of a country under martial law.’\(^50\) The general order, of course, was no theoretical absurdity: it was a disturbing reality. Lt. Wheeler agreed with the MLCs, and the basis of his agreement was the general order. He ‘looks upon himself as a military officer and the whole of the blacks in the country as under martial law, it is easy to understand how he should coolly tell the committee that “there is no other way than surrounding the camps and shooting innocent gins” by mistake.’\(^51\)

The general order, therefore, did mean that the ‘whole of the blacks in the country’ were under martial law. Although Queensland had not ratified that order by due process, New South Wales had. Draconian, anti-assembly regulations began with Governor Lachlan Macquarie as early as May 1816. Aborigines ‘were forbidden to carry weapons within one and a half kilometres of European habitations or to congregate in groups of more than six, on pain of being shot at.’\(^52\) In Tasmania, Governor Arthur empowered settlers to treat threatening Aborigines as ‘open enemies’; in 1828, he declared limited martial law to combat Aboriginal resistance, followed by total martial law in 1830.\(^53\)

O’Connell railed at the injustice of the policies governing the Native Police: ‘If the Native Police are left to pursue a wholesale system of extermination and to keep the blacks from all contact with the whites, [then] you may protect the lives of the white population, but at a great sacrifice—and I believe an unjust sacrifice—of the lives of the aborigines.’\(^54\) O’Connell’s approach had two flaws: it was contained in a Parliamentary Inquiry, and not part of a broader public protest, and he limited himself to the operations of the Native Police, rather than proclaiming general support for Aboriginal people. As did Charles Lilley, Maurice O’Connell saw Native Police violence and frontier conflict as failures in applying the rule of law, not as a social justice issue emanating from the illegal dispossession of Indigenous land.

Charles Lilley, a foundation member of the QRA, was a Brisbane solicitor, a former editor of the *Courier*, and MLA for Brisbane’s Fortitude Valley. He was later Queensland’s Premier, then Chief Justice. He most famously attacked the reputation of the Native Police in an 1863 case involving Richard Miller. Miller was charged with assaulting a Native Police Officer, William Cave, with intent to prevent the apprehension of an Aboriginal boy. Lilley cross-examined Miller’s boss, the station owner Mr. Cameron. Cameron told the court that both he and Miller supposed Cave was going ‘as was the habit of NP

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\(^49\) Ibid., 562.
\(^50\) *The Courier*, 29 August 1861: 2.
\(^51\) *The Courier*, 24 July 1861: 3.
\(^52\) Michael McKernan and Margaret Browne, eds., *Australia: Two Centuries of War and Peace* (Canberra: Allen and Unwin, 1988), 95.
\(^53\) Ibid., 96.
\(^54\) Select committee on the Native Police Force, 489.
officers, to shoot the boy Peter.\textsuperscript{55} In summing up, Lilley stressed that Miller’s actions were due to his impression that the lad’s life was in danger. The jury returned almost immediately with a verdict of not guilty.

Along with the \textit{Courier} newspaper, and testimony from the two Parliamentary Committees, Lilley consolidated the reputation of the Native Police as a legalised hit squad. The 1861 Inquiry, itself, augmented the force’s unsavoury reputation: the Inquiry found proven instances of ‘indiscriminate slaughter which appears on more than one occasion to have taken place.’\textsuperscript{56} No charges were ever laid.

In later years, ex-members of the Native Police sought to clear its name. W. R. O. Hill, in his book, \textit{Forty-Five Years Experiences in North Queensland}, exclaimed, ‘The old talk about dispersing the blacks, and wiping out tribes indiscriminately, is a fallacy, for I am in a position to assert that I never knew an officer to allow a shot to be fired unless in extreme necessity, and then only when the blacks were caught red-handed.’\textsuperscript{57} In the next chapter, Hill contradicts himself. He describes ‘Vick, another good trooper … carrying a little boy about four years of age whose father had been deservedly shot … I was horrified to see Vick ride up to a tree and knock the little chap’s brains out! … Vick got a flogging he never forgot.’\textsuperscript{58}

Vick was never charged for the murder of the child. In comparison, consider bushranger Thomas Jeffries and his gang who killed six Europeans in a rum-fuelled rampage in northern Tasmania in January 1826. The death that attracted the most condemnation was Mrs. Tibbs’s five-month old child. Jeffries took the infant ‘and dashed out its brains on a tree-trunk.’\textsuperscript{59} Jeffries, ‘the monster’ who had eaten the flesh of another victim, was captured, charged, found guilty, and hung.

Colonists believed the law should protect as well as punish them, and ignored the fact that Aborigines were punished, rarely protected. Queensland juries would often add insult to injury by acquitting whites of crimes committed against blacks. In February 1873, Robert Dunsmore appeared in the Toowoomba Circuit court. He admitted murdering the Aborigine Thurragai Jack, and said, ‘Served him right … I saw I had gone too far but it was no use crying over spilt milk.’ The jury delivered a verdict of not guilty and the prisoner was discharged.\textsuperscript{60}

The Native Police reports were kept to a minimum; Native Police officers learned not to have a European witness with them on patrol: ‘I never take any white people with me’ admitted Wheeler.\textsuperscript{61} Accountability was a by-product of public interest or media scrutiny, rather than procedural intervention. The administrative failures facilitated Native Police crimes and shielded members from prosecution. Although contemporaries continued to question the paramilitary activities of the Native Police, and to condemn its violence, the Queensland government failed to restrain its activities.

The most conspicuous reason for the government’s failure was money. Queensland’s Native Police fought on the frontier at an average of £10,000 per annum. When Maurice O’Connell proposed a reconstructed force, his budget quadrupled that amount, with annual salaries alone costing £16,446 7s 6d.\textsuperscript{62} O’Connell’s plan was doomed since Native troopers were paid a quarter of the European wage. It was a foregone conclusion the Committee would find against ‘the substitution of white troopers for native.’ The frontier war might have been economic, but first and foremost it was a war of economy, the cheap option, and a war of investment, a futures option. As British historian Neil Faulkner described the Roman invasion of Britain, ‘It was expected to return a reward in plundered wealth, which in the long run at least, not only paid for the war, but made the warmonger richer and stronger. The lower the level of economic and social development, the more marginal were the gains, and the more problematic

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{The Courier}, 21 April 1863: 3.
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{The Courier}, 24 July 1861: 2.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 38–39.
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Hobart Town Gazette}, 28 January 1826: 2.
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{The Brisbane Courier}, 21 February 1873: 7.
\textsuperscript{61} Select committee on the Native Police Force, 17.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 488–489.
the military effort.’63 Aboriginal Australia made a virtue of nomadic subsistence; cities paved with gold were not their style. Consequently, expenditure on the frontier war was always minimal.

When the Courier announced in 1879 that ‘we are today at war with every tribe of wild blacks on the frontiers of settlement, and the gain to the community, judging from numerous complaints that reach us from the North, is not commensurate with the expense of maintaining the force of native troopers,’64 it was the exasperated cry of a reformist newspaper unable to make Parliament commit to reform. Squatter interests dominated Parliament, especially the Legislative Council. The landed elite pursued their own interests consistently and shamelessly. Since the Native Police performed at the beck and call of squatters, the Legislative Council was wary of interfering with the force. O’Connell, station owner and President of the Legislative Council, was at odds with his own, both in his wish to upgrade the Native Police, and to establish a viable volunteer force.

Parliament initially voted £3,000 for the volunteers’ arms. After the 1861 Inquiry, Parliament starved the volunteers of funds for a decade. From 1860–1870, the total Queensland defence vote was £9,048 1s 8p.65 The Native Police received more in a year. The QRA received no government assistance, instead relying on subscriptions of a guinea per member per annum, and donations from supporters. Debate over the reality of the frontier ‘war’ stretches back 150 years, with recent interest coloured by Australian nationalism. The bullish nationalism of the 1970s painted colonialism with a wide stripe of anti-British sentiment. ‘Blaming the British’ linked frontier conflict with Gallipoli and the fall of Singapore, a triumvirate of defence débâcles from which Australia sought to assert an independent national voice. However, attempts to blame frontier violence entirely on British colonialism must founder. While the provision of external colonial defence certainly illustrates an overwhelming dependence on the ‘Mother Country,’ internal defence was a colonial responsibility. Queensland was no exception. Britain supplied Queensland’s Native Police and Volunteers with guns and ammunition, but local authorities made the final decision about who used the weapons, and who they were used against, or not.

Maurice O’Connell’s choice that the Queensland Volunteers would not bear arms against Aborigines belies the so-called ‘inevitability’ of conflict. ‘Shooting blacks is one of the common accessories of bush life all over Queensland,’ wrote a Charters Towers resident in 1883. ‘It is the inevitable consequence of our possession of the land.’66 Inevitability had found sustenance in Social Darwinism and the doctrine of manifest destiny, two populist notions that many Queenslanders found particularly attractive. The phrase ‘survival of the fittest’ even sold beer for Brisbane’s West End Brewery.67 While Darwinian theories and manifest destiny seemed to provide retrospective absolution for frontier violence, those views always had opponents. On Christmas Day 1882, a Courier book reviewer pilloried Miss Anna Buckley’s social Darwinist tract, Winners in Life’s Races, ending with an elegant coup de grâce: ‘It is the triumph of civilisation to correct in some degree the inequalities of nature and to protect the weak against the strong.’68

O’Connell’s choice reaffirmed the frontier as a place where negotiation and cooperation could and did occur. In 1861, the Chairman of the Wide Bay Cotton Growing Association praised ‘the blacks [who] in various numbers have been continually occupied. Had it not been for the aborigines, the work already done could not have been done with our limited means.’69 In 1858, grazier Alfred Brown noted, ‘The blacks whom we employ as shepherds and stockmen … are very useful to us and very beneficial

64. The Brisbane Courier, 18 February 1879: 2.
67. The Northern Miner, 21 August 1891: 3.
68. The Brisbane Courier, 25 December 1882: 5.
to the country. O’Connell himself spoke of a property on the Burnett where Aboriginal shepherds had charge of nearly 16,000 sheep.

That a penny-pinching Parliament facilitated violence on Queensland’s frontier seems oddly prosaic amid larger debates about colonialism, dispossession and racism. It is the commonplace, everyday aspect of the stinginess that makes it so chilling. The parsimony had a purpose — Parliament wanted to create infrastructure — but the honourable members knew building railways would reduce protection of Aboriginal people. That fact is to the lasting discredit of Queensland’s colonial Parliament.

70. Select committee on the murders by the Aborigines on the Dawson River, 889.
71. Select committee on the Native Police Force, 490.
72. This article is dedicated to John and Joyce McDowell for innumerable kindnesses shown to my family and myself over many years. When I was a high school history student, John’s brilliant teaching was an inspiration. He has been a great friend and mentor ever since.