CHAPTER II

THE INFLUENCE OF THE SQUATTING MOVEMENT UPON FRONTIER CONTACT

The first North Queensland squatters who took possession of their runs on New Years' Morning, 1861, were only the vanguard of a quickly growing army of land-hungry pioneers which had begun the invasion of the Moreton Bay settlement in 1842. The approach of separation increased the flow from the southern states where the agitation to 'unlock the land' caused many squatters to seek safer investments. In the opening years of the 1860's, the passing of the selection legislation in Victoria and New South Wales sustained the movement.

The Queensland Government, dependent upon the pastoral industry for its revenue, was anxious to exploit its vast, readily available land resources.

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At separation the pastoral industry provided 71.4% of Queensland's revenues and 93.53% of its export earnings and the squatters knew how to use their predominant position. In Parliament, the squatter vote was essential to the existence of the first Herbert ministry while the opposition, although almost exclusively made up of town members, realized that compromise with the pastoral interest was essential; the progress of Queensland could be equated with the progress of the pastoral industry.

The incentive of wealth in the virgin lands of North Queensland attracted some of the most adventurous and most experienced bushmen in Australia. Bolton described the typical North Queensland pioneer as a young owner-manager coming from an established squattting family to whom he owed his backing. Others were financed by sleeping partners in Sydney or Melbourne,

4. ibid., p.39.

or by banks or old-established merchant houses. Many were only birds of passage hoping to sell out quickly for a good price so that they could return to England; and many were so heavily in debt that any unfavourable circumstance threatened them with insolvency. Under the 1860 land legislation, squatters were obliged to stock new runs to one-quarter of their capacity within twelve months and most of them needed heavy backing to do this, especially as the rush north 'sent up the prices of sheep and cattle to fabulous rates'. By the close of 1863, about two-thirds of the sheep and horses and about one-half of the cattle in Queensland were under mortgage; by 1865, the amount mortgaged had almost doubled and many squatters could not survive the financial crisis of 1866, unfavourable seasons, or the expense of dispossessing the Aborigines.

6. Bolton, op. cit., p.32. See article on 'Alexander Kennedy' in North Queensland Pioneers, compiled by J. Black, (Printed for Queensland Country Women's Association, (early 1930's), p.64, for the, perhaps, not impartial claim that the North Queensland pioneers were 'the most adventurous bushmen in Australia'. The various reminiscences, listed in the Bibliography, of Gray, Christison, Corfield, Eden, etc. however, do much to substantiate the claim.

7. Article on 'Alexander Kennedy' in North Queensland Pioneers, compiled by J. Black, p.64. Kennedy was a pioneer squatter.

The Aborigines threatened more than the lives of North Queenslanders; they threatened their economic survival. At a time when shepherding was the only means of flock control on the frontier, fear of the Aborigines made such labour scarce and expensive.\(^9\)

Moreover, keeping cattle on a run involved constant 'tailing' or riding around the herd for some months before the cattle settled down. If the Aborigines seriously disturbed the cattle, the whole expensive, time-consuming process had to be started all over again.\(^10\) Many squatters believed that 'cattle have always a great fear of blacks'; that is, cattle and wild blacks couldn't mix.\(^11\) As well the Aborigines frequently destroyed large numbers of sheep and

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10. ibid., pp.160-162.

11. 'Minutes of Evidence', p.98, in 'Report from the Select Committee on the Native Police Force and the Condition of the Aborigines Generally Together with Proceedings of the Committee and Minutes of Evidence' in *1861 Votes & Proceedings of the Queensland Legislative Assembly*, p.393ff. As the pages are not numbered consecutively throughout the whole book, I shall refer to the page number of the 'Native Police Force Report' or the 'Minutes of Evidence' in *1861 V. & P.*
cattle either because they did not differentiate between them and wild life or because they wished to avenge themselves on the white man's valuable property. Often they killed these animals because their own food was depleted but many Europeans refused to acknowledge this.  

Thus the squatters who came north, in 1861, would inevitably be brought into conflict with the people whose land they were usurping. Driven on by visions of wealth and a 'greed of country' and often stretched across a financial knife edge, they found it easy to believe they were engaged in a just war with a dangerous foe constantly threatening themselves and their families.  

At this time the isolated shepherds and hut-keepers who encountered the Aborigines most and had most to fear from them were generally poor types -

12. ibid., pp. 8; 9. Squatter Lowe testified to the destructiveness of the Aborigines. Other witnesses at this inquiry agreed.

13. ibid., Squatter Lowe thought the Aborigines wanton not hungry.
usually ex-convicts Cowin believed\textsuperscript{14} - as the job was very unattractive because of its monotony, isolation, and danger. In fear of their lives they often took the law into their own hands to destroy the Aboriginal threat with guns and poisoned flour or poisoned meat.\textsuperscript{15} Some of the employees were ne'er do wells given a last chance to redeem themselves, and many didn't.\textsuperscript{16} Consequently, at many of the most sensitive points of contact were men of either low intelligence and education or poor character or both.

Many of the North Queensland pioneer squatters came from pastoral families or had pastoral experience and were thus a dynamic offshoot of the eastern Australian squatting movement which had been in progress for a generation by 1861. A very large number of the pioneers coming to North Queensland, the last region in Eastern Australia to be settled, were

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{14} W. Cowin, \textit{European-Aboriginal Relations in Early Queensland, 1859-92}, (Queensland University Honours Thesis, 1950), p.3. She does not give her source for this information.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} 'Minutes of Evidence' in \textit{1861 V. & P.}, p.19. Captain Coley mentioned the use of strychnine and arsenic in flour. Wilson, p.72, a squatter thought hutkeepers and employees were 'frequently responsible'.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Bolton, op. cit., p.36.
\end{itemize}
already experienced in dispossessing Aborigines or steeped in the squatters' rationale for dispossession. Jane Black's valuable historical document, *North Queensland Pioneers*, indicates that the more noteworthy and more successful pastoralists represented in her biographies had almost without exception accumulated such experience. Of the sixty-three whose origins can be determined, approximately 80% were of experienced pastoral stock while approximately 20% became pastoralists after following various non-pastoral occupations such as carting or running such small country businesses as hotels, butcheries, stores etc.; that is, many of these from non-pastoral stock had lived for years in frontier conditions and had probably absorbed bush experience and bush mores. Many had accumulated experience moving from one area to another throughout eastern Australia while only one was a 'new chum' seemingly fresh from overseas.\(^{17}\)

\[\text{A North Queensland squatter, Curr, has well}\]

\(^{17}\) Black, *North Queensland Pioneers*, passim.
illustrated how violent conflict with the Aborigines was accepted as an inevitable part of the adventure of pioneering:

We thoroughly enjoyed those days of wild and romantic life, with our horse and our gun, swimming flooded rivers, with the danger of being dragged under by undertows or swept under driftwood, and 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. (18)

The Basis of Frontier Conflict throughout Eastern Australia

In theory, the squatters and Aborigines had equality before the law as the Aborigines were British citizens living in a territory over which British sovereignty had been proclaimed. On the frontier, however, they could not be expected to understand British law, or even to accept it if ever it had been explained to them. They had their own law which was inextricably a part of their way of life while the theoretical benefits of British citizenship were only an unpalatable sequel of British conquest. Thus, it

18. 'Article on Curr' in North Queensland Pioneers, compiled by Black, p.27.
is obvious that the Aborigines on the frontier could not claim protection as British subjects. This was often true as well for the pioneer who could not resort to the normal process of law before, during, or often after conflict, as nowhere in frontier Australia was police protection adequate. The settler was expected to defend himself and, this being the case, the various governments could not afford to inquire too closely into how it was done, nor conduct inquests except when, as occasionally happened, a concerned European made a complaint. Their nineteenth century budgets could not provide adequate frontier security yet their economic welfare demanded expansion of settlement.

In 1799, when free New South Wales settlers on trial for murdering two Aborigines, received an unduly light sentence, colonists concluded that the local

19. P. Hasluck, Black Australians, A Survey of Native Policy in Western Australia (Melbourne, 1942), pp. 13; 45-54. Hasluck discusses the illusion, to the Aborigines, of British citizenship.

administration was no longer willing to put whites on trial for killing Aborigines. Grenfell Price stressed the importance of this government action but the lack of supervision on the expanding frontier was probably more important in producing racial conflict. The British humanitarian movement penetrated to New South Wales and in 1838 seven whites were executed for perpetrating the infamous Myall Creek massacre. Grenfell Price claimed the colonists again realized that wanton murder of Aborigines was prohibited, but, on the frontier, conflict continued in much the same way as before. Cowin maintained that there was open conflict of formidable proportions between the Aborigines and northern squatters for the twenty years before separation. Each race assumed the collective responsibility of the other race for injuries received and practised collective retaliation. While Cowin thought the main reason for the Aborigines' uncompromising hostility was the unavoidable placing of

22. ibid., p.108. He writes: 'the previous state of affairs'.
23. W. Cowin, European-Aboriginal Relations in Early Queensland 1859-1897, pp.2; 3.
irresponsible shepherds and hutkeepers where they would encounter the Aborigines, she considered there were other aggravating factors. Such legacies of brutality and mistrust as the Kilcoy massacre and the earlier, often brutal, relations with the convicts and their guards poisoned relations with the Aborigines from the start in the newly settled areas. By 1848, as the whole frontier was a line of continual conflict, a force of Native Police was established which greatly reduced Aboriginal depredations. In the Wide Bay and Burnett districts, the force was again used with remarkable success. Yet the determined and often successful resistance of the Aborigines united most European opinion against them; and when, in 1857, ten Europeans known to be sympathetic to the Aborigines, were murdered at Hornet Bank station on the Dawson River, most colonists were confirmed in their belief

24. Cowin, op.cit., pp.2; 3. In the Kilcoy massacre of 1842, large numbers of Aborigines (amounting to hundreds according to one report) were killed by a gift of poisoned flour to avenge the killing of two shepherds and a valuable bull. See 'Minutes of Evidence', p.19, in 1861 V. & P.
that frontier Aborigines could only understand coercion. At separation, then, the Queensland government had two convictions derived from New South Wales' experience: firstly, that the Native Police was the best means of facilitating expansion until the Aborigines were subdued; and secondly, that Exeter Hall humanitarianism which had resulted occasionally in Europeans' being tried for the murder of Aborigines in New South Wales was unwarranted and a grave threat to the squatter. No white man, therefore, should ever have to fear for action taken against Aborigines on the frontier. As one squatter put it: '...if the magistrates are obliged to overlook the doings of the Native Police they must also overlook any imprudent acts committed by the settlers too'. The government seemed to agree when it continued to use the Native Police but neglected to appoint a protector or establish reservations until

25. ibid., pp.3-6. 'The Hornetbank Tragedy' in The Queensland Register 28 September 1929. The Europeans were probably murdered to avenge an outrage perpetrated by two white men on some Aboriginal girls. See also Australian Encyclopaedia, Vol. I, p.101.

26. 'Minutes of Evidence', in 1861 V. & P., pp.72; also 15; 23, to indicate similar expectations.
1875 even though these practices were tried in Victoria, South Australia and West Australia, and the Queensland government was aware of them. This, then, was the crystallization of seventy years of New South Wales' experience that the new Queensland Government accepted. On 17 October 1861, the worst massacre of Europeans in Australia's history at Cullin-la-Ringo was seen as proof of both Aboriginal treachery and the soundness of Queensland government policy.

The experience was based on, and supported by, an attractively false and destructive legality that the Aborigines did not use the land which was therefore declared 'waste and unoccupied'. This meant that the squatters could claim 'self-defence' for actions against

27. Grenfell Price, op.cit., pp.110-114. 'Minutes of Evidence' in 1861 V. & P., pp.19; 41; 42; 84. A.C. Gregory, the explorer, was able to describe the West Australian experiments.

28. Cummins and Campbells' Monthly Magazine, December 1938. The Wills family of Cullin-la-Ringo Station treated the Aborigines with such confident kindness that the men did not carry firearms while working. With no obvious justification, the Aborigines attacked them killing nineteen of the twenty-two whites. See also Australian Encyclopaedia, Vol.1, p.101.

the Aborigines and could demand the protection of British law for their legally acquired runs whereas, if the Aborigines tried to defend their tribal lands against invasion, they became criminals.

The rapid spread of settlement discouraged the colonial governments from spending the time, resources, or finances to strive thoroughly for a better solution of the resulting frontier conflict. The protection of the lives and property of the British settlers was the most urgent problem, and the settler complained loudly if he wasn't satisfied.\(^30\) The less urgent problem of the welfare of the Aborigines was overshadowed by the many other pressing problems of development. This was well illustrated in Queensland where a Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly had been appointed within the first six months 'to enquire into the efficiency, management and general working of the Police and Native Police Force throughout the Colony'.\(^31\) This was


followed by a much more exhaustive enquiry the next year into the Native Police Force. The concern for security on the frontier was also evidenced in the first estimate when £13,516 (6%) was voted for the Native Police Force out of a total sum of £220,808.32

Theoretically, the Governors were the ultimate defenders of indigenous peoples and were called upon to express British Government policy by ensuring:

(a) that the Aborigines became civilized and Christian
(b) that the Aborigines enjoyed the full benefits of British citizenship and
(c) that their physical well-being was protected and fostered.

These aims had been stated as early as 1670, reasserted by the 1836-7 Select Committee of the House of Commons inquiring into the treatment of native races, and repeated automatically to the various governors.33 In the 1836-7 inquiry the British humanitarian movement expressed the idealism that had stimulated the attack on the slave trade and resulted in that watchdog of the rights of indigenous peoples, the Aborigines Protection

Society. But the ideals emanating from Exeter Hall were meaningless to laissez faire nineteenth century governments. Neither Westminster nor the colonial governments were willing to undertake the expense of the massive social welfare schemes needed, and responsible government had rendered the governor powerless to initiate such programmes. By the 1870's the convention had been established that the governor should have no opinion contrary to that held by his ministers.

Queensland native policy was the result of experience on the unsupervised frontier of the nineteenth century. Its cynical and unconcealed rejection of idealism and acceptance of pragmatism was an assertion that a statement of rights and principles could not solve the problem of contemporary racial contact. The Europeans' code of values could not equitably encompass the nineteenth century European conquest of most of the globe, a process that had been in progress for over three centuries and of which the colonization of Queensland was only a part.

34. ibid., pp.53; 54.
35. Cowin, op. cit., pp.78; 79.
Frontier Opinion of the Aborigines

The squatters' opinion of the Aborigines was largely conditioned by experience, not governed by abstract reasoning. They did not know enough about the Aborigines, their ideas were often little related to how the Aborigines lived, and they were in a situation that prevented impartiality. Nor can one accept that their stated opinion was always what they believed; often it seemed a rationalization justifying their actions. The 1861 inquiry on the Native Police Force and the condition of the Aborigines gave the squatters an opportunity to express their opinions about the people they had dispossessed or were dispossessing. An analysis of some of the commonly expressed views reveals the conventional wisdom of the frontier which a squatter had access to to justify his actions to himself, his employees, and his peers. The squatter-dominated Select Committee certainly framed their questions to sanction such views.

Possibly, the most damaging belief held was that the Aborigines were non-religious beings with no religious ceremonies, no belief in a god or gods, and not even any 'religious susceptibilities'. Even Europeans
like James Davis who had lived for over fifteen years with the Aborigines still could not understand the religious basis of Aboriginal life. Previous failures to Christianize or educate the Aborigines were used to assert that future attempts would also fail. The Commissioners stated this emphatically in their report:

The Aborigines have no idea of a future state; and are sunk in the lowest depths of barbarism. Missions have been established amongst them with but partial success; and the same may be said of the schools established in the different Colonies.

Such opinions reinforced two complementary views: firstly, that the Aborigines were a primitive form of humanity incapable of being civilized; and secondly, that they were the degraded descendants of a once higher form of life. Even James Morrill expressed this

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36. 'Minutes of Evidence' in 1861 V. & P., pp.54; 55.
37. ibid., pp.8; 74; 75; 84. 'Native Police Report' in 1861 V. & P., p.4.
second view when he associated the Aborigines with events in Biblical history and regretted that their knowledge of a future life was 'nearly obliterated'.

This very common application of the Mosaic time scale indicated that the Aborigines were a remarkably degraded retrogression from human civilization, which had originated with Adam. The first view, which is implied in much of the evidence of the Select Committee, was not based on Darwin's 'Origin of the Species' which could hardly have gained much currency by 1861. It reflected the contemporary European arrogance which found it difficult to grant these naked 'savages' human worth. Both views justified the Europeans in despising, hating, or even injuring the Aborigines to whom, many felt, normal European standards of behaviour need not apply. This intellectual blindness, at root, was 'organic with the European mind of the day. How could there be Religion without God? Without creed or church or priests? Without concern for sin or sexual morals? Without any material show?'


Britain's superiority complex had been developing for a long time from a variety of interwoven sources. The Renaissance had revived memories of ancient European culture at a time when Turkish expansion aroused a fear of pagan barbarism. This pride was expressed by the ruling elite of the newly developed national states but only indirectly reflected to the masses. The rationalist philosophers then encouraged Europeans to believe that the principle of reason had unlocked the secret of progress and was daily making their civilization superior to all others which were static and priest ridden. This supposed superiority was made tangible to the masses by the great advances in science and technology, especially European military science which was stimulated to a crushing superiority by the European national rivalries.

In the moral sphere the Europeans believed their superiority was shown in the growth of humanism and, in


43. Kiernan, op. cit., p.16.
the religious, by the spread of Christianity with which Europeans invariably associated their culture. Regardless of the intentions of the individual evangelist, European Christianity inevitably indicated its confident belief in its own superiority, a view that was generally uncritically accepted by its European adherents. As the missionaries penetrated to the Pacific, this culminated in the evangelist's picture of the 'ignoble and degraded brute' whose soul, the white Christians believed, they had to save. Yet this yearning to convert the heathen did not imply equality; for when the Europeans began to colonize distant lands, they became colour conscious as well as culture conscious. Kinship was felt with the colonists not the non-white 'natives'. In nineteenth century north-western Europe, the commercial interests became accepted as 'divinely right' and the bearers of superior civilization. The belief became established that the conquest of backward peoples was justified. In this civilizing mission, Christianity had a part but only a subsidiary one.

44. Spear, op. cit., p.131.
47. ibid., p.15.
48. ibid., p.23.
The conquest of India gave the British a special sense of psychological superiority which was amply reinforced by their commercial and industrial pre-eminence.\textsuperscript{49} This sentiment of increasing superiority pervaded all classes\textsuperscript{50} and was brought to North Queensland by those ambitious individualists, the pioneers, who believed they opposed some of the most 'ignoble and degraded' of all savages.

The squatters asserted there was much to justify their feeling of contempt. 'Civilized' Aborigines returned to their old way of life and were ungrateful for European charity.\textsuperscript{51} Witnesses related horrifying evidence of cannibalism, and claimed that tribal members, even young children, were consumed enthusiastically.\textsuperscript{52} The naked, old gins, who must have seemed hideously ugly to the Victorians and almost a perversion of the conventional idea of dignified motherhood, were thought to be malicious and responsible for inciting the young men to commit depredations.\textsuperscript{53} And disapproving squatters charged the Aborigines with homosexual and heterosexual

\textsuperscript{49} ibid., p.25.
\textsuperscript{50} Spear, op. cit., p.131.
\textsuperscript{51} 'Minutes of Evidence' in 1861 V. & P., pp.9; 62.
\textsuperscript{52} ibid., pp.2; 55.
\textsuperscript{53} ibid., pp.5; 62. See Squatter Collins p.62 for comment on the gins.
vice: they committed 'unnatural acts' at bores and raped white women. The pioneers completed a picture of sub-human behaviour by describing the Aborigines' low value of human life and their innate treachery: they would kill each other for a blanket and whites for no reason at all. \(^54\) Lying and treachery were said to be so characteristic of the race that non-acceptance of their evidence in court was warmly supported. \(^55\) Squatters denied provoking the Aborigines and claimed they had to meet the innate malice of sub-humans, incapable of religious experience, ineducable, cannabilistic, addicted to abominable vices, and scornful of the value of human life. Here was the racial stereotype of intolerance.

There were people who expressed humanitarian concern for the Aborigines, an appreciation of their human worth, and vehement criticism of the violence used.

\(^{54}\) ibid., pp.8; \(^{55}\) 78.
\(^{55}\) ibid., p.64.
against them. A Brisbane liberal like Dr. Challinor might be expected to be highly critical of the squatters and government policy towards the Aborigines, but such criticism came as well from influential men with great experience on the frontier. M.C. O'Connell, president of the Legislative Council, maintained that he had 'never seen the blacks do mischief without some previous injury being inflicted upon them by the whites', while

56. Ibid., p.14. Henry Challinor (1814?-1882), studied medicine in London. He arrived in 1849 as surgeon on the Fortitude which brought the first of Lang's migrants to Moreton Bay. Challinor contributed to the Moreton Bay District in four main fields: medicine, civic affairs, the Congregational Church and colonial politics. He aligned himself with the growing urban commercial interests against the dominant squatter establishment and was a member of the first Queensland Legislative Assembly. He lost his seat in 1868. He was an ardent if sometimes naive liberal in a squatter dominated legislature where he was disliked and feared. However, this disconcerting 'do-gooder' lived to have his virtues of liberalism and tolerance recognized.

57. Ibid., p.94. Sir Maurice Charles O'Connell (1812-1879) was born in Sydney, a grandson of Governor Bligh. Educated at Edinburgh, he entered the army attaining the rank of colonel in the British Legion in Spain. He returned to Sydney on the staff of his father, the Major-General in charge of the New South Wales armed forces. He resigned from the army, took up land, and was elected a member of the Legislative Council in 1846. He was appointed Commissioner of Crown Lands for the Burnett District in 1848 and was Government Resident at Port Curtis from 1854 to 1860. He was a nominated member of the original Queensland Legislative Council in 1860 and a minister without portfolio in the first Herbert ministry. By 1861 he was President of the Legislative Council and retained that position until his death. He was also commandant of the Queensland military forces and acting-governor of Queensland on four occasions. He was knighted in 1871.
a squatter, G.R. Haley, said that he had never had trouble with the Aborigines on stations that he had formed. He had explained his new authority over their land to the Aborigines and pointed out the conditions under which they could hunt. A refusal to co-operate resulted in banishment to the scrubs or mountains. Possibly, such humane firmness was the most that could be expected from a conqueror. Dr. Challinor, O'Connell and Sheridan, a public servant, both pointed out the need to include the Aborigines in the new frontier society by supplementing their depleted food supplies, providing useful employment, and making them understand British laws and penalties.

These voices were not dominant. Their advice demanded restraint, a personal, understanding commitment to meeting the needs of the Aborigines, and possible expense. Such minority opinion was expressed on the North Queensland frontier by men like Christison of Lammermoor but it did not create a climate of opinion that would tend to modify or restrain personal initiative.

58. ibid., pp.78; 79. G.R. Haley was a Member of Parliament who had been a squatter for twenty-two years.
59. ibid., pp.14; 26; 84.
60. M.M. Bennett, Christison of Lammermoor (London, 1927), pp.56-60; 81-86; 95.
in dealing with the Aborigines. The majority opinion sanctioned the time-honoured New South Wales solution which had always been effective for the white man. By 1861 in North Queensland, there was no compelling private or governmental incentive to question or change it, especially as it was also widely believed that, with the inexorable spread of settlement, the Aborigines died out. It was pointed out that close to European settlement the Aborigines died from drink bad living, disease, and cold while fewer children were born. Squatter Lowe maintained the ratio of deaths to births was three to one. As it was concluded that the Aborigines could not adapt to the white civilization which was inevitably sweeping away their tribal life, such resignation to their passing tended to discourage positive measures to ameliorate their condition. It could be claimed that any contemplated change would fail. 61

Yet the Queensland Government could assert that it did employ an agency to mitigate the effect of frontier contact upon the Aborigines; for this was one

61. 'Minutes of Evidence' in 1861 V. & P., pp.10; 11; 18; 42; 44.
Native police, 1860's: Lt. G. Murray, another officer, a camp sergeant, and troopers.

From Kennedy, The Black Police, Frontispiece.
of the important functions it claimed for the Native Police Force. Some understanding of the organization and procedures of this force, then, will be necessary although a full account is beyond the scope of this thesis.

The Native Police

Each detachment of the Native Mounted Police Force consisted of a senior European officer, called, at first, lieutenant but later sub-inspector, sometimes a subordinate European officer, with the rank of acting sub-inspector or camp sergeant, and a body of Aboriginal troopers generally at a strength of either four to six or eight to ten. The non-commissioned officer supervised the distribution of stores and generally remained in charge of the station while part, or all, of the rest of the detachment patrolled under the command of

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62. 'Native Police Force Report' in 1861 V. & P., p. 2 '...since its establishment and reconstruction... the destruction of property and loss of life on either side has considerably diminished.'

63. A perusal of the 'Police Commissioner's Reports' (whenever the distribution is shown) in the Votes and Proceedings of the Queensland Parliament reveal these sizes as the most common although, of course, with desertions etc. there is quite a deal of variation.
the senior officer. The 'Instruction of the Commandant to Officers and Camp Sergeants' pointed out that it was the duty of each detachment to patrol stations, providing the squatters with protection when called upon, and, at all times 'to disperse any large assemblage of blacks' because the Europeans believed 'such meetings .... invariably [led] to depredations or murders'. Officers were instructed to see that all 'outrages' were severely punished to teach the Aborigines that 'retributive justice' would speedily follow the 'commission of crime'. Officers were told to be careful in receiving reports to identify the aggressors correctly. Such a patrol would stay out two to three weeks, travelling twenty-five to thirty miles in a day, visiting the stations, and 'giving any troublesome blacks an occasional lesson'.

The Native Police, thus, had three duties. They

64. W. Cowin, European-Aboriginal Relations in Early Queensland, pp. 26; 27.
65. 'Instruction of Commandant to Officers and Camp Sergeants of Native Police' in 'Minutes of Evidence' in 1861 V. & P., p. 151.
were to prevent Aboriginal depredations by breaking up assemblages of Aborigines and by intimidating them into quiescence with constant patrolling; they were to act as a punitive force to protect the settlers; they were to capture or recapture suspected Aboriginal 'criminals'. The extent of territory they had to patrol and the constant calls on their services meant that they would become associated with violent, rather than non-violent, repression of the Aborigines. In practice, their protection was limited to Europeans.

With such mobility, armed with European weapons, benefiting from European organizational ability, and supported by such powerful allies as the squatters and their employees, it is no wonder that such a comparatively small force, 120 troopers in 1860,\textsuperscript{67} was able to move into areas of conflict and break the resistance of the Aborigines.

By the very nature of their instructions the Native Police were aggressors as it was essential for

\textsuperscript{67} 'Measures Recently Adopted for the Amelioration of the Aborigines', in \textit{1897 V. & P., Vol. II}, p.143. The Home Secretary, Tozer, gave a brief history of the force.
Aborigines to assemble, for various traditional reasons in groups of varying size. The instructions to the officers meant that the only life the Aborigines found meaningful was forbidden to them; nothing short of open conflict could result. In fact, the term used for the breaking up of Aboriginal groups, 'dispersing', was equated with 'firing at them' by a Native Police lieutenant. This determination of the Aborigines to live their essential corporate life puzzled the Europeans and proved that there was only one way of discouraging what were thought to be essentially malicious gatherings. 'I don't think they can understand anything else except shooting them,' explained Lt. Wheeler. 68

As well as attacking the very basis of Aboriginal life, the Native Police force used the expedient of collective punishment which European powers had found it almost impossible to avoid when subjugating other tribal communities, for example, on the South African and Indian frontiers. This seems to have been justified on the grounds that depredations were tribally planned.

68. 'Minutes of Evidence', in 1861 V. & P., p.17 where Lt. Wheeler defines the method of dispersal; p.29.
In Queensland, the rare voice that questioned the morality of the action merely focused attention on its general acceptance. Yet, on the Queensland frontier, 'justice' in tribal punishment was not regarded as essential as the fact of punishment. In most cases, the Native Police no doubt did try to punish the right 'mob' but the fluid nature of tribal organization must have meant that many innocents suffered for the guilty. To the squatters, this was not very important. If every 'outrage' was followed by prompt punishment of some Aborigines in the vicinity, most pioneers believed that the desired effect would be achieved. Racial punishment, it was hoped, would be followed by racial acquiescence. There was thus no great incentive to punish the 'right mob' but the greatest incentive to punish some 'mob'.

Generally the Native Police did not carefully check European complaints but accepted them as valid and punished the accused. Lt. Wheeler asserted that he could not 'waste time to see whether a cow or bullock had been speared'. Nor were suspects generally called

69. ibid., p.15. See evidence of Dr. Challinor. His was just such a rare voice.
70. ibid., p.18.
upon in the Queen's name to halt so that their guilt could be investigated as naturally they only ran away. It was thought better that the innocent suffer than the guilty escape. 71

'Everything depends on the officers,' said Commandant Morisset 72 at the 1861 inquiry, but good officers, it seems, were hard to find. Theirs was a hard life, constantly patrolling in all weathers, with little to induce zeal in men of humane disposition. 73

No doubt, the rigour and brutality of the life was partly responsible for the drunkenness of at least one-quarter of the officers. 74 This admitted poor quality of so many officers was a major weakness as the conditions under which they worked gave them unchecked power. 'I act on my own discretion, and on my own responsibility,' said Lt. Wheeler. 75 In 1876, the same officer was charged with beating a ten year old Aboriginal to death, unprecedentedly given bail by a sympathetic court, and fled the country. 76 He could be

71. ibid., p.29.
72. ibid., p.145.
73. ibid., Lowe, pp.10; 11; Compigne, p.38; Brown, p.114; O'Connell, p.88.
74. ibid., p.147. This figure is based on Commander Morisset's own estimate which one assumes would be conservative.
75. ibid., p.30.
76. Cowin, op. cit., p.43.
considered unfortunate as there were rarely white witnesses in the field and the evidence of Aborigines, whether Native Police or their victims, was not accepted in a court of law until the Oath's Act Amendment Act of 1876. Even then, normal punishment for inefficiency 'indiscretion', or revealed excesses was only dismissal from the force. 77

The officers needed few qualifications and received little training for such responsible positions. Edward Kennedy, a Native Police officer who patrolled from Bowen to Townsville, probably in 1866, pointed out that no examination or preparatory training was needed and 'as long as a man bore a good record, could ride and understand the use of firearms, he had as good a chance of entering the force as anyone'. 78 Only the troopers had

77. *Towers Herald*, 20 November 1884, and 11 December 1884. Sub-Inspector Nicholl's detachment was responsible for a publicised massacre at Irvinebank. *1867 V. & P.*, p. 983 ff. An 'excess of zeal' at Morinish Diggings resulted in a well publicised massacre for which Sub-Inspector Aubin was dismissed.

any sort of formal training after enlistment, and that was only for efficiency in routine.

The camp sergeants were very often men of inferior character. Drunkenness was almost expected of them and accepted, as will be illustrated in the Bowen district, and their incompetence was one reason for the very high rate of desertion among the troopers. 79

Relations between the European officers and the Aboriginal troopers obviously varied greatly, from the mutual affection described by Kennedy 80 to the murderous brutality illustrated in Sub-Inspector Carroll's dismissal from the force. 81 But the high desertion rate indicated a great deal of dissatisfaction with the way of life and its procedures. It was apparently normal in 1861 to take Aborigines by force from inland stations, 82 but willing recruitment became normal in later years when recruiting drives as far south as the Murrumbidgee were well publicised. 83 Flogging was the

79. 'Minutes of Evidence' in 1861 V. & P., pp. 88; 92; 133.
80. Kennedy, op. cit., p. 142.
82. 'Minutes of Evidence' in 1861 V. & P., p. 87.
83. P.D.T., 9 September 1865.
accepted means of enforcing discipline among the troopers, many of whom resented the military life. The officer could bestow any punishment at his own discretion, even the death penalty which was quite common. Apparently desertion was often punished by summary execution. A witness at a magisterial enquiry into the disappearance of a trooper candidly excused his not having reported the suspected murder: 'It has always been my opinion that police officers could shoot their runaway troopers'. The officer could simply record 'trooper absconded' in his police diary. However Hill was probably correct when he wrote: 'If wisely handled the native troopers were as easy to

84. 'Minutes of Evidence' in 1861 V. & P., p.133.
85. See Hill, op. cit., pp.37-39. Hill described with remarkable candour to an early twentieth century reading public how he had considered whether execution or flogging was a fitting punishment for a trooper who had murdered a four year old Aborigine.
86. 'A Magisterial Enquiry into the Disappearance of Trooper Sam, a Deserter', Q.S.A./COL A202/2615 of 1874.
87. Inspector Armstrong to Police Commissioner Seymour, 29 June 1876, Q.S.A. COL/A320/3821.
manage as children'. It all depended on the officers.

There were other highly dubious features associated with the Native Police. It was apparently common for the officers to order the summary execution of prisoners rather than to go to the trouble of bringing them to trial to attempt the formidable task of proving that a particular Aboriginal, or group of Aborigines, was guilty and not others who were in the vicinity.

Thus, on the frontier, the Native Police assumed the role of police, judge, jury and executioner. Defenders of the Native Police claimed Aborigines habitually attempted to escape; therefore shooting was justified. It was maintained as well that Aboriginal hands were smaller than European hands and that they slipped the standard issue handcuffs with similar fatal results. Other witnesses testified that disposal of prisoners without justification was quite common.

The officers also allowed troopers to collect gins as camp followers from dispersed tribes, a practice which was open to serious abuse and no doubt further

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89. 'Minutes of Evidence' in 1861 V. & P., pp.38; 62.
90. ibid.; pp.33; 83; 87.
antagonised the local Aborigines. The Commandant admitted only that troopers bought or were given women by the male Aborigines but it is clear that they were often the survivors of affrays who were taken willingly or terrified into submission. 91 Most Europeans would probably have accepted the justification that such abduction was 'only their own usage - their own style of warfare' and vaguely hoped that it 'wouldn't worry the blacks too much', thus expressing in a few words ignorance of tribal life, apathy, and an acceptance of such frontier barbarism. 92

There can be no doubt that the Native Police did inspire the Aborigines with great dread as James Davis, after living fifteen years with the Aborigines in South Queensland, could avouch. 93 Probably their initial impact was to provoke the Aborigines to a more vigorous resistance which was then broken. 94 A squatter, Wilson, pointed out how the squatters on the Fitzroy and MacIntyre were able to spread out only after they

91. ibid., pp.39; 62; 83; 148. Also Kennedy, op.cit., pp.120-123 for 'marriage' after massacre.
92. 'Minutes of Evidence' in 1861 V. & P., p.61.
93. ibid., p.55.
94. ibid., pp.13; 28.
received Native Police protection; the interests of Queensland's dominant industry would ensure the continuance of such protection. One of North Queensland's pioneer squatters probably gave the most balanced view of the force:

It was often charged that the native police behaved with great brutality and this may have been correct, but it is difficult to see how a small and scattered European population could have continued to occupy the country without some such protection.

In this statement, the inverted logic of European thinking is evident: the squatters owned the land. The Aborigines were the aggressors. The government had to take all necessary action, no matter how brutal, to protect the endangered whites.

The policy of dispersal would have had disastrous effects upon the Aborigines even if it could have been carried out with humanity and justice. It was, in fact carried out most often with complete disregard for humanity and justice for three main reasons. The hard life ensured that the officer corps had a large number of poor types; their training was grossly inadequate; and supervision of each detachment's activities was virtually non-existent. To send such a force to virgin country was to accept violence as the inevitable result of frontier contact.

95. ibid., p.73. See also A.C. Gregory's comment on p.41.
In 1861, while the Select Committee was making its extensive inquiry into the running of the Native Police Force, the Bowen settlement was still in its infancy.97 The Select Committee concluded that some admitted excesses of the force were caused only by the inefficiency, indiscretion, and intemperance of some of the officers. The Report recommended that the Queensland Government continue to use the force with no real change in the nature of its work and only such changes in its organization as would improve its efficiency. It concluded that the force had diminished 'the destruction of property and loss of life on either side'.98 The whole report was in effect a squatter white-wash, a request for more of the same. In a study of frontier conflict in the Bowen District, it is possible to subject the functioning of this force to fairly close scrutiny even though much of its correspondence has been removed from the Queensland Government Archives. As the Native Police Force was the only Governmental agency to meet the problem of frontier contact, this study will reveal as well Queensland native policy in practice.