

THE NATIVE POLICE AT CALLANDOON – A BLUEPRINT FOR FORCED ASSIMILATION?

Mark Copland
Griffith University, Qld

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The establishment of the Native Police of Queensland is often highlighted as “the final bankruptcy of frontier policy”.¹ The brutal actions of the Queensland Native Police and poor treatment of troopers have been reasonably well accepted in historical circles. In some recent studies the focus seems to have moved from the role of the native police on the frontier to the personal relationships between European officers and Indigenous troopers. Historians such as Marie Fels argue that the early work of the Native Police under the leadership of Frederick Walker was a “success” contrasting it with the “excesses” of the force after the departure of the first Commandant in 1854. This paper closely examines the factors leading to the establishment of the native police at Callandoon and the first few months of the forces operation. Frederick Walker’s approach to frontier policing differed to other leaders of the Native Police. His ‘Callandoon Experiment’ was a success for the squatters in the local district and a disaster for the local Bigambul people.

The events that brought Walker to the MacIntyre River in May of 1849 and his response to these events played as big a role in his downfall as his love for a drop of alcohol. In many ways it could be argued that Walker was fifty years ahead of his time. His desire to maintain peace and provide local squatters with a cheap and subservient labour force would not have been out of place as a police protector in the early 1900’s. In two years Walker’s force transformed the MacIntyre River district from a state of warfare to a state of enforced harmony. This transformation came about through a disregard for human life and legal process.

The geographical focus of this paper is the Cowbawn Coonigal² later named the MacIntyre River by Allan Cunningham in 1827. Callandoon is situated on this river which makes up the present NSW – Queensland border 625 km North of Sydney and 300 km South West of Brisbane (near the present day town of Goondiwindi). This area was Bigambul country. The Bigambul people were connected with the Northern Kamilaroi and met with them for ceremonies at Boobera Lagoon, the dwelling place of the Kurra.³

The resistance of the Bigambul people gained them a certain notoriety in the colonial press of the day. The missionary William Ridley stated in 1855, “The Pikumbul blacks were for some years the most determined and troublesome foes the colonists have met in this country.”⁴ The European shepherds and squatters were left in little doubt that they were entering occupied country when they arrived on the MacIntyre River in the early 1840’s.

The first recorded settler in the district, James Howe graphically described Aboriginal aggressions in January 1842. Cattle were being continually “rushed” and horses were speared. Two hutkeepers were killed, their hut ransacked and a seven stand of arms and quantity of ammunition taken. On the 15th January two horses were taken from another station and the following night the hut was “rushed” by Aborigines. The next day two panels of a stockyard were knocked down, a calf was killed and the cattle dispersed. The Europeans could only look on, as the Bigambul were in an unassailable position beyond the firing range of the white’s firearms.

¹ C.D. Rowley, The Destruction of Aboriginal Society (Ringwood: Penguin, 1970), p.39

² Aboriginal name for the MacIntyre River: - John Calvert, “Mineral and Topographical Survey of the Five Northern Districts N.S.W.”, 1844-1846 (Mitchell Library, Sydney, A3951 – CY373) p.33

³ Jennifer Isaacs, Australian Dreaming: 40 000 Years of Aboriginal History (Sydney: Lansdowne Press, 1980), pp.18-20; 67-9

⁴ Sydney Morning Herald 14 December 1855

Howe joined forces with two employees and two local policemen and embarked on a retaliatory raid. The Bigambul used their vastly superior bush-skills to great advantage, retreating to the scrub. "... it was impossible for us to do anything, as they would not come within shot and took shelter behind the trees, and kept hooting and telling us they were not frightened, calling us white b_____s and telling us to come on..."⁵

The policemen who took part in this reprisal would have been part of the Border Police force instituted by Gipps in the wake of the Myall Creek massacre. The motivation for Aboriginal warriors killing stock and destroying property has often been portrayed as being a simple matter of hunger. On the MacIntyre River in the 1840's the actions of the Bigambul were not motivated by hunger but by a desire to drive out the new white invaders.

In January of 1842 a horse belonging to the squatter Dight was killed. Its head was taken off and its entrails were hung from bush to bush. This was not the work of "hungry natives" but was a message for all white settlers on the MacIntyre River. Jacob Lowe, a local squatter and later Queensland Parliamentarian gave evidence of the resistance of the Bigambul to the Queensland Select Committee on Native Police. Six months after bringing a herd of cattle from the Gwydir district he allowed them onto his cattle run. Seventy-five head of cattle were found slaughtered, and between a quarter and a half of the original herd was "damaged". None of the seventy-five carcasses had been taken away for food. The Bigambul stuck the hearts of two heifers on poles facing each other, similar to gateway posts. Again the message was clear and Lowe did not mistake it. He told the Select Committee that a desire for food was not the motivation, but it was an effort "to drive us away out of the district – to frighten us."⁶

In January of 1843 a group of Aborigines approached a hut on the Moonie River and warned the white occupants that they had killed all the horses and would kill or drive all the whites off the Mooney, MacIntyre and Barwin Rivers.⁷ This campaign was initially successful. Seventeen stations on the MacIntyre River were abandoned in 1843 and only thirteen were re-established after 1846.⁸ Aborigines killed more than a dozen whites in the Moreton bay district by 1843, while the figure for the MacIntyre River district was sixteen.⁹

The Bigambul mounted a thirteen-year campaign against the white squatters and their shepherds with disastrous economic consequences from the European point of view. The Aborigines understood the importance of horses to the European economic position¹⁰ and by the time the stations were abandoned over 100 horses were killed.¹¹ Things didn't improve when the Europeans returned in 1846. In 1847 one leaseholder brought 1600 cattle to the MacIntyre, and, within twelve months had lost 900 of them.¹² The cost of such losses was phenomenal. Another leaseholder was forced to spend one hundred and fifty pounds per

⁵ Hunter River Gazette 12 February 1842

⁶ Report from the Select Committee on the Native Police Force: Queensland Legislative Assembly, Votes and Proceedings, 1861, p.7

⁷ Maitland Mercury, 28 January 1843

⁸ William Gardner, Production and resources of the Northern and Western districts of New South Wales, Vol I p.80

⁹ Mark Copland, A System of Assassination, B.A. Honours, University of Queensland, 1990, pp. 98-99

¹⁰ Henry Reynolds, The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal resistance to the European invasion of Australia, (Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1982), p.107

¹¹ Gardner p.78

¹² D. Larnach (Proprietor of Carbury 1847): Letter to Colonial Secretary 24th November 1848 (NSW State Archives, 4/2929:48/13167)

annum for eight years and did not receive a return on his herds until 1849.¹³ Jacob Lowe told the Select Committee on Native Police that Aboriginal “depredations” occurred daily until the arrival of Frederick Walker’s force in May of that year.¹⁴

It is important to note that the official reason that the Native Police was initially established on the MacIntyre River was the killing of Aborigines by whites. On the 8th June 1848 Governor Fitzroy set aside 1000 pounds to be used for the establishment of a small Corps of Native Police. The reason stated in the Legislative Council was, “Circumstances having recently been brought under the Governor’s notice, in respect to certain collisions which have taken place, in parts beyond the Settled Districts, between the white inhabitants and the Aborigines, which appear to him to require that immediate steps should be taken for their repression...”¹⁵

More telling is the correspondence between the Colonial Secretary and Frederick Walker. In October of 1848 (prior to the force being deployed on the MacIntyre) E. Deas Thomson advised Walker of certain murders having been recently perpetrated by the whites on the Aborigines at the MacIntyre River.”¹⁶ In 1853 Walker’s force was criticised in a letter to the Moreton Bay Courier. Walker referred to the author of this letter; a James Marks in a letter to the Colonial Secretary. Of Marks Walker wrote, “an individual whose atrocities on the MacIntyre first induced His Excellency to command me to raise the Native Police.”¹⁷

James Mark (Marks) was a leaseholder in the Goondiwindi district between 1847 and 1850. He first occupied a station named “Yalleroy”, but Aboriginal attacks on his shepherds and flocks of sheep forced him to abandon the run and move his flocks to “Goodar” on the Weir River. The “Goodar” run was situated just North of Callandoon. One of the few European women in the district, Margaret Young, described Marks relations with the Bigambul people. “Old Mr Marks was a hater of all aboriginals and would shoot any seen approaching his property.”¹⁸

Early in September of 1847 a neighbour of Marks (possibly Legislative Council member and owner of Callandoon, Augustus Morris) killed a beast and sent a “native boy” with fresh meat to Goodar. It is unclear what occurred between the “native boy” and James Marks, but it resulted in the death of the “boy”.¹⁹ The Bigambul were outraged by this and soon sought revenge. Mark’s hatred of Aboriginal people was well known and a number of Aboriginal people at Beebo (upstream of the MacIntyre River) told a squatter named John Watts that they had been seeking vengeance for a long time.²⁰ On the 10th September an opportunity for revenge presented itself. Local Aborigines took the life of Mark’s son Johnny who had been left to tend a flock of sheep while his father took lunch. Graphically venting their anger, the Bigambul cut up the boy’s body and placed it in a nearby log. One account suggests that

¹³ Frederick Walker, N.S.W. Legislative Council Votes and Proceedings, 1852 p.790

¹⁴ Report from Select Committee on the Native Police Force: Queensland Legislative Assembly, Votes and Proceedings, 1861, pp.6-7

¹⁵ N.S.W. Legislative Council, Votes and Proceedings, 8 June 1848, p.315

¹⁶ Colonial Secretary to Commandant of Native Police 4 October 1848 (NSW State Archives, 4/3860: Reel 2818)

¹⁷ Walker to Colonial Secretary, 31 December 1853 NMP B/5 QSA cited in Skinner, P. 124

¹⁸ A.E. Tonge, “The Youngs of “Umbercolle”: The First White Family in South-West Queensland”, p.22 (Mitchell Library, Sydney, M.L. MSS 3821 5-537C)

¹⁹ In this context the word “boy” could be a paternalistic term given to male Aboriginal servants of all ages.

²⁰ John Watts, “Personal reminiscences includes description of journeys in the Darling Downs District to 1850. (1901), p.20 (John Oxley Library, Brisbane. Q994.33wat)

Marks could not find the head of his son until that evening when he located it impaled on the limb of a tree in front of the Goodar hut. Whether this brutal act of defiance occurred or not, once Mark found the grisly remains of his son, he lost little time in arming himself and preparing for what would be a twelve month reign of terror upon the local Aboriginal population.

The Sydney Morning Herald reported the killing of Marks son calling on the government to provide official protection for settler's lives and property. "It is high time something were done to render life and property in that part of the country a little more secure, and the settlers there trust that some notice of it will be taken by you, so as to draw attention to their present critical state."²¹ Similar pleas for protection of squatter's lives and property all failed to mention Marks act of aggression which sparked off the attack on his son. The Moreton Bay Courier published a letter written by a Macleay River Squatter who believed that the killing of Marks son was enough justification for the extermination of all Aborigines in South Eastern Australia.

*Is it to be wondered that the man Marks whose child was cut into quarters, or the eight men above alluded to, (Myall Creek eight) whose white brethren had been murdered by the blacks, should take into their own hands that revenge which the law was unable or unwilling to afford. I consider that the lives recently sacrificed are a greater loss to the colony, both socially and politically, than if all the Aborigines from Sydney to Moreton Bay had been swept from the face of the earth.*²²

Marks travelled throughout the district recruiting white stockmen and landholders for a vigilante party to avenge the death of his son. Not all squatters joined with Marks. Jonathan Young, a manager of a station named Umbercollie refused to join Marks believing that he had brought his sons tragic death upon himself through his ruthless shooting of Aborigines.²³ The Warialda Bench of Magistrates were not as discerning. On the 2nd October 1847 they sent Chief Constables McGee and Hancock to the district. They were instructed to join with the group of settlers already in pursuit of the Aborigines but were told not to use "unnecessary violence".²⁴

From October 1847 a number of attacks upon camps of Aborigines occurred. Primary sources suggest that at least 47 Aboriginal people were killed at the hands of Marks' men.²⁵ Most reports of these attacks reflect a focus on "station blacks". By September 1848 attacks had been made on Aboriginal people camped on Carbucky, Broomfield, Callandoon and Umbercollie stations. In the early morning of the 11th June 1848 an attack took place at Umbercollie bearing some chilling resemblance to the Myall Creek Massacre which had taken place almost exactly ten years prior to the day.

On the evening of the 10th June 8 men (including James Marks and Billy an Aboriginal man from Port Macquarie) gathered and prepared to attack a camp of Aboriginal people on Jonathan Young's station, Umbercollie. The events are best described in the words of one of the party.

²¹ Sydney Morning Herald 15 October 1847

²² Moreton Bay Courier 30 October 1852.

²³ Tonge, p.23

²⁴ Warialda Letterbook C.P.S. Justices 1847 – 1855, 2 October 1847 (NSW State Archives, 4/5681)

²⁵ Copland, Appendix II

“We all came up to the rails we could see the place where the blacks were lying – we fired upon them - We were close to the sheepyard - We fired two or three times loading and firing as fast as we could with cartridge - After firing two or three shots Mark Steebie and Reardon and Martin and Jones and the Blackfellow jumped over the rails and rushed the camp. I think they killed some dog or puppy. The blackfellow Billy was looking about and found a gin planted by the side of the fence - He seized her and pulled her up she got away from him and ran - Steebie or Jones or Mark said “Shoot her” - They fired upon her and she fell down close to the slip panel. When she fell Martin took his pistol and struck her once or twice on the head with it - I cannot say whether the shots struck her or not - We all fired upon her. We then put the net and cloaks on the fire and broke the spears and put them on the fire...”

Both Margaret and Jonathan Young witnessed the attack. The following morning Jonathan discovered the body of “Bootha” whose skull had been broken into six or seven pieces. Some days later the body of Mary was found in the bush. Margaret Young stated in her journal that some weeks later some Police returned and shot more Aborigines.²⁶ “Some weeks later the police came back shooting still more natives whether guilty or not; we lost twelve more of our station blacks...”²⁷ It is fairly certain that the police mentioned were the constables from the Warialda Police District.

In August of 1847 Richard Bligh, Crown Lands Commissioner for the Gwydir pastoral District began investigations in the attacks by James Marks and his accomplices. He took statements from Jonathan and Margaret Young and three Aboriginal people identified the men involved in the attack on Umbercollie in the early hours of Whitsunday 1847. Daniel Maclean, one of attacking party made a confession implicating seven others, including James Mark. A number of the Umbercollie killers were arrested and held to stand trial for the murder of “Bootha” in Maitland on the 12th February 1849. James Marks resisted arrest and left the district. He later told John Watts, “I have friends all over the country who let me know when Mr Walker is in the neighbourhood, and I must never leave my rifle out of my reach, and whoever tries to take me must kill or be killed...”²⁸

Despite the evidence against the men arrested no convictions were recorded. George Harris, a hutkeeper at Minimee came forward and gave a statement stating that he had never seen an armed party leave Minimee for Umbercollie in June of 1848. Bligh informed the Attorney General that he believed that Harris was perjuring himself but the flimsy defence was good enough for the Attorney General who concluded; “The contradiction of the approver by Harris is important... and weakens very considerably the case against them.”²⁹

MacIntyre River squatters and their employees went to extraordinary lengths to prevent the investigations of Crown lands Commissioner Bligh. Similar to the Myall Creek case local squatters helped provide funds to defend the Umbercollie killers. In December of 1848 a man and woman were committed for trial for attempting to bribe the main witness, Daniel Maclean.³⁰ In November of 1848 two police horses were stolen and three of Bligh’s personal horses were driven fifty miles from the MacIntyre River. Local squatters refused to sell or give police food as well as despatching messengers warning all residents when the police were in the district.³¹

²⁶ Tonge, p.23

²⁷ Tonge, p.25

²⁸ John Watts, Personal reminiscences Including description of journeys in the Darling Downs District to 1850. (1901) John Oxley Library p.21

²⁹ Maitland Circuit Court Depositions, March/April 1849.

³⁰ Moreton Bay Courier 16 December 1848

³¹ Commissioner of Crown Lands, Gwydir District to Chief Commissioner of Crown Lands 10 January 1849

After months of inquiry Richard Bligh concluded, “I feel justified in stating that could these miserable savages give evidence in a court of justice or even support their case with a little of the eloquence employed against them the balance of injury and crime would be fearfully against the white population. During the past year a system of assassination has been pursued by the whites which has been now first discovered (though it is impossible to say how long it may have existed).”³²

On the 4th October 1848 the Colonial Secretary authorised the Warialda Bench of Magistrates to engage four additional constables on the MacIntyre River until the arrival of a Native Police Corps.³³

Walker’s force comprising fourteen troopers from the Murray, Murrumbidgee and Murray Rivers arrived on the southern bank of the MacIntyre River on the 10th May 1849. One of their first actions was the ambush of a group of Aborigines on the Severn (Dumaresq) River. The troopers attacked and John Watts a squatter on the Severn reported that they “were so excited that Captain Walker could not control them, this being the first time they had been in action.”³⁴

When Walker arrived on the MacIntyre he noted that the majority of squatters and their employees had adopted the practise of “keeping them at a distance”. Writing to the Colonial Secretary he stated, “I have the honor to call your attention to the iniquitous practice carried on at some stations, which is to drive off all blacks from there, this system they call keeping them at a distance.”³⁵ Walker advocated breaking up large groups of Aborigines – and forcing them onto stations – thereby dividing and controlling them. He stated, “If every settler were to allow only ten Aborigines on his station, there would be such a small number of them in the bush that they would hardly be dangerous.”³⁶ In an effort to force settlers to accommodate Aborigines on stations Walker decided to refuse assistance to those who wished to maintain a policy of “keeping them at a distance.”³⁷ It is not difficult to understand why Walker was unpopular with some whites on the MacIntyre River frontier.

One of the first major clashes which the Native Police took part in was on Carbucky station owned by W.B. Tooth, a member of the NSW Legislative Assembly. Tooth had bought the station “at a sacrifice” from a Mr Lanarch prior to the Native Police arriving in the district. Lanarch had written to the Colonial Secretary on the 24th November 1848 complaining of the aggressions of the Aborigines and stating that unless protection was given to the squatters many would be forced to abandon their stations. Walker and his troops found some Aborigines killing cattle close to Tooth’s camp and according to Tooth, “The blacks were so completely put down on that occasion, and terrified at the power of the police, that they never committed any more depredations near there.”³⁸

Between the 18th May and the 14th June the Native Police travelled throughout the district crushing Bigambul resistance. During this time the only evidence of the impact of this exercise given by Walker was that “there had been some lives lost.” whilst attempting to

³² Commissioner of Crown Lands, Gwydir District to Chief Commissioner of Crown Lands 8 January 1849

³³ Colonial Secretary: Letter to The Commandant of Native Police, 4 October 1848. (NSW State Archives, 4/3860: Reel 2818)

³⁴ Watts p.20; Walker to Colonial Secretary, 26 May 1849 (NSW State Archives, 4/2920:49/5554)

³⁵ Walker to Colonial Secretary, 26 May 1849 (NSW State Archives, 4/2920:49/5554)

³⁶ N.S.W. Legislative Council, Votes and Proceedings 1852, p.791

³⁷ Walker to Colonial Secretary, 26 May 1849 (NSW State Archives, 4/2920:49/5554)

³⁸ N.S.W. Legislative Assembly, Votes and Proceedings 1858 Vol II, p.880

apprehend some Aborigines “charged with murder”.³⁹ This phrase became all too common in reports from the frontier and conveniently hid the loss of many Aboriginal lives. Walker stated that there could be no peace in the district until the blacks that had committed so many crimes were taken “alive or dead.”⁴⁰ There is very little evidence of Aborigines being “taken alive” and when this did occur they were invariably killed while “trying to escape.”⁴¹ There is no evidence of Walker or the Native Police attempting to apprehend whites suspected of murdering Aboriginal people on the MacIntyre River.

What could be termed the ‘final stand’ of the Bigambul took place on the 9 July 1849.⁴² On the 1 July Walker was preparing to go the Condamine River again when Pantaloon, a local man described by Walker as a “ringleader” approached the Native Police camp making offerings of peace. At nine o’clock that evening Walker was made aware that Pantaloon and his brother Bobby had stolen two sheep. A tribe of Aborigines believed to be under the leadership of ‘Darby’ had joined a strong reinforcement of ‘Moonee blacks’ at a place called Cumba.

Walker felt that the peace proposal was an attempt to mislead the Native Police and at eleven o’clock that evening set off in pursuit of the Aborigines. They followed the trail, finding slaughtered beasts at each camp. Late in the afternoon of Monday the 9th July walker’s detachment came across a party of Aborigines cutting up a beast belonging to a Mr R. Pringle. The Aborigines immediately attempted to escape across a plain but were driven back by a detachment of troopers under the command of Corporal Logan. Two troopers prevented them escaping across the river. Walker joined by local squatters Messrs Augustus Morris, Richard Marshall and Rens and four troopers were cut off from the main body by a group of thirty or more Aborigines who were protected by thick scrub. Sundown was approaching and Walker’s men flushed the Bigambul out of the bush and then rushed forward on foot. They fired their muzzle loading carbines upon the Aborigines who were twelve paces away. They eventually drove them from cover, but not without injury to themselves. Walker’s orderly, Edgar was speared through the leg but drew the weapon out and drove it several inches into the body of his adversary. Rens received a facial wound from a boomerang.

Once this party had been dealt with, Walker’s small group rejoined the main body of troopers. What remained of the Bigambul warriors had by now escaped. Not satisfied with the carnage already inflicted Walker reported, “*I much regretted not having one hour more daylight as I would have annihilated that lot, among which were six murderers and all the rest living solely on cattle.*”⁴³ Returning to the battlefield the next morning Walker recorded that he found the body of one Aborigine and “saw that several had been badly wounded, having crawled off on their hands and knees leaving a trail of blood.”⁴⁴

³⁹ Letter from Walker to Colonial Secretary, Sydney, 31 December 1849: N.S.W. Legislative Council Votes and Proceedings 1850

⁴⁰ Walker, MacIntyre River 26th May 1849 Qld State Archives, NMP/4

⁴¹ An example of this occurred in January 1850. Yorkey and Logan shot “Nobody” claiming he was attempting to escape. “Nobody” was one of many Aborigines accused of killing Edward Bradley. Walker to Colonial Secretary, 26 October 1850, (Queensland State Archives, NMP J/1); Maitland Mercury 16 February 1850

⁴² There are two accounts of events leading up to this clash but there is little available evidence to support either. The first is “Davison’s Diary” in Edgar Browne *A Short History of Goondiwindi* (Goondiwindi Argus, 1922), pp. 10-11. The second is the “Darky Flat Massacre” described in Thomas Hall, *A Short History of the Downs Blacks* (Toowoomba: Vintage Books, n.d. republished 1988), pp.149-152.

⁴³ Walker to Colonial Secretary, MacIntyre River, 12 July 1849 NSW State Archives, 4/2920: 49/7305

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

The battle was described in the Maitland Mercury

...spears and boomerangs were flying in every direction, the flashing of fire arms shewing the blacks the position of their assailants; the yells of the savages, answered by the war cry of the police, and the ring of the carbines must have had a most exciting effect...It is surprising that the government does not declare the disturbed districts in a state of siege, and thus relieve the Commandant from his great responsibility. Why does the government not at once acknowledge there is a war, when it is so notorious.⁴⁵

The Colonial Secretary wrote to Walker on the 8th August cautioning him, “not to commit acts of aggressive warfare against the Aboriginal Natives, and that the Command of the Native Police had been entrusted to him for the maintenance of peace and order and not for the purpose of carrying warfare to an enemy country.”⁴⁶ A similar warning not to carry out warfare was given to Walker’s deputy, Richard Purvis Marshall after a number of Aboriginal ‘ringleaders’ were killed whilst he was in command. The governor believed that Marshall “proceedings against the Aborigines have been characterised by too harsh and belligerent a spirit.”⁴⁷

Marie Fels believes that the use of the term ‘War’ by Marshall was “a slightly loose use of the English language.”⁴⁸ Most of the language contained in Native Police reports from the MacIntyre frontier describes a field of conflict, rather than a problem with law and order. The squatters described the conflict on the MacIntyre River frontier as warlike; the Colonial Secretary believed that the actions of the Native Police were warlike, as did much of the Colonial Press. It is curious in these times when some historians maintain that we must not judge the events of the past with the standards of today that Fels cannot accept an overwhelming body of evidence pointing to militaristic attacks on groups of Aboriginal people on the MacIntyre River frontier.

One MacIntyre River squatter J.K. Wilson declared to the 1861 Qld Select Committee on Native Police that war should have been declared. “But if a military force were established instead of the Native Police, then any district requiring their services could be declared in a state of siege. The acts of the force would then be legal, and the magistrates could act with them; besides which the government would be relieved from a great deal of embarrassment.”⁴⁹

Walker boasted of the results of his action on the MacIntyre. “... a run which would not have fetched a hundred pounds in May, 1849 was disposed of in January for 500 pounds.”⁵⁰ Walker’s friend and Member of the Legislative Council, Augustus Morris attributed this newfound peace directly to the ‘Battle of Carbucky’. “... a very favourable change has come over the hitherto hostile Aborigines. Since the engagement near Carbucky they appear to

⁴⁵ Maitland Mercury, 1 August 1849

⁴⁶ Notes written by Colonial Secretary on Walker’s Report of the 9th July Battle. NSW State Archives 4/2920: 49/7305

⁴⁷ Colonial Secretary to Walker, 25 October 1850, (NSW State Archives Copies of Letters addressed to Benches of Magistrates, Justices of the Peace and Superintendents of Police Beyond the Settled Districts 4/3861 Reel 2818)

⁴⁸ Marie Hansen Fels, Good Men and True the Aboriginal Police of the Port Phillip District 1837 – 1853 (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1988) pp. 222 - 223

⁴⁹ Report from the Select Committee on the Native Police Force: Queensland Legislative Assembly, Votes and Proceedings, 1861, p.71

⁵⁰ N.S.W. Legislative Council, Votes and Proceedings, 1852 p. 790

think that they cannot carry on their former depredations with impunity.”⁵¹ Squatters like Morris and W.B. Tooth not only saw their run value improve but also saw a great reduction in the level of wages paid to employees. Tooth declared that before the force arrived on the MacIntyre squatters were forced to pay employees double the wages paid elsewhere.⁵² As time went on the wage bill dropped even more dramatically. By 1851 the Annual Aborigines Report for the Darling Downs stated:

All the flocks of Mr Young of the MacIntyre are tended by blacks – Mr R. Dines has not a single white person in his employment – the blacks doing everything that is necessary. The sheep washing of Messrs Morris of Callandoon was entirely performed by Natives of whom twelve are now in their service as shepherds.”⁵³

It was more than coincidence that Walker had proposed that Callandoon be made the headquarters for the Native Police Force in December of 1849.⁵⁴ Walker felt that his aggressive actions had been vindicated.

“In the MacIntyre country I used my own discretion, and although the Hon., the Attorney general told me he feared I had not acted legally throughout, yet the result shows that I was morally right for I affirm that the Country of Cumberland is now more secure from the aggressions of the aboriginal natives.”⁵⁵

This was frontier morality at its best. The ends justified the means and the legal difficulties of warrants for arrest, statements and the gathering of evidence could be overlooked if peace could be bought at a price.. And the price of Bigambul lives. By January of 1854 only 100 Bigambul remained. Incredibly a little over 80 years later the American anthropologist Norman Tindale recorded that a small number of Bigambul people were living at Toomelah Mission Station (close to present day Goondiwindi on the New South Wales side of the MacIntyre River).

There can be no denying that Walker had a close relationship with his troopers and exhibited some willingness to learn their language and pay them a degree of respect. In this relationship Walker clearly differentiated between the ‘wild blacks’ or ‘Charcoals’ as he termed them and the domesticated and tamed blacks. He seemed only comfortable dealing with people who had been ‘domesticated’ and related to him from a position of subservience. In a method of social engineering Walker believed that if the wills of defiant blacks could be broken then they might be taught to be useful on the fringes of the white man’s world.

It could be argued that the personal relationship that Walker enjoyed with his troopers was often lacking in some of the Commandants who took the reins from him in 1854. Historians such as Fels argue that the early period of the Native Police under Walker’s command went smoothly due to his special relationship with his troopers. I would argue that the use of violence to achieve peace was as much a part of Walker’s modus operandi on the MacIntyre as it was for the Native Police Force, which followed him. There can be no doubt that most squatters on the MacIntyre believed that Walker’s Native Police were an effective and useful frontier tool. Later in the Wide Bay District when the Colonial Administration started to reign in some of Walker’s activities a petition from 28 squatters was sent to the Colonial

⁵¹ Morris to Walker, Callandoon 18 October 1849 (NSW State Archives, 4/2920: 49/10488)

⁵² NSW Legislative Assembly, Votes and Proceedings, 1858 Vol. 2, p. 880

⁵³ Annual Report Darling Downs District on Aborigines. 1851 (NSW State Archives, 4/7153)

⁵⁴ Walker to Colonial Secretary, Sydney, 17 December 1849 (NSW State Archives, 4/2920: 49/11968)

⁵⁵ Walker to Colonial Secretary., 7 November 1850, reel A2/18, COL, Oxley Library

Secretary urging him to give Walker more autonomy. “Having learned the great good effected by the Native Police force on the MacIntyre River”⁵⁶ the squatters told of how much they were looking forward to the arrival of Walker’s men.

When Walker told them he was unable to proceed to the Bunya Mountains to act against the great number of ‘natives gathering there’ without instructions from the government he began a chain of events which would eventually see him leave his post in disgrace. A number of more vocal settlers in the Wide Bay District who favoured the policy of “keeping them at a distance” started a campaign against Walker with a fair degree of coverage in the Moreton Bay Courier.⁵⁷ It was Walker’s relationship with a number of influential squatters on the MacIntyre River and in the colonial government that saw a ‘smooth’ introduction to the force on the MacIntyre River. It was when he moved further afield to the Wide Bay district where his views on race relations were out of step with the local squatters that the wheels started to fall off Frederick Walkers career carriage.

Walker clearly established the Native Police as the Squatter’s force. A number of local squatters joined in “punishing the natives” for depredations. Augustus Morris, Richard Purvis Marshall and George Fulford all served in the native police and all owned runs on the MacIntyre River frontier. Probably the most influential of Walker’s friends was Augustus Morris. In 1854 when things started to sour for Walker and a number of complaints were received in the Colonial Administration Morris endeavoured to look after his friend. He tried to establish a Select Committee and begged Walker to furnish him with any evidence, which could be used against his enemies.

It is interesting to note that when Morris’ Select Committee was rejected two other issues outside of Walker’s management of his force were also raised. The Attorney General had declared that he was interested in investigating a charge of murder made against the native police. Another member of the Legislative Council also mentioned the ‘slaughter of twenty-six blacks out of a tribe between Wide Bay and Port Curtis.’⁵⁸ Whether these charges would have been investigated is unclear. Walker’s drunken appearance before the board of Inquiry in Brisbane gave his enemies more than enough ammunition with which to expel him from the force. So while Walker’s alcoholic tendencies and creative accounting played a role in his downfall it is far too simplistic to believe that he was a drunkard with his hand in the till.

The Wide Bay squatters like what they saw on the MacIntyre and expected a command performance. The Attorney General and Solicitor General were less enamoured with Walker’s mode of operation. This is less than surprising as Walker’s force had established the premise of acting illegally within the pretence of a legal framework. As Walker and Marshall’s reports from the MacIntyre hit the desks of the Attorney General and Solicitor General the vague justifications for killing of Aboriginal people did not go unnoticed.

“...in place of a mere statement of resistance by the Blacks, such as we find in Mr Walker’s and Mr Marshall’s letters, the Government should be informed of the acts done or demonstrations of forcible resistance made by them.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Qld State Archives NMP5

⁵⁷ Denis Cryle, *A Social and Political History of the Press in Colonial Queensland 1846 – 1871* PHD Thesis, Griffith University, 1986, pp. 18 - 36

⁵⁸ Mr Nichols to Legislative Council, Sydney Morning Herald, 9th September 1854

⁵⁹ J.H. Plunkett (Attorney General) and W.M. Manning (Solicitor General) to Colonial Secretary 3 December 1850 Qld State Archives NMP J1

Denis Cryle rightly highlights that Walker was not simply a protector but also a persecutor of Aborigines.⁶⁰ At Callandoon a blueprint for forced assimilation was definitely produced. The Bigambul were ruthlessly persecuted and then 'protected' in return for free labour. Following the demise of Walker in 1854 the Callandoon blueprint was not taken up. On the ground the pretence of 'protection' was dropped and the policy of persecution continued. I choose the word continue deliberately for the 'excesses' as Fels labels them started in May of 1849 when Walker took up his post at Callandoon.

Any study of the Native Police should acknowledge the relationship between Aboriginal troopers and European officers. Where there was positive interaction this should not be glossed over. Such acknowledgment cannot take place however within a vacuum. The Native Police Force as commanded by Frederick Walker was established to deal with only one race of people. It was established to clearly benefit another race of people who sought to inhabit and control land which was not theirs. While Walker's approach might have had a gentler veneer the result was nevertheless the same.

Walker's vision for the frontier was eventually realised. A little under fifty years later Police Protectors of Aborigines were appointed in Queensland. These men could control the movement and lives of Aboriginal people living in their districts and helped to provide station owners with an almost free supply of labour. In March 1980, Bob Katter Jnr., State Member for Flinders in a letter to the Queensland Premier Joh Bjelke Petersen praised the work of Walker.

"He was a very strong advocate of our own government policy of assimilation, an outstanding man in every respect."⁶¹

Some historians have been kind to Frederick Walker. Skinner in his *Police of the Pastoral Frontier* neglects to mention Walker's use of the term annihilate in his report of the Battle of Carbucky. He also neglects to mention a murder and the alleged slaughter of 26 Aboriginal people which were brought to the attention of the Attorney General at the same time Walker's mismanagement of the force was being discussed in parliament. Much is made of the dying words of Corporal Jack reported by Walker's friend Augustus Morris. "The poor fellow thought of you in his last minutes saying that you would cry for him and be angry at his death."⁶² Less is made of his methods of discipline. W. Archer reported to a select committee in 1858 that under Walker, troopers were regularly scourged, being tied up and flogged by one of their fellow troopers.⁶³ Another witness to the same committee described Walker's methods, "He was very severe, more so than any other person has been since."⁶⁴

In July of this year (1999) the Queensland Police Commissioner made a welcome apology to Indigenous Queenslanders on behalf of his force.⁶⁵ It is interesting to note that by the time the Police Act of 1863 had been passed the Native Police Force first commanded by Walker

⁶⁰ Cryle, *op.cit.*, p.35

⁶¹ Frederick Walker Documents (Manuscript) "Correspondence re T.J. Staunton's Research on the Richmond District and in particular Frederick Walker" (John Oxley Library, Brisbane, manuscripts and records collection, OM72.090)

⁶² L.E. Skinner *Police of the Pastoral Frontier Native Police 1849 – 59* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1975) p.40

⁶³ W. Archer: "...it is an excellent way of appealing to the feelings of a black trooper.": Report from the Select Committee on the Murders of the Aborigines on the Dawson River: N.S.W. Legislative Assembly, Votes and Proceedings 1858, Vol. 2., 871

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p.878

⁶⁵ *Courier Mail*, July 8, 1999

had been in existence for 14 years. By that time the force had been firmly established as the squatter's frontier force. From time to time the colonial administration raised concerns over the acts of the native police but usually a blind eye was turned to the activities of a body of men created to aid the feeding of an ever-increasing hunger for land.

Conclusion

In many ways this paper poses more questions than it answers. Who controlled the Native Police between 1859 and 1863 and who was this force answerable to? Were there similar attacks on 'station blacks' in other localities similar to Myall Creek and Umbercollie? It is also interesting to contrast the work of Richard Bligh, Crown Lands Commissioner for Gwydir and the work of Frederick Walker, Commandant of the Native Police. Bligh attempted to apply the British model of justice to the MacIntyre River district but was prevented by the dominant frontier culture. Walker attempted to bring his vision of the frontier to the same district and succeeded with the support of squatters and the force of violence. In many ways this paper raises some fundamental questions. What is policing? Can the word be applied to a force sanctioned to work outside of the law? Police have played a central role in the history of race relations in Queensland. Perhaps now is the time to begin to look more closely at the role that this arm of the state has played in the lives of Indigenous people during the last two centuries.