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Part 3 of Australian Frontier Wars

The Hawkesbury Nepean Wars

The Hawkesbury and Nepean Wars (1794–1816) were a series of conflicts where British forces, including armed settlers and detachments of the British Army in Australia, fought against Indigenous clans inhabiting the Hawkesbury River region and the surrounding areas to the west of Sydney. The wars began in 1794, when the British started to construct farms along the river, some of which were established by soldiers.

Aboriginal People of the Sydney Region

The Sydney region comprised a variety of nations that were united by a common language. These nations were the Eora who lived along the coast, the Tharawal to the south, the Darug to the northwest and the Gandagara to the southwest. Within the language groups there were several clans. The Eora people generally comprised three main clans known as the Cadigal, Wanegal, and the Cammeraygal, and several smaller ones. The Dharug people, however, were the largest dialect of the Sydney region and consisted of the Wangal, Kurrajong, Boo-rooberongal, Cattai, Bidjigal, Gommerigal, Mulgoa, Cannemegal, Bool-bain-ora, Cabrigal, Muringong and the Dural clans. A clan typically numbered between 50–100 people.

The arrival of the First Fleet in 1788 at Port Jackson marked the beginning of the colonisation of Australia. At the time it was used as a penal colony to which criminals and political dissidents were sent as punishment, however, a small number of free settlers also took up land. The penal colony had been established at Port Jackson (present-day Sydney) which was the traditional land of the Cadigal people. The penal colony had a population of around one thousand and for the first few years struggled to adapt to the Australian climate.

1789: Skirmish at Botany Bay

In March 1789, sixteen convicts marched to Botany Bay with the intention of plundering the natives of their fishing-tackle and spears. They had armed themselves with whatever tools they could find such as hatchets, shovels, and clubs. As they arrived near the bay a body of natives ambushed them, and in the skirmish most of the convicts fled.

Those who fled back to the camp alerted the military to the attack. An officer with a detachment of marines quickly rushed to their aid, however they were too late to repel the natives which left one convict dead and seven severely wounded. Arthur Phillip sought no vengeance against the natives for this event as the convicts had hostile intentions, and instead dealt punishments on the convicts involved.

December 1790 Retaliatory Action Bidjigal Tribe

An irate Governor Arthur Phillip ordered a company of marines and led an expedition against the Bidjigal in retaliation for an attack on the Governor's gamekeeper John McIntyre by a tribal member Pemulwuy who speared McIntyre, and later died of the wound. The spear was barbed with small pieces of red stone, confirming that Pemulwuy belonged to one of the 'woods tribes' or Bediagal (Bidjigal) clan. A bungled retaliatory expedition failed to find any Aborigines. *(It is now thought McIntyres spearing was in retaliation for him indiscriminately murdering Aborigines).*

From 1792 Pemulwuy led raids on settlers at Prospect, Toongabbie, Georges River, Parramatta, Brickfield Hill and the Hawkesbury River. In December 1792 David Collins, the Lieutenant Governor, reported an attack by Aborigines who 'were of the Hunter's or Woodman's tribe, people who seldom came among us, and who consequently were little known'. He also reported that 'Pe-mul-wy, a wood native, and many strangers, came in' to an initiation ceremony held at *yoo-lahng* (Farm Cove) on 25 January 1795. Collins thought him 'a most active enemy to the settlers, plundering them of their property, and endangering their personal safety'. Raids were made for food, particularly corn, or as 'payback' for atrocities: *(Collins suggested that most of the attacks were the result of the settlers' own misconduct, including the kidnapping of Aboriginal children).*

To check at once 'these dangerous depredators', military force was used against Pemulwuy and his people. Captain Paterson directed that soldiers be sent from Parramatta, with instructions to destroy 'as many as they could meet' of the Bediagal. In March 1797 Pemulwuy led a raid on the government farm at Toongabbie. Settlers formed a punitive party and tracked him to the outskirts of Parramatta. He was wounded, receiving seven pieces of buckshot in his head and body. Extremely ill, he was taken to the hospital. Yet, late in April that year when the governor met several parties of natives near Botany Bay Pemulwuy was among them. Having 'perfectly recovered from his wounds', he had 'escaped from the hospital with an iron about his leg. He saw and spoke with one of the gentlemen of the party; enquiring of him whether the governor was angry and seemed pleased at being told that he was not'.



Engraving by Samuel John Neele believed to be the only known depiction of Pemulwuy

Pemulwuy's close escapes resulted in him believing that firearms could not kill him. In Collins's words: 'Through this fancied security, he was said to be at the head of every party that attacked the maize grounds'. On 1 May 1801 Governor King issued a government and general order that Aborigines near Parramatta, Georges River and Prospect could be shot on sight, and in November a proclamation outlawed Pemulwuy and offered a reward for his death or capture.

Pemulwuy was shot dead about 1 June 1802 describing the subsequent events: 'his head was cut off, which was, I believe, sent to England'. On 5 June King wrote to Sir Joseph Banks that although he regarded Pemulwuy as 'a terrible pest to the colony, he was a brave and independent character'. Pemulwuy's head was preserved in spirit's and sent to England. It is not known where it now is.

1804–1805: Interwar Conflict

Along the Hawkesbury and Nepean Rivers there was a nexus between drought, the expansion of settlement and fighting between settlers and Aboriginal people. Drought began in 1803. In 1803, Philip Gidley King allocated 4,435 acres, nearly twice as much the previous record of 2,631 acres in 1799. In 1804, he allocated 10,000 acres in land grants and over 20,000 acres in commons on the Hawkesbury. Land grants were made where there was easy access to water, particularly the creeks and paleochannels along the Hawkesbury and Nepean Rivers. Conflict was inevitable as these areas were important food sources for Aboriginal people. The only records of conflict in 1804–05 come from Governor King's dispatches and the *Sydney Gazette*, which was an official newspaper. Unlike other periods there are no other sources to balance the official accounts.

In 1803, settlement was extended down stream of Windsor to Portland Head by the Coromandel settlers, non-conformist free settlers who arrived on the Coromandel. Fighting broke out there in May 1804. Matthew Everingham, his wife and servant on their Sackville Reach farm; and John Howe on his Swallow Rock Reach farm were wounded. Governor King sent troops with orders for constables and settlers to support the Portland Head settlers. In June there was a standoff between 300 warriors and a group of settlers in which no casualties were reported. In the same month a settler was speared; crops from the farms of Bingham and Smith were taken; John Wilkin was speared and the farms of Cuddie and Crumby on South Creek, at what is now Llandilo, were burnt by a group of 150 warriors who spared the life of a convict there. Joseph Kennedy fired on Aboriginal people taking corn from his fields on the Upper Crescent Reach, as did James Dunn on Portland Reach. The 1804 fighting stopped in mid-June with the killing of Aboriginal warriors somewhere around Richmond Hill.

In mid-April 1805, Branch Jack, a notorious Aboriginal leader led attacks upon isolated Hawkesbury River farms killing three settlers. General orders were issued sending NSW Corps soldiers to the frontier farms and banning Aboriginal people from the farms. The government farm at Seven Hills was attacked and two of MacArthur's stockmen at Cobbity were killed. An Aboriginal attack on the fish salting boat the *William and Mary* at Pittwater was thwarted and two salt boilers thought killed were escorted back to Sydney by Aboriginal people. In early May 1805, the Bidjigal people around Prospect sued for peace. The most intense fighting occurred in mid-May with more attacks on boats at Pitt Water, attacks on farms at Seven Hills and Concord, and attacks on traveler's at Homebush. Andrew Thompson led an attack on Aboriginal camps near the junction of the Nepean, Grose and Hawkesbury Rivers. Tedbury, son of Pemulwuy, was captured near Pennant Hills. In June, the fighting continued on the Hawkesbury and Georges Rivers and South Creek. The fighting appears to have ceased with the apprehension of the Aboriginal warrior, Musquito, in late June. Five white men were killed in 1805.

Hawkesbury Nepean War 1814–16

There are more sources for the fighting on the Nepean and Hawkesbury Rivers, than for the earlier 1804–05 conflict, reflecting the greater literacy levels of the free settlers, officials and clergy taking up large land grants, not just along the waterfronts but on the land between the creeks and rivers. A severe drought beginning in 1812 put additional pressure on both settlers and Aboriginal people. William Reardon, the first to die in February 1814, appears to have been speared in mistake for another man who accused some Aboriginal men of destroying his vegetable garden on Cox's Fernhill estate at Mulgoa. In April 1814, a number of farms were attacked including Fernill and Campbell's Shancarmore.

Fighting in 1814 in the Appin district appears to have centred around a number of farms and individuals. An



**"Night Attack by Blacks", monotone painting
by Livingston Hopkins**

Aboriginal boy was killed by three Veteran Company soldiers while taking corn, probably on Broughton's farm. Warriors drove two of the soldiers off and killed private Eustace as he was reloading and mangled his body. In response a group of Campbelltown settlers fired into an Aboriginal camp, killing a woman and two children. The woman's body was mutilated and one of the dead children had been both shot and beaten. John Kennedy buried the bodies on his farm, an act of kindness that may have saved the life of a young girl who was on the spot when Aboriginal warriors killed two of the killers of the woman and children near Kennedy's farm.

Wallah, the leader of these warriors also spared the life of the girl's brother because their mother Mrs Byrnes had given food to Aboriginal people. Hannibal Macarthur wrote to his uncle in mid May telling him that Aboriginal warriors had killed a man and woman

on their Cowpasture farm and that escaped convicts were involved in the attacks. Governor Macquarie's response was measured, sending out a small party of soldiers and warning the settlers against further provocation. In July 1814 two children on the Daly's Mulgoa farm were killed after Mrs Daly fired at a party of Aboriginal people. Mrs Daly and her infant were spared. The only conflict in 1815 appeared to be the spearing of a man and a woman on Macarthur's Bringelly farm as a result of an argument over a blanket.

The drought broke in January 1816 and there were a number of floods during the year. Fighting broke out in March 1816. Four men were killed while pursuing Aboriginal warriors who had taken crops from Palmer's Bringelly farm. The lives of a man and a woman were spared when warriors took crops from Wright's farm on the following day. An attack was made on the government camp at Glenroy on the western side of the Blue Mountains and the government cart on its way there was also attacked. On the Grose River Mrs Lewis and a convict were killed in a dispute over wages. At the end of the month between eighty and ninety warriors attacked farms at Lane Cove.

Governor Macquarie ordered out several parties of the 46th regiment, (a Devonshire Regiment), in April 1816. Captain Wallis went south to Appin, Captain Schaw to the Hawkesbury and Lieutenant Dawe was detached to the Cow pastures. Soldiers were sent to protect the Glenroy depot. The role of the guides points to the complex nature of the hostilities. Schaw unsuccessfully chased a handful of warriors around the Hawkesbury and after a white guide failed to guide the soldiers in a surprise attack on a camp at Maroota he marched south to the Cow Pastures. When the nature of Wallis' military expedition became clear to the Aboriginal guides, Bundle and Bootbarrie or Budburry, they left Captain Wallis. John Warby, a white guide, also disappeared for a time from Wallis' command. Captain Schaw's pursuit of a party of warriors on the Wingecarribee River ended after Colebee told him that the tracks of the warriors were two days old.

The Appin Massacre came about because local settlers guided Captain Wallis to an Aboriginal camp containing women and children near Broughton's farm, suggesting that attacks upon Aboriginal people were opportunistic. Despite the lack of orders regarding decapitation, bodies of sixteen Aboriginal people were decapitated and the soldiers were rewarded for their actions.

Governor Macquarie's May 1816 Proclamation ordered magistrates and troops at Sydney, Parramatta and Windsor to support settlers in driving off hostile Aboriginal people. The proclamation had the effect of indemnifying soldiers and settlers against charges of murder. Four settlers were killed on the Kurrajong slopes in June and July. Magistrate William Cox put parties of soldiers, settlers and native guides in the field capturing and killing Butta Butta, Jack Straw and Port Head Jamie in mid July. At least three of these men were executed without trial. The fighting extended in August. Four Aboriginal children from the Hawkesbury were put in the Native Institution. They were probably picked up in unreported raids. In late August two hundred of Cox's sheep and a shepherd were killed at Fernhill. The expedition sent out in response reported no casualties.

Aftermath

Settlers were driven from their Hunter Valley farms in late 1816. In September 1816 Magistrate William Cox outlined his plan to Governor Macquarie to put five parties of soldiers, settlers and guides into the field to scour the Grose, Hawkesbury and Nepean Rivers. There were no reports of Aboriginal casualties from these expeditions. Despite the apparent lack of Aboriginal casualties fighting ceased on the Hawkesbury Nepean River system in 1816. Governor Macquarie was generous in his rewards. The guides received land grants for their services. Breastplates were made for Aboriginal guides. Macquarie's April 1817 report to Bathurst, while highlighting the success of his measures, made no mention of Aboriginal casualties.

Many of the Aboriginal nations occasionally allied themselves to the British in order to conquer more land for their tribes, and just as quickly returned to a state of war against the British.

Apart from the silence of the land there are other records that point to something catastrophic happening to the Aboriginal people of the Hawkesbury Nepean in 1816. The Macarthur letters noted the absence of Aboriginal people upon their return in 1817. George Bowmans' 1824 memorandum to Magistrate Scott recalled soldiers indiscriminately killing Aboriginal people. The church ministers, Threlkeld and Lang, both heard stories of killings on the Hawkesbury. Prosper Tuckerman recalled his father tell him that 400 Aboriginal people had been killed at that time. In 1834, John Dunmore Lang wrote: "There is black blood at this moment on the hands of individuals of good repute in the colony of New South Wales of which all the waters of New Holland would be insufficient to wash out the indelible stains.

Edited from Wikipedia, Dreamtime.com and The Australian Dictionary of Biography