

# NUNAWADING MILITARY HISTORY GROUP

## MINI NEWSLETTER No. 30

### Part 6 of Australian Frontier Wars Western Australia

The first British settlement in Western Australia was established by the British Army, 57<sup>th</sup> of Foot, (West Middlesex Regiment) at Albany in 1826. Relations between the garrison and the local Minang people were generally good. Open conflict between Noongar and European settlers broke out in Western Australia in the 1830s as the Swan River Colony expanded from Perth. The Pinjarra Massacre, the best known single event, occurred on 28 October 1833.

The **Pinjarra massacre**, also known as the **Battle of Pinjarra**, is an attack that occurred in 1834 at Pinjarra, Western Australia on an uncertain number of Binjareb Noongar people by a detachment of 25 soldiers of the 21<sup>st</sup> of Foot, (North British Fusiliers), police and settlers led by Governor James Stirling. Stirling estimated the Binjareb present numbered "about 60 or 70" and John Roe, who also participated, at about 70–80, which roughly agree with an estimate of 70 by an unidentified eyewitness.



Pinjarra Massacre Site memorial

On the attacking side, Captain Theophilus Tighe Ellis was killed and Corporal Patrick Heffron was injured. On the defending side an uncertain number of Binjareb men, women and children were killed. While Stirling quantified the number of Binjareb killed as probably 15 males, Roe estimated the number killed as 15–20, and an unidentified eyewitness as 25–30 including 1 woman and several children in addition to being "very probable that more men were killed in the river and floated down with the stream". The number of Binjareb injured is unknown, as is the number of deaths resulting from injuries sustained during the attack.

The Pinjarra Massacre was the culmination of increasing tension and violence between European settlers and Noongar peoples. Despite Stirling after the attack "effectively threatening to kill 80% of the Noongar population of the South West" (which would equate to genocide) should the Binjareb continue to resist, some did continue while others sought peace.

Although the effects of the attack's outcome were devastating for the Binjareb, allowing "surrounding groups to exploit the weakness of the once powerful Binjareb", the Bindjareb today are strong custodians and representatives of their culture and of greater Australia.



Portrait of Noongar warrior Yagan's severed head. 1833

The Noongar people, forced from traditional hunting grounds and denied access to sacred sites, turned to stealing settlers' crops and killing livestock to supplement their food supply. In 1831 a Noongar person was killed taking potatoes; this resulted in Yagan killing a servant of the household, as was the response permitted under tribal law. In 1832 Yagan and two others were arrested and sentenced to death, but settler Robert Menli Lyon argued that Yagan was defending his land from invasion and therefore should be treated as a prisoner of war. The argument was successful and the three men were exiled to Carnac Island under the supervision of Lyon and two soldiers. The group later escaped from the island.

Fighting continued into the 1840s along the Avon River near York.

In the Busselton region, relations between the white settlers and the native Wardandi people were strained to the point of violence, resulting in several

Aboriginal deaths. In June 1841, George Layman was speared to death by Wardandi elder Gaywal. According to one source, Layman had got involved in an argument between Gaywal and another Wardandi tribesman over their allocation of damper, and had pulled Gaywal's beard, which was considered a grave insult. According to another source, Layman had hired two of Gaywal's wives to work on his farm and would not let them go back to their husband. A manhunt for Layman's killer went on for several weeks, involving much bloodshed as Captain Molloy, the Bussell brothers, and troops killed unknown numbers of Aboriginal residents in what has become known as the Wonnerup Massacre. The posse eventually shot Gaywal and captured his three sons, two of whom were imprisoned on Rottnest Island.

The discovery of gold near Coolgardie in 1892 brought thousands of prospectors onto Wangkatha land, causing sporadic fighting.

The last British regiment 99<sup>th</sup> of Foot, (the Wiltshire Regiment), left Western Australia in 1856.

Continued European expansion in Western Australia led to further frontier conflict, Bunuba raiders also attacked European settlements during the 1890s until their leader Jandamarra was killed in 1897. Sporadic conflict continued in northern Western Australia until the 1920s, with a Royal Commission held in 1926 finding that at least eleven Indigenous Australians had been killed in the Forrest River massacre by a police expedition in retaliation for the death of a European.