

The Savage Kalkadoons.

In the late 1800's the Aborigines of Queensland were depleted by disease and shot.

The area around Boulia had been "depleted", by Alexander Kennedy and his good friend Police Sub-Inspector Frederic Urquhart.

Kennedy a bloodthirsty savage, originally from Scotland, established a station at Buckingham Downs, and later Noarnside and Calton Hills, he subdued the area with his stockwhip, his pistol, and his penis.

One of the reasons Alexander Kennedy survived numerous attempts on his life was his young, Kalkadoon 'servant' Sandy, whom he had fostered since childhood. One night Kennedy sent Sandy to spy a special Kalkadoon "Kill Kennedy corroboree" where a new song was performed.

Sandy translated the words for his master:

We kill Kennedy in the morning,

We of the Kalkadoon tribe; have our glory and prowess departed,

Our hunting grounds are ravished,

Our water is taken by the cattle,

But bullock is good,

Kill and we shall have beef forever,

Kill the white man,

Kill the white man!

Do not our women deride us,

We are many and can conquer the white man's magic.

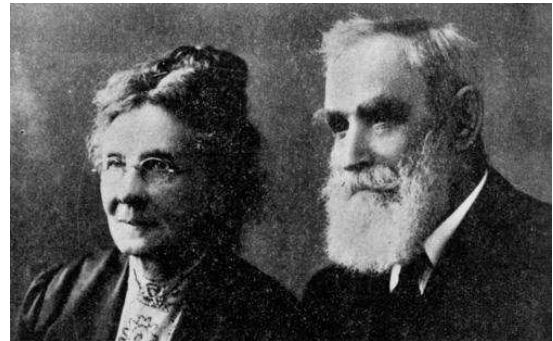
We kill Kennedy in the morning!

Thus forewarned, Kennedy rode to the ceremony and fired into the assembled group at random, scattering the people.

Soon after, Kennedy went to Brisbane in an effort to get government support to fight the Kalkadoons. Although he was not officially backed, David Thompson Seymour, the Commissioner, in charge of the police and other paramilitary forces informally gave Kennedy his full support.

Early in 1883 the officer-in-charge of the Cloncurry Native Police force, Marcus de la Poer Beresford, was tracking down the Kalkadoon killers of a man called Britcher. On the night of 24 January, he himself was attacked, together with four troopers, as they camped in the McKinlay Ranges. The well-armed police soon had the upper hand, and took a number of Kalkadoons prisoner. Beresford corralled them in a gorge for the night and put them under guard. By morning Beresford and three of the troopers were dead.

Beresford had underestimated the Kalkadoons. It was later worked out that they had left a cache of weapons in the gorge, and simply waited for the opportunity to use them. The



surviving trooper walked twenty miles with a spear embedded in his flesh to raise the alarm. This was a moment of glory for the Kalkadoons.

Punitive expeditions were unsuccessful, and for long months the people of Cloncurry lived in constant fear of attack. Settlers moved about only in strongly armed groups. The horses of the Native Police were driven off and many were speared.

For more than a year, the gorges and hills were Kalkadoon country again.

It was not destined to last.

Late in 1883 a new Sub-Inspector of Native Police in Cloncurry was appointed; twenty-five year old Frederick Charles Urquhart.

His first action was to round up the scattered horses and buy or commandeer more. He drilled the Native Police troopers 'with all the vehemence of a Prussian Sergeant-Major', moving their camp twenty-five miles out of town to maintain discipline.

The Kalkadoons did not take long to contact their new enemy, sending a message challenging 'him to come out into the hills, and that they would finish him off like Beresford'.. This challenge was issued most likely by a man called Mahoni, the only Kalkadoon leader whose name has been recorded.

In mid-1884 the co-owner (with Alexander Kennedy) of Calton Hills Station, James Powell, was speared to death while mustering cattle. When Kennedy heard the news he rode eighty kilometres to meet Urquhart and the troopers.

Having buried Powell, they joined forces and trapped the war party in a gorge. Although the Kalkadoons fought hard, they could not match the carbines. One eyewitness said that 'men, women and children were killed, but mainly men'.

Sub-Inspector Urquhart justified these actions, and those to come, in verse:

*Grimly the troopers stood around
That new-made forest grave,
And to their eyes that fresh heap mound
For vengeance seemed to crave.
And one spoke out in deep stern tones,
And raised his hand on high
For every one of these poor bones,
A Kalkadoon shall die.*



Considering the 500 bones in the human body, Urquhart may not have been too far off the mark.

Over the next months private posse's of armed squatters, together with Urquhart's revamped Native Police, took a terrible toll on the local Aborigines.

It has been said that 'the murder of Powell marked the point at which it was officially decided to break the strength of the Kalkadoons'.

The event which led to the final battle of the Kalkadoons was the September murder of a Chinese shepherd in the foothills of the Argylla Mountains, on the Granada Station.

Worried about his stock, the station's owner, Hopkins, gathered a large body of men to augment Urquhart's Native Police. Pastoralists and farmhands came from all over the surrounding area to take part in the punitive expedition.

In military terms, the total body of men amounted to company strength.

Observing this large body of whites gathering, messages quickly went through the Kalkadoon network for the warriors to assemble.

Urquhart tracked the Kalkadoons, now 600 strong, to a spot atop a boulder-studded hill, sixty miles north of Cloncurry. Now known as Battle Mountain, the site had been well chosen.

As well as the excellent tactical advantage presented by the location, overlooking the plain below, the Kalkadoons had laid in large stocks of spears and boomerangs for just such a siege.

Sub-Inspector Urquhart started the battle by following regulation Native Police procedure, ordering the assembled warriors to 'Stand in the Queen's name'. The Kalkadoons replied with a hail of rocks and missiles and a 'roar of defiance'.

Urquhart then ordered the now famous cavalry charge, hoping to terrify the defenders from their strong position. 200 men and horses thundered up the lower slopes of the hill. Bullets from their weapons bouncing harmlessly off the rocks.

After thirty metres the hill became too steep for the horses, and the men were forced to dismount and run for cover as spears rained down.

High above, the warriors yelled in derision, led by a man wearing a headdress of white down, and a 'thick possum-string hanging around his neck and attached to another string passing around his waist'.

The attack was a shambles.

As Urquhart battled to regain control over his men, he himself was hit in the face with a heavy lump of rock-hard anthill, thrown by a 'huge' warrior. As Urquhart lay unconscious on the ground, one of the Native Police shot down his attacker.

A wall of covering fire allowed the troopers to rescue their commander while other dead and dying men were temporarily abandoned on the mountainside. Leaderless, the white army could offer little fight. The merest movement from cover brought down an avalanche of missiles. It must have seemed to the Kalkadoons that the battle was won.

Several hours later however, Urquhart recovered consciousness and immediately took command.

A flanking movement was attempted, in which the Kalkadoons were forced from cover to defend assaults on two sides. Suddenly, without warning, the Kalkadoon warriors formed ranks and came charging down the hill towards their assailants, spears raised like lances.

For one extraordinary moment the formation held - then the warriors were cut down by round after round from the carbines of the whites.

The Kalkadoons wavered, then reformed and charged once more. Again they were mown down.

Bravery and stone age weapons were no match for the explosive firepower of the whites. At last the guns fell silent. The resistance of the Kalkadoons had ended.

At least 200 of the finest Kalkadoon warriors lay dead on the slopes of Battle Mountain.

Not content with the slaughter, Urquhart and his troopers continued their 'cleaning up' operations for several days.

The last known Kalkadoon survivor of Battle Mountain, Tubbie Terrier, died in Cloncurry Hospital in 1930.

In 1960 it was noted that 'for decades, the hill was littered with the bleached bones of warriors, gins and piccaninnies'.

Urquhart went on to become Commissioner of Police for Queensland, becoming involved in right-wing politics and the Red Flag riots in Brisbane after World War I, and then an Administrator of the Northern Territory. He also had a major part in the investigation of the Gatton murders.

Urquhart was a writer of poetry, and was given to describing his massacres in some detail in his poems as also in his police reports.

By 1885, it seems the power of the Kalkadoons had been "finally broken".

Walter Edmund Roth (1861-1933), physician, anthropologist and protector of Aborigines first came to the area in 1890. A powerful picture of the state of the Aborigines in this area is given in a report sent to the Colonial Secretary in 1892:

Carandotta seems to be the centre of disease and there I saw men and women, their faces sunken in, their bodies so shrunken, and eyes so small and far back in their heads that at first sight they appeared like mummies of centuries gone by walking about the camps....

Lake Nash has some bad cases and white travellers do their very best to disease the black gins.

I saw one poor child not 12 years that had syphilis for 12 months or more, can anything be more horrible than this, it is bad enough to know how they have been shot down without allowing these things to continue.

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