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We're all told a story about colonial Australia and it goes something like this. Convicts, wool, gold, the Eureka Stockade, boom and busts, then the six colonies federated in 1901 to establish the nation state of Australia. But of course there were lots of other things going on throughout that period and at the time these events were enormously controversial and they haunted the consciences of many Australians. Today these actions would be judged as crimes against humanity.

This was mass murder conducted on behalf of squatters who were determined to clear people from the land they had taken in New South Wales and Queensland and the instrument of these clearances

was a force called the native police. Author and journalist David Meyers here. David comes from an old Australian family and a few years ago at the request of a relative David went looking into the family tree and he discovered that several of his colonial ancestors were among the worst of these

killers. David Mars' new book is called Killing for Country, a family story and just a quick heads up this conversation will mention Aboriginal people who have died. Hello David. Richard, hello. What stories were you told about your family when you were growing up? We weren't a family that told

endless stories about the family. We had a few simple stories. One involved the Mars and the Mars have got nothing to do with frontier killings. It is my mother's family and my mother's family was always a bit murky. Very few stories were told about my mother's family but to celebrate the centenary of the armistice a group of us decided we would go to northern France and I just dug out some stuff about the family so that we would have an idea of my grandfather's war record. He was an inconspicuous soldier on the western front and a year later the uncle who'd organised that family expedition decided that we wouldn't have another family expedition and this time we would go to a dot on the map in the middle of New South Wales called Barn Bar where his grandparents

met and he said to me would I just dig out some stuff on his grandmother because he knew nothing about her. He'd heard a rumor that there was a book somewhere. I might have some info in it.

I got hold of a copy of the book and there was a picture of Maud Ewer's father Reg in the uniform of the native police. What did he look like in that uniform? The uniforms had braid and ceremonial swords. You had to have social connections in order to get a job of this kind and there was Reg looking pompous in this uniform with dead eyes Richard. Who else is in this picture? That's just him. There's another picture later on in his career in the native police with two black troopers sitting on the ground at his feet him again in his officers' finery and those figures black scolding figures at his feet. He and his brother Darcy were both members of the native police. How well known were they in their time in Australia? Reg was promoted in the end as many beautiful officers of the native police were. He was promoted to become a magistrate. Darcy was famous. Darcy was a wild, shameless, silver-tongued bastard who killed and conducted adventures and

was a pioneering drover. Darcy loved publicity. We know so much about him because he was always feeding his adventures to the press as great colonial escapades. When it came to the actual killing he was often circumspect but sometimes and some of the most detailed accounts we have of official killings on the frontier in this country are of Darcy's killings. Very detailed.

This story starts a few decades back further from there. It starts in 1809. This is very early colonial Sydney we're talking about now and it starts with a distant relation of yours. A merchant named Richard Jones. What brought Richard Jones to Australia? Richard Jones was a bright kid from a family in Wales. He came out here as a sort of apprentice merchant and he was very good. He was very good. He was very trustworthy. He was very Christian, publicly Christian. He was a mate of Samuel Marsden's. He made his first fortune in whaling and then in trading tea and then in the 1820s having reached the age of 36 without a wife he decided he needed one went back to London and for reasons which nobody can really understand. Married a poor but beautiful

woman from the Thames side slums and she had five little brothers. They were the Ewer boys and he looked after them one after another. He brought them out to Australia in their teens, gave them a job, gave them a start, put at least one of them, maybe two of them through the King's School. He was one of the founders of the King's School Paramatta and he was an enormous dispossessor of Aboriginal lands. In his lifetime he either was granted or bought or connived to possess 600,000 acres of the best land in the colony. So this is a man who goes from being a minor clerk in Wales, arrives in Sydney, makes his fortune in whaling and then from sheep by importing Saxon merino sheep and creates some of the finest wool in the world from it. He was the pioneer of Saxon sheep and for that of course he earned the furious distaste of the Macathurs because the Macathurs had Spanish merinos but but Jones had German merinos and they were

better. So he sends his drovers into the Hunter Valley. They seized vast amount of land there which dispossessed the local people, the Wanarua people. How did they fight back?

The Wanarua were determined to resist the advances of the settlers. They fought back in small guerrilla engagements. Often no more than the killing of a drover on the roads, the killing of a shepherd, the looting of shepherds' drays on the road, the slow-moving dray pulled by six oxen was a very easy thing to loot. It's like bush rangers in other words. They were never allowed the dignity of bush ranging in the stories of the time but one of the strategies they used and used well was to lure squatters who were pursuing them to hill sides. They would position themselves on the top of the hill and roll boulders down on them and they won battles that way and that was a strategy used by Aboriginal people not only in the Hunter Valley but later on at Morton Bay. It was a familiar strategy. They fought back but they were overwhelmed. Who were Aboriginal people in the eyes of British law at that time because there was no treaty ever signed in Australia? What did that mean for the legal standing of Aboriginal people in colonial Australia? Well it begins with fundamental legal bullshit which was vital to the colony and the colony's sense of itself. The first being that Australia was barely inhabited and that there weren't enough people and they were so so footloose that they couldn't be thought to possess land. The first governor understood within weeks of arriving in Sydney that the place was actually heavily populated

and it was very clear from very early on that Aboriginal peoples had very distinct territories in which they lived. The other great thing was this supposed humanitarian claim that all of the people on the continent of Australia were subjects of the crown and owed the protection of the crown

etc etc etc. Black and white. Black and white everybody but what that meant was that the people whose land was being invaded were denied the legal capacity to make a treaty because you

don't make treaties between subjects. They have the status of sort of agricultural labourers from Kent and you don't make treaties. This wasn't a common situation in other parts of the British Empire was it? I mean treaties were made in North America, made in New Zealand, made in Canada. This is quite an unusual situation in Australia wasn't it? It's nonsense to pretend that Australia could somehow escape being colonised. It was always going to be colonised. What sets Australia apart is the kind of total brutality of it. In South Africa then called the Cape. There were native police that is white officers and local troopers and there were treaties. There were treaties in New Zealand, Arturo, New Zealand. There were treaties and warfare in North America. Again there were equivalents of the native police in North America. The native police were a colonial institution not only in the British Empire, French, Portuguese, all the you enlist the conquered to allow you to pursue your conquest but in Australia it was total. No land was set aside. No treaty was ever signed. The laws were not enforced at all outside the cities. The colonists got the lot. It was a uniquely total colonisation. We know these massacres to face because the people who perpetrated them told us what they did. They wrote about it. You have an account by the Surveyor General in New South Wales, Thomas Mitchell, of a massacre he perpetrated on the Murray River. I'll quote him here. He says, attacks simultaneously by both parties the Holber took themselves to the river. This is the Aboriginal people in question here. My men pursuing them and shooting as many as they could. Numbers were shot in swimming across the Murray and some even after they had reached the opposite shore as they ascended the bank. Amongst those shot in the water was the chief recognised by a particular kind of clokey war which floated after he went down. Thus, in a very short time, the usual silence of the desert prevailed in the banks of the Murray and we pursued our journey unmolested. This is something he wrote himself and put down in Black and White that he named nearby mountain Mount Dispersal. How was this massacre greeted in the Sydney Herald which is the predecessor of today's Sydney Morning Herald? News of the massacre provoked a battle between newspapers in Sydney. Those newspapers who deplored the massacre mocked Mitchell for being scared of aborigines and those newspapers like the Sydney Herald who defended him vigorously and defended him in ways which we find quite familiar today. The defence took the form of attacking those who wailed after the aborigines and these good people we would say were attacked for showing off their humanitarian values. They were mocked for living in cities and not knowing what was really going on in the bush. They were mocked for being elites. They were mocked in ways which we find completely familiar today. So Richard Jones, this merchant made good in Sydney, as you say, brought out relatives on his wife's side of the family and one of them was a man named Edmund Nure, your ancestor, David. What was his story? What kind of a man was Edmund Nure? He was arrogant, a bit stupid, energetic, ambitious and he lived under the shadow of Richard Jones for about 25 years. He was Richard Jones' principal lieutenant in the dispossession of hundreds of thousands of acres of land principally on the Darling Downs and then the whole operation moved further north into the hinterland of Brisbane and Edmund B. Nure became, in the way of gentlemen, a magistrate and being a magistrate is what he most loved in the world. He was Jones' principal lieutenant. So that kind of work, that work of leading drovers and tens of thousands of sheep, beyond the Hunter Valley, up into the Liverpool Plains and then beyond there even further as Jones' land claims got bigger and bigger and bigger into the Darling Downs and to Morton Bay in that area, can you imagine what that work was like to

do that out in the bush? It was tough, brave work and you had not only tens of thousands of sheep to deal with but large contingents of convict workers who were assigned to Jones and they had to be disciplined and overseen and for the most part this was very lonely work but Edmund B. Nure married and she lived with him on the frontier which was in itself an act of some bravery. So Jones now owns a spectacular amount of land trailing up through New South Wales up into what we now call Queensland and became very wealthy from these massive sheep runs. You write that his initial homestead was on the waterfront instead in the modern day Woolloomaloo and then he moved up the hill and founded an entirely new suburb, David.

Yes, he had a four acre garden and he named his garden Darlinghurst.

Why did he name it Darlinghurst? Because he had been a great, he had been an intimate and a great admirer of Governor Darling and he loathed Darling's successor Governor Burke so he named his estate Darlinghurst out of spite and you know I still think an air of spite hangs over Darlinghurst even today. So what happened to governors who tended, who were trying, those governors, few governors who were trying to rein in the squatters, people like Jones?

The governors were absolutely unable to rein in the squatters. Governor Burke came apparently offering a totally new approach to the colony. He was a wig. Like a small ill liberal by today's political stand. By today's political stand it's exactly but he was gutless, you know, he couldn't fight. He was appalled by Thomas Mitchell's diary entry but he didn't punish him.

He wanted the squatters to be reigned in so that they couldn't flog their convict workers more than about say 50 times and those squatters led by Richard Jones actually tore Burke down because they managed to convince the authorities in London that the inability to lash their workers say a hundred or 200 times was leading to a lack of control and peace.

Rule of law, one of the proudest boasts of British civilization. Actually that was a threadbare thing in this country in the early days wasn't it? This lasted at least as long as the century. There are laws but they are not enforced. A law that is not enforced I think kind of ceases to exist doesn't it? There were laws that operated in the city but laws the same laws did not operate in the bush. Burke was thrown out by a cabal led by Jones whose other complaint against Burke was that he had brought out Catholic gentlemen and the viciousness of anti-Catholic warfare in Sydney at that time is almost unimaginable. So Jones was one of the leaders of a movement to block Burke's plans for the education of all children in the colony because it would mean Catholic and Protestant children sharing the same playgrounds and that was intolerable. Jones was at the same time part of the cabal that established the King School parameter using about as much money to establish the King

School as was going to be spent on the education of the rest of the colony. But then Jones came a cropper in the early 1840s. The price of wool collapsed, wool which had been earning fabulous sums for these merchants, for these squatters on international markets. The price just collapsed. Jones kept buying sheep, kept buying sheep. He had some other business dealings which were actually the key to his fall but the main thing, his main asset was then his sheep and he hid his sheep as many as he could in the names of his brothers-in-law the Ewers. So he hid his ownership of these sheep runs and the sheep. Not the sheep runs. The sheep runs weren't worth very much money.

The sheep were the only thing of value. The value of the sheep had collapsed but nevertheless they were his assets and parked tens of thousands of them in the name of my great-great-grandfather

and another brother-in-law and that was to bulk his creditors. So his creditors got I think six shillings in the pound and when they'd been dealt with Jones re-emerged on another 180,000 acres in the hinterland of Maryborough with all of his sheep. Now at this time given that sheep, well the wool wasn't worth anything like they wanted it to be, you write that they extracted residual value from the sheep in other ways. Tell me about this process please David. Boiling down. Boiling down. What is boiling down? It was discovered that a sheep not worth feeding because the price of wool had so collapsed could be boiled down for fat, for lard because that was required for soap and candles and it was the boiling down of the sheep that saved most of the squatters and the stench. There are accounts of the stench around Sydney as sheep were skinned, gutted, thrown into vats and melted down. It was disgusting but it made enough money to survive. In fact it made so much money that the wool dealers in Britain were saying please be careful of the sheep you're boiling down. Don't boil down your best sheep because one day wool will come back and

you'll want your best sheep. It's an extraordinary story. I had no idea this was going on in Australia at the time. The wool was so worthless you're boiling down sheep to make soap and candles. And in the country where this is happening Aboriginal people gathered at the boilings down, some worked on the boiling down and they survived on the rancid meat left over from the boiling process. So Jones had gone bankrupt nonetheless. He'd been forced to resign from the Legislative Council which must have been shattering for him. He was found to be insolvent. And he was forced to

resign as the President of the Bank of New South Wales because through most of this story he was the President of the Bank of New South Wales. He was the President of Westpac at one point?

Well it was not called Westpac then. But he ran up, I think it's said to be the biggest overdraft in the history of the Bank and eventually they had to ask him, send a messenger to tell him that he really had to resign. So he lost all of those officers and he went to the bush and he lived for a time in the hinterland of Brisbane on a huge run on the Brisbane River called Wyvernhoë. Wyvernhoë Dam is today that supplies Brisbane with most of its water. These famous names keep popping up. Then he founded a homestead on the Brisbane River. Yes, he bought 90 acres along

the river and built a very beautiful bungalow for himself and called his property New Farm. The splendidly gentrified Brisbane suburb of New Farm with the Powerhouse Art Centre is now located

and some of Brisbane's most expensive real estate. From Darlinghurst to New Farm. From Darlinghurst to

New Farm and by stopping off at Wyvernhoë as well. What was Brisbane as a colony when he got there?

What was that like? It had been just shut down as a convict settlement hadn't it?

Brisbane was built at a spot which was just perfect for a convict settlement and a wretched spot to build a commercial city. It's too far up river but it was impossible to shift because there were convict buildings there, there was a small population there, lots of shacks, lots of shanties, lots of pubs, two quite large aboriginal camps, some jetties and merchants, merchant wharfs.

It was not much of a town but Jones and others could see the possibilities because it was where wool was going to be exported and that's what grew Brisbane and it remained the administrative

centre

of this strange landscape. So you have Jones living in New Farm, he's got his property at Wyvernhoë and he set up his brother-in-law Edmund Neewer nearby on a property called Tent Hill. Then you record that Edmund's brother, John, was murdered while tending sheep. Probably, we don't know for sure, but probably by local younger men or other people we don't know, but what effect did the murder of John Neewer have on the colonists of the day?

It is uncalculable the effect it had on the family that their brother was murdered while shepherding on the on the Brisbane River. The effect on the family, I think, was profound. Jones had by this time gone back into the Legislative Council, this is still New South Wales, by the way, he'd gone back into the Legislative Council and he had become one of the most vociferous preachers for violent reprisals against the Aboriginal people.

1846, a new Governor of New South Wales, Governor Fitzroy arrives in Sydney from Britain and New South Wales is still running that part of what we now call Queensland, Brisbane and Wharton Bay area. New South Wales goes from Bass Strait to Cape York. Cape York at this point and Fitzroy has got new orders from the Colonial Secretary in London, Lord Gray. Now, Lord Gray has said he will issue leases now to these squatters who have taken the land in that part of the world, but he's more or less ordered them in the fine print of these leases, that they are to share the land with the native people who are to be allowed to use the land for hunting and fishing. Now, that's in Black Letter Law, is it, David? That was actually stipulated by the Colonial, by the Imperial authorities. But the backstory, the backstory says everything. The squatters had only ever had a licence to take their stock out into the bush. They didn't have ownership of the land and they were campaigning all through the United Kingdom, all through Australia to get title. Freehold, you mean? Freehold title. Well, that's what they dreamt of getting. But oddly enough, the British weren't willing to give away the principal asset of their new colony, the land. So they said, we won't give it to you, but we'll let you lease it. And Fitzroy said, those leases must in law contain a guarantee that the native peoples living on that land can continue to hunt and fish and live there. And London said no. They said no. So this great man, Plunkett, the Attorney General who prosecuted the killers at Mile Creek, Plunkett said, look, at least we can put it as a clause in the leases. So not as a law, but as a clause. And then there was an argument between London and Sydney about who was going to announce to the squatters that they had to share their land. And both London and Sydney balked. Neither would do it. There was never a public announcement that the squatters had to share their land. Never. So it was just there quietly in the leases and continually ignored for over a century. I call it a ghost in the fine print of those leases. This is Conversations with Richard Fiedler.

To find out more, just head to [abc.net.au slash conversations](http://abc.net.au/slash/conversations).

1846, not long after Governor Fitzroy has arrived from Britain in New South Wales, he sets up this new black force, the native police. What was at the remit of the native police? The squatters had been arguing for two things. One was better title to their land. The other was protection in the bush. And this was the first time that there would be an armed force that would roll out with the squatters themselves into the bush to protect the squatters from the Aboriginal people and to clear the Aboriginal people from the land. The remit was very, very vague and there was no law to back what the native police were being asked to do. The first commandant of the native police, a fascinating man called Frederick Walker, actually kind of went on strike right

at the beginning saying, I'm not going to send my men out there until I have clear instructions from the governor about what we can and can't do. And he never got them. He never got them. And so out he went and was at once killing in order to teach the blacks a lesson and bring peace to the rivers to the west of Darling Downs, which is where it began. And he did indeed bring peace so much so that the wages of shepherds fell dramatically and the value of land rose dramatically. And then those detachments of about seven or eight Aboriginal men and a white officer with a couple of people supporting them were then distributed in camps along the frontier. Now these forces were made up of white officers and black troopers. Where did they find these black troopers? They were found hundreds of miles from where they were going to serve. The first troopers were recruited along the Murrumbidgee in order to serve in the hinterland of the Darling Downs. So hundreds and hundreds of miles away. And why those men served is one of the most difficult and delicate questions. They were young men in a broken world where hunting and fishing were either no longer possible or were clearly not going to be possible for long. They were being offered food. I think food was very important. They were being offered adventure and women. And as a Wiradjuri historian said to me, victims don't make good choices. When they were taken up into this country from the Murrumbidgee in the Murray from way, way, way, way and brought up into places like the Darling Downs or into Moreton Bay around there, what was that country to them? Was there any kinship with the local Aboriginal people in that part of the world? No, none, whatever. Four men from the Murrumbidgee, the men of the Darling

Downs were almost as foreign to them as the white officers who were leading them there. At that time, take a man five, six hundred miles away. And there's no kinship. There was at that time no sense of being fellow victims of the colonists. These were foreigners. Your ancestor, Edmund B. Yure, moved to Maryborough and took over the sheep-boiling-down facilities that were there. What were conditions like in Maryborough in those days, David? Maryborough was a spot on the Mary River where supplies could be shipped in for the squatters and wool could be shipped out and also the fat from the boiling downs. It was primitive and when Edmund B. Yure went there, it was unsurveyed. It was just a squalid dump. It was also a town which had some doubts about whether it would survive in the face of Aboriginal hostility. The people of the valley, particularly the butchula of the coast, had driven the whites out once already and there was always this fear that they would drive them out again. But with the assistance of the native police, that fear began to vanish and they built more confidently a very prosperous town.

So in theory, the native police were an arm of the colonial government, but in practice, they were really the army of the squatters?

They were an armed wing of government, yes. And once Queensland broke away in 1859, one of the few virtues of the government of Queensland was candour. They would admit this is a paramilitary force with no legal backing operating on behalf of the government to assist the squatters. They were absolutely blunt about it. The squatters exerted pressure on the governor for protection. The squatters loved having a native police camp on their property and that was a favour that was usually given to people with vast land holdings and good relations to the governor. And so there was a lot of bickering in the local newspapers about how come he got so much protection when we needed more? There was all of that bickering was going

on. There's no secret about what was happening. Absolutely none. Everybody knew what was happening

and that was patrolling and killing. I'm struck by reading this, David, the kind of wild west atmosphere that's there, this kind of general atmosphere of lawlessness. Were you shocked by this? Yes, I was. What happened was constantly provoking protest. Protest from some wonderful magistrates who should be regarded as heroes, from squatters who began to see that the presence of the native police actually made things worse on the frontier for them. Not better.

From writers and editors and journalists of the many small newspapers that were quickly established in the country towns of Queensland and had been, of course, from the start, almost, in Sydney. And those voices were complaining and saying, this is murder, this is theft, this has to stop. Those voices had to be silenced and the way they were silenced was the very Australian way of having an inquiry which ventilated some distress and did nothing. And each of those inquiries made life worse for the Aboriginal people because horrible things were revealed in those inquiries and nothing was done and therefore that set the bar even lower. The bar was set lower with every inquiry. After the Mile Creek massacre, seven of the perpetrators, seven men, were found guilty of a lesser charge but nonetheless found guilty of murder of several children amongst that black encampment there and they were sentenced to hang.

And justice of a sort was done in this in this process. But what was the lesson learned after the successful prosecution of those murderers at Mile Creek? Well, a number of squatters realised that you could kill more quietly by poison rather than having armed men with swords and guns charging through villages and capturing and killing in that way. So you could do it more quietly, more discreetly. They weren't worried, of course, about what the survivors might tell the authorities because Aboriginal people in New South Wales and Queensland were not able to give evidence in court until the late 1870s. You would understand, of course, that a Christian with the knowledge that hell awaits him or her, should they lie in court, always tells the truth. But of course, the problem with Aborigines was that they didn't have a clear concept of heaven and hell. They were heathens, right? They were heathens and therefore they couldn't give evidence in court. So they had nothing to fear from the oath, in other words? They had nothing to fear from the oath and therefore they couldn't be trusted. So none of the survivors of the camps raided at dawn, none of the survivors of the poisonings that then happened after Mile Creek, could ever give evidence in court about what had occurred. None of the troopers could give evidence against their officers. They were all kept from court. There was means by which the native police could protect the white officers from knowledge of the crimes perpetrated by the black troopers at their own orders, wasn't there? Tell me how that worked. Well, the notion was that a white man could

not penetrate some thickets of bush and jungle. Only the blacks could penetrate those areas. And so what used to happen was that the officer would sit outside this stretch of bush on his horse.

The troopers would actually strip off and taking their guns and bullets would go in to the thicket and shoot up. And all the officers could hear was the occasional plink-plink of bullets and never count the dead. They were supposed to report all casualties of native police raids, but they couldn't report if they couldn't see. And so those killings went unreported. Edmund Newell went bankrupt in Maryborough, as you said, much the same way Richard Jones did. He had two sons, Reg and Darcy, Reg being your great-great

grandfather. How was Reg brought into the native police? His father had by this time become the sergeant at arms of the Queensland Parliament. He was always a crawler and he'd managed to get this job. And using that position, he got Reg a position in the native police. Those were much sought after positions. They paid something over a hundred pounds a year and he got his son in. He did his work so well that within a few months he was promoted from cadet to officer and he took part in some celebrated killings in the hinterland of Bowen.

Yeah, Bowen. Now we're going further and further up the coast here. Bowen near Ailey Beach in the Whitsundays, one of the most beautiful places in the whole of this planet is around there.

That's where he was posted with some some troopers. What kind of massacres were perpetrated there by

Reg and his men? There was a run with the grand name of the Hermitage that was in the possession of a man with this spectacular name of Cuthbert Fanshawe, known to his friends as Feathers.

There had been two shepherds killed on the Hermitage by the Aboriginal people and Reg and his men were called in. They chased the supposed perpetrators for about 10 days and they found a group of blacks. I mean whether they were actually the killers didn't matter because you just killed whoever you came across because that was going to teach everybody a lesson

and there was a killing. So all of the Aboriginal people in the area were held to be collectively responsible for the murder of the the shepherds. That's putting too intellectual a cast on it. It was more that you just killed any blacks you could find because it would teach the others a lesson. It's not because you thought them necessarily even guilty and that was the problem with going to court. Those damned judges kept asking what is the proof that this man committed that crime. So instead you dealt with it in the bush roughly. Reg reported having killed six that morning but Feathers Fanshawe wrote his memoirs a few years later. He was an eyewitness of that account and he said there was 12 and he gives this description of the troopers and a few of the workers on the Hermitage sitting down to cook themselves a meal amongst the bodies with women scolding from the trees. It's a famously hideous passage in the history of Australia and it was Reg Ewer who was leading the troops. Well this is reported in the local papers as you have a report in the local Bowen newspaper this new newspaper that's been set up that says Mr. Sub-Inspector Ewer dispersed a mob of over 200 in camp near Urie Creek. It is evidence that our

sable brethren meaning Aboriginal people are advancing in civilisation and they seem to be rapidly losing a portion of that dread of the white man which is so great a safeguard to us and we may add to them as without it we should be compelled to enter upon a war of extermination. Yes the Urie Creek dispersal was a couple of years later in Reg's in Reg's career.

We don't know how many died there. This was a perfectly peaceful gathering of Aboriginal people on a creek just near Bowen. The squatters were just a bit anxious about what might come of this. They seemed to have a lot of spears in their camp and so Reg and his men were sent in to shoot them

up. How was Governor Bowen the first Governor of Queensland reacting to all this kind of lawless violence going on in East Colony? Throughout this story it's extraordinary how men like well Jones and Bowen and others could view themselves as showing humanitarian restraint on the frontier when in fact they were allowing terrible killings. Bowen was in love with the Empire. He had this romantic delusion that the Empire was not only advancing the power of Britain

but the civilisation of the world. Well if that's your mission if you're trying to build heaven on earth then all kinds of things are permissible then aren't they? In the usual way of course because so much is at stake then you can overlook the continuous slaughter of the Aboriginal people by both the native police and by vigilante parties of Stockman. Now I don't want to go too far down this road because you know the old thing you compare people to Nazis and you've lost the argument but

nonetheless I kept reading about this and I was reminded of the speeches Heinrich Himmler made to the SS who was machine gunning Jewish people into pits in Eastern Europe. He would tell his men

what you're doing is harrowing for you I know but it is hard and necessary work to build a better world. I'm reminded of this this seems to be a similar mindset to me. I don't think you have to go to the Nazis for comparisons of this kind it's a common it's a common mistake of the human soul to imagine we've got to be nasty now but heaven awaits around the corner. Do you get a sense that your ancestor Reg Eur was debauched by his time in the native police? Do you get a sense there was some kind of despite all these wanton killings and his willingness to sit down and have a nice dinner after the murdering of six to twelve people that something in him rebelled against all this this this horror? It was a common pattern that the officers of the native police emerged drunks and he was clearly when he left the police in his late 20s he was a drunk and there are accounts in his postings as a magistrate because he then was sort of posted around the back blocks of Queensland as a magistrate frequent accounts of him being drunk in hotels being robbed while drunk

etc etc etc he was he was a wrecked human being and he died at the age of 44 you know he he was wrecked

by the experience. And how about his brother Darcy who was perhaps even more adventurous than his

brother Reg? Darcy was a shameless silver-tongued adventurer you can't believe that somebody could survive so many brushes with the law so many violent acts so many betrayals and lived a reasonable old age but Darcy was famous because he always talked to the press he was a famous colonial adventurer and he led the first police force in the Gulf of Carpentaria based in Burktown and if things got a bit nasty in Burktown he just deserted his men and went on a chase if he decided what to do and no one could tell him otherwise he was a prankster and then he was a murderer on a conspicuous scale. Yes there's another media report this like it's astonishing how much of this is candidly reported in the journals the local newspaper up in Burktown reported everybody in the district is delighted with the wholesale slaughter dealt out by the native police and we thank Mr Yure for his energy in ridding the district of 59 Aborigines. Yes and the paper congratulated him it's one of the very few accounts from the frontier where we have very specific headcount of the dead that 59 was the was the overall but there were about three or four different operations you know 30 here nine there 10 there came to 59 yes. So news of this massacre quickly travelled throughout Australia it was greeted with you know usual mixed reports in Australia amongst the Australian press like hooray for him and my god what have we done and it made its way to London how was this the news of this massacre received in London. Well it was reported all over the United Kingdom it was

reported all through Ireland Scotland England under different headlines some deploring the

murders

and most most deploring but some applauding but the thing that mattered about these vivid reports of slaughter on the frontier was firstly they showed that Bowen had been lying to the British authorities about the peacefulness of the frontier they lied, prevaricated, put the best face on things here was yet more proof not the first proof but yet more proof that Queensland was Queensland was ankle deep in blood but the thing was the British government looked at this and did nothing and doing nothing was a license for the killing to continue.

David in your book you haven't put your own feelings at the forefront in this book because it's not about your feelings of course it's about what happened and there's the ancestral connection there but you're here now what was it like for you to draw through all this blood and horror and blood and horror with an ancestral connection. The ancestral connection took me to a door through which I walked into a magnificent and appalling story my sense of shame when I discovered that red should been an officer in this corps soon began to look a bit puny beside the kind of continental shame that this story exhibits because I'm not a hero for doing this I'm a journalist who came across a story and it involves my family and I decided that the only way to deal with it was to deal with it no excuses whatever to dig as deeply as I possibly could to understand how all of this happened originally I was just going to write about the killings of Reg and Darcy but for myself I had to go back and and work out how the native police had come into being and that took me back into the era of Jones's triumphant land-taking and the kinds of political and legal framework that was established at that time to allow the dispossession and to compel the killing so I was drawn back into this long and and grim story I took it as a professional assignment and apart from moments when I felt a toe-curling horror it was at a distance from me I didn't feel guilty I have never felt guilty about I didn't raise a gun in all of this and I'm not wallowing in shame this discovery took me into the history and then the history took me into the book you've written all your life about Australia and I think it's fair to say you love Australia you've always loved Australia and I might even go so far as to give you that awful labels being a patriot David you you have patriotic feelings of powerful attachment to Australia let me put it that way yes it's fair to say deep deep has it changed the way you feel about Australia it has a bit you gave a magnificent list of history early on you know the keynote Australian history starting with Captain Cook and convicts and going all the way through to Gallipoli but what was really happening behind all of that was the conquest of a continent if we could just understand that we are a conquered country then all kinds of necessary decencies flow from that do you see moments in this story when there's another door Australians could have walked through white Australians could have walked through a path not taken or taken by a few and then abandoned where the coexistence would have been less murderous

or was it always going to be this murderous to your mind it was not one at all it's door after door after door but all of them have the same label laws not enforced why didn't Governor Richard Burke sack Thomas Mitchell after he discovered that needless slaughter in the Murray River why were squatters never brought to task for the vigilante killings they conducted on their properties how could a government ignore a finding by the great Dr Chalonier a magistrate of Ipswich that officer Frederick Wheeler was responsible for the willful murder of Aborigines in the hinterland of Brisbane a verdict simply ignored what about an immoral organic sense of squatters pastoralists living coexisting peacefully on the same plot of

land as the traditional owners there were some wonderful Scottish families and some terrible Scottish families who lived in the hills behind Brisbane the archers worked with the Aboriginal people and their land holdings and there was peace and they wrote these letters home about the warfare of their neighbours also Scots who killed all the time another Scottish family in the district was the MacKenzie's of Kilcoi the great poisoning of Kilcoi 59 60 perhaps more people murdered with

arsenic laced mash and there were the archers doing the hard work the hard work of maintaining peace and sharing their land that could have been possible but there was never the political will to rein in the squatters one of the reasons only one of them but one of the reasons I think is fascinating the American War of Independence was not about taxing tea it was about access to Indian land the British government had drawn a line down the appellations and said most of the land west of the appellations across to the Mississippi will remain in Indian hands if the colonies of America were to expand they had to get rid of Britain and Washington was a general sure but he was also a land speculator Britain never drew those sorts of lines again no line of that kind was ever drawn in Australia and there was always the fear particularly after the rum rebellion in London that the squatters just might rise up and get rid of the government and so it was kid gloves all the way and kid gloves meant blood all the way you have Aboriginal friends First Nations friends yeah what have they said to you about the writing of this book they've thanked me for doing it I'm awaiting their verdicts David thank you so much thanks Richard

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for more conversations interviews please go to the website abc.net.au