

**THE CAPTURE OF ARABANOO AT MANLY COVE:
30TH OR 31ST DECEMBER, 1788**

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Governor Phillip determined to capture one or more Aborigines, in an endeavour to facilitate communication between the white settlers and the Aborigines, by learning each other's language. In his dispatch to Lord Sydney of 12th February, 1790, Phillip gave the following report:

Phillip: "Not succeeding in my Endeavours to persuade some of the Natives to come & live with us, I ordered one to be taken, by Force, which was what I would gladly have avoided, as I knew it must alarm them; but not a native had come near the Settlement for many Months, and it was absolutely necessary that we should attain their Language, or teach them ours; that the Means of Redress might be pointed out to them, if they were injured; & to reconcile them, by showing the many Advantages they would enjoy by mixing with us. A young man, who appeared to be about Twenty four Years of Age, was taken the latter End of December; and unfortunately died of the Small Pox in May, when he was perfectly reconciled to his Situation, and appeared so sensible of the Advantages he enjoyed, that, fully persuaded he would not leave us, I had some Time freed him from all Restraint. He had lived with me for the last two months, and his Behaviour gave good Reason for forming a more favorable opinion of the people of this Country, than what has been drawn from the Report made by those who formerly touched on this Coast."

On the following day, 13th February, 1790, Phillip wrote a further dispatch to Lord Sydney, and reported:

Phillip: "In December, 1788, one of the Natives was seized, for the Purpose of learning the Language, & reconciling them to us, as mentioned in my former Letter to your Lordship, none of the Natives having for some Months come near the Settlement; the Man was taken for that Purpose, appeared to be about Twenty-four years of Age, & in three Months, was so well reconciled, that he was freed from all Restraint, & lived with me perfectly satisfied with his Situation.

"In the Beginning of the following April, Numbers of the natives were found dead with the Small-Pox, in different parts of the Harbour; & an Old Man & a Boy of about Eight Years of Age were brought to the Hospital: the man died, but the Boy recovered, and now lives with the Surgeon. An Elderly Man & a Girl of ten or eleven Years of Age were found soon after, & brought up; of the Man there was no Hopes of Recovery, & he died the third Day, but the Girl recovered & lives with the Clergyman's Wife. I brought these people up with the Hopes, that their being cured & sent away with the many little Necessaries we could give them, would be the means of reconciling them to live near us; but unfortunately both the Men died, & the Children are too young to have Weight with the natives, with whom since they have frequently conversed; & what was more unfortunate, our Native caught the Disorder & died..."

The Judge Advocate, David Collins, recorded the following:

Collins: "It being remarked with concern, that the natives were becoming every day more troublesome and hostile, several people having been wounded, and others, who were necessarily employed in the woods, driven in and much alarmed by them, the

governor determined on endeavouring to seize and bring into the settlement, one or two of those people, whose language it was become absolutely necessary to acquire, that they might learn to distinguish friends from enemies.

“Accordingly, on the 30th a young man was seized and brought up by Lieutenant Ball of the Supply, and Lieutenant George Johnston of the marines. A second was taken; but, after dragging into the water beyond his depth the man who seized him, he got clear off. The native who was secured was immediately on his landing led up to the governor’s, where he was clothed, a slight iron or manacle put upon his wrist, and a trusty convict appointed to take care of him. A small hut had been previously built for his reception close to the guardhouse, wherein he and his keeper were locked up at night; and the following morning the convict reported, that he slept very well during the night, not offering to make any attempt to get away.”

Captain Watkin Tench identified the location of the capture of Arabanoo as “Manly Cove”, and recorded the date as being the 31st December. Tench was present when Arabanoo was first brought into the settlement at Sydney Cove.

Tench: “Pursuant to his resolution, the governor on the 31st of December sent two boats, under the command of Lieutenant Ball of the Supply, and Lieutenant George Johnston of the marines, down the harbour, with directions to those officers to seize and carry off some of the natives. The boats proceeded to Manly Cove, where several Indians were seen standing on the beach, who were enticed by courteous behaviour and a few presents to enter into conversation. A proper opportunity being presented, our people rushed in among them, and seized two men: the rest fled; but the cries of the captives soon brought them back, with many others, to their rescue: and so desperate were their struggles, that, in spite of every effort on our side, only one of them was secured; the other effected his escape. The boats put off without delay; and an attack from the shore instantly commenced: they threw spears, stones, firebrands, and whatever else presented itself, at the boats; nor did they retreat, agreeable to their former custom, until many musquets were fired over them.

“The prisoner was now fastened by ropes to the thwarts of the boat; and when he saw himself irretrievably parted from his countrymen, set up the most piercing and lamentable cries of distress. His grief, however, soon diminished: he accepted and eat of some broiled fish which was given to him, and sullenly submitted to his destiny.

“When the news of his arrival at Sydney was announced, I went with every other person to see him: he appeared to be about thirty years old, not tall, but robustly made; and of a countenance which, under happier circumstances, I thought would display manliness and sensibility; his agitation was excessive, and the clamorous crowds who flocked around him did not contribute to lessen it. Curiosity and observation seemed, nevertheless, not to have wholly deserted him; he shewed the effect of novelty upon ignorance; he wondered at all he saw: though broken and interrupted with dismay, his voice was soft and musical, when its natural tone could be heard; and he readily pronounced with tolerable accuracy the names of things which were taught him. To our ladies he quickly became extraordinarily courteous, a sure sign that his terror was wearing off.

“Every blandishment was used to soothe him, and it had its effect. As he was entering the governor’s house, some one touched a small bell which hung over the door:

he started with horror and astonishment; but in a moment after was reconciled to the noise, and laughed at the cause of his perturbation. When pictures were shewn to him, he knew directly those which represented the human figure; among others, a very large handsome print of her royal highness the Dutchess of Cumberland being produced, he called out, woman, a name by which we had just before taught him to call the female convicts. Plates of birds and beasts were also laid before him; and many people were led to believe, that such as he spoke about and pointed to were known to him. But this must have been an erroneous conjecture, for the elephant, rhinoceros, and several others which we must have discovered did they exist in the country, were of the number. Again, on the other hand, those he did not point out, were equally unknown to him.

“His curiosity here being satiated, we took him to a large brick house, which was building for the governor’s residence: being about to enter, he cast up his eyes, and seeing some people leaning out of a window on the first story, he exclaimed aloud, and testified the most extravagant surprise. Nothing here was observed to fix his attention so strongly as some tame fowls, who were feeding near him: our dogs also he particularly noticed; but seemed more fearful than fond of them.

“He dined at a side-table at the governor’s; and eat heartily of fish and ducks, which he first cooled. Bread and salt meat he smelled at, but would not taste: all our liquors he treated in the same manner, and could drink nothing but water. On being shewn that he was not to wipe his hands on the chair which he sat upon, he used a towel which was given to him, with great cleanliness and decency.

“In the afternoon his hair was closely cut, his head combed, and his beard shaved; but he would not submit to these operations until he had seen them performed on another person, when he readily acquiesced. His hair, as might be supposed, was filled with vermin, whose destruction seemed to afford him great triumph; nay, either revenge, or pleasure, prompted him to eat them! But on our expressing disgust and abhorrence he left it off.

“To this succeeded his immersion in a tub of water and soap, where he was completely washed and scrubbed from head to foot; after which a shirt, a jacket, and a pair of trousers, were put upon him. Some part of this ablution I had the honour to perform, in order that I might ascertain the real colour of the skin of these people. My observation then was (and it has since been confirmed in a thousand other instances) that they are as black as the lighter cast of the African negroes.

“Many unsuccessful attempts were made to learn his name; the governor therefore called him Manly, from the cover in which he was captured: this cove had received its name from the manly undaunted behaviour of a party of natives seen there, on our taking possession of the country.

“To prevent his escape, a handcuff with a rope attached to it, was fastened around his left wrist, which at first highly delighted him; he called it ‘Ben-gad-ee’ (or ornament), but his delight changed to rage and hatred when he discovered its use. His supper he cooked himself: some fish were given to him for this purpose, which, without any previous preparation whatever, he threw carelessly on the fire, and when they became warm took them up, and first rubbed off the scales, peeled the outside with his teeth, and eat it; afterwards he gutted them, and laying them again on the fire, completed the dressing, and eat them.

“A convict was selected to sleep with him, and to attend him wherever he might go. When he went with his keeper into his apartment he appeared very restless and uneasy while a light was kept in; but on its extinction, he immediately lay down and composed himself.

“Sullenness and dejection strongly marked his countenance on the following morning; to amuse him, he was taken around the camp, and to the observatory: casting his eyes to the opposite shore from the point where he stood, and seeing the smoke of fire lighted by his countrymen, he looked earnestly at it, and sighing deeply two or three times, uttered the word ‘gwee-un (fire).

“His loss of spirits had not, however, the effect of impairing his appetite; eight fish, each weighing about a pound, constituted his breakfast, which he dressed as before. When he had finished his repast, he turned his back to the fire in a musing posture, and crept so close to it, that his shirt caught by the flame; luckily his keeper soon extinguished it; but he was so terrified at the accident, that he was with difficulty persuaded to put on a second.

“1st January, 1789. To-day being new-year’s-day, most of the officers were invited to the governor’s table: Manly dined heartily on fish and roast pork; he was seated on a chest near a window, out of which, when he had done eating, he would have thrown his plate, had he not been prevented: during dinner-time a band of music played in an adjoining apartment; and after the cloth was removed, one of the company sang in a very soft and superior style; but the powers of melody were lost on Manly, which disappointed our expectations, as he had before shown pleasure and readiness in imitating our tunes. Stretched out on his chest, and putting his hat under his head, he fell asleep.

“To convince his countrymen that he had received no injury from us, the governor took him in a boat down the harbour, that they might see and converse with him: when the boat arrived, and lay at a little distance from the beach, several Indians who had retired at her approach, on seeing Manly, returned: he was greatly affected, and shed tears. At length they began to converse. Our ignorance of the language prevented us from knowing much of what passed; it was, however, easily understood that his friends asked him why he did not jump overboard, and rejoin them. He only sighed, and pointed to the fetter on his leg, by which he was bound.

“In going down the harbour he had described the names by which they distinguished its numerous creeks and headlands: he was now often heard to repeat that of ‘Wee-rong’ (Sydney), which was doubtless to inform his countrymen of the place of his captivity; and perhaps invite them to rescue him. By this time his gloom was chased away, and he parted from his friends without testifying reluctance. His vivacity and good humour continued all the evening, and produced so good an effect on his appetite, that he eat for supper two Kangaroo rats, each of the size of a moderate rabbit, and in addition not less than three pounds of fish.

“Two days after he was taken on a similar excursion, but to our surprise the natives kept aloof, and would neither approach the shore, or discourse with their countryman: we could get no explanation of this difficulty, which seemed to affect us more than it did him. Uncourteous as they were, he performed to them an act of attentive benevolence;

seeing a basket made of bark, used by them to carry water, he conveyed into it two hawks and another bird, which the people in the boat had shot, and carefully covering them over, left them as a present to his old friends. But indeed the gentleness and humanity of his disposition frequently displayed themselves: when our children, stimulated by wanton curiosity, used to flack around him, he never failed to fondle them, and, if he were eating at the time, constantly offered them the choicest part of his fare.

“February, 1789. His reserve, from want of confidence in us, continued gradually to wear away: he told us his name, and Manly gave place to Ar-ab-a-noo. Bread he began to relish; and tea he drank with avidity: strong liquors he would never taste, turning from them with disgust and abhorrence. Our dogs and cats had ceased to be objects of fear, and were become his greatest pets, and constant companions at table. One of our chief amusements, after the cloth was removed, was to make him repeat the names of things in his language, which he never hesitated to do with the utmost alacrity, correcting our pronunciation when erroneous. Much information relating to the customs and manners of his country was also gained from him...”

“On the 17th February the Supply again sailed for Norfolk Island. The governor went down the harbour in her, and carried Arabanoo with him, who was observed to go on board with distrust and reluctance; when he found she was under sail, every effort was tried without success to exhilarate him; at length, an opportunity being presented, he plunged overboard, and struck out for the nearest shore: believing that those who were left behind would fire at him, he attempted to dive, at which he was known to be very expert; but this was attended with a difficulty which he had not foreseen: his clothes proved so buoyant, that he was unable to get more than his head under the water; a boat was immediately dispatched after him, and picked him up, though not without struggles and resistance on his side. When brought on board, he appeared neither afraid or ashamed of what he had done, but sat apart, melancholy and dispirited, and continued so until he saw the governor and his other friends descend into a boat, and hear himself called upon to accompany them: he sprang forward, and his cheerfulness and alacrity of temper immediately returned, and lasted during the remainder of the day. The dread of being carried away, on an element of whose boundary he could form no conception, joined to the uncertainty of our intention towards him, unquestionably caused him to act as he did.

“One of the principal effects which we had supposed the seizure and captivity of Arabanoo would produce, seemed yet at as great a distance as ever; the natives neither manifested signs of increased hostility on his account, or attempted to ask any explanation of our conduct through the medium of their countryman who was in our possession, and who they knew was treated with no farther harshness than in being detained among us...”

Tench then described the spread of small-pox among the Aborigines. Some of those suffering from the disease were brought into the settlement, where Arabanoo showed great concern and assisted with their nursing. Inevitably, he succumbed to small-pox himself. Tench went on:

Tench: “May 1789. I feel assured, that I have no reader who will not join in regretting the premature loss of Arabanoo, who died of the small-pox on the 18th instant, after languishing in it six days. From some imperfect marks and indents on his face, we were inclined to believe that he had passed this dreaded disorder. Even when the first

symptoms of sickness seized him, we continued willing to hope that they proceeded from a different cause. But at length the disease burst forth with irresistible fury. It were superfluous to say, that nothing which medical skill and unremitting attention could perform, were left unexerted to mitigate his sufferings, and prolong a life, which humanity and affectionate concern towards his sick compatriots, unfortunately shortened.

“During his sickness he reposed entire confidence in us. Although a stranger to medicine, and nauseating the taste of it, he swallowed with patient submission innumerable drugs, which the hope of relief induced us to administer to him. The governor, who particularly regarded him, caused him to be buried in his own garden, and attended the funeral in person.

“The character of Arabanoo, as far as we had developed it, was distinguished by a portion of gravity and steadiness, which our subsequent acquaintance with his countrymen by no means led us to conclude a national characteristic. In that during, enterprising frame of mind, which, when combined with genius, constitutes the leader of a horde of savages, or the ruler of a people, boasting the power of discrimination and the resistance of ambition, he was certainly surpassed by some of his successors, who afterwards lived among us. His countenance was thoughtful, but not animated: his fidelity and gratitude, particularly to his friend the governor, were constant and undeviating, and deserve to be recorded. Although of a gentle and placable temper, we early discovered that he was impatient of indignity, and allowed of no superiority on our part. He knew that he was in our power; but the independence of his mind never forsook him. If the slightest insult were offered to him, he would return it with interest. At retaliation of merriment he was often happy; and frequently turned the laugh against his antagonist. He did not want docility; but either from the difficulty of acquiring our language, from the unskilfulness of his teachers, or from some natural defect, his progress in learning it was not equal to what we had expected. For the last three or four weeks of his life, hardly any restraint was laid upon his inclinations: so that he had medicated escape, he might easily have effected it. He was, perhaps, the only native who was ever attached to us from choice; and who did not prefer a precarious subsistence among wilds and precipices, to the comforts of a civilized system.

“By his death, the scheme which had invited his capture was utterly defeated. Of five natives who had been brought among us, three had perished from a cause which, though unavoidable, it was impossible to explain to a people, who would condescend to enter into no intercourse with us. The same suspicious dread of our approach, and the same scenes of vengeance acted on unfortunate stragglers, continued to prevail.”

Sergeant James Scott of the marines gave a short reference to the capture of Arabanoo, identifying the place of capture as Manley Bay:

Scott: “1788 Tuesday Decr. 30th. The Governor. Sent. Cap.t Ball of the Supply Brig & Lieut. G. Johnstone With. Two Arm,d Boats. To Secure Some of the Natives, they Brought. In one, Call,d him, (Manley) they Secured him at. Manley. Bay. One More Made his Escape. After they had hold of him,-

“The Governor, Cloathed him & Made him Dine, With him, he is Secured With a Rope & a Man Leades him Abought; there is a house built for him & his Keeper.-“

The *Sirius* returned from the Cape of Good Hope, reaching Port Jackson the afternoon of 8th May, 1789, and anchoring in Sydney Cove at 6.00 p.m. Captain John Hunter went ashore:

Hunter: “As soon as the ship was secured, I went on shore to wait on the governor, whom I found in good health. He was sitting by the fire, drinking tea with a few friends; among whom I observed a native man of this country, who was decently cloathed, and seemed to be as much at his ease at the tea-table as any person there; he managed his cup and saucer as well as though he had been long accustomed to such entertainment.

“This man was taken from his friends, by force, by Lieutenant Ball, of the *Supply*, and Lieutenant George Johnston, of the marines, who were sent down the harbour with two boats for that purpose; the governor having found that no encouragement he could give the natives, would dispose them to visit the settlement of their own accord: this method he had therefore determined upon, to get one man into his possession, who, by kind treatment, might hereafter be the means of disposing his countrymen to place more confidence in us. This man, whose name was Ara-ba-noo, was taken, as I have already said, by force, and in the following manner:

“After having been a short time in conversation with some of the gentlemen, one of the seamen, who had been previously directed, threw a rope round his neck, and dragged him in a moment down to the boar; his cries brought a number of his friends into the skirts of the wood, from whence they threw many lances, but without effect. The terror this poor wretch suffered can better be conceived than expressed; he believed he was to be immediately murdered; but, upon the officers coming into the boat, they removed the rope from his neck to his leg, and treated him with so much kindness, that he became a little more cheerful.

“He was for some time after his arrival at the governor’s house, ornamented with an iron shackle about his leg, to prevent his being able to effect his escape with ease; this he was taught to consider as ‘bang-ally’, which is the name given in their language to every decoration; and he might well believe it a compliment paid to him, because it was no uncommon thing for him to see several (of the most worthless of the convicts, who had merited punishment) every day shackled like him; the cause of which he could not of course understand. However, he was very soon reconciled to his situation, by the very kind treatment he received from every person about him, and the iron growing uneasy, it was taken off, and he was allowed to go where he pleased.

“He very soon learnt the names of the different gentlemen who took notice of him, and when I was made acquainted with him, he learnt mine, which he never forgot, but expressed great desire to come on board my ‘nowee’: which is their expression for a boat or other vessel upon the water.

“The day after I came in, the governor and his family did me the honour to dine on board, when I was also favoured with the company of Ara-ba-noo, whom I found to be a very good natured talkative fellow; he was about thirty years of age, and tolerable well looked...”

Five or six days after my arrival, poor Ara-ba-noo was seized with the small-pox, and although every possible means for his recovery were used, he lived only till the crisis of

the disease. Every person in the settlement was much concerned for the loss of this man.”

Lieutenant William Bradley, who returned to Port Jackson on the *Sirius* with Captain Hunter, recorded the following:

Bradley: “We found that a Native Man had been taken by force by Lieut Ball Commander of the Supply, for the Governor it not being possible to persuade any of them to come amongst us; He was for some time kept with an Iron about his leg & when on board the Supply going down the Harbour, he jump’d overboard but was taken up & prevented from joining his Countrymen & Old Companions who were near. He was so well reconciled to his situation when we arrived that he was allowed to walk about by himself; His Irons were taken off, when an Old Man & his child were brought up to Sydney Cove with the small pox out on them, soon after this Old Man, another Native Man was found in the same situation, with a Child laying by him, both of which were brought up to the Hospital; The Native at the Governors (Arrabanoo) met them without fear of the disorder by which it was then supposed that he was ignorant or that he had had it & was recover’d. The two Men died before we arrived, but the children were then on the recovery.”

“18th. Arrabanoo, the Native at the Governor’s died of the Small pox which it is supposed he caught from the Native Children he was taken ill about the time of their recovery: He was a great loss being quite familiarized & very happy quite one of the Governors family & had got some of our language as well as communicated much of theirs; He was remarkably good temper’d & had he lived would no doubt been of infinite use to us.”

Midshipman Newton Fowell also returned to Port Jackson on the *Sirius* with Captain Hunter. In a letter to his father dated 31st July, 1790, he stated:

Fowell: “The Govonor had likewise during our Absence taken one of the Natives by Stratagem, as he found it impossible to bring them among us any other Way, and by treating him well he was in hopes to convince them it was not our intention to do them any harm His [name] was Aroboonoo/ he was a very Good Natured Fellow and gave a vast deal of information Respecting their Manners.”

Newton Fowell then told his father about the small-pox among the Aborigines, and went on:

Fowell: “Aroboonen was at this time quite Reconciled to this Way of living and Assisted the sick children very much / he appeared much affected when their Father Died / Soon after our Arrival from the Cape he was taken ill of the Small Pox & Died the 18 of May / While he lay ill he suffered himself to be bled & took all the Physicks that was offered him with a Great deal of Confidence ‘ he was regreted by everyone as it was Supposed he would be of great Service in Reconciling the Natives to Us / he was a very good Mimic & was much attached to several particular People / When he was first taken he had a voracious Appetite but as he found he got his Meals regular that Appetite wore off He was very fond of Bread & Vegetables On the Christmas Day after he was taken all the Officers as it is usual Dined with the Govonor When they first assembled at his House Aroboonen was Vastly Frightned so much that his Appetite failed him After

Dinner he Appeared more Chearful and it was afterwards learnt he supposed it was intended to Eat him”

No interpretation of these accounts was considered to be necessary.

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