



UNIVERSITY  
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# **Frontier Conflict in Van Diemen's Land**

Nicholas Patrick Clements  
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### **Declaration of Originality**

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis.

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24 April 2013

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## Abstract

Eastern Van Diemen's Land was the site of the most intense frontier conflict in Australia. What is known today as the Black War (1824-1831) produced at least 450 colonial casualties and all but wiped out the Aborigines. This thesis examines the attitudes and experiences of the men, women and children – black and white – who were involved. It asks: How did each side perceive the other? What motivated them to violence? What tactics did they employ? How did each side cope with being hunted? And what was the emotional cost? These questions are long overdue. Historians have almost invariably examined the War from the 'top down', poring over ethical and legal questions. These are important concerns for posterity, but they were not those of Aborigines or frontier colonists. Their beliefs, desires, behaviours and emotions constituted the human side of the Black War, and they have been all but ignored.

The alternating white/black chapters of this thesis juxtapose the perspectives of colonists and Aborigines. Close attention has been paid to the minutiae of frontier life, which were a chief determinant of behaviour and experience. Drawing on a range of methods, the cultures, voices and actions of participants have been sifted from Tasmania's vast archive. To verify and contextualise this anecdotal evidence, a catalogue of all recorded violent incidents and their details has been appended.

The Black War was a guerrilla war consisting of hundreds of ambushes on Aborigines' camps by night, and on colonists' huts by day. Exceptions to this day/night pattern were rare, which meant the War was fought and experienced according to a solar rhythm. A key source of white violence was sex deprivation. European women being extremely scarce, so frontiersmen sought black females any way they could. Later, revenge and self-defence also motivated them to kill. Aborigines attacked whites to resist invasion, avenge mounting insults, and to plunder food and blankets. Both lived in suffocating fear, terrified of their enigmatic foes. Likewise, both saw themselves victims, and both felt justified in victimising the other. It was not a battle between good and evil, but a struggle between desperate human beings.

This thesis challenges a range of long-standing assumptions about the War, while also providing new evidence and perspectives. Its attitudinal and experiential analysis illuminates the War in a new light, while its quantitative analysis indicates a larger-scale conflict than previously imagined, with distinct and telling patterns of violence. Moreover, a systematic examination of frontier conflict at the ground level and from both is all but untried in Australian history.

## Acknowledgements

An Australian Postgraduate Award has funded this project, but it is the work of the great scholars and enthusiasts who have gone before me that has really made this project possible.

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I would like to thank the staff at the University of Tasmania Library, the State Library of Tasmania, the Community History Centre, the Launceston Historical Society, the Glamorgan Spring Bay Historical Society, the British Library, the Imperial War Museum, the National Archives, and the various other institutions and groups that have assisted me in my research.

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## Acronyms, Conversions and Abbreviations

CHC	Community History Centre
CSO	Colonial Secretary's Office
GSBHS	Glamorgan Spring Bay Historical Society archive
ML	Mitchell Library
NLA	National Library of Australia
SLNSW	State Library of New South Wales
SLT	State Library of Tasmania
TAHO	Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office
QVMAG	Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery

1 ounce (oz.)	=	28.35 grams (g)
1 pound (lb.)	=	0.45 kilograms (kg)
1 bushel (bus)	=	36.37 liters (l)
1 inch (')	=	2.54 centimeters (cm)
1 foot (")	=	30.5 centimeters (cm)
1 yard (yd.)	=	0.9 meters (m)
1 mile (m)	=	1.6 kilometers (km)
1 acres (ac)	=	0.4 hectares (ha)

Three publications are cited with such frequency that their editors' names are not included in the footnotes. The first two are N. J. B. Plomley's edited volumes *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals and Papers of George Augustus Robinson, 1829-1834*,<sup>1</sup> and *Weep in Silence: A History of the Flinders Island Aboriginal Settlement*.<sup>2</sup> The third is the *Historical Records of Australia* series.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Friendly Mission* was first published by the Tasmanian Historical Research Association (Hobart) in 1966, but unless otherwise stated, this thesis uses the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition published in 2008 by Quintus (Hobart).

<sup>2</sup> Published by Blubber Head Press, Hobart, 1987.

<sup>3</sup> Series 1 and 4 of the *Historical Records of Australia* were published between 1914 and 1925 by Frederick Watson (Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament, Sydney). Series three was resumed by Peter Chapman and Tim Jetson in 1997 (Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra). All series appear under the same bibliographic entry with Watson as the first author.



## Note on Terminology

### **Black War:**

There are three reasons why the term ‘Black War’ might be considered problematic. Firstly, it was as much a white war as a black one; but in prevailing, the colonists won the naming rights. Secondly, the term was not contemporaneous. Towards the end of the War some settlers used Black War to refer to the military campaign now known as the ‘Black Line’,<sup>4</sup> but the application of the term to the conflict generally was a later development. The use of the terms ‘war’ and ‘warfare’, however, were frequently employed during the conflict, so the *post hoc* coining of the Black War is not entirely anachronistic. Thirdly, there was little coordination of the War efforts on either side. For the most part, it was fought by independently acting parties who had only a vague knowledge of what was happening in other locations around the island, and the Aboriginal side was itself divided by warring factions. Furthermore, the conflict was fought on at least three fronts (see below), so for these reasons it could be argued that the plural ‘wars’ is more appropriate than the singular ‘war’. Nevertheless, I have chosen to use ‘Black War’ because it is the name this conflict has gone by for more than one and a half centuries, and any alternative name would be an unnecessary obfuscation.

### **Black and White:**

There are a number of semantic and political problems with distinguishing the chapters of this thesis with the titles black and white, but they have been used for the following reasons. They reflect the simplistic ways each side viewed the other, and their dichotomous connotations are reflective of divisiveness that characterised frontier relations during the War. They are also the simplest and most concise way to distinguish Aborigines and colonists.

### **Aborigines and Vandemonians vs. Natives and Blacks:**

This thesis is divided between chapters from the Aborigines’ perspectives and chapters from the colonists’ perspectives, so it has been useful to employ distinguishing terminology. The former chapters use the terms ‘Aborigines’ and

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<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, P. L. Brown (ed.), *Clyde Company Papers*, vol. 1, Oxford University Press, London, 1949, pp. 108, 110 & H. Melville, *The History of Van Diemen’s Land from the Year 1824 to 1835 Inclusive, During the Administration of Lieutenant Governor George Arthur, to which is added a few words on Prison Discipline*, G. Mackaness (ed.), Horwitz-Grahame, Sydney, 1965 [1835], p. 90. The Black Line is discussed in Chapters 13 and 14.

‘Vandemonians’ interchangeably,<sup>5</sup> while the latter chapters use the terms ‘natives’ and ‘blacks’ interchangeably and without inverted commas.<sup>6</sup> The term native is generally not considered appropriate in contemporary Australian discourse, and black is sometimes met with discomfort as well. These terms have not been selected to offend, but because they were the terms most commonly used by colonists at the time.

### **Colonists, Whites:**

The non-Aboriginal inhabitants of Van Diemen’s Land are referred to in the white chapters of this thesis as ‘colonists’. The author acknowledges that soldiers were not technically colonists, and convicts were not voluntary ones, but some all-encompassing term was needed. ‘Whites’, ‘white men’ and ‘invaders’ are the terms used in the black chapters to refer to non-Aborigines, all of which were broadly distinguishing features of the newcomers.<sup>7</sup> This is not to say that Aborigines were ignorant of class and occupational distinctions within colonial society, but there is little evidence of them explicitly making these distinctions.

### **Settlers, Convicts, Labourers, Sealers, Frontiersmen**

The term ‘settler’ refers to free colonists, but especially landowners. Some landowners were emancipists (ex-convicts), but most were free emigrants.<sup>8</sup> The term ‘convict’ is used to denote any member of colonial society under sentence, whether in a penitentiary, a chain gang, assigned to a settler or holding a ticket-of-leave, though the vast majority referred to in this thesis were either assignees or ticket-of-leave men. The term ‘labourers’ is used in the appendices and occasionally throughout the body of the thesis to designate any persons working for someone else. These were overwhelmingly convicts and emancipists. ‘Sealers’ is an all-encompassing term for the men who inhabited or operated in the Bass Strait islands.<sup>9</sup> ‘Frontiersmen’ is a more general term referring to men engaged in and exposed to frontier violence – especially to those labouring in remote areas.

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<sup>5</sup> ‘The Aborigines’ or ‘The Vandemonians’ can be misleading, as there was no pan-Aboriginality in Van Diemen’s Land. It is used in this thesis because it is often necessary to lump these diverse peoples into one category, but this should not be taken to imply homogeneity.

<sup>6</sup> Chapter 1 is an exception to this, because its temporal and geographical scope is much wider than later chapters.

<sup>7</sup> This term is intended to be gender neutral, though it is incidentally reflective of how disproportionately male the colonists and explorers were. There was a small number of some non-white colonists.

<sup>8</sup> A small number of settlers were officers who stayed in the colony after retiring, and were thus not technically emigrants.

<sup>9</sup> As Chapter 5 explains, most of these men were engaged in sealing, but some were full- or part-time whalers, while others were little more than pirates.

### **Northwest, Eastern and Sea Frontiers:**

The term ‘frontier’ is used to refer to the zones in which conflict occurred. This thesis recognises three zones of violence (see fig. 17). The ‘sea frontier’ refers to the Bass Strait islands and the northern and eastern littorals visited by sealers.<sup>10</sup> The ‘northwest frontier’ refers the greater northwest of the island, but predominately to the lands occupied by the Van Diemen’s Land Company (see fig. 18).<sup>11</sup> The third and largest frontier was the greater eastern part of the island,<sup>12</sup> referred to here interchangeably as ‘the interior’, ‘the frontier’ or ‘the east’.<sup>13</sup> The vast majority of the violence took place in the east, and it is the primary focus of this thesis.

### **Gins and Half-Castes:**

‘Gin’ or ‘jin’ is a colloquialism for an Aboriginal woman that originated in New South Wales (probably a colonist’s rendering of an Aboriginal word), and it does not appear to have been considered derogatory in the early nineteenth century. ‘Half-caste’ refers in this context to the offspring of an Aboriginal mother and a white father. It was the standard contemporaneous term, and was not inherently derogatory. Although neither gin nor half-caste is appropriate today, it is crucial that a thesis about attitudes and experiences uses contemporaneous language, even if it has since acquired derogatory connotations. Again, this is not intended to offend, but to promote authenticity.

### **Aboriginal Names:**

The main Aboriginal social unit was a group of thirty to eighty individuals. The term ‘tribe’ has traditionally been used to refer both to these groups and to the socio-linguistic affiliates of such groups. Chapter 2 argues these affiliates were not particularly distinct or important categories, and they are generally not referred to in this thesis.<sup>14</sup> Because the literature has confusingly referred to both groups and group affiliates as ‘tribes’, that term has been jettisoned for the sake of clarity.<sup>15</sup> The three alternatives to tribe – horde, clan or band – all share its basic meaning (though there are differences). Band has been chosen here because it carries no primitivist connotations (while clan and horde sometimes do), and because its martial connotations are appropriate to a thesis focused on war.

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<sup>10</sup> The sea frontier is the topic of Chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>11</sup> The northwest frontier is the topic of Appendix 1.

<sup>12</sup> Whilst some early violence took place south of the Derwent and on Bruny Island, the terms ‘interior’, ‘frontier’, and ‘east’ are (unless explicitly stated) not to be thought of as including these areas (see fig. 17).

<sup>13</sup> This area is greater than the area known at the time as ‘the settled districts’, because some of the violence took place beyond the settlements. There is also significant overlap between the eastern and sea frontiers, which is one of the main reasons the chapters on the sea frontier are included in the main body of the thesis.

<sup>14</sup> The only exception is the Mairremmener affiliate (see Chapter 2).

<sup>15</sup> The term ‘tribal’ is used occasionally because there is no equivalent derivative of band.

Where possible I use the names of individual Aborigines (as rendered by colonial observers), but avoid using Aboriginal names for bands and places.<sup>16</sup> There are several reasons for this. Most significantly, the linguistic diversity of the island and the poverty and inconsistency of the recorded vocabularies renders the use of Aboriginal words highly problematic, if not arbitrary. Other authors have tried employing such words, often to signal empathy with the Aborigines, but have done so clumsily and with far more certainty than can be justified. This is especially true of band names. All bands appear to have had at least two Aboriginal names, and we do not know why. Because of the crude names used by colonists, it is generally impossible to know which band they were referring to.<sup>17</sup> In the interest of not pretending to know more than is knowable, I refer only to the general areas that bands were known to inhabit. The decision to avoid using Aboriginal place names was made for similar reasons. Early colonists recorded some place names, but different bands used discrepant names in a variety of ways, and none of this is well understood.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Aboriginal place names are unrecognisable to readers, so any usages would require the colonial nomenclature in parentheses. I have therefore used only colonial place names.

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<sup>16</sup> Many Vandemonians appear to have had two or more names. I have used the most commonly cited names.

<sup>17</sup> See Chapter 2 for more on social structure and band names.

<sup>18</sup> See, in particular, J. A. Taylor, *Tasmanian Place Names: The Aboriginal Connection*, self-published, Launceston, Tasmania, 1995 & N. J. B. Plomley, 'Tasmanian Aboriginal Place Names', paper presented to Queen Victoria Museum, occasional paper no. 3, c.1990.

## Foreword

### Setting the Scene

Wantonly wounded and shot down, they [the Aborigines] retaliated. Fresh wrongs produced their kind: at length, every white man was a guerilla, and every black an assassin. The original temper of both parties was changed. Dread, detestation and treachery embittered every mind: even the humane yielded to the general sentiment.<sup>19</sup>

John West, *History of Tasmania*, 1852

The Black War in Van Diemen's Land did more than just disarm men of their compassion; white and black alike, it primed them with hatred and fear. It was no conventional armed conflict. It consisted entirely of stealth ambushes – Aborigines attacking by day, colonists by night. The two sides never met in set-piece combat, but this did little to reduce the bloodshed. Between 1824 and 1831, the island was the scene of horrific violence that produced at least 450 colonial casualties and all but wiped out the Aborigines.<sup>20</sup> Small as these numbers may seem, the Black War was a titanic struggle for the men, women and children involved; many of them victimisers, but all of them victims.

The population of eastern Van Diemen's Land was entirely Aboriginal in 1803, but by 1832 it was entirely European (see fig. 1). Appreciating the scale and pattern of this demographic inversion is crucial to understanding the attitudes and experiences of those it affected. As Appendix 3 argues, there were probably around 3,500 Aborigines on the island when the first forty-nine colonists arrived in 1803, a ratio of around 1:70. Colonists probably remained numerically inferior for more than a decade. As late as 1815, there were fewer than 2,000 of them on the island, and only a few hundred had broached the interior. Even if individual frontiersmen were as violent before the War, as they were during it, there were simply not enough of them to instigate large-scale hostility.

By 1824, however, the white population had increased to 12,313 through emigration and convict transportation. More than half this number resided outside the greater Launceston and Hobart districts. I argue in Appendix 3 that there were around 1,000 Aborigines in the eastern half of the island at this point, in which case white men outnumbered them in the interior by 6:1. In less than a decade, human occupation of the interior had shifted from overwhelmingly black to overwhelmingly white, and this trend accelerated rapidly after 1824. By the height of

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<sup>19</sup> J. West, *The History of Tasmania with Copious Information Respecting the Colonies of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, &c., &c., &c.*, vol. 2, H. Dowling, London, 1852, p. 24.

<sup>20</sup> The figures presented in this foreword are sourced from Appendices 2, 3 and 4.

the War the ratio of colonists to Aborigines had blown out to around 100:1. This dramatic shift in population can seem at odds with the War's modest scale. Compared to the great wars of Europe, the Black War was tiny – probably less than two thousand casualties. Yet, as a proportion of their respective populations, both the Aboriginal and European death rates in Van Diemen's Land surpassed those of most modern conflicts.<sup>21</sup> These facts and figures indicate the intensity of the Black War in stark terms, but they fail to convey its real horrors. The War was an experience before it was a statistic, and only by examining the former can we illuminate the significance of the latter.

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<sup>21</sup> See M. Finnane, 'Just like a 'nun's picnic'? Violence and Colonisation in Australia', *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2003, pp. 299-306. See also Steven Pinker's exceptional book *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence has Declined* (Viking, New York, 2011), which presents proportional death rates for numerous conflicts throughout history.

## Introduction

The Black War has received almost two centuries of scholarly attention from eminent historians such as John West, N. J. B. Plomley and Henry Reynolds. It remains the subject of international debate over the question of genocide, holding hostage the character of the colonial government, the British Empire, and ultimately the Australian nation. For many, the near annihilation of Van Diemen's Land's ancient peoples has become emblematic of racism and imperial ambition at its most insidious. This unsettling legacy raises a host of questions about the culpability of the colonial authorities, questions that have hitherto dominated the field. But where are the social histories of the Black War? Where are the investigations into the attitudes, experiences and day-by-day exigencies that constituted its very substance? Scholars have paid little attention to these spheres of inquiry, and our understanding of the War has suffered accordingly. It is my intention to fill this gap in the literature. The detailed, local focus that this demands has not allowed space for investigating the wider imperial and global significances of my findings, or for comparing Van Diemen's Land with other colonies. These are, nonetheless, likely to be fruitful lines of inquiry.

### Black War Historiography

In 1835, Henry Melville's *History of Van Diemen's Land* became the first monograph to reflect on the Black War. Although his prejudice against Governor George Arthur inevitably coloured his writing, Melville was well attuned to the public's sentiments, having been editor of the *Colonial Times* during the War. He was the first in a series of nineteenth century writers to examine the War. The most renowned and perceptive of these was John West, whose seminal *History of Tasmania* (1852) is arguably the most significant treatment of the subject to date. This excellent and generally reliable book was followed by James Bonwick's *Last of the Tasmanians* (1870), which was highly sympathetic towards the Aborigines.<sup>1</sup> Although Bonwick's papers prove that he conducted extensive research, he was nonetheless prone to embellishment, so his claims are not relied upon here unless they can be independently verified. The next historian to reflect on the War was James Calder, whose *Some Accounts of the Wars, Extirpation, Habits, etc. of the Native Tribes of Tasmania* (1875) remains essential reading to anyone serious about the subject.<sup>2</sup> In 1884, James Fenton's *History of Tasmania*

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<sup>1</sup> Full citation: *The Last of the Tasmanians, or the Black War of Van Diemen's Land*, S. Low, Son & Marston,

<sup>2</sup> Published by Henn & Co., Hobart.

contributed some new insights, despite being strongly reminiscent of West,<sup>3</sup> and in 1890 the ethnographer Henry Ling Roth produced his outstanding *Aborigines of Tasmania*.<sup>4</sup> This work, revised in 1899, is an almost exhaustive compendium of the published observations of Aboriginal life, which also includes some significant remarks on the War.<sup>5</sup> Historians continue to draw on these invaluable nineteenth century works, but despite their relatively high standard, many of their claims cannot be verified. They are used cautiously in this thesis.

The Aborigines received scant attention from scholars during the first half of the twentieth century, and nothing of significance was written about the War. This historiographical drought was broken in 1948 by Clive Turnbull's anthology of selected government correspondence *Black War: The Extermination of the Tasmanian Aborigines*.<sup>6</sup> Turnbull was extremely sympathetic, writing in the wake of the Holocaust and owing much to Melville for both material and sentiment. Thereafter, nothing significant appeared until the publication of Lyndall Ryan's *Aboriginal Tasmanians* in 1981.<sup>7</sup> Since then, there has been a proliferation of books that have included sections on the War. Their authors include Henry Reynolds (1995, 2004), Keith Windschuttle (2002), Ian McFarlane (2008), Graeme Calder (2010), Patsy Cameron (2011) and Lyndall Ryan (1996, 2012).<sup>8</sup> Other significant books that devoted chapters to the War have been written by authors such as Lloyd Robson (1982), Sharon Morgan (1992), John Connor (2002), James Boyce (2008) and Henry Reynolds (2001, 2012).<sup>9</sup> Important theses have been written by Hendrik Rhee (1972), Bronwyn Desailly (1977), James Boyce (1994) and John McMahon (1995), and many authors have written on the Black War in

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<sup>3</sup> Full citation: *A History of Tasmania from its Discovery in 1642 to the Present Time*. This thesis uses the 1978 reprint published by Melanie Publications, Hobart.

<sup>4</sup> Full citation: *The Aborigines of Tasmania*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., F. King & Sons, Halifax, England, 1890.

<sup>5</sup> Roth did not have access to the Colonial Secretary's records or to George Augustus Robinson's papers.

<sup>6</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., Sun Books, Melbourne, 1974.

<sup>7</sup> Full citation: *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, New South Wales, 1981. Between 1948 and 1980 the only significant book to include a section on the War was Robert Travers' *The Tasmanians: The Story of a Doomed Race* (Wilke & Company Ltd, Melbourne, 1968). Travers' Doomed Race theory, however, is now widely rejected.

<sup>8</sup> L. Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, New South Wales, 1996; H. Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, Penguin Books, Camberwell, 2004 [1995]; K. Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History: Volume One, Van Diemen's Land 1803-1847*, Macleay Press, Sydney, 2002; I. McFarlane, *Beyond Awakening: The Aboriginal Tribes of North West Tasmania: A History*, Fullers, Launceston, Tasmania, 2008; G. Calder, *Levé, Line and Martial Law: A History of the Dispossession of the Mairremmener People of Van Diemen's Land 1803-1832*, Fullers, Launceston, 2010; P. Cameron, *Grease and Ochre: The Blending of Two Cultures at the Colonial Sea Frontier*, Fullers, Launceston, 2011; L. Ryan, *Tasmanian Aborigines: A History since 1803*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> L. L. Robson, *A History of Tasmania: Volume One, Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1983; S. Morgan, *Land Settlement in Early Van Diemen's Land: Creating an Antipodean England*, Cambridge University Press, Oakleigh, 1992; J. Connor, *The Australian Frontier Wars 1788-1838*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2002; J. Boyce, *Van Diemen's Land*, Black Inc., Melbourne, 2008; H. Reynolds, *An Indelible Stain? The Question of Genocide in Australia's History*, Penguin, Ringwood, Victoria, 2001; H. Reynolds, *A History of Tasmania*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 2011.



journals and edited collections.<sup>10</sup> All germane texts are cited or discussed in the body of the thesis, so it will be unnecessary to summarise them here.

The current generation of Black War historians can be divided into two general camps. On one side is Keith Windschuttle, who has typically been disparaging of the Aborigines while attempting to exculpate the colonists. Windschuttle continues to deny that a war took place in Van Diemen's Land. In the other camp are almost all the others – those Windschuttle refers to as the 'orthodox school' – whose sympathy for Aborigines is really their only commonality. The debate between these two camps, popularly known as the 'history wars', has been carried on with great furore over the last decade.<sup>11</sup>

Historians are in the business of interpretation, but the present persistently clutters our vision of the past. Windschuttle was right to espouse a balanced and dispassionate handling of the evidence, but he fell well short of achieving this. His imperial apologetics and disdain for the Aborigines gave his thesis the character of a diatribe. But the problem is not Windschuttle's alone. Historians of Tasmania have shown a marked sympathy for the island's vanquished peoples. The unintended result of this well-meaning tradition has been an image of hapless blacks eradicated by heartless whites, which undermines any attempt to understand the experiences of either. This thesis is intended to circumvent these ideological differences by stepping back from the standard ethical and legal debates, and instead presenting a systematic juxtaposition of the perspectives of the colonists and Aborigines.

Another feature of the literature is its marked tendency to examine the War from the 'top down', its narratives arranged along the well-worn chronology of government orders. There is of course value in this framework, but its ubiquity has been at the expense of other perspectives, namely those of the killers, the victims and the threatened. For these people, the lofty pronouncements of a distant government made little difference to their day-to-day experience of this pitiless conflict. What was it like for them to live through the Black War? How and why did they fight it? These are long overdue lines of inquiry, and I pursue them in this thesis.

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<sup>10</sup> H. S. Rhee, 'The Black Line and Governor Arthur's Aboriginal Policy', Hons thesis, University of Tasmania, History & Classics, Hobart, 1972; B. Desailly, 'The Mechanics of Genocide: Colonial Policies and Attitudes Towards the Tasmanian Aborigines 1824-1836', MA thesis, University of Tasmania, History & Classics, Hobart, 1977; J. Boyce, 'Surviving in a New Land: The Early European Invasion of Van Diemen's Land 1803-1823', Hons thesis, University of Tasmania, History & Classics, 1994; J. F. McMahon, 'The British Army and the Counter Insurgency Campaign in Van Diemen's Land, with particular reference to the Black Line', MA thesis, University of Tasmania, History & Classics, Hobart, 1995.

<sup>11</sup> Despite the vitriolic nature of the debate, it has nonetheless raised the profile of the field, and both camps have made valuable contributions.

## Sources

Examining contact history from Aboriginal perspectives is not without precedent. Henry Reynolds' *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia* (1981) broke new ground by collecting fragments of archival and oral evidence from across the country to piece together an account of Aborigines' experiences. Frontier conflict was a major theme of Reynolds' book, but its modest size and enormous scope permitted only brief references to specific localities. The evidence for Aboriginal perspectives is so sparse that a local study would be impossible in most places. Possibly only in Tasmania are the sources abundant enough to sustain a more focused study. Here, despite the poverty of the ethnographic record and the fact that no Aborigines ever wrote about their wartime experiences, there is a relative wealth of observer reports describing their speech and behaviour.

The most important of these observers was George Augustus Robinson,<sup>12</sup> an ambitious Hobart Town builder who led a party of Aboriginal envoys on a series of 'friendly missions' between 1830 and 1834 to conciliate the hostile bands.<sup>13</sup> Robinson's religious zeal was matched only by his moralistic arrogance, yet he was undeniably motivated by genuine humanitarian instincts. His voluminous Tasmanian journals and papers, edited by N. J. B. Plomley as *Friendly Mission* (1966) and *Weep in Silence* (1987), are replete with descriptions of Aboriginal testimony, actions and emotions, most of which can be taken as honest renderings of what he observed.<sup>14</sup> Plomley noted that Robinson was not above stretching the truth in his correspondence if he thought it beneficial, but there is no suggestion that his almost illegible journal writing was intended for anything but supplementing his memory and venting his stream of consciousness. These journals are invaluable, and together with many scattered archival references, it is possible to reconstruct a rich, albeit incomplete picture of Aboriginal attitudes and experiences.

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<sup>12</sup> The only substantial biography of Robinson is Vivianne Rae-Ellis' *Black Robinson: Protector of Aborigines* (Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria, 1988). Rae-Ellis was highly critical of Robinson, but Jacqueline D'Arcy of the Australian National University is nearing the completion of her PhD on Robinson, and her thesis is much more sympathetic. See also the recent collection of essays on Robinson edited by Anna Johnstone and Mitchell Rolls, *Reading Robinson: Companion Essays to Friendly Mission* (Quintus, Hobart, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> The term 'envoys' will be used throughout this thesis to refer to those Aborigines who at various times aided Robinson's mission. See Chapter 16 for more.

<sup>14</sup> Sometimes these statements were paraphrased, other times they appear to have been recorded verbatim, to the extent that this was possible. Problems of language and dictation must have led to numerous errors, but there is little the historian can do to correct for these.

The colonists' experiences have, like those of the Aborigines, been all but ignored by scholars of the Black War.<sup>15</sup> One reason for this is the dearth of surviving accounts. Around eighty per cent of victims were labourers, and the vast majority of those were male convicts or ex-convicts. Some of these men were literate, but if they wrote anything about the War, it has not survived. Nonetheless, there exists a vast trove of letters, diaries, newspapers, police records and reminiscences that describe the actions and utterances of this voiceless majority. Distilling out the perspectives of 'the observed', however, is not at all straightforward, and what follows is a summary of my key methodological approaches to this challenge.

### **Methodology**

The historian attempting to access the attitudes and experiences of colonists and Aborigines must have a panoramic acquaintance with the primary and secondary sources. The Black War is a well-documented event, but references to how people fought it and felt about it are relatively uncommon. It has thus been necessary to sift through almost the full range of primary sources relating to the War. There are also copious secondary sources that discuss the War and the people involved in it. Wherever the narrative of the thesis intersects with this scholarship I have engaged with it, though I have attempted not to detract from the originality of either the sources or the endeavour by descending into lengthy or superfluous literature reviews.

The cultural gulf separating today's historians and their early nineteenth century colonial subjects is expansive. Bridging this gulf is more difficult when the subjects are convicts who can be known only through the writings of literate contemporaries who tended to refer to them in disparaging and condescending terms. These difficulties are further compounded when the subjects are Aborigines who were as culturally distinct from European observers as humans could be. Thus, there is more than one cultural divide to transcend in attempting to understand the subjects of this study, and the reader must appreciate the limitations this imposes. Nevertheless, there are methodological tools that, when allied with the requisite research and imagination, can begin to illuminate the worlds of those swept up in the Black War.

This thesis employs what philosophers call 'abduction' or, more colloquially, 'inference to the best explanation'.<sup>16</sup> Using this type of inference, the best explanation of the evidence is selected (from the set of plausible explanations) for its superior parsimony, explanatory power

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<sup>15</sup> As noted in Chapter 11, Henry Reynolds has given some attention to the fear experienced by white men on the frontier.

<sup>16</sup> For an excellent comparative assessment of abductive reasoning, see J. E. Adler & L. J. Rips, *Reasoning: Studies of Human Inference and its Foundations*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 2008.

and congruity with background data (historical context and accompanying evidence). Importantly, the conclusions in these cases do not follow with certainty from the premises, though there must be no logical inconsistency. Where the evidence does not admit of direct induction,<sup>17</sup> abductive reasoning implicitly underpins the conclusions drawn in this thesis.<sup>18</sup> However, unlike induction, where conclusions can be said to be true if the premises are true, conclusions arrived at by abduction can only be assigned an imprecise probability. I have at all times tried to convey the level of confidence with which I assert abductive conclusions. This has been done using terminology of varying strengths, ranging from ‘unlikely’ and ‘questionable’, to ‘possible’ and ‘might’, to ‘probable’ and ‘likely’, to ‘undoubtedly’ and ‘almost certainly’. Some historians in this field have written with certainty about things that are, at best, educated guesses, but in this thesis I have taken pains to scale the confidence of my assertions with the strength of the evidence. In the interest of preserving the flow of the narrative, I have tried to minimise the amount of qualification by focusing on general rather than local experiential and attitudinal patterns. This focus is also dictated by the broad scope of the study.

This thesis is not underpinned by any single methodological paradigm, but rather draws inspiration from various approaches. One of these is Rhys Isaac’s dramaturgical method for examining social interactions at a molecular level.<sup>19</sup> Adapted from the ethnographer’s toolkit, Isaac’s method is most effective when the various historical actors described in a source, comprehended one another’s linguistic, behavioural and metaphorical tropes. This is especially useful when interpreting the speech and ‘action statements’ of frontiersmen, but less so in the case of the Aborigines whose cultures were and are poorly understood. Nevertheless, the dramaturgical method has provided a range of helpful ideas for micro-analysing sources and the ‘action statements’ they describe. For instance, there are some things that all humans seek – such as food, water, rest, safety and warmth – and there is much to be gained from keeping these constantly in mind when interpreting the observed behaviour of Aborigines and colonists, and conjecturing about gaps in the record. As an essential complement to this, the historian requires a keen appreciation of Tasmanian topography, resources and climate, not just from maps, charts and historical accounts, but from walking the country. Only with such attention to detail can one hope to comprehend the exigencies that motivated wartime behaviours, and only by drawing on all these strategies can the historian hope to advance a project such as this.

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<sup>17</sup> In the case of induction, the conclusion follows necessarily from the premises, such as in the formula: if A then B; A; therefore B.

<sup>18</sup> Deciding between contradictory sources is typical of the dilemmas that abduction is useful for adjudicating.

<sup>19</sup> R. Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1999 [1982], pp. 323-57.

## Chapter Summary

This thesis divides the black and white perspectives of the War into alternating chapters in order to juxtapose and illuminate their distinct features. Most of the thesis will focus on the War, but it must first be placed in its ideological, cultural and historical contexts. This is the task of the four opening Chapters. Chapters 1 and 2 present a concise background to the types of people involved in the War, looking at what might have informed their wartime attitudes and experiences, while Chapters 3 and 4 survey the five decades of contact before the outbreak of the War, with a particular focus on the nature of early frontier relations as the harbingers of later conflict. The next two Chapters examine the sea frontier in and around Bass Strait, the birthplace of today's mixed descent Aboriginal community. In this intriguing theatre of the War sealers initially traded with coastal bands, but later inflicted enormous suffering on them by abducting women and killing their kinsfolk.

The focus of the thesis then turns to the War in the interior, with Chapters 7 and 8 examining the attitudes of colonists and Aborigines towards one another and the War. These Chapters reveal that colonial violence was initially motivated by the desire for sex and the thrill of killing, but later by revenge and self-preservation, and there was little to deter them beyond the fear of reprisal. Aborigines were provoked by insult and encroachment, but they were also motivated by the desire and later the need for food and blankets. Chapters 9 and 10 explore the nature of the violence and the tactics employed, demonstrating among other things that the Black War exhibited a solar rhythm in which the Aborigines attacked by day, and the colonists by night. Chapters 11 and 12 canvas the varieties of precautions, experiences and emotions that accompanied the War. They argue that, on both sides of the frontier people's lives were profoundly affected by the constant threat of violence, and they responded in a variety of ways. Fear dominated the colonists' experience, while for the Aborigines, emotions such as anger, despair and sadness were just as salient. Chapters 13 and 14 examine the ill-fated 'Black Line', arguing that it was not only a failure, but also a horrendous experience for participants, and a demoralising blow to the frontier community generally. They contend that the event had far less significance for the Aborigines than previously thought, and probably contributed little to their decisions to surrender. Finally, Chapters 15 and 16 focus on the year 1831 and the ways both sides experienced the end of the War. These Chapters demonstrate how a despondent white community was shocked at the success of the friendly mission, and at how such widespread fear had been generated by so few Aborigines. The case is made that, by 1831, the only key difference between those Aborigines who collaborated with the invaders, and those who continued to resist them, was that the chance to surrender had not yet been offered to the latter.

The thesis is complemented by four appendices, the first of which examines the conflict in the northwest. It argues that, although this theatre of the War exhibited similar patterns to the conflict in the east, its isolation and situational peculiarities led colonists to conduct an especially grisly campaign of violence. Aborigines in the northwest continued their attacks for more than a decade after the eastern bands had surrendered, though they ultimately suffered the same fate. Appendices 2 and 3 tabulate all known instances of violence by Aborigines and colonists. Building on earlier work by Plomley, they are the most extensive data sets yet produced. Both Appendices are accompanied by detailed commentaries that interrogate the casualty data. Appendix 4 presents a number of graphs extrapolated from this data, which illustrate some of the trends in the recorded violence. It also includes four graphs depicting the colony's demographic composition and changes, together with several maps and paintings. All figures have been gathered into a single appendix for ease of reference, since many of them are referred to at several locations throughout the thesis.

## *White*

### *I*

#### **Background**

The peoples of Van Diemen's Land and Europe lived similar hunter-gatherer lifestyles for at least thirty millennia. Then, around 5,000 BP, the Neolithic or First Agricultural Revolution began transforming Europe, setting its various tribes on a path of rapid political, economic and technological advancement.<sup>1</sup> Ignorant as Europeans were of their humble origins, they assumed a sense of inherent superiority over those peoples who retained hunter-gatherer economies. This ethnocentrism was as intuitive as the racism that accompanied it, but neither was driven purely by intuition. From the sixteenth century, chattel slavery became one of the most profitable industries in the world, and the enslavement of millions of blacks demanded moral and scientific justification. Economists, theologians, scientists and philosophers all contributed to the assortment of ideas that permeated European consciousness on this question. Consequently, Van Diemen's Land's first explorers and settlers arrived with deeply engrained preconceptions. This Chapter surveys these broader intellectual and ideological currents, before turning its attention to the colonists themselves and the socio-economic and environmental factors that shaped both them and many aspects of their experience.

#### **Ideas about Aborigines and Colonialism**

Europe in the late eighteenth century was in the throes of great change, and in the cases of France and America, revolutionary change. This was the Enlightenment, a period characterised by a decline in church power, and unprecedented technological and intellectual flourishing. This was also an era of ambitious exploration and imperialism that radically widened the scope of the known world. The nature and significance of newly discovered peoples was discussed at all levels of European society, in cafés, beer halls and around family hearths. But to understand how Europeans came to think about Aborigines, we must first forget everything we currently know about them – their wit, perceptiveness, emotionality and rich spiritual lives – and envisage a cocktail of religious dogma, pseudo-science, mythology and ethnocentrism.

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<sup>1</sup> See J. Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel: A Short History of Everybody for the last 13,000 Years*, Random House, New York, 1998.

One of the most common features of Enlightenment thinking was the popularity of taxonomy and hierarchical paradigms.<sup>2</sup> The antecedent of this movement was the ‘Great Chain of Being’, an idea that went back to the ancients, and remained popular well into the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> According to Henry Reynolds, the ‘Great Chain of Being was one of the most pervasive concepts of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century’.<sup>4</sup> The most significant feature of the Chain was its immutability, which meant that efforts to ‘raise up’ the lowly were considered futile. Atop the Chain was the Christian God, followed by Jesus, the angels, humans, animals and finally non-sentient organisms. Among humans, white, western European males were superior. They were followed in descending order by white females, Asians, Africans, Australian Aborigines and, last of all, the Aborigines of Van Diemen’s Land.<sup>5</sup> For many Europeans, those on the lowest rungs of this hierarchy were scarcely distinguishable from apes.<sup>6</sup>

The idea of a Chain of Being appears to have been prevalent among colonists in Van Diemen’s Land. In 1827, Land Commissioner Roderic O’Connor referred to the Aborigines as ‘Ourang Outang’s, [a] disgrace it would be to the human race to call them Men.’<sup>7</sup> In 1830, Mrs Prinsep, who had recently settled in the colony, asserted that the Aborigines were:

undoubtedly in the lowest possible scale of human nature, both in form and intellect. They have small hollow eyes, broad short noses, with nostrils widely distended, uncommonly large mouths, jaws elongated like the Ourang Outang, and figures scarcely more symmetrical.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Carolus Linnaeus, an eighteenth century Swedish botanist and zoologist, is considered the father of modern taxonomy. His classificatory system extended the Great Chain of Being to humans, whom he divided into six varieties based on colour and behavioural characteristics. He argued there was a close relationship between the highest apes and the lowest humans (see, for instance, L. Koerner, *Linnaeus: Nature and Nation*, Harvard University Press, Harvard, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> This commentary on the Great Chain of Being has been informed, in particular, by Margaret Hodgen’s *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Oxford University Press, London, 1964, pp. 433-516) and Arthur Lovejoy’s *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 2009 [1936]).

<sup>4</sup> H. Reynolds, ‘Racial Thought in Early Colonial Australia’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1974, p. 47.

<sup>5</sup> It was their simple toolkit and supposed lack of art and religion that caused some Europeans to believe Van Diemen’s Land’s Aborigines were the lowest of all humans.

<sup>6</sup> At the beginning of the eighteenth century, science was interested in the more general relationship between apes and humans, but by the end of the century it had become focused on ‘the relative closeness to apes of particular ethnic groups, especially blacks’ (G. Jahoda, *Images of Savages: Ancient Roots of Modern Prejudice in Western Culture*, Routledge, London, 1999, p. 50).

<sup>7</sup> A. McKay (ed.), *Journals of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen’s Land, 1826-28*, Tasmanian Historical Research Association, Hobart, 1962, p. 67, journal 10 November 1827.

<sup>8</sup> Prinsep [Christian name unrecorded], *The Journal of a Voyage from Calcutta to Van Diemen’s Land: Comprising a Description of that Colony during a Six Months’ Residence: From Original Letters*, Smith & Elder, London, 1833, p. 79.



Likewise, in 1833, a popular Hobart writer argued that, ‘of all creatures who wear the human form, they may be justly placed at the very lowest scale of barbarism’.<sup>9</sup> These remarks were penned at the height of conflict and just after, but even in 1820 a visitor to Hobart observed that ‘[t]he aborigines of this island are supposed [by locals] to be the most degraded of any known in the world.’<sup>10</sup> Of course, only the well read grasped the specifics of the Great Chain of Being and other elaborate theories, but over time an understanding of their basic themes percolated down to the masses.<sup>11</sup>

The Great Chain of Being had an ambivalent relationship with the ascendant evangelical Protestantism of the late eighteenth century, which advocated monogenism, the idea that all humans descended from Adam and Eve.<sup>12</sup> Evangelical churches preached that, given the right conditions, people of any race might be ‘improved’, and their missionaries flocked to colonies in the Americas, India, South Africa, and the Pacific islands.<sup>13</sup> In Australia, however, the native inhabitants were considered so low in the scale of humanity that missionaries showed little interest, especially in Van Diemen’s Land.<sup>14</sup> Although the doctrine of monogenism held that Aborigines could in principle be ‘saved’, until this occurred they stood condemned as brutish heathens, described exclusively in terms of what they lacked. It was for these reasons, argued Bernard Smith, that evangelicalism in Australia ‘did much to present the unredeemed savage as an object of pity or dislike.’<sup>15</sup> Indeed, as Chapter 7 explains, colonists interpreted the Bible to suit themselves, and for all its humane preachments, the good book contained plenty of fodder for violence and dispossession.

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<sup>9</sup> Cited in Calder, *Some Accounts*, p. 54. Hobart was officially called Hobart Town until it was formally renamed Hobart in 1881. Contemporaries referred to it interchangeably as Hobart Town, Hobarton or Hobart, but in the interest of concision this thesis will simply use Hobart.

<sup>10</sup> Leigh [Christian name unrecorded], ‘Of the Aboriginal Inhabitants of Van Diemen’s Land’, *Missionary Notices to the Methodist Conference*, vol. 3, 1820, p. 242.

<sup>11</sup> Another idea that was gaining popularity in the early nineteenth century was ‘stadial theory’. The earliest proponent of this idea was English philosopher John Locke, who argued in his *Two Treatises of Government* (P. Laslett (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1960 [1689]) that indigenes were examples of how Europeans had lived before the domestication of animals, the invention of agriculture, private property, capitalism and other ‘civilized’ developments. Stadial theory was refined by economist Adam Smith (*Lectures on Jurisprudence*, R. L. Meek, D. D. Raphael & P. G. Stein (ed.), Liberty Fund, Indianapolis, 1982 [c.1760], p. 14), who proposed ‘four distinct stages which mankind pass thro: – 1<sup>st</sup>, the Age of Hunters; 2<sup>dly</sup>, the Age of Shepherds; 3<sup>dly</sup>, the Age of agriculture; and 4<sup>thly</sup>, the Age of Commerce.’ Unlike the Great Chain of Being, stadial theory proposed a dynamic view of nature, in which human societies moved through ‘stages of development’ and were thus ‘perfectible’. Nevertheless, whilst stadial theory may have been popular with the intellectuals of Hobart and Launceston, it does not appear to have had a major influence on the frontier.

<sup>12</sup> The Great Chain of Being did not explicitly deny monogenism, but it was hostile to the notion that all men were equal in their current state.

<sup>13</sup> The desire to ‘raise the savage’ was not confined to Christianity. Evangelicalism combined in the eighteenth century with the Lockean notion of the ‘tabula rasa’ and enlightenment optimism to foster an intellectual milieu that was broadly congenial to the possibility of ‘improving’ indigenous peoples.

<sup>14</sup> The only religious instruction Van Diemen’s Land’s Aborigines received came after their removal to Flinders Island in the mid 1830s, and then only from a government appointed catchiest.

<sup>15</sup> B. Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Harper & Row, Sydney, 1985 [1960], p. 317.

Science also contributed to the stock of ideas about Aborigines. Theories of racial difference, which were becoming increasingly popular in the early nineteenth century, focused on physical features as indicators of racial category and intellectual capacity.<sup>16</sup> One of the more influential branches of race science was phrenology, which attempted to link skull shape to intellect. In 1822, the British anatomist William Lawrence asserted that the physiology of Aborigines and other lower races ‘approximates unequivocally to that of the monkey.’<sup>17</sup> Significantly, Lawrence also claimed to espouse monogenism, which, ironically, was common among early practitioners of race science.<sup>18</sup> Race science, according to Merete Borch, tended to perversely complement evangelical ideas about the hierarchical ordering of humanity, albeit for different reasons. Both, she argued, ‘easily led to a contemptuous and even hostile attitude towards such peoples.’<sup>19</sup>

Notwithstanding the growing influence of race science, ‘[t]he ubiquitous concept of savagery was’, Reynolds contended, ‘ultimately more important than phrenology and cognate theories, promoting at times an idealization of tribal society but more often its vigorous denunciation.’<sup>20</sup> Savagery was more a folk genre than a cogent philosophical concept, and it was vague enough to sit comfortably with most scientific, philosophical and theological assumptions.<sup>21</sup> It came in two varieties, the most common being the conception of savages as ignoble, beastly and godless. This negative perception had its antithesis in the more distinct idea of the ‘noble savage’,<sup>22</sup> popularised by the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau in 1754.<sup>23</sup> Rousseau proposed that social progress led, not to virtue, but ‘toward the decrepitness [*sic*] of the species.’<sup>24</sup> The true ‘state of nature’, for Rousseau, was a situation from which all human groups had progressed; but savages had not progressed far and thus retained much of the

<sup>16</sup> M. F. Borch, *Conciliation – Compulsion – Conversion: British Attitudes Towards Indigenous Peoples 1763-1814*, Rodopi, New York, 2004, p. 275.

<sup>17</sup> Cited in Borch, *Conciliation – Compulsion – Conversion*, p. 275. See also W. Lawrence, *Lectures on Comparative Anatomy, Physiology, Zoology, and the Natural History of Man*, 9<sup>th</sup> edn., H. G. Bohn, London, 1848 [1819], pp. 164-66.

<sup>18</sup> There were already some ‘polygenists’ writing at this time who claimed the reason savages exhibited signs of inferiority was because they were in fact distinct species from Europeans. In the early 1800s, however, this was still a fringe idea as it conflicted with the dominant Christian doctrine of monogenism. See Borch, *Conciliation – Compulsion – Conversion*, p. 273.

<sup>19</sup> Borch, *Conciliation – Compulsion – Conversion*, pp. 282-83.

<sup>20</sup> Reynolds, ‘Racial Thought in Early Colonial Australia’, p. 51.

<sup>21</sup> Other notions used at the time were ‘soft primitivism’ and ‘hard primitivism’. For instance, peoples from the Society Islands were seen as examples of soft primitivism, whereas the Maoris and Aborigines were perceived in the light of hard primitivism (Smith, *European Vision*, pp. 6-7).

<sup>22</sup> The noble savage was the product of the urban middle-class’ sentimental attraction to the ‘natural’. It was also a critique of European society, with its rigid social hierarchy, urban squalor and shallow materialism. Indeed, the literature on noble and ignoble savages tended to either condemn or extol European civilization, and to either denigrate or idealise Aboriginal society, with very little in between (Borch, *Conciliation – Compulsion – Conversion*, pp. 261, 285).

<sup>23</sup> J. J. Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men*, N. K. Singh (ed.), Global Vision Publishing House, Delhi, 1754. The first formulation of the noble savage concept was in 1580 by Michel de Montaigne (*The Essays of Montaigne done in English anno 1603*, translated by J. Florio, AMS, New York, 1967).

<sup>24</sup> Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin*, p. 68. The idea of a ‘state of nature’ goes back to the seventeenth century British philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, though his was a much bleaker view.

'purity' and 'nobility' associated with this original state. The more 'simple' and 'untouched', the more noble in Rousseau's eyes, and his writings exerted an enormous influence, especially during the late eighteenth century.

The desire to encounter the noble savage is particularly evident in the writings of the explorers who 'left Europe when the dreams of Rousseau were the toys of the speculative'.<sup>25</sup> In 1770, for instance, Captain Cook concluded that Australia's Aborigines 'may appear to some to be the most wretched People upon the earth; but in reality they are far more happier than we Europeans'.<sup>26</sup> By the early nineteenth century, however, the noble savage was being undermined not just by emerging intellectual trends, but also by the disillusioning experiences of explorers and settlers. Captain Watkin Tench of the First Fleet came to reject Rousseau's philosophy and challenged adherents to 'survey the phantom which their heated imaginations have raised.'<sup>27</sup> Writing around the same time, Jean-François La Pérouse excoriated Europe's romantics:

While they are making books by the fireside, I have been traversing the globe for thirty years, and have actually witnessed the cunning and injustice of nations which they portray as necessarily simple and virtuous, because little removed from a state of nature.<sup>28</sup>

The French explorer Julien Crozet reported directly to Rousseau on the 'grotesque' savages he encountered in Van Diemen's Land in 1772.<sup>29</sup> To his unflattering description, Rousseau replied despairingly: 'Is it possible that the children of nature can really be so wicked?'<sup>30</sup>

Hoxie Fairchild argued that '[t]he history of the Noble Savage from 1810 to 1830 is in the main the history of a dying convention'.<sup>31</sup> Even so, this romantic conception of indigenes probably never held much currency outside the middle-class anyway. Margaret Hodgen contended that 'even after men of letters became enchanted with noble savages, the same unfavourable conception of the real savages was still afloat in the parish ethnology of Britain.'<sup>32</sup> Most lay people imbibed their views about indigenous peoples from the pulpit, but

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<sup>25</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 3. See also P. J. Marshal & T. G. Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: Perceptions of New Worlds in the Age of Enlightenment*, Harvard University Press, Harvard, 1982, p. 263.

<sup>26</sup> J. C. Beaglehole (ed.), *The Journals of Captain James Cook on His Voyages of Discovery: Volume One, The Voyage of the Endeavor 1768-71*, Hakluyt Society, London, 1968 [1955], pp. 508-9. This was in stark contrast to the view of explorer William Dampier, recorded a century earlier. Dampier (*A New Voyage Round the World*, J. Knapton, London, 1927, p. 464) reported that '[t]he Inhabitants of this Country are the miserabest people in the World'.

<sup>27</sup> Cited in Marshal & Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind*, p. 293.

<sup>28</sup> Cited in Marshal & Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind*, p. 293.

<sup>29</sup> Crozet was second in command to Captain Marion du Fresne.

<sup>30</sup> Smith, *European Vision*, p. 87.

<sup>31</sup> H. N. Fairchild, *The Noble Savage: A Study in Romantic Naturalism* (New York, 1961 [1928]), p. 363. See also Borch, *Conciliation – Compulsion – Conversion*, pp. 260-61.

<sup>32</sup> Hodgen, *Early Anthropology*, p. 362.

also from adventure tales such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). This hugely popular genre reinforced existing European prejudices – namely, 'dirt and darkness, bestial appearance, sexuality and especially cannibalism.'<sup>33</sup> Hodgen concluded that the majority of Europeans, especially the working-class, were 'anti-savage, and strongly so.'<sup>34</sup>

In addition to the suite of ideas about race, savagery and hierarchy, there was another intellectual current that played a significant role in the tragedy that was to unfold in Van Diemen's Land. The unparalleled expansion of the British Empire between 1756 and 1815 brought vast swaths of the world's population under its rule. During the same period, the French, Ottoman, Mughal and Safavid empires either fell or waned considerably, leaving Britain as the sole imperial superpower.<sup>35</sup> Though economics and logistics were always important, from the turn of the nineteenth century Britain's imperial policies were increasingly shaped by ideological considerations.<sup>36</sup> Of these, the paramount concern was legitimacy. The physical, political and to some extent cultural usurpation of so many peoples, who had never posed a threat to Britain, demanded justification. Many indigenous peoples were exploited, oppressed and even killed in the process of colonisation, and Britons of conscience needed some ideological rationalisation for this profitable, but morally ambiguous conduct.

Since Aborigines were hunter-gatherers, the Colonial Office assumed Australia was a 'desert and uncultivated' land that could be 'claimed by right of occupancy'.<sup>37</sup> This tradition was first formalised by the English philosopher John Locke, who famously asserted that no man could 'own' land until he had 'mixed his labour with; and joined to it something that is his own'.<sup>38</sup> Together with the pervasive assumption that nomadic peoples had no meaningful attachment to land, this conception of ownership helps explain why colonists were so bewildered by the tenacity of Aboriginal resistance.<sup>39</sup>

Legalistic defenses were strongly reinforced by the biblical injunction to subdue the earth and till the soil. When settlers presented their justifications for appropriating Aboriginal land in the

<sup>33</sup> Jahoda, *Images of Savages*, pp. 197-98.

<sup>34</sup> Hodgen, *Early Anthropology*, pp. 361-66.

<sup>35</sup> C. A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830*, Longman, Harlow, 1989, p. 256.

<sup>36</sup> Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, p. 133.

<sup>37</sup> W. Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England in Four Books*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn., Rees Welsh, Philadelphia, 1902 [1765], pp. 93-94. It was not until 1822 that the British Colonial Office finally elucidated the official pretense under which Australia had been colonised: 'the colony was acquired neither by conquest or cession, but the mere occupation of a desert or uninhabited land' (Council's opinion re-validity of Statute 20, George II, 1822, *Historical Records of Australia*, ser. 4, vol. 1, p. 414).

<sup>38</sup> Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, p. 329.

<sup>39</sup> By this time, most prominent jurists believed consultation, compromise and compensation were necessary to legitimise the dispossession of a colonised people, but this was overlooked in the Australian case (H. Reynolds, *The Law of the Land*, Penguin, Camberwell, 2003 [1987], pp. 19-23).

colonial newspapers, their appeals to international law were invariably laced with religious language.<sup>40</sup> Even those who felt uneasy about such transparently self-interested rationalisations could never fundamentally challenge the colonial project without betraying flagrant hypocrisy.<sup>41</sup>

Establishing a right to the land was necessary for settlers' sense of legitimacy, but often not sufficient. Many believed that dispossessed peoples should be recompensed with the blessings of civilisation and Christianity. In fact, the increasingly powerful evangelical and humanitarian movements considered it imperative to export Britain's superior customs and religion to the 'barbarous' corners of the globe.<sup>42</sup> Viewed through this lens, colonialism was not only a legal right, but also a moral obligation.<sup>43</sup> In reality though, there was a fundamental contradiction inherent in the very concept of 'humane colonisation'. It was manifestly inhumane to drive indigenous peoples from their homelands and force them to adopt foreign laws, customs and beliefs, yet humanitarian colonisers presumed these 'gifts' would more than compensate them for their losses.

Such justifications were important for conscientious colonisers, but the majority of the men and women who first populated Van Diemen's Land were not humanitarians. In some cases, they were not even humane. Convicts and soldiers were not there by choice, and needed no contrived justifications to sooth their consciences. To them, the blacks, like the landscape and the authorities, were dangers to be negotiated. 'Rights' were a fantasy most of them felt bereft of, and they had no intention of extending them to 'savages'.

## The Colonists

The colonists involved in the Black War included emigrant settlers, emancipists, soldiers and convicts.<sup>44</sup> Before examining in later chapters the roles these people played in the conflict, we

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<sup>40</sup> See, for instance, *Colonial Times*, 11 May 1827, pp. 2-3, 23 April 1830, p. 4, 30 April 1830, p. 4 & *Independent*, 15 October 1831, p. 2. See also N. Clements, "'Wriggle, and Shuffle, and Twist': Attitudes Towards Aborigines in the Vandemonian Press 1825-1831', Hons thesis, University of Tasmania, 2007.

<sup>41</sup> See, for instance, *Launceston Advertiser*, 15 February 1830, p. 2, 26 September 1831, p. 299; *Tasmanian*, 21 December 1827, p. 3, 28 November 1828, p. 2, 25 June 1831, p. 197.

<sup>42</sup> Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, pp. 157, 252. It was also thought indigenes would benefit from British technology, work ethics, customs and values.

<sup>43</sup> This helped forge a strong link between evangelical Protestantism and British imperialism from the 1820s (Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, pp. 137-38).

<sup>44</sup> This section is informed by a number sources, including S. Nicholas (ed.), *Convict Workers: Reinterpreting Australia's Past*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1988; L. L. Robson, *A History of Tasmania: Volume One, Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1983, part 2; A. Alexander, *Tasmania's Convicts: How Felons Built a Free Society*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, New South Wales, 2010; S. Morgan, *Land Settlement in Early Van Diemen's Land: Creating an Antipodean England*, Cambridge University Press, Oakleigh, 1992; A. G. L. Shaw, *Convicts and the Colonies: A Study of Penal Transportation from Great Britain and*

must first establish who they were and the circumstances in which they lived. In the first two decades of settlement, convicts could be granted a small parcel of land on completing their sentence, but by the time the War began, most were employed by emigrant settlers for wages and keep.<sup>45</sup> Thus, the wartime conditions and experiences of emancipists were often similar to those of their comrades under sentence.

Emigrants comprised the bulk of those referred to as settlers in this thesis. They sailed to the colony in droves to exploit the offer of free land and a new start. They were generally middle-class, between the ages of twenty-two and forty-four, and most came out with their families.<sup>46</sup> Before the appointment of Lieutenant Governor George Arthur in 1824, land had been granted to almost 1,500 people, approximately half of whom had arrived free.<sup>47</sup> Significantly though, only one third of 'prosperous' grantees were of convict stock, which reflected the numerous advantages enjoyed by emigrant settlers.<sup>48</sup> The first two decades was a period when grants were smaller and opportunities more democratic, and where success was determined largely by industriousness. However, as Chapter 3 notes, this was to change with the publication of the Bigge Report in 1823, after which capital became paramount. Governor Arthur was instructed to provide wealthier settlers with sizable grants and a commensurate number of convict servants, which allowed a group of around 200 large landowners to monopolise the island's agricultural economy within just a few years.

Consequently, there were considerable differences in the settler experience. Smaller landholders sometimes had no servants at all; others had one or two whom they worked alongside. These small farmers were often just as likely to encounter Aborigines as their servants were. Alternatively, wealthier settlers could have dozens of servants and relied on overseers to manage their estates. They spent comparatively little time in exposed situations, often running their operations in part or in whole from Launceston or Hobart. Their servants, on the other hand, were regularly exposed to attacks in their day-to-day lives. As these larger estates were usually those most recently established, they were also situated in the remoter regions that became the locus of hostilities in the 1820s. Thus, it was the assigned convicts and

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*Ireland to Australia and other parts of the British Empire*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton Victoria, 1978 [1966]; J. Hirst, *Freedom on the Fatal Shore: Australia's First Colony, Being Convict society and its Enemies: A History of Early New South Wales (1983)*, *The Strange Birth of Colonial Democracy: New South Wales 1848-1884 (1988)*, Black Inc., Melbourne, 2008 & H. Maxwell-Stewart, 'Convicts', in A. Alexander (ed.), *The Companion to Tasmanian History*, Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, Hobart, 2005, pp. 415-19.

<sup>45</sup> Stephen Nicholas and Peter Shergold ('Unshackling the Past', in S. Nicholas (ed.), *Convict Workers: Rinterpreting Australia's Past*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1988, p. 9) found that ninety-five per cent of Australia's convicts stayed on in the colonies, and those lucky enough to be granted land were usually allotted between 20 and 50 acres.

<sup>46</sup> Morgan, *Land Settlement*, pp. 28-29, 40. Morgan's second Chapter gives an insightful overview of 'what sort of people' land grantees were.

<sup>47</sup> Morgan, *Land Settlement*, p. 25

<sup>48</sup> Morgan, *Land Settlement*, p. 31. These included the speed of grant approval, grant size, disposable capital and the assistance of families.

emancipists labouring for the landed elite who comprised the bulk of the Aborigines' victims and victimisers.

Convicts comprised the largest constituent on the frontier, transported to the colonies on sentences of seven years, fourteen years or life.<sup>49</sup> Stephen Nicholas and Peter Shergold argued that few were 'professional or habitual criminals'. In fact, most were just average working-class men and women who had fallen on hard times.<sup>50</sup> Allison Alexander agreed with this contention in her 2010 book, *Tasmania's Convicts*.<sup>51</sup> However, there is a danger of over-emphasising the harmlessness of such people and of forgetting the hardening effects of squalor and violence. The historical record is replete with testimony affirming the bad character of convicts, and not all of this can be dismissed as class prejudice.<sup>52</sup> The experiences of convictism and frontier life were highly conducive the callousness described time and again in this thesis. Once sentenced and torn from their families, homes and everything they valued, the life of a convict was characterised by harsh discipline, loneliness and deprivation. Those sent to Van Diemen's Land were repeat offenders and, therefore, even more likely to have been affected by the crueler aspects of convictism.<sup>53</sup> It would be remarkable if any of these men had the strength of character to fully resist the brutalising effects of such an existence.

Drawing on the work of a number of reputable scholars, historian Michael Sturma concluded that convicts, having been brutalised by a draconian penal system, violently projected their frustration and emasculation onto the one group perceived to be below them in the social order – Aborigines.<sup>54</sup> His basic premise – that sustained, systematic violent treatment increases the likelihood of violent propensities, particularly towards perceived inferiors – is undergirded by a voluminous psychological literature.<sup>55</sup> It is also well established that the potential for violence increases in a group setting and, as Sturma pointed out, convicts generally lived and

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<sup>49</sup> Nicholas & Shergold, 'Convicts as Migrants', in S. Nicholas (ed.), *Convict Workers: Reinterpreting Australia's Past*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1988, p. 59.

<sup>50</sup> Nicholas & Shergold, 'Unshackling the Past', p. 7.

<sup>51</sup> Alexander, *Tasmania's Convicts*, pp. 22-27.

<sup>52</sup> Both official and private sources are replete with criticisms of the behaviour and character of convicts.

<sup>53</sup> A. Graeme-Evans, *Tasmanian Rogues and Absconders 1803-1875*, vol. 2, Regal Publications, Launceston, Tasmania, 1994, p. 2. In 1813, this situation led Governor Davey to break protocol and write a complaint directly to London.

<sup>54</sup> M. Sturma, 'Myall Creek and the Psychology of Mass Murder', *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 16, 1985, p. 63. In this landmark paper, Sturma drew on a rich psychological and historical literature. He investigated the infamous 'Myall Creek massacre', which occurred in New South Wales in 1838, examining the mindsets of the killers and the conditions that gave rise to them. He argued that men across a range of times and places tend to resort to violence under certain conditions – 'environmental stress', 'small group dynamics', brutalisation, frustration, fear, vindictiveness – all of which were present in Van Diemen's Land. My own findings harmonise with Sturma's.

<sup>55</sup> 'Violentization' theory, developed by American criminologist Lonnie Athens', is one of the more compelling and popular frameworks for understanding the impact of brutalisation and anonymity on violent propensities (see L. Athens & J. T. Ulmer, *Violent Acts and Violentization: Assessing, Applying, and Developing Lonnie Athens' Theories*, vol. 4, Emerald Group Publishing, London, 2003).

worked in small groups.<sup>56</sup> Thus, the conditions in Van Diemen's Land were ripe for the cruel forms of violence it manifested.

The other main group on the frontier was the military. The colony's garrison was comprised of companies from a number of different regiments generally cycled between India and the Australian colonies. The size of the garrison fluctuated according to the availability of troops across the Empire. In 1829, it comprised nearly one thousand soldiers of the 40<sup>th</sup>, 57<sup>th</sup> and 63<sup>rd</sup> regiments, around half of whom were distributed throughout the interior.<sup>57</sup> Small detachments, usually comprising between two and eight men, were dispersed widely on the frontier to protect outlying settlers against hostile blacks. This highly unorthodox deployment left many detachments without the supervision of an officer. Boredom and privation were common complaints among the soldiery, while those relying on their protection complained of their inefficacy and regular drunkenness.<sup>58</sup> These men had the same socio-economic backgrounds as the convicts – a large number of convicts were formerly soldiers – and they were subject to similarly harsh punishments and deprivations.<sup>59</sup> Both were hardened and brutalised; the one major difference being that soldiers were trained to kill.

Colonists appear to have been largely uninterested in the island's native inhabitants, especially when compared to the explorers who came before them. Settlers were consumed with economic survival and prosperity, to the exclusion of most other concerns. Convicts and soldiers were the engine of colonisation, but they were not there by choice and their interest in the 'savages' rarely went beyond killing them, having sex with them, or avoiding them. There was a situation that gave little encouragement to humaneness, and much to its antithesis. To them, the natives were both an ever-present threat and the only means of sating their sexual desires. Thus, the demographic and ideological features of the colonising population ultimately, if not inevitably, incubated the Black War.

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<sup>56</sup> Sturma, 'Myall Creek and the Psychology of Mass Murder', pp. 63-66.

<sup>57</sup> Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, p. 100; W. H. Hudspeth, 'The British Army in Tasmania', c.1940, Royal Society of Tasmania archive, RS3/4(3); McMahon, 'The British Army and the Counter Insurgency Campaign', p. 56. McMahon pointed out that the average size of Van Diemen's Land's garrison between 1829 and 1830 was 965.

<sup>58</sup> J. F. McMahon, 'The British Army: Its Role in Counter-Insurgency in the Black War in Van Diemen's Land', *Tasmanian Historical Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1996, pp. 57-60; Deposition of Sergeant Armstrong, 1 April 1829, *Historical Records of Australia*, ser. 1, vol. 15, p. 317. See also Chapter 7.

<sup>59</sup> P. Hilton, 'Branded 'D' on the Left Side: A Study of Tasmanian Military Convicts', PhD thesis, University of Tasmania, History & Classics, 2010.



*Black*

## 2

**Background**

Aborigines have inhabited Australia for at least 50,000 years. After making their way south from the Indonesian archipelago, they quickly populated the continent.<sup>1</sup> The Tasmanian peninsular was at different times joined to mainland Australia by land bridges across what is now Bass Strait.<sup>2</sup> Sites in both northern and southern Tasmania bear evidence of Aboriginal occupation extending back at least 34,000 years.<sup>3</sup> John Taylor has argued from linguistic evidence that humans migrated to the Tasmanian landmass in several waves before it became an island around 10,000 BP.<sup>4</sup>

As an isolated people, the Vandemonians continued to change and adapt in various ways, but remarkably, they never became culturally or linguistically homogenous. Bands from different areas retained distinctive rock and body art, hunting and gathering practices, butchery and cooking methods, stone tools, shelters, watercraft, rituals and mythologies.<sup>5</sup> However, Vandemonians did diverge collectively from their mainland ancestors in a number of cultural and physical respects. The most marked of these was technological. Vandemonian toolkits were much simpler than those on the Australian mainland. In fact, as they adapted to more favourable conditions, they abandoned superfluous technologies until they had the simplest toolkits of any modern humans.<sup>6</sup> They were, nonetheless, a thriving and spectacularly resilient people, who had evolved rich social and spiritual lives.<sup>7</sup> Understanding something of these

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<sup>1</sup> J. Flood, *The Original Australians: The Story of the Aboriginal People*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, New South Wales, 2006, pp. 79-83, 178.

<sup>2</sup> For diagrams of the Bassian Plain and the probable migrations across it, see J. A. Taylor, 'A Study of the Palawa (Tasmanian Aboriginal) Place Names', unpublished manuscript, SLT, TL.Q 499.15 TAY, 2006, pp. 374-76. This plain connected Tasmania and Australia from approximately 36,000 BP – 29,000 BP and again from approximately 20,000 – 10,000 BP.

<sup>3</sup> R. Cosgrove, 'Late Pleistocene Behavioural Variation and Time Trends: The Case from Tasmania', *Archaeology in Oceania*, vol. 30, no. 3, 1995, p. 83; A. Pike-Tay, R. Cosgrove & J. Garvey, 'Systematic seasonal land use by late Pleistocene Tasmanian Aborigines', *Journal of Archaeological Science*, vol. 35, 2008, p. 2532; S. Bowdler, 'The Empty Coast: Conditions for human occupation in Southeast Australia during the late Pleistocene', *Terra Nullius*, vol. 32, 2010, pp. 177-79. Recent digs have suggested occupation as early as 40,000 BP, but these dates are yet to be firmly established.

<sup>4</sup> J. A. Taylor, 'A Study of the Palawa (Tasmanian Aboriginal) Place Names', MA thesis, University of Tasmania, Riawunna, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> N. J. B. Plomley, *The Tasmanian Aborigines*, Plomley Foundation, Launceston, Tasmania, 1993 [1977], pp. 45-55.

<sup>6</sup> R. Jones, 'The Tasmanian Paradox', in R. V. S. Wright (ed.), *Stone Tools as Cultural Markers: Change, Evolution and Complexity*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1977, p. 196; R. Vanderwal, 'Adaptive Technology in South West Tasmania', *Australian Archaeology*, vol. 8, 1978, pp. 107-27; D. Horton, 'Tasmanian adaptation', *Mankind*, vol.12, no.1, 1979, pp.28-34; Plomley, *The Tasmanian Aborigines*, p. 42.

<sup>7</sup> The adaption hypothesis is supported by the fact that Vandemonians endured the world's longest isolation and actually went through a period of economic intensification in the 2,000 years before colonisation (See, for instance, D. J. Mulvaney & J. Kamminga, *Prehistory of Australia*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, New South Wales, 1999, pp. 345-46; Vanderwal, 'Adaptive Technology in South West Tasmania', pp. 107-27).

ways of living and believing is essential for contextualising the Aboriginal perspectives discussed in this thesis, and it is the purpose of this Chapter.

## Social Structure

The most prominent unit of Vandemonian society was the band. Depending on the carrying capacity of the land, bands consisted of thirty to eighty people, all sharing a common dialect and migratory pattern.<sup>8</sup> These groups were comprised of hearth groups of four to ten (generally related) individuals.<sup>9</sup> Hearth groups shared the same campfire, and had the capacity to be semi-autonomous with regard to movement and subsistence, although most endeavours appear to have been coordinated at the band level.<sup>10</sup>

Scholars have traditionally assumed that the primary social unit was a larger grouping of bands, which they called a 'tribe'. Rhys Jones concluded there were nine tribes in total (see fig. 19), conforming vaguely to the groupings referred to by colonists – 'Big River tribe', 'Oyster Bay tribe', 'Ben Lomond tribe', 'Port Dalrymple tribe', etc. – but there are a number of problems with this orthodoxy.<sup>11</sup> For one, these colonial names were nothing more than crude labels given to any Aborigines seen in those areas.<sup>12</sup> Since all bands were migratory, these designations were largely arbitrary. What is more, the island's hunter-gatherer economies could not sustain groupings of hundreds of people in confined proximity.<sup>13</sup> Butressing these objections, Taylor found that Vandemonians did not have names for any of these supposed tribes, whereas they did for bands. He argued that tribes, as Jones conceived of them, never existed in Van Diemen's Land.<sup>14</sup> This is not to say that bands were completely solitary. There were certainly relationships and alliances between bands, generally those occupying contiguous areas and speaking similar dialects.<sup>15</sup> However, these 'socio-linguistic groups' – or

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, R. Jones, 'Tasmanian Tribes', in N. B. Tindale (ed.), *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia: Their Terrain, Environmental Controls, Distribution, Limits and Proper Names*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1974, p. 325.

<sup>9</sup> Jones, 'Tasmanian Tribes', p. 324.

<sup>10</sup> N. J. B. Plomley, *Tasmanian Tribes and Cicatrices as Tribal Indicators among the Tasmanian Aborigines*, QVMAG, Launceston, Tasmania, 1992. p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Jones, 'Tasmanian Tribes', pp. 319-354. It is telling that there is no mention of such groupings before the War. Although Robinson wrote of them, he did so in confusing and contradictory ways that add little to their credibility as a genuine category.

<sup>12</sup> Plomley, *Tasmanian Tribes and Cicatrices*, p. 5 & Plomley, *The Tasmanian Aborigines*, p. 26. Plomley also used 'tribe' (without qualification) to refer to both bands and socio-linguistic affiliates.

<sup>13</sup> Corroborees involving multiple bands did occur, but only at places where food was abundant and only at certain times of the year.

<sup>14</sup> J. A. Taylor, 'The Aboriginal Discovery and Colonisation of Tasmania', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers & Proceedings*, vol. 50, no. 4, 2003, p. 224. See also Taylor, 'A Study of the Palawa (Tasmanian Aboriginal) Place Names', c.2007, pp. 66-72; B. Brimfield, 'Did tribes exist in the Tasmanian Palaeo Society?', in B. Brimfield (eds.), *Controversial Paleo Tasmania*, self-published, Mowbray, Tasmania, 2011, unpaginated.

<sup>15</sup> Plomley, *Tasmanian Tribes and Cicatrices*, p. 5.

‘affiliates’, as I will call them – were not as tight-knit, stable or important as Jones believed.<sup>16</sup> Historian Graeme Calder referred to one of these putative affiliates as the ‘Mairremmener’.<sup>17</sup> Its constituent bands, which often fought each other, were known collectively to colonists as the ‘Oyster Bay-Big River tribe’. These bands roamed the territory north of the Derwent River, south of the highland lakes, and east of the Dee River to the coast.<sup>18</sup> They were responsible for much of the violence during the Black War, thus it is useful to have Mairremmener as a collective term for them, even if they did not recognise the category.

The leadership structure within bands is not fully understood either. Robinson declared (when it suited him) that the chiefs had limited power and thus could not serve as representatives in treaty negotiations, yet his journals are spotted with references to powerful and charismatic leaders whom he called ‘chiefs’.<sup>19</sup> Kickertopoller once told him that ‘the chief of a nation has great power. He is absolute, he can put to death whom he chooses, and can take away any of the young women of the band.’<sup>20</sup> On another occasion he observed that ‘WYMURICK the chief keeps the whole of his people in subjection.’<sup>21</sup> However, the most common observation was typified by the Quaker missionary James Backhouse, who established that the ‘chiefs among these tribes are merely heads of families of extraordinary prowess’.<sup>22</sup> Along with other generally reliable observers, Backhouse suggested chiefs were not autocratic leaders but rather respected figures looked to in times of turmoil.<sup>23</sup> Needless to say, these men played a pivotal role in the Black War.

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<sup>16</sup> As Chapter 10 explains, socio-linguistic affiliates probably became more significant during the Black War, especially as bands disintegrated and reformed as conglomerates.

<sup>17</sup> G. Calder, *Levéé, Line and Martial Law: A History of the Dispossession of the Mairremmener People of Van Diemen’s Land 1803-1832*, Fullers, Launceston, Tasmania, 2010. Calder, with John Taylor, derived ‘Mairremmener’ from a suffix form common to names of certain constituent bands. It was not contemporaneous.

<sup>18</sup> There is evidence that Mairremmener bands occasionally ventured north of the Central Plateau (Jones, ‘Tasmanian Tribes’, pp. 338-42).

<sup>19</sup> The term chief is not without its problematic connotations, but it is employed in this thesis without inverted commas because it was contemporaneous and non-derogatory.

<sup>20</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 292, journal 25 October 1830. Kickertopoller was an important envoy on Robinson’s friendly mission. He is discussed further in Chapter 16.

<sup>21</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 679, journal 27 August 1832.

<sup>22</sup> J. Backhouse, *A Narrative of a visit to the Australian Colonies*, Hamilton, Adams & Co., London, 1843, pp. 105-6.

<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, James Cook & Charles Jeffreys cited in G. W. Evans, *A Geographical, Historical, and Topographical Description of Van Diemen’s Land*, John Souter, London, 1822, pp. 12, 23-24; T. Dove, ‘Moral and Social Characteristics of the Aborigines of Tasmania’, *The Tasmanian Journal of Natural Science, Agriculture, Statistics, &c.*, vol. 1, 1842, p. 253; R. H. Davies, ‘On the Aborigines of Van Diemen’s Land’, *Tasmanian Journal of Natural Science*, vol. 2, 1846, p. 418. This would explain why explorers observed highly democratic relations, while colonists observed powerful chiefs during the Black War. In some cases, these men seem also to have assumed the role of shaman (see below).

## Territory and Movement

Vandemonian bands identified themselves with specific regions of the island. John Taylor has pointed out that Plomley's *Word-List of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Languages* contains thirty-three words under the heading 'country'.<sup>24</sup> Taylor has also shown that part of a band's name 'was a geographical reference to the location of the[ir] territory', which further points to the importance of country to identity.<sup>25</sup> Whilst we cannot know exactly how they conceptualised and related to country, the Vandemonians were clearly territorial. In 1831, for instance, the *Hobart Town Courier* claimed, 'from the evidence of Mr. Robinson and others, that the different tribes ... are almost, always at variance with one another, though, it would appear that the limits of the territory of each is well understood and mutually observed'.<sup>26</sup> In 1838, after ten years of experience among the survivors, Robinson asserted that the island 'was divided and sub-divided by the natives into districts, and contained many nations [bands]'.<sup>27</sup> But, even without evidence like this, the territoriality of Vandemonian bands can be deduced from the fact that, despite at least ten millennia of isolation, significant cultural differences persisted, and the population remained divided into four mutually unintelligible language groups.<sup>28</sup>

The respective territories of the Vandemonian bands were expansive and often shared with allies, but their migrations sometimes took them into foreign country.<sup>29</sup> Often they made forays in search of precious items such as red ochre (iron oxide clay), a mineral that was of great practical, aesthetic and spiritual importance.<sup>30</sup> Ochre was mined at only a handful of sites around the island, so access had to be negotiated with local bands, or the desired goods could

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<sup>24</sup> J. Taylor, 'Windschuttle's *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*: Linguistic Matters', *Tasmanian Historical Studies*, vol. 9, 2004, p. 102. See also H. Reynolds, 'Terra Nullius Reborn', in R. Manne (ed.) *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, Black Inc., Melbourne, 2003, pp. 109-38.

<sup>25</sup> Taylor, 'Windschuttle's *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*', p. 102.

<sup>26</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 22 January 1831, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Robinson's speech to Australian Aborigines Protection Society, 19 October 1838, [http://www.law.mq.edu.au/research/colonial\\_case\\_law/nsw/other\\_features/correspondence/robinson\\_speech\\_1838/](http://www.law.mq.edu.au/research/colonial_case_law/nsw/other_features/correspondence/robinson_speech_1838/) (2 February 2012). See also Brown to Aborigines Committee, 5 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 130-31; R. Jones, 'Hunting Forebears', in M. Roe (ed.) *The Flow of Culture: Tasmanian Studies*, Australian Academy of the Humanities, Canberra, 1987, p. 28; West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 20.

<sup>28</sup> See Taylor, 'A Study of the Palawa (Tasmanian Aboriginal) Place Names', 2006, pp. 37-61 & Jones, 'Tasmanian Tribes', p. 322. Taylor and Jones both argued for four language groups, though they derived this from different reasoning.

<sup>29</sup> Jones, 'Tasmanian Tribes', pp. 330-52. Jones found that some bands travelled distances of up to 600 miles annually, though most were more sedentary between May and September, gravitating towards the littorals and living largely off shellfish. See also Chapter 12.

<sup>30</sup> Ochre has been a mineral coveted by indigenous peoples throughout the world, but particularly in Australia. In Van Diemen's Land it was used, most notably, for insulation (when mixed with animal fat and smeared over the body) and ritual purposes. Although its exact spiritual significance is unclear, Vandemonians appear to have derived an aura of confidence from besmearing themselves with ochre, which might explain why they sought to procure it even at the very end of the War (A. Sagona, *Bruising the Red Earth: Ochre Mining and Ritual in Aboriginal Tasmania*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria, 1994, pp. 19-38; Roth, *The Aborigines of Tasmania*, pp. 127-28).

be acquired through trade.<sup>31</sup> Cultural knowledge, in the form of songs, dances and stories, was also exchanged when bands met to arrange marriages and conduct ceremonies.<sup>32</sup> However, the scarcity of evidence makes it difficult to establish the details of pre-settlement trade and diplomacy.

Another reason bands migrated was to regenerate food sources. Aborigines used a highly sophisticated system of land management – often called ‘fire-stick farming’<sup>33</sup> – to create what Bill Gammage has called ‘templates’ for encouraging the proliferation of certain species in specific areas.<sup>34</sup> Gammage found that the great extent and precision of these burning techniques is still evident in the landscape today. Deeply in tune with their surroundings, they knew where to go, when to go there, what to take, how to take it and when to leave it. Whilst we must not romanticise Aboriginal cultures, or overlook the hardships and violence their lives entailed, the Vandemonians’ survival over so many millennia is testament to their resilience and adaptability – virtues that came to the fore during the Black War.

### **Shelter, Diet and Health**

During the summer months most Vandemonians slept in the open air, employing windbreaks where necessary, but in the winter they built huts. On the rugged west and south coasts, where bands were more sedentary, huts were often large beehive constructions suitable for a dozen or more people. Easterners, on the other hand, tended to build smaller, less robust lean-tos and huts.<sup>35</sup> Food economies were also regionally distinct. On the coast, people lived predominantly on shellfish, supplementing their diets with littoral vegetation, seals and a variety of avian and

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<sup>31</sup> Jones (‘Tasmanian Tribes’, p. 328) argued that movements outside tribal territory was along well-defined roads, and based on a principle of ‘maximum access with minimum trespass.’ Archaeological and ethnographic evidence establishes the existence of trade networks spanning the length of the Island (L. L. Robson & N. J. B. Plomley, ‘Mining for Ochre by the Tasmanian Aborigines’, *The Artefact*, vol. 7, nos. 1-2, 1982, pp. 3-11). There is also evidence that spongolite stone (the best for making sharp cutting tools), which is found only in the west and northwest, was traded throughout the island (Plomley, *The Tasmanian Aborigines*, p. 42).

<sup>32</sup> See, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, p. 659, journal 5 July 1832. Taylor (‘A Study of the Palawa (Tasmanian Aboriginal) Place Names’, 2006, p. 70) argued that most contiguous bands differed from each other only in dialect, meaning that neighbours could usually understand each other. Jones (‘Tasmanian Tribes’, p. 331) referred to these connections as ‘dialect chains’. Women, who often married exogamously, became translators and diplomats in intertribal negotiations.

<sup>33</sup> ‘Fire-stick farming’ was coined by Rhys Jones in 1969. The long-standing question of whether or not Vandemonians could make fire appears to have been settled in the affirmative, according to Rebe Taylor in her recent article ‘The Polemics of Fire Making in Tasmania: The Historical Evidence Revisited’ (*Aboriginal History*, vol. 32, 2008, pp. 1-36).

<sup>34</sup> Gammage’s recent book *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines made Australia* (Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, New South Wales, 2011) is the preeminent work on Aboriginal land management. In addition to fire-stick farming, some groups also manipulated their environment through the use of fish-traps and wells (see also Jones, ‘Tasmanian Tribes’, p. 333 & McFarlane, *Beyond Awakening*, pp. 13-16).

<sup>35</sup> Plomley, *The Tasmanian Aborigines*, pp. 32-35.

marsupial species.<sup>36</sup> Betty Hiatt found that vegetable foods constituted only around eight per cent of the diet of eastern bands, while they made up about twenty per cent of the west coast diet. Alternatively, bands that spent the majority of the year inland relied chiefly on hunting.<sup>37</sup> Because of these different food economies, there was significant regional variation in Aborigines' day-to-day lives.

Pre-colonial Van Diemen's Land appears to have been free of serious endemic diseases, still its inhabitants suffered from common ailments and injuries. Like most humans at the time, Aborigines attributed illness to evil spirits, sometimes called 'Raegowrapper'.<sup>38</sup> They employed a host of treatments to combat these maladies,<sup>39</sup> but the standard panacea was to make deep incisions into the affected area 'to let out the devil'.<sup>40</sup> Another method was to apply intense force to the area.<sup>41</sup> Through the medium of a shaman, Aborigines also enlisted the help of more benign spirits.<sup>42</sup> One colonist observed that '[e]very tribe of the Blacks has a medical man, peculiar to itself, who is consulted in all cases of sickness or accident.'<sup>43</sup> Moreover, health was an important concern for Aborigines, to whom it was indistinguishable from spiritual wellbeing.<sup>44</sup>

## Gender Relations and Law

Gender relations in Vandemonian society were strongly patriarchal, and some European observers wrote unfavourably on its treatment of women. The early settler George Lloyd emphasised 'the slavish exactions of savage husbands', and claimed that '[h]ard labour is the

<sup>36</sup> For an exhaustive list of the known and likely plant foods of the Aborigines, see N. J. B. Plomley, 'Plant Foods of the Tasmanian Aborigines', *Records of the Queen Victoria Museum*, no. 101, 1993, pp. 1-27.

<sup>37</sup> B. Hiatt, 'Food Quest and the Economy of the Tasmanian Aborigines', *Oceania*, vol. 38, no. 3, 1968, p. 119. The staple foods for inland bands were kangaroo, wombat, possum and emu, and for this reason they tended to roam further over the course of the year than coastal bands.

<sup>38</sup> For example, *Friendly Mission*, pp. 62, 69-70, 143, 172-73, journals 27 May, 9 July 1829, 2 February, 30 March 1830. There is no good evidence Vandemonians believed – as mainland Australians did – that illness was due to sorcery. Even introduced diseases do not appear to have been attributed to the invaders, but to traditional spiritual causes.

<sup>39</sup> See, for instance, the list of traditional treatments enumerated by James Bonwick (*The Daily Life and Origins of the Tasmanians*, Sampson Low, London, 1870, p. 89).

<sup>40</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 319, journal 3 December 1830. A number of colonists observed this technique, which was employed by Europeans for different but equally misguided reasons. It often hastened death. The term 'devil' was used by Vandemonians as an English rendering of 'spirit'. It usually referred to evil spirits, but not always.

<sup>41</sup> This could be achieved by someone pressing hard on the affected area with the knee, foot or fist (see, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, p. 635, journal 29 April 1832) or by tying cord tightly around it (see, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, pp. 70-72, journal 11 July 1829).

<sup>42</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 400, 670-71, journals 30 June 1831, 31 July 1832. The seminal work on shamanism is still Mircea Eliade's *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (2<sup>nd</sup> paperback (ed.), Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2004 [1964]).

<sup>43</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 4 April 1829, p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> J. A. Taylor, 'Aboriginal Language of Health and Well-Being in Tasmania', in P. Richards, B. Valentine & T. Dunning (ed.), *Effecting a Cure: Aspects of Health and Medicine in Launceston*, Myola House of Publishing, Launceston, Tasmania, 2006, pp. 3-18.

matrimonial inheritance of the poor gin'.<sup>45</sup> During migrations, women carried everything except the weapons, so the men could hunt. They were also primarily responsible for the collection of shellfish and plant materials, as well as for food preparation, hut construction, and the care of infants.<sup>46</sup> Women were enormously important to Aboriginal society, and to them this was the normal and appropriate division of labour. To some extent, domestic violence must also have been normalised. French explorer Jacques Labillardière reported that women were 'often victims of the brutality of their tyrants.'<sup>47</sup> Several other observers also recorded evidence of domestic violence, and in varying degrees it was probably something most women endured.<sup>48</sup> This violence notwithstanding, Vandemonian society generally appears to have been characterised by loving relationships, not just between men and women, but also between parents, children and other relatives.<sup>49</sup>

Violence was extremely common in most pre-modern tribal societies, and Vandemonian society was no exception.<sup>50</sup> Robinson's Aboriginal envoys gave him more than a dozen accounts of small but fierce internecine clashes, mostly ambushes or arranged battles.<sup>51</sup> There were several common causes of these conflicts, which Jones believed usually took place near territorial boundaries.<sup>52</sup> One source of provocation appears to have been trespass, but most reported violence centred on women.<sup>53</sup> Feuds could arise from jealousies or failed marriage agreements, but there is also evidence that bands raided their enemies for women.<sup>54</sup> Custom dictated that such offences had to be avenged, which could create generational cycles of

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<sup>45</sup> G. Lloyd, *Thirty-Three Years in Tasmania and Victoria: Being the actual experience of the Author interspersed with Historic Jottings, Narratives, and Counsel to Emigrants*, Houlston & Wright, London, 1862, p. 44. See also, for instance, Calder, *Some Accounts*, p. 33 & Davies, 'On the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land', p. 415.

<sup>46</sup> These gender roles were widely attested to in the literature. See, for instance, Plomley, *The Tasmanian Aborigines* & Jones, 'Tasmanian Tribes'. Children also performed an important function within the band by assisting their mothers.

<sup>47</sup> Cited in N. J. B. Plomley & J. Piard-Bernier, *The General: The Visits of the Expedition led by Bruny d'Entrecasteaux to Tasmanian waters in 1792 and 1793*, QVMAG, Launceston, Tasmania, 1993, p. 295.

<sup>48</sup> See Jeffreys, *Van Diemen's Land*, pp. 118-24; *Friendly Mission*, p. 562, journal 24 November 1831; *Weep in Silence*, p. 420, journal 4 February 1837.

<sup>49</sup> See Chapter 12.

<sup>50</sup> Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, pp.47-55. The evidence relating to internecine conflict in Van Diemen's Land comes entirely from the colonial period, so scholars are forced to make a leap of faith in extrapolating from this evidence to pre-colonial society.

<sup>51</sup> For examples of arranged battles, see *Friendly Mission*, pp. 425, 652, journals 1 August 1831 & 20 July 1832; *Weep in Silence*, p. 512, journal 15 December 1837; Clark to Colonial Secretary, 29 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 706-11. See Chapter 10 for more on internecine conflict.

<sup>52</sup> Jones, 'Tasmanian Tribes', p. 349.

<sup>53</sup> For examples of trespass related violence, see O'Connor to Aborigines Committee, 17 March 1830, in A. G. L. Shaw (ed.), *Van Diemen's Land: Copies of all Correspondence between Lieutenant-Governor Arthur and his Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies, on the Subject of the Military Operations lately carried on against the Aboriginal Inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land*, Tasmanian Historical Research Association, Hobart, 1971, p. 55; West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 20; *Friendly Mission*, pp. 291-92, journal 25 October 1830; N. J. B. Plomley (ed.), *The Westlake Papers: Records of Interviews in Tasmania by Ernest Westlake, 1908-1910*, QVMAG, Launceston, Tasmania, 1991, pp. 143-44.

<sup>54</sup> See, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, pp. 291-92, 410-11, 592-93, 586-87, journals 25 October 1830, 15 July, 15 & 20 December 1831.

violence.<sup>55</sup> Evidence of prearranged battles suggests that such conflicts were probably constrained by rules, and many of the feuds within bands and among allies exhibited the hallmarks of a ritualised system of law – one closely tied to notions of honour and proportional retaliation.<sup>56</sup> From the available evidence, it appears several types of interpersonal and group violence were endemic to Vandemonian society, but these generally manifested on a small scale that members accepted as normal.<sup>57</sup>

## Cosmology

The Vandemonians were animists, who perceived the agency of spirit-beings in all the workings of nature.<sup>58</sup> Like most humans, they developed complex mythologies to make sense of their perceived reality. However, many of the details of their spiritual lives remain obscure. Robinson was the first to make serious observations of their beliefs, but their society had already collapsed by this stage.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, Robinson wrote with palpable condescension and derision, hoping as he was to supplant their ‘childlike superstitions’ with Christianity. Yet, even if contemporaries had taken a stronger and more objective interest, a prerequisite for properly understanding the nuances of a foreign belief system is knowledge of the language in which it is expressed. Neither Robinson nor any of his literate contemporaries learnt more than a smattering of any Vandemonian language.<sup>60</sup> Thus, our evidence comes to us through an imposing cultural and linguistic barrier, and the lens of racial and religious prejudice has distorted it further. Nevertheless, if these factors are taken into account, it is possible to reach some tentative conclusions about the Vandemonians’ cosmology.

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<sup>55</sup> See, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, pp. 431-32, 586-87, journal 13 August & 15 December 1831.

<sup>56</sup> See, for instance, G. W. Walker, *The Life and Labours of George Washington Walker*, J. Backhouse & C. Tylor (ed.), Bennett & Brady, London, 1862, pp. 101-2; West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, pp. 81-82; *Friendly Mission*, pp. 448-49, journal 30 August 1831; J. Ross, *The Settler in Van Diemen’s Land*, Marsh Walsh, North Melbourne, 1975 [1836], pp. 93-94; M. Fels, ‘Culture Contact in the County of Buckinghamshire, Van Diemen’s Land, 1803-11’, *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers & Proceedings*, vol. 29, no. 2, 1982, p. 59; E. FitzSymonds, *A Looking Glass for Tasmania: Letters, Petitions and other Manuscripts Relating to Van Diemen’s Land 1808-1845*, Sullivan’s Cove, Adelaide, 1980, pp. 35-36. The conclusion that violence was traditionally not indiscriminate is further indicated by the evidence that no white woman or child was harmed before 1828, except for the wounding of Mrs Osborne in June 1824 (see fig. 10).

<sup>57</sup> For internecine violence, see Chapter 10 and Appendix 3.

<sup>58</sup> For more on animism and why it is the appropriate way to describe Aboriginal belief systems, see G. Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2006.

<sup>59</sup> Some important observations were also made by James Backhouse, George Washington Walker and Jorgen Jorgenson.

<sup>60</sup> Ad hoc vocabularies were compiled by Robinson and others, but the ability of these men to speak or understand the various dialects was extremely limited.



All recorded human societies have had creation stories. Vandemonian myths were strikingly similar in content and structure to the elaborate 'Dreaming' myths of mainland Australia.<sup>61</sup>

Woorrady, one of Robinson's most trusted envoys, informed him that 'LALLER a small ant first made the natives'.<sup>62</sup> '[O]n his first formation', Woorrady continued, the black man:

had a tail like a kangaroo and no joints in his knee; that ... he never could lay down and always had to stand up, and was obliged to sleep standing; that DROE.MER.DEEN.NE [a spirit connected with the star Canopus] cut off his tail and rubbed grease on the wound and made joints to his knees. He then for the first time sat on the ground and expressed his approbation of the comfort.<sup>63</sup>

Humans were not Laller's only creation, however. Woorrady explained that this ant also:

made all the rivers; he cut little streams and thus made big rivers. Said that he made the kangaroo out of the ground and that they run away: he described it by putting his hand on the ground and shewing how they came out and run away.<sup>64</sup>

In Aboriginal mythology, beings were not only made from the earth, but also transformed into it. According to Trugernanna, the Bruny (then spelt Brune) Islanders believed an ancestor spirit called Moinee:

was hurled from heaven and dwelt on the earth, and died and was turned into a stone and is at Coxes Bight, which was his own country. The natives say that there is a large stone standing up which is MOINEE and that he was a native and turned into this stone.<sup>65</sup>

The previous week, Robinson had been given a different version, in which Moinee 'used to fight with the devils ... that the devils stopped in the ground and that MOIHERNEE took him out of the ground and made PARLEVAR [black man].'<sup>66</sup> Such evidence demonstrates not only that the ancestral spirit-beings of Vandemonian mythology were implicated in the creation of

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<sup>61</sup> If Dreaming (or proto-Dreaming) existed before the flooding of the Bassian Plain (there is inconclusive evidence dating it to before 20,000 BP), then such parallels ought to be expected. Although this analogy with mainland Australia should not be taken too far, it is worth keeping in mind when assessing Vandemonian belief systems.

<sup>62</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 408-9, journal 12 July 1831. Confusingly, Robinson later observed his envoys to 'say that DROMEADEENE made the natives' (p. 409, journal 13 July 1831) and at another point 'WOORRADY said that MOIHERNEE made natives' (pp. 404-6, journal 7 July 1831).

<sup>63</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 405, journal 7 July 1831. This is remarkably similar to, for instance, the Aranda myth 'Rella Manerinja' recorded by Carl Stehlow in 1907 (*Die Aranda-und Loritja-Stämme*, vol. 1, Joseph Baer & Co., Frankfurt, p. 3).

<sup>64</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 405, journal 7 July 1831. Laller, however, was not the only ancestor spirit to whom creative powers were attributed. Robinson (*Friendly Mission*, pp. 433, 435-36, journals 15 & 16 August 1831) was also told that 'MOIHERNEE made all the rivers, that he cut the ground and made the rivers.' Alternatively, people from the east coast region believed 'the two stars in the Milky Way made man, made rivers, gave the fire &c.' There is a clear resonance between these myths and the rainbow serpent myths of mainland Australia.

<sup>65</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 409, journal 12 July 1831.

<sup>66</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 406, journal 7 July 1831.

the landscape, but also that they continued to dwell there.<sup>67</sup> This is what Nancy Munn described, in her landmark study of Warlpiri and Pitjantjatjara mythology, as ‘subject-object transformation’.<sup>68</sup>

Vandemonian creation myths also focused strongly on celestial bodies. Robinson found the Aborigines ‘spoke on the subject of the stars with great zest’; indeed, ‘they have names for the stars and constellations and are aware that they revolve ... They call the black spot in the Milky Way or Orion’s Belt a stingaree [*sic*] and say the blackfellows are spearing it.’<sup>69</sup> He noted further how they ‘described constellations in the heavens as resembling men and women, men fighting, animals, and limbs of men; together with names for the stars.’<sup>70</sup> The Bruny Islanders, for instance, told him ‘that the two stars in the Milky Way are two men,<sup>71</sup> and Mars is his foot and the Milky Way his road.’<sup>72</sup> The sun and the moon were particularly important to this genre of Vandemonian mythology.<sup>73</sup> Robinson was told by the Bruny Islanders:

that the kangaroo and mutton-fish [crayfish] asked the moon to stop there [over Oyster Bay], that the moon was a LOONER, woman, and that she was roasting mutton-fish when the sun (PARNUEN) came and swept her away, and she tumbling in the fire was hurt on her side and then rolled into the sea, and afterwards went up to the sky (WARRANGERLY) and stopped there with her husband the sun.<sup>74</sup>

Animals too were believed to have spirits. In 1831, for instance, Robinson’s envoys explained to him the Wombat’s creation story:

two black men was asleep when a DROEGERDY came at night and scraped fire on them ... they caught hold of his leg, and ... put him in the ground; and that afterwards

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<sup>67</sup> See, for instance, Roth, *The Aborigines of Tasmania*, pp. 54-55 & *Friendly Mission*, pp. 148, 201, 293-94, 555-57, 942, journals 11 February, 8 June 1830, 30 October, 19 November 1831, 24 July 1834. See also the discussion of animal creation stories and funerary sites below.

<sup>68</sup> N. Munn, ‘The Transformation of Subjects into Objects in Warlpiri and Pitjantjatjara Myth’, in M. Charlesworth (ed.), *Religion in Aboriginal Australia*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1984, pp. 56-82.

<sup>69</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 894-95, journal 13 March 1834. Joseph Milligan (*Vocabulary of the Dialects of some of the Aboriginal Tribes of Tasmania*, Government Printer, Hobart, 1890, pp. 13-14) recorded the same story in much greater detail. He followed it with an equally fascinating myth entitled ‘Legend of the Origin of Fire’.

<sup>70</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 399, journal 27 June 1831.

<sup>71</sup> These stars were Pumperneowlle and Pineterrinner – or Castor and Pollux.

<sup>72</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 433, journal 15 August 1831 (see also, pp. 435-36, journal 16 August 1831). Robinson also noted that ‘[t]he Cape Portland natives confirmed this’, which indicates that some myths were shared between different socio-linguistic affiliates. The story has striking parallels with the legend of *Jurumu* and *Mudati* from Bathurst Island (C. P. Mountford, *The Tiwi: Their Art, Myth and Symbolism*, Phoenix House, London, 1958, p. 25.)

<sup>73</sup> See, for instance Tyrell to Anstey, 15 January 1830, TAHO, CSO1/320, section F; Brown to Aborigines Committee, 5 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 137-39. Aborigines also carved cicatrix patterns of the sun and moon into their bodies.

<sup>74</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 412, journal 17 July 1831.

they used to catch him and eat him. This was the first intimation of the badger [wombat].<sup>75</sup>

Stories of animal creation are often associated with totemism and totemic law (a feature of mainland Australian ‘Law’), as are taboos on eating particular animals.<sup>76</sup> Food taboos regulated the consumption of scale fish and certain marsupial species, particularly wallabies and kangaroos.<sup>77</sup> These only applied to some people and often only to animals of a particular sex. In 1832, for instance, the Quaker missionary George Washington Walker observed that ‘[s]ome will eat only the male of a particular species, others only the female, and I am assured by those who know well their habits, that they would rather starve than infringe this rule.’<sup>78</sup> Walker also mentioned a song that described those animals that were off-limits to married women.<sup>79</sup> Such observations are supported by Robinson’s journals, which mention taboos on a number of occasions, indicating that they were common to all Vandemonians.<sup>80</sup> Taboos were almost certainly connected to the forbidden animal’s spirit and associated mythology, and they may also explain why Aborigines did not eat introduced species.<sup>81</sup>

In Aboriginal cosmology, humans were possessed of spirits also. Robinson wrote on a number of occasions of people being possessed by a personal ‘devil’ or totem spirit.<sup>82</sup> Those mentioned were usually chiefs or shamans. The northeast chief, Mannalargenna, spoke constantly of a powerful guiding spirit. Often he was gripped by violent convulsions that he and his terrified onlookers took to be possession experiences, usually resulting in some profound insight.<sup>83</sup> Mannalargenna was a revered shaman, but there is reason to believe that all

<sup>75</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 405-6, journal 7 July 1831. See also the story of the pademelon’s creation (p. 406, journal 7 July 1831).

<sup>76</sup> Julia Clark and Rhys Jones (in J. Clark, ‘Devils and Horses: Religious and Creative Life in Tasmanian Aboriginal Society’, in M. Roe (ed.), *The Flow of Culture: Tasmanian Studies*, Australian Academy of the Humanities, Canberra, 1987, pp. 28-29) both believed that, like their counterparts on the Australian mainland, Vandemonians engaged in totemism. For further evidence suggestive of totemism, see Gilbert Robertson’s journal, 13 January 1829, TAHO, CSO1/331, p. 115; *Hobart Town Courier*, 21 March 1829, p. 3; *Friendly Mission*, pp. 523-24, 596, journals 23 October & 24 December 1831.

<sup>77</sup> The question of whether or why Aborigines did not eat scale fish has generated much controversy. Excavations at Rocky Cape by Rhys Jones in the 1960s, together with observers’ accounts (for instance, Backhouse, *A Narrative*, p. 436) have been the basis for a long-standing assumption that all Aborigines ceased eating scale fish around 3,500 BP (Jones, ‘The Tasmanian Paradox’, pp. 189-208). More recently, Ian McFarlane (*Beyond Awakening*, pp. 10-16) and Nicholas Brodie (‘A ‘highly significant’ Silence: Fish Bones at Rocky Cape and the Tasmanian Archaeological Sequence’, unpublished paper, 2010) have called this assumption into question. On balance though, the evidence suggests that at least some bands had taboos on scale fish.

<sup>78</sup> Walker, *The Life and Labours*, p. 110. Backhouse (*A Narrative*, p. 171) observed the same practice.

<sup>79</sup> Walker, *The Life and Labours*, pp. 100-1.

<sup>80</sup> See, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, pp. 166-67, 426, 634-35, 756-57, journals 24 March 1830, 3 August 1831, 28 April 1832, 12 May 1833.

<sup>81</sup> See Chapter 7.

<sup>82</sup> There are a host of such references in Robinson’s journals August 1831 – June 1832.

<sup>83</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 429-30, 445-47, 521-24, 572-76, journals 12, 27 & 28 August 1831, 21 & 23 October 1831, 5 & 6 December 1831. Mannalargenna, who will be referred to often in this book, distinguished himself as one of Robinson’s most important guides. He was also highly respected among his fellow Vandemonians, friend and foe alike.

Vandemonians assumed a personal totem or spirit.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, scarce as the evidence is, it suggests they recognised a complex pantheon of spirit-beings who personified the forces of nature, and of good and evil,<sup>85</sup> as well as a host of minor spirits associated with animals, places and people. This was how Vandemonians perceived the world around them, so it stands to reason that the violent chaos of the War years was also experienced as spiritual chaos.

## Death

Death was a very important rite of passage in Van Diemen's Land. Most bands cremated their dead, though some were known to place them upright in hollow trees, impaled in position with spears.<sup>86</sup> There is also evidence that bodies were occasionally entombed in specially made huts, or buried beneath shallow mounds.<sup>87</sup> In all cases, the funerary and mourning processes were highly ritualised. Walker recorded 'that for those who are removed by death, they are in the habit of setting apart a certain portion of the day to indulge in lamentation; near relatives are said to keep up the practice for months after the decease [*sic*] of their companions.'<sup>88</sup>

The Vandemonians believed in an afterlife, though accounts vary in their details.<sup>89</sup> The most common response, when asked what happened after death, was that people went to an isle of the dead, which is reminiscent of mainland Australian traditions.<sup>90</sup> A northwest Aborigine, Nicermenic, told Edward Curr 'that they burn their dead, who are supposed to go to some very distant place over the sea to the north-west'.<sup>91</sup> On enquiring 'where they went to after death', Robinson was told 'to England'.<sup>92</sup> Years later, he found '[t]he natives of the west coast of VDL [also] believe when they die that they go to PONE.DIM, i.e. country a long way off to

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<sup>84</sup> The discussion of death and funerary rites in the next section supports the assumption that all Vandemonians were believed to possess spirits. They may also have had the equivalent of 'Dreaming sites' (see Walker, *Life and Labours*, pp. 102-3).

<sup>85</sup> The same type of cosmic dualism was observed all over the Australian mainland.

<sup>86</sup> The best source for these practices is again Robinson. Other sources include Backhouse, *A Narrative*, pp. 104-20.

<sup>87</sup> See, for instance, N. J. B. Plomley (ed.), *Jorgen Jorgenson and the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land: Being a Reconstruction of his 'Lost' Book on their Customs and Habits*, Blubber Head Press, Hobart, 1991, pp. 67-68; Bonwick, *The Lost Tasmanian Race*, p. 48.

<sup>88</sup> Walker, *Life and Labours*, p. 108.

<sup>89</sup> This was probably due not just to communication problems, but also to the secretive nature of certain aspects of their ritual life.

<sup>90</sup> Many mainland Australians thought the isle of the dead was a stop-off point before one's spirit ascended to the stars. In Van Diemen's Land, Robert Clark (cited in Bonwick, *Daily Life and Origins*, p. 181) heard both views, some saying they went to the stars, others to the islands. A clue to why Vandemonians believed both that the spirits of the dead departed *and* that they remained for a time to 'haunt' the funerary site might be found in the mainland Australian belief in 'twin souls', but there is no way to be sure.

<sup>91</sup> Curr to Colonial Secretary, 5 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/330, p. 85.

<sup>92</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 64, journal 31 May 1829. Robinson continued: 'I scarcely credited what I heard. I asked the question again, when they all replied that they went to England after death'.

England and that they then appear as white people.’<sup>93</sup> This probably reflects an original assumption that white men were ancestors returned from the isle of the dead.<sup>94</sup>

Deceased persons left behind powerful spirits that haunted the funerary site. The convict writer Jorgen Jorgenson observed that Vandemonians ‘would rather go miles round than pass close to them.’<sup>95</sup> One might enlist the help of these spirits, though this could be perilous.<sup>96</sup> When Robinson was trying to discover the whereabouts of the hostile Mairremmener people, Mannalargenna told him ‘a dead man’s devil that had been put in a tree was walking about and would tell him about [their location]. He set off in the woods; Tom and another native trembling followed him; the women lay as still as mice.’<sup>97</sup> Human remains were thought to be especially powerful. On one occasion, while inspecting a funerary site, Robinson:

found what I thought was small pieces of bone, about the size of the thumbnail. It seemed to me it was the spot where some natives had been burned and that these were the ashes. Took one of the pieces to my natives and asked them what it was. They shrieked out, said it was RORGRE RAINER, dead man’s bones. Some of them trembled as though their dissolution was near.<sup>98</sup>

In other circumstances, however, human remains were used as charms, and their powers harnessed for good.<sup>99</sup> Either way, the Vandemonians took death and the spiritual forces it unleashed seriously. These things could be managed when death was infrequent, but during the Black War it was all around them. Often they could not retrieve the bodies of fallen kinsfolk, let alone perform the proper funeral rites. In such cases, the dissatisfied spirit of the dead man might have been considered as dangerous as the white man’s gun – the two may even have been connected.

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<sup>93</sup> *Weep in Silence*, p. 507, journal 4 December 1837. See also Backhouse, *A Narrative*, p. 181; R. Hare, *The Voyage of the Caroline from England to Van Diemen’s Land and Batavia in 1827-28*, I. Marriott (ed.), Longmans, London, 1927, p. 40; E. Worms & H. Petri, *Australian Aboriginal Religions*, Spectrum Publications, Richmond, Victoria, 1998 [1968], p. 709.

<sup>94</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>95</sup> Plomley, *Jorgenson and the Aborigines*, p. 67. Jorgenson (1780-1841) was a highly interesting character. In addition to being a prolific writer, he was a seaman, adventurer and general rogue, who is important to the story of the Black War both for his rich commentaries and for his role in leading parties against the Aborigines (see D. Sprod, *The Usurper: Jorgen Jorgenson and his Turbulent Life in Iceland and Van Diemen’s Land 1780-1841*, Blubber Head Press, Hobart, 2001).

<sup>96</sup> See, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, pp. 670-71, 907-9 journals 31 July 1832, 7 April 1834.

<sup>97</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 572, journal 25 October 1831

<sup>98</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 198, journal 1 June 1830.

<sup>99</sup> See, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, pp. 69-70, 184-85, 300-1, journals 9 July 1829, 18 April, 3 November 1830. The same custom was widely observed among mainland Australian peoples (see, for instance, A. W. Howitt, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1996 [1904], pp. 456-57).

## Ritual and Ceremony

Ceremonies of song and dance were central to Vandemonian cultural life. Some of these were cloaked in secrecy. Of one in particular, the naturalist Richard Davies wrote in 1846 that they were ‘extremely jealous of this ceremony being witnessed by strangers; but I had, upon one occasion, an opportunity of being an ear-witness of it the whole night.’<sup>100</sup> However, most ceremonies appear to have been open and frequent events,<sup>101</sup> serving a variety of functions, from storytelling and entertainment, to propitiation and mourning, to healing and betrothal.<sup>102</sup> Because of his dismissive attitude, Robinson rarely recorded much detail, though he was occasionally impressed, such as when the women at Port Davey ‘bound[ed] from one position to another. Legs, arms, head and every part of the body is in motion. Their eyes also are made to act their part and at the same time they keep up a song which regulates their motions.’<sup>103</sup> One of the more detailed descriptions comes from the Silesian agriculturalist, Adolphus Schayer, who observed dances performed by Robinson’s party, remarking that they ‘usually represent a topic which one can easily guess’:

The warrior ... gets so worked up that, after a few minutes he can barely speak, and can only utter inarticulate sounds and perform actions accompanied by movements expressing anger and the love of fighting, and in that way he comes to a state of mind which is close to madness. This moment seems to be the specific aim of the whole performance, because it’s then that the men rush towards him, and giving vent to frightful screams, begin a dance as ordered by the chief.<sup>104</sup>

The most visible features of these performances, such as the pantomimic representations and the rise in tempo to a point of ecstasy, were all reminiscent of mainland Australian ceremonies.

Ceremonies intended to propitiate or invoke the favour of certain spirits were also observed in Van Diemen’s Land. Robinson witnessed men reciting a particular song as they straightened their spears and suspected it was ‘to invoke the spirit’.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, he observed that, before Aboriginal women dived for shellfish, ‘they stand on the rocks in rather an obscene position

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<sup>100</sup> Davies, ‘On the Aborigines of Van Diemen’s Land’, p. 418. This may have been an initiation ceremony. No indigenous society is known to have been without some rite of passage into adulthood, but because so little ethnography was undertaken in Van Diemen’s Land, nothing can be concluded with confidence, but a substantial body of circumstantial evidence concerning secret ceremonies, elaborate ceremonial grounds, cicatrix and other indicators of initiation rites suggest the Vandemonians were no exception. See especially Clark, ‘Devils and Horses’, pp. 50-68.

<sup>101</sup> Evening dances were routine events. West claimed they occurred ‘thrice a-week’, which is consistent with Robinson’s journals.

<sup>102</sup> See, for instance, Davies, ‘On the Aborigines of Van Diemen’s Land’, p. 416; Clark, ‘Devils and Horses’, pp. 53-56; Horton, ‘Tasmanian Adaptation’, p. 33.

<sup>103</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 175, journal 5 April 1830.

<sup>104</sup> Cited in I. McFarlane, ‘Adolphus Schayer: Van Diemen’s Land and the Berlin papers’, *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers & Proceedings*, vol. 57, no. 2, 2010, pp. 105-118. To Robinson, this was just ‘a little hilarity’, thus he never once bothered to describe Aboriginal ceremonies in detail. McFarlane only recently discovered Schayer’s account, thus we are reminded of how absence of evidence is not proof of absence.

<sup>105</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 532, journal 3 November 1831.

and chant a song'.<sup>106</sup> Another type of propitiatory ritual was performed by some of the women removed to Bass Strait by sealing gangs. One of these women assured Robinson:

that the song was the devil's song and their attitude is a homage paid to the fire spirits ... They say that they sing to please the devil, that the devil tells them to sing plenty. These devotees of the devil are excessive in their devotions. They continue to chant their devil song and perform their rites at every opportunity.<sup>107</sup>

Ceremonies also functioned as a means of intertribal communication. Bands sometimes danced for or with each other as a way of consolidating amicable relations;<sup>108</sup> at other times dances functioned as a warning or show of aggression.<sup>109</sup> Even people who spoke mutually unintelligible languages were able to communicate using dance.<sup>110</sup> Bands met for various reasons throughout the year, but prearranged 'grand corroborees', consisting of several affiliated bands, appear to have been infrequent.<sup>111</sup> Jorgenson claimed that every November there were large intertribal meetings on the plains northwest of the Ouse River.<sup>112</sup> It is probable that these gatherings provided the circumstances for cultural exchange, alliance building, conflict resolution, entertainment, initiation, marriage and betrothal and various other rites, as they did on the Australian mainland. However, like so much else about the Vandemonians, the dearth of evidence means we cannot be certain.<sup>113</sup> All we know for sure is that ceremonies were fundamental to their cultural lives, and that the Black War made these important events increasingly difficult to conduct.

In the Vandemonians' animist cosmology, everything was attributed to spirit-beings. The nuances of their mythologies remain a mystery, but it appears from the surviving evidence that they strongly resembled mainland Australian belief systems. The interplay between animals, humans and celestial bodies; the tension between good and evil; and the subject-object transformations were all present in Vandemonian mythology and law, just as they were on the mainland. Likewise, their intellectual and spiritual lives were comparably rich and

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<sup>106</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 166, journal 24 March 1830. James Kelly (K. M. Bowden, *Captain James Kelly of Hobart Town*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1964, pp. 35-44) observed this same phenomenon in 1816.

<sup>107</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 334, journal 25 December 1830. See also pp. 284-85, 317, journals 15 October & 25 November 1830. This dance had an accompanying mythology that is discussed in Chapter 6.

<sup>108</sup> During his missions, Robinson often observed newly surrendered bands to dance with his envoys.

<sup>109</sup> See *Friendly Mission*, pp. 682-89, journals 3 & 4 September 1832.

<sup>110</sup> See, for instance, Davies, 'On the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land', p. 416; Clark, 'Devils and Horses', p. 56.

<sup>111</sup> Contemporary accounts of these events are rare, not only because they were uncommon, but also because the rapidity of invasion rendered them unfeasible by the late 1820s. One of the more colourful of these accounts comes to us from George Lloyd (*Thirty-Three Years*, pp. 43-49).

<sup>112</sup> Plomley, *Jorgenson and the Aborigines*, p. 68.

<sup>113</sup> There are many reasons for the paucity of the written record and these ought serve as a caution against reading too much into evidentiary absences. If, for instance, Robinson's journals had been destroyed we would know almost nothing about Vandemonian myths. When the myriad impediments to accurate recording are also considered, we ought be surprised, not at how little evidence there is, but rather, at how much.

sophisticated. The beliefs and practices summarised in this Chapter constituted the Vandemonians' sense of normality, and it is instructive to note how vastly they differed from the invaders' culture, and from our own. These differences must, therefore, be kept clearly in mind when interpreting the Vandemonians' behaviour from colonial sources, and when imagining how they experienced invasion.



*White*

## 3

**Road to War**

On 4 March 1772, the French explorers under Marion du Fresne became the first Europeans to encounter the natives of Van Diemen's Land. When the crew rowed ashore at Marion Bay and attempted to greet a curious band, no one present could have grasped the full historic significance of the meeting. Culturally and technologically, there had never been a meeting between such fundamentally different people. By implication, as Jared Diamond proposed, 'no two peoples on earth were less equipped to understand each other.'<sup>1</sup> Their brief meeting began on friendly terms, but for reasons the visitors did not understand, it ended in bloodshed. Following du Fresne, seven British and two more French expeditions visited harbours in the island's southeast before colonisation, most achieving some communication with the natives.<sup>2</sup> These later encounters, whilst not always genial, were never openly hostile.

The explorers who made brief visits to Van Diemen's Land between 1772 and 1802 differed in a number of ways from the colonists who began settling in 1803. The former were men of science, curious and generally well intentioned towards the island's inhabitants. The latter, however, had little interest in the natives, save for avoiding or exploiting them. This Chapter surveys the experiences of colonists during the first two decades of settlement, and their evolving attitudes towards the natives. It also examines the circumstances and developments that set the colony on a path to war.

**Kangaroo Economy<sup>3</sup>**

The British seized Van Diemen's Land in a flurry of paranoia about French interests in the region, but they also envisaged another dumping ground for convicts. On 12 September 1803, Lieutenant John Bowen and a small contingent of forty-eight marines, settlers and convicts disembarked at Risdon Cove, inauspiciously commencing the British colonisation of Van Diemen's Land. The colony's first Lieutenant Governor, David Collins, arrived the following

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<sup>1</sup> J. Diamond, 'In Black and White: How have ordinary people, so often throughout history, brought themselves to commit genocide?', *Natural History*, vol. 97, no. 10, 1988, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> As interesting as the explorers' accounts are, they were heavily influenced by their preconceptions. They saw the natives as occupying the earliest stage of human development. For some, this reflected a debased and barbaric nature, while for others it spoke to their uncorrupted purity. They proclaimed their nobility or ignobility based on behaviour they had no way of understanding. Still, these accounts offer great insights both into native culture and the intellectual temper of the day.

<sup>3</sup> 'Kangaroo economy' is the title of Chapter 4 of James Boyce's *Van Diemen's Land*.

February, and relocated the main settlement to Hobart. The remainder of the season was spent erecting lodgings and storing provisions before the tiny settlement huddled in for its first winter. Preoccupied as it was with surviving, the fledgling colonial government scarcely even considered the natives – except to utter the usual platitudes about leaving them unmolested.<sup>4</sup>

Collins was a competent administrator, but he had much working against him. Only months after taking command he indignantly received word that his colony was to be split along the 42<sup>nd</sup> parallel, with Colonel William Paterson assuming command of the north.<sup>5</sup> After two false starts, Patterson finally moved his settlement to the Launceston site in 1806, where it developed at a slow pace, plagued by problems similar to those vexing the southern settlement. Many of these problems could have been avoided, but for the inattention of the home government, which was now focused with combating Napoleon. Collins complained in vain of inadequate tools and supplies, and the ‘collection of old, worn-out and useless men’ with which he was supposed to establish the colony.<sup>6</sup> In the winter of 1804, as the hope of resupply faded, and shortages of food and clothing became acute, Collins was forced to offer high prices for kangaroo meat and other native game. Hunting quickly became as lucrative as it was essential, and this led to scores of men, mostly convicts, roaming ever-greater distances in search of quarry.<sup>7</sup> The settlement’s wants were soon alleviated, but this would not be the last time starvation threatened.

Records for the early years of settlement are few in the south and even fewer in the north, but we know Collins was heavily dependent on indigenous foods, and Paterson could procure almost nothing else.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, for most of the first decade, hunting was the island’s main industry. Kangaroo meat became the staple food and the animal’s fur was widely used as a superior alternative to woven fabrics. Focusing on the southern colony, Marie Fels identified four periods of desperation between 1804 and 1811, when demand for meat led to intensive hunting.<sup>9</sup> Initially the Derwent Valley supplied sufficient game, but later, over-hunting necessitated wider-ranging forays that instigated the first significant contacts with natives. Venturing into the ‘wilderness’ years before it was tamed by settlement, these often unarmed

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<sup>4</sup> Fels, ‘Culture Contact’, p. 52.

<sup>5</sup> The northern settlement remained administratively independent of Hobart until 1812.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in W. A. Townsley, *Tasmania from Colony to Statehood 1803-1945*, St David’s Park, Hobart, 1991, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Some prisoners were tasked solely with hunting, whereas others hunted in their considerable free time. Collins had reduced the work demand on convicts to twenty-five hours per week so as to allow them time to procure their own food and accommodations (General Orders, 26 October 1806, *Historical Records of Australia*, ser. 3, vol. 1, p. 550).

<sup>8</sup> Records for the north before 1820 are few, and almost nothing regarding the natives has survived. However, contact no doubt occurred, and as Chapter 4 argues, there is reason to suspect much of it was violent.

<sup>9</sup> Fels, ‘Culture Contact’, p. 138. Period one: August to December 1804; period two: July to October 1805; period three: April 1806 to March 1807; period four: September 1810 to January 1811. Although hunting was most intense during these periods, it was common throughout.

hunters were exposed to considerable danger from the more numerous and powerful blacks, who made almost two-dozen attacks on colonists during the first decade of settlement.<sup>10</sup> However, the violence went both ways. Bushranging had become a serious problem for the colony by 1808, and some of these men were also responsible for perpetrating violence against the natives.<sup>11</sup> Several bushrangers became notorious for their cruelties, but they were not alone.<sup>12</sup> Four government proclamations issued between 1808 and 1813 condemned the killings, rapes and kidnappings of blacks that were apparently common at the time.<sup>13</sup> Although some amicable contact did take place,<sup>14</sup> a clear pattern of occasional, small-scale violence predominated in accounts of early frontier contact.

### **Expanding beyond the Beachheads**

By 1813, the now united colony had become largely self-sufficient. Although hunting remained common, cereal crops, sheep and cattle had replaced marsupials as the staple foods. Intermittent contact with blacks continued as the settlements extended further and further along the lush river valleys radiating from Launceston and Hobart. Soon after his arrival in 1817, Governor Sorell reprimanded those ‘in the habit of maliciously and wantonly firing on and destroying, the defenceless NATIVES’, and threatened ‘to punish any ill-treatment’.<sup>15</sup> Two years later he issued another order, claiming that:

in many former Instances Cruelties have been perpetrated repugnant to Humanity and disgraceful to the British Character ... kept up by the occasional Outrages of Miscreants whose Scene of Crime is so remote as to render detection difficult.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Hunting gave many convicts their first glimpse of the world beyond the beachheads, but it also gave them a financial incentive to remain at large, and the government did not have the resources to stop them. Hunters were sometimes unarmed because settlers were often reluctant to issue them weapons, or because dogs were more effective at running down prey than hunters were at shooting it. Greyhounds and deerhounds were the most well adapted breeds, and they soon became prized possessions, as well as prime targets for thieves. For early attacks on hunters, see tally in Appendix 2.

<sup>11</sup> Barnes & Scott to Aborigines Committee, March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 299, 315-17; *Derwent Star*, 29 January 1810, p. 2; *Sydney Gazette*, 10 April 1813, p. 2; Robson, *A History of Tasmania*, p. 48; M. Tipping, *Convicts Unbound: The Story of the Calcutta Convicts and their Settlement in Australia*, Viking O’Neill, Melbourne, 1988, p. 129. For specific cases of violence towards blacks, see tally in Appendix 3.

<sup>12</sup> The most notorious of these were William Russell, George Getley, James Carrett and Richard Lemon (Fels, ‘Culture Contact’, pp. 59-63).

<sup>13</sup> These orders were issued on 10 February 1808, 29 January 1810, 29 September 1810 and 25 June 1813. They referred to torture, murder, and the abduction of women and children as if they were commonly occurring. They also warned the perpetrators they would face the ‘utmost rigor of the law’ if caught. On his tour of Van Diemen’s Land in 1811, Governor Macquarie of New South Wales noted that bushrangers ‘continually molest the natives of the country’ (Macquarie to Geils, 8 February 1812, *Historical Records of Australia*, ser. 3, vol. 1, p. 466).

<sup>14</sup> The Chaplain Robert Knopwood (M. Nicholls (ed.), *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen’s Land*, Tasmanian Historical Research Association, Hobart, 1977, pp. 217; 293) recorded several amicable encounters at his farm during the early years of settlement, and there were probably others that went unrecorded.

<sup>15</sup> Government Order, 17 May 1817, in *Hobart Town Gazette*, 24 May 1817, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Government Order, 13 March 1819, in *Hobart Town Gazette*, 27 March 1819, p. 1.

Despite ongoing threats, Sorell, like his predecessors, never punished any maltreatment of blacks. ‘The government disapproved of oppression’, but as John West pointedly observed, ‘it was either too weak, or too indolent, to visit the guilty.’<sup>17</sup> Official proclamations were a necessary to uphold the Empire’s humanitarian image, but the government’s unwillingness to even attempt to uphold them revealed its indifference.<sup>18</sup> Survival and prosperity were all that mattered to colonists, so as long as the natives posed no significant threat, they could be ignored.

Archival records for the period 1814-1823 are scarcely better than those documenting the initial settlement. Our knowledge comes largely from official documents, together with the *Hobart Town Gazette* and a handful of private letters and journals. There was much hearsay regarding frontier violence during this decade, but only around fifty specific incidents were recorded.<sup>19</sup> There was some friendly intercourse, albeit superficial, but the evidence indicates that frontier relations in the second decade continued to be infrequent and mostly hostile.<sup>20</sup> This is unsurprising given that the majority of those making contact with natives between 1813 and 1823 were convicts and bushrangers, many of them hardened and brutalised men.

### **Sex and the Shortage of Women**

In 1822, there were six times as many men in the colony as women, and the ratio among the convict population was 16:1.<sup>21</sup> The military permitted only one soldier in eight (usually the officers) to have their wives and children accompany them on overseas duty.<sup>22</sup> The few available women in the colony were mostly convicts, who could take their pick of men, and

<sup>17</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> Detection was of course difficult, though numerous cases that could have been followed up were not.

<sup>19</sup> See tallies in Appendices 2 and 3. The tiny size of the British population militated against large-scale violence. Even with the arrival of some 1,000 colonists from Norfolk Island between 1807 and 1814, the total colonial population of Van Diemen’s Land in 1814 was a mere 1,933 (see fig. 1).

<sup>20</sup> There is little evidence of meaningful communication, and the sources indicating friendly contact between 1813 and 1823 are limited and retrospective (see Mrs Fenton’s journal, 18 December 1830, TAHO, NS187/12/1/4; Bonwick, *Last of the Tasmanians*, pp. 43-44; Boyce, ‘Surviving in a New Land’). Statements made to the Aborigines Committee in 1830 (TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 63-383 & Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, pp. 47-55) tell a conflicting story about the level of violence on the eve of the War. Some represented it as peaceful, but in comparison with the intense violence occurring as they wrote, it was easy to dismiss the early 1820s in this way. Most respondents affirmed varying levels of hostility.

<sup>21</sup> Blue Book for 1822, in ‘Tasmanian Statistics 1804-1902’, compiled by Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, 1989, SLT, 319.46 TAS. Figs. 2-4 show that, whilst the gender ratio shrank considerably during the 1820s, it was still 7:1 in 1830.

<sup>22</sup> J. Lennox and J Wadsley, *Barrack Hill: A History of Anglesea Barracks 1811-2011*, Defence Publishing Service, Canberra, 2011, p. 34. Those soldiers who had wives and families were rarely able to afford the passage and upkeep necessary to have them follow their detachments around the empire (M. Glover, *Wellington as Military Commander*, Penguin, London, 2001 [1968], pp. 22-23).

generally opted for wealthier, free suitors.<sup>23</sup> This rendered sexual opportunities – to say nothing of loving relationships – depressingly scarce for convicts and soldiers. Thousands of mainly young men in their sexual prime were forced onto the frontier without any ‘proper’ sexual outlets.<sup>24</sup> One settler observed in 1823 that it was ‘quite rare to find a female in any of the huts in the country and stock keepers live a life of complete solitude seldom seeing a human face’.<sup>25</sup> This situation produced its fair share of ‘unspeakable crimes’ (homosexuality and bestiality), but it also meant that native women were highly coveted.<sup>26</sup> Initially, some frontiersmen were able to trade for sex,<sup>27</sup> but as demand outstripped supply, and as more and more women were taken by force, the relationships necessary for such exchanges broke down. Consequently, the rape and abduction of native women became increasingly common.<sup>28</sup>

The link between the gender imbalance and sexual predation did not go unnoticed. One settler writing to the *Tasmanian* in 1830 went so far as to suggest that the government should release all female convicts into the interior in order to stem the prevalence of ‘nameless crime’ and ‘the aggressions of the Stock keepers upon their [the natives’] Wives and Daughters’.<sup>29</sup> West drew the connection more explicitly:

The state of the census was equally reprehensible: England not only forgot the prescriptions of nature, and formed communities of men, but the inevitable consequence to the natives was utterly neglected. It would be impossible even to hint [at] the series of facts, which are authenticated to the writer, and which strangely blended ferocity and lust. The sealer, or stockman, who periled his life to accomplish the abduction of a native female, thought that danger but fairly avenged by the destruction of her relatives!<sup>30</sup>

It is difficult to overstate the power of sexual deprivation on such a scale. The role of sex in igniting the War, and the tactics used by colonists to procure it, are discussed in later chapters.

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<sup>23</sup> See D. Oxley, *Convict Maids: The Forced Migration of Women to Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1996.

<sup>24</sup> For age, see Alexander, *Tasmania’s Convicts*, pp.26, 33.

<sup>25</sup> Parramore to family, 13 August 1823, in W. Parramore, *The Parramore Letters: Letters from William Thomas Parramore, sometime Private Secretary to Lieutenant Governor Arthur of Van Diemen’s Land, to Thirza Cropper, his Fiancée in Europe and England, the majority from 1823-1825*, D. C. Shelton (ed.), self-published, Epping, New South Wales, 1993, p. 23.

<sup>26</sup> Secondary sources that discuss bestiality and homosexuality in the convict system include N. Shakespeare, *In Tasmania*, Random House, Missions Point, New South Wales, 2004, pp. 98-99; A. Collins, ‘Woman or Beast: Bestiality in Queensland, 1870-1949’, *Hecate*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1991, pp. 36-42; Boyce, *Van Diemen’s Land*, pp. 237-40; Alexander, *Tasmania’s Convicts*, pp. 122-29; J. Damousi, *Depraved and Disorderly: Female Convicts, Sexuality and Gender in Colonial Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1997. These ‘crimes’ were clearly prevalent, though they were generally spoken of in hushed and euphemistic tones.

<sup>27</sup> The middle-class observers who wrote about this practice were predictably disapproving, not of the colonists, but of the native women for their ‘immodest behaviour’, and of their menfolk for allowing and even forcing them to engage in such practices.

<sup>28</sup> For specific examples, see Chapters 7 and 9.

<sup>29</sup> *Tasmanian*, 10 December 1830, p. 796.

<sup>30</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 94.

### **'Keeping' Native Children**

Colonists also coveted native children. The colony was only in its infancy, West noted, when 'certain settlers established a species of juvenile slavery'.<sup>31</sup> In 1813, Governor Davey was convinced 'the resentment of these poor uncultivated beings has been justly excited by ... the robbery of their children'.<sup>32</sup> Plomley and Henley found records of thirty-seven baptisms of native children between 1810 and 1820,<sup>33</sup> but presumably government disapproval and sheer indifference prevented some colonists from making this effort.<sup>34</sup> Governor Sorell echoed Davey's condemnation in 1819, demanding all settlers and convicts who could be shown to have acquired children 'illegitimately', to hand them over to the government.<sup>35</sup> However, there is no evidence the matter was pursued, and so long as the awkward question of acquisition was avoided, many considered it 'charitable' to raise heathen children in Christian surrounds.<sup>36</sup>

How, then, were native children acquired? James Boyce claimed they were 'commonly *lent* to the Europeans by the South East tribe as part of the complex trading arrangements', but this is entirely unsupported.<sup>37</sup> More reasonably, Boyce later suggested that '[r]emoved infants were almost certainly refugees from armed conflict, their families having fled or been killed', and that 'kidnapping was probably prevalent'.<sup>38</sup> The chaplain Robert Knopwood was aware of the practice from the outset. In January of 1806, he recorded that convicts had brought a 'little native girl' into Hobart, but that she promptly 'made her escape out of a window'.<sup>39</sup> In 1814, Knopwood was gaining the trust of a local band until '[a] number of children were forcibly taken from them, and they disappeared from the camp.'<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Edward White told the Aborigines Committee that, soon after he arrived in 1803, the natives' 'wives and children

<sup>31</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> Government Order, 25 June 1813, in *Friendly Mission*, p. 27. Three years elapsed between Collins' death and Davey taking command. In that time there was a flurry of baptisms of Native children, many of whom bore the surnames of commanding officers. Clearly, those who commanded the settlements before Davey's arrival did not share his objection to kidnapping (J. Boyce, *Van Diemen's Land*, Black Inc., Melbourne, 2008, p. 84).

<sup>33</sup> N. J. B. Plomley & K. A. Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait and the Cape Barren Island Community*, Blubber Head Press, Hobart, 1990, pp. 25-26.

<sup>34</sup> Lyndall Ryan (*Tasmanian Aborigines*, p. 62) claimed 'fifty or so Aboriginal children were known to have been taken into colonists' homes between 1809 and 1823.' She did not reference this claim (although the claim had been challenged by Windschuttle (*Fabrication*, pp. 56-57), but Plomley and Henley's findings indicate that fifty is by no means an implausible figure.

<sup>35</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 27 March 1819, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> J. Boyce, 'Journeying Home: A New Look at the British Invasion of Van Diemen's Land 1803-1823', *Island*, vol. 66, 1996, p. 48. Even if authorities had been interested, colonists' stories were difficult to verify.

<sup>37</sup> Boyce, 'Surviving in a New Land', pp. 51-52. My italics. Boyce's attachment to the notion of harmonious frontier relations lends a tinge of romanticism to some of his arguments.

<sup>38</sup> Boyce, *Van Diemen's Land*, pp. 86-87.

<sup>39</sup> Knopwood diary, 8 January 1806, Nicholls, *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood*, p. 99. A child was also taken in 1804 after its parents had been killed in a shooting at Risdon (see Chapter 4).

<sup>40</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 9.

were taken from them by stock-keepers'.<sup>41</sup> On further investigation the Committee found that raids:

were then frequently made by lawless and desperate characters for the purpose of carrying off the native women and children; attempts which, if resisted, the aggressors did not scruple to accomplish with circumstances of dreadful and unnecessary barbarity.<sup>42</sup>

According to the *Colonial Times*, the practice of taking children only subsided in the early 1820s, when:

many of the native tribes were suffering severely from some most loathsome coetaneous disease ... [which] prevents many of the Settlers in the interior from taking into their service infant natives, as has been the case, for the purpose of bringing them up in a civilized manner.<sup>43</sup>

There are no detailed accounts of how children were kidnapped, but they were probably taken in campfire ambushes the same way women were. According to West, another popular method was to 'follow up the mother, retarded by the encumbrance of her children, until she was compelled in her terror to leave them.'<sup>44</sup>

There were probably several reasons why colonists stole native children. Boyce claimed the primary reasons were friendship, survival skills and labour,<sup>45</sup> and there was doubtlessly some truth to all these. Some colonists entertained genuine, if misguided, civilizing intentions, and under this noble pretext, many native children were exploited as domestic and farm labourers.<sup>46</sup> Boyce conceded that 'many children' were kept as 'slave labour', but he failed to consider an even less palatable reason.<sup>47</sup>

Bass Strait sealers regularly took native girls from the northern and eastern coasts of Van Diemen's Land to keep as sex slaves,<sup>48</sup> but paedophilia also occurred elsewhere in the colony. In 1824, for instance, convicts raped two nine-year-old 'half-caste' girls in separate

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<sup>41</sup> White to Aborigines Committee, 16 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 53. The Aborigines Committee, initially called the Committee for Care of Captured Aborigines, comprised several high-ranking civil servants and religious figures. Formed in December 1829, the committee was charged with making arrangements for the long-term care of captured and surrendered natives, but more immediately with investigating the causes of the War and making recommendations for how to end it. As part of these investigations, the committee questioned numerous settlers and other interested parties, whose responses are an invaluable resource.

<sup>42</sup> Aborigines Committee report, 19 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 36.

<sup>43</sup> *Colonial Times*, 16 June 1826, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 9.

<sup>45</sup> Boyce, 'Journeying Home', p. 48.

<sup>46</sup> See, for instance, Boyce, *Van Diemen's Land*, pp. 84-87 & Ryan, *Tasmanian Aborigines*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>47</sup> Boyce, 'Surviving in a New Land', p. 51.

<sup>48</sup> See Chapters 5 and 6. As Chapter 5 points out, the sealers were similar to the labourers of the interior in a number of respects.

incidents.<sup>49</sup> Likewise, one convict was hanged for raping a four-year-old girl the same year; two more were executed on the same charge in 1828; and in 1830, yet another three convicts swung for gang raping a magistrate's five-year-old daughter.<sup>50</sup> The *Colonial Advocate* recognised in 1828 that the problem of child rape stemmed from 'the transportation of male convicts without a due proportion of females'.<sup>51</sup> What is more, if such men were unable to restrain themselves in the face of certain execution, it stands to reason that native children were also preyed upon.<sup>52</sup>

### Pre-War Developments

The 1820s saw the transformation of a barely viable network of smallholders into a highly profitable pastoral economy. By the time George Arthur arrived to replace William Sorell as Governor in 1824, the colony was well on its way to becoming the wool and wheat-based 'economic miracle' that it could rightfully be called in the early 1830s.<sup>53</sup> This transition, which had an enormous impact on frontier relations, had two main causes. The first was the influx of human and monetary capital. From around 1817, following the cessation of war in Europe, increasing numbers of wealthy settlers began emigrating to the colony. Meanwhile, in Britain, thousands of delisted soldiers and redundant labourers were turning to crime, which dramatically increased the number of convicts transported to Van Diemen's Land.<sup>54</sup> By 1823, the colonial population – half of which was convict – had reached 10,000; more than three times what it had been in 1818 (see fig. 1). Of this number, at least half resided in the interior.<sup>55</sup>

The second major development was a series of reforms resulting from an *Inquiry into the state of the Colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land*.<sup>56</sup> Commissioner John Bigge

<sup>49</sup> For rape of Margaret Thomas, see *R. vs. Farrell*, Supreme Court of Van Diemen's Land, 11 August 1824, [http://www.law.mq.edu.au/research/colonial\\_case\\_law/tas/cases/case\\_index/1824/r\\_v\\_farrell/](http://www.law.mq.edu.au/research/colonial_case_law/tas/cases/case_index/1824/r_v_farrell/) (accessed 8 August 2011); For rape of Eliza Briggs, see various testimonies, January 1825, TAHO, LC347 & *Colonial Times*, 2 February 1827, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> *Colonial Times*, 6 July 1827, p. 4; *Colonial Advocate*, 1 August 1828, p. 280; J. C. Sutherland's diary, 4 May 1830, TAHO, NS61/1/3 & Brown, *Clyde Company Papers*, p. 98. These cases are by no means exhaustive.

<sup>51</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 1 August 1828, p. 279.

<sup>52</sup> Access to native children was far easier than to settlers' children. If native children were taken for indecent reasons, they were just as likely to be molested by their 'custodians' as a rapacious servant. Children were less likely to have venereal diseases, which is one probable reason they were sought after.

<sup>53</sup> Townsley, *Tasmania from Colony to Statehood*, pp. 6-7. It was not until the early 1830s that wool overtook wheat as the staple of the colony's economy (L. Mickleborough, *William Sorell in Van Diemen's Land: Lieutenant-Governor, 1817-24: A Golden Age?*, Blubber Head Press, Sandy Bay, Tasmanian, 2004, p. 43).

<sup>54</sup> The return of peace also increased the number of ships available to transport convicts and emigrants.

<sup>55</sup> General muster for 1823, *Historical Records of Australia*, ser. 3, vol. 4, pp. 163, 635-36.

<sup>56</sup> J. D. Ritchie, *Punishment and Profit: The Reports of Commissioner John Bigge on the Colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, 1822-1823: Their Origins, Nature and Significance*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1970.



spent three months appraising Van Diemen's Land, and his report, published in 1823, ultimately revolutionised the island's economic and penal systems. Although Governor Sorell had initiated some modest reforms, these were widely eclipsed by those that came about as a result of Bigge's recommendations. Van Diemen's Land, Bigge concluded, could be both a repository for convicts and a thriving economy. Thus a series of reforms were implemented to ensure the effective distribution of convict labour, maximum agricultural productivity, judicial and administrative efficiency, but above all, a more orderly, moral and hierarchical society.<sup>57</sup>

As a consequence of Bigge's report and the burgeoning population, the colony began to take on many of the social and commercial characteristics of the Mother Country. The economy accelerated and the island was soon spotted with fine estates brimming with imported goods. Within the space of just a few years, Van Diemen's Land was transformed from a tiny unproductive outpost into a small, but promising colony.<sup>58</sup> However, not everyone benefitted from these changes. The new 'assignment system' disproportionately benefited the wealthy, which had a powerfully stratifying effect. Convicts and emancipists were doubly impacted by the extension of government authority, which removed many of the freedoms and opportunities they had hitherto enjoyed.<sup>59</sup> What is more, Bigge gave practically no consideration to the island's natives, believing they would pose no 'serious resistance' to further expansion.<sup>60</sup>

The impact of these changes was dramatic. In 1813, the midlands region between Launceston and Hobart remained untouched by agriculture, broached only by hunters and bushrangers.<sup>61</sup> Yet, within a decade, a continuous chain of farms linked the northern and southern settlements.<sup>62</sup> On 30 June 1823, the entire backlog of grant applications was approved with the stroke of a pen, which saw 441, 871 acres of land given away in 1,827 parcels.<sup>63</sup> In addition, pastoralists regularly grazed unallocated lands beyond their grants, which meant 'stock and stockmen preceded official settlement by some years.'<sup>64</sup> The pace at which settlement proceeded in the 1820s was extraordinary and, in the absence of decent maps, often chaotic

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<sup>57</sup> Townsley, *Tasmania from Colony to Statehood*, pp. 7-9; Robson, *A History of Tasmania*, pp. 139-41.

<sup>58</sup> Robson, *A History of Tasmania*, parts 1 & 2.

<sup>59</sup> For both women and convicts, the relaxed social and penal controls in the early period afforded them many benefits, but these were greatly circumscribed in the 1820s (Boyce, 'Surviving in a New Land', p. 59).

<sup>60</sup> Cited in Turnbull, *Black War*, p. 61.

<sup>61</sup> Boyce, *Van Diemen's Land*, p. 63; S. Morgan, *Land Settlement in Early Van Diemen's Land: Creating an Antipodean England*, Cambridge University Press, Oakleigh, 1992, p. 14.

<sup>62</sup> Morgan, *Land Settlement*, p. 21.

<sup>63</sup> Morgan, *Land Settlement*, p. 13. The grants given out in 1823 equated to about four times the amount of land given out in all of the preceding twenty years combined. The understaffing of the survey department meant that getting a grant could take years if settlers did not have influential patronage. To expedite the process many settlers were given tickets of occupation to begin farming in lieu of a survey.

<sup>64</sup> Morgan, *Land Settlement*, p. 19. Settlers wanted the land mainly for raising sheep and cattle for the colony's nascent export trade, but also for growing a variety of cereal crops for domestic sale (Morgan, *Land Settlement*, pp. 74-75).

and antagonistic as well. The resulting land disputes continued throughout the Black War, though, ironically, few colonists recognised that the War itself was a land dispute.

### Pre-War Encounters

About 1814, one or more groups of blacks began visiting Hobart.<sup>65</sup> Colonists' attitudes towards these people are difficult to gauge. In 1819, when the visiting missionary Rowland Hassall inquired with locals: 'Why are there no natives seen in the town?' They answered: 'because we shoot them whenever we find them.'<sup>66</sup> Whilst this is consistent with several references to the cruel treatment blacks received during these visits, they would not have visited at all if Hassall's informants had been fully serious.<sup>67</sup> By 1822, a band known as the 'town mob' was regularly seen on the outskirts of Hobart, attracting some curiosity, but more often pity and disgust. One resident complained: 'it is disgusting to behold, the state of nudity in which they wander about our streets, Surely something may be done to induce them to conform, in a slight degree, to our ideas of personal decency!'<sup>68</sup> There was even a 'barbarous custom of encouraging the Black people [with rewards of alcohol] to murder or mangle one another ... for the amusement and gratification of those who are denominated Christians'.<sup>69</sup> It is not clear whether these were references to visiting bands or to the orphaned and detribalised blacks that were becoming regular sights around Hobart and Launceston.<sup>70</sup> For newly arriving colonists, these 'unsightly prostitutes', 'drunkards' and 'beggars' were the first image they formed of the island's natives.<sup>71</sup>

Despite their visibility, few references to fringe-dwelling blacks survive, and the so-called 'wild tribes' seem to have attracted scarcely more attention. Settlers were usually too busy

<sup>65</sup> See, for instance, Nicholls, *Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood*, pp. 232, 277, 293-94; *Hobart Town Gazette*, 26 September 1818, p. 1; *Historical Records of Australia*, ser. 3 vol. 2, pp. 741, 750; Bonwick, *Last of the Tasmanians*, p. 59. See also Chapter 4.

<sup>66</sup> Cited in Ryan, *Tasmanian Aborigines*, p. 67.

<sup>67</sup> See, for instance, West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, pp. 9, 15 & Bonwick, *Last of the Tasmanians*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>68</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 12 November 1825, p. 4. See also Nathan Turner, William Horton and Robert Mansfield to the Wesleyan Mission Society, 22 November 1822-15 July 1824, Bonwick transcripts, SLNSW, ML, BT52, pp. 1204-341. These men make several descriptive references to fringe-dwelling natives.

<sup>69</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 26 December 1818, supplement. The correspondent had witnessed more than one of these spectacles about Hobart, noting that onlookers considered the blacks 'degraded below the brute'.

<sup>70</sup> See, for instance, Wallace to father, 10 September 1825, in J. Richards, *Fifteen Tasmanian Letters 1824-1852*, Jayrich Productions, Christchurch, 1955, pp. 5-10.

<sup>71</sup> Drunkenness and disorder was also rife among the colonists. Alexander Laing, for instance, recalled that 'up to the arrival of Sir George Arthur in 1824, rum payments were almost the currency of the colony – a bottle of rum or a bushel of wheat was equivalent to £10 all over the land, which, naturally led us all to dabble a little in the drop of rum' ('Reminiscences of Alexander Laing, 1820-1838', unpublished manuscript, n.d., TAHO, NS906, p. 1). Convictions for drunk and disorderly behaviour were extremely common throughout the convict era.

establishing themselves to spend time musing over the island's 'degraded' natives.<sup>72</sup>

Occasionally they would warrant a passing mention if a convict was killed or some sheep speared, but such attacks were readily explained away as the barbarism of ignorant savages, provoked by unscrupulous convicts. There is no indication that any settler considered, or even cared how their encroachment might affect the original occupants; it was assumed they would simply 'move on'.

The natives were of greater interest to convicts and poor labourers. Frontiersmen, West pointed out, were often stationed 'forty and fifty miles from their masters' dwellings, were rarely visited, and were under no immediate control.'<sup>73</sup> Some stockmen and sawyers seized on the sexual opportunities presented by this lack of surveillance. The company of a black woman, whether obtained by exchange or force, was probably one of their few pleasures these men experienced. Eventually though, many frontiersmen found themselves watching their backs – especially those who had incurred the natives' displeasure.

In 1819, Governor Sorell predicted that, 'if the natives were intent upon Destruction ... the Mischief done by them ... would be increased a Hundred Fold.'<sup>74</sup> But as expansion continued, and no major resistance was encountered, the Governor's concerns were abated. When he was recalled in 1824, Sorell did not even mention the natives in his lengthy hand-over letter to Arthur.<sup>75</sup> That same year, the *Hobart Town Gazette* reassured its readers that 'the sable natives of this Colony are the most peaceable creatures in the universe.'<sup>76</sup> Most colonists shared this complacency, having been lured into a false sense of security by twenty years of relative quiet.<sup>77</sup> Preoccupied as settlers were in the mid 1820s, both with establishing their farms and suppressing an unprecedented epidemic of bushranging, scarcely anyone imagined that an even deadlier conflict was simmering.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> As Chapter 4 notes, several settlers were on amicable terms with local bands, and would give them food when they visited, but it seems all these relationships had ended by 1827.

<sup>73</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, pp. 127-28.

<sup>74</sup> Government Proclamation, 13 March 1819, in *Hobart Town Gazette*, 27 March 1819, p. 1.

<sup>75</sup> Sorell to Arthur, 22 May 1824, *Historical Records of Australia*, ser. 3, vol. 4, pp. 134-55. This is a truly remarkable omission, particularly given Arthur's well-publicised humanitarian interests and the violence that was developing at the time. It may simply be further evidence of the general disinterest that Sorell had shown towards the subject, or perhaps he foresaw trouble ahead, and wanted to be officially disassociated from it.

<sup>76</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 16 July 1824, p. 2.

<sup>77</sup> This complacency demonstrates that the British had learnt little from two centuries of colonialism, which had attested time and again to the bloody consequences of dispossessing indigenous peoples.

<sup>78</sup> There is a vast literature on bushranging in Van Diemen's Land. See, for instance, Robson, *A History of Tasmania*, pp. 78-105 & J. Bonwick, *The Bushrangers: Illustrating the Early Days of Van Diemen's Land*, George Robertson, Hobart, 1856. See also Chapter 11.



*Black*

## 4

**Road to War**

The arrival of a mysterious race of white-skinned men posed enormous challenges to the Vandemonians' worldviews. Their cosmology posited all sorts of fantastical beings, but nothing like those that were now appearing on their beaches. The strangers provoked a great deal of contemplation, discussion and emotion. Who were they? Where did they come from? Why were they here? Where were their women? What were the wooden islands on which they lived? What was wrong with their skin? What did they eat? What did their words mean? Why did they behave so strangely? And what were all the strange animals and objects they possessed? No Vandemonian ever imagined they would they would be confronted by such questions. They had no precedent for profound cultural difference, and thus no preconceptions of the types engrained in the minds of their visitors. Indeed, the Aborigines' ethnocentricity must have been almost complete.<sup>1</sup> This Chapter will explore how they interpreted these early visitations, before investigating their various responses to the invasion that followed.

**First Encounters**

Though it was customary for Vandemonians to suppress their curiosity and surprise, many were unable to do so upon first encountering white men.<sup>2</sup> Explorers observed their bemusement at seeing not just the white-skinned strangers, but also their animals, ships and other wondrous possessions. French sailor Nicolas Ladroux penned in his journal: 'we stayed five hours examining them, men and women alike, and then they for their part did just the same'.<sup>3</sup> When Mara, an 'inquisitive and intelligent' man, took the opportunity to go on board one of d'Entrecasteaux's frigates, he was overwhelmed by the experience: 'Everything surprised him, stunned him, fascinated him ... with each new thing he showed the greatest

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<sup>1</sup> There were differences between Vandemonian groups, but their behaviour was mutually intelligible. It was only after experience had gradually eroded their imbedded assumptions about the limited scope of the world that they recognised white culture as fundamentally different. One consequence of this was that, whilst Europeans had a preconceived sense of (superior) racial identity defined by reference to the numerous foreign peoples they had encountered, Vandemonians could not have perceived themselves collectively as one human group unique among many.

<sup>2</sup> Walker, *Life and Labours*, p. 97; Backhouse, *A Narrative*, pp. 81, 93; Ross cited in D. Bunce & L. Leichhardt, *Australasiatic Reminiscences of Twenty Three-Years' Wanderings in Tasmania and the Australias: Including Travels with Dr. Leichhardt in North or Tropical Australia*, J. T. Hendry, Melbourne, 1857, p. 55. This façade of indifference is common still among many traditionally orientated mainland Aborigines today.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in S. Anderson, 'French Anthropology in Australia, a Prelude: The Encounters between Aboriginal Tasmanians and the Expedition of Bruny d'Entrecasteaux, 1793', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 24, 2000, p. 216.

surprise.’<sup>4</sup> One of the most perplexing features of the newcomers was the absence of women among them. Vandemonians gestured for the white men to pull aside their strange coverings, yet all were inexplicably revealed to be men.

Wonderment, however, was easily replaced with indignation. Vandemonians had never imagined there could be people with radically different customs and beliefs to their own, thus the white men’s behaviour appeared very peculiar. Sometimes this aroused laughter, but the strangers’ constant infringements of custom led also to suspicion and anxiety. ‘They observe us closely’, wrote François Péron in 1802, ‘always their suspicions of us are unfavourable.’<sup>5</sup> To the explorers, this seemed capricious and unreasonable; but to the Aborigines it was a logical response to strange and threatening behaviour.

The most immediate question the Vandemonians faced was how to integrate these puzzling beings into their existing cosmology. On the Australian mainland there is significant evidence that white men were initially seen as the spirits of returned ancestors.<sup>6</sup> As Henry Reynolds argued, ‘[t]he spirit-world was real, tangible and ever present. It was a much more likely starting point for the white strangers than unknown, even unsuspected, countries beyond the horizon.’<sup>7</sup> This has been true of many indigenous societies the world over, the best known being the cargo cults of the southwest Pacific.<sup>8</sup> After all, whites were physically different, they came from somewhere other than the known world, and they possessed many things that must have appeared supernatural.

It is not clear whether the first white men to visit Van Diemen’s Land were viewed as spirits or just very different humans, but there is some evidence to indicate the former. In the 1830s, for instance, James Backhouse noted that ‘[o]ne of their names for a white man signifies a white devil or spirit; this has probably arisen from mistaking white men at first for spiritual beings.’<sup>9</sup> This is consistent with West’s assertion that, when Vandemonians died, ‘they

<sup>4</sup> Plomley & Piard-Bernier, *The General*, p. 369.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in S. Anderson, ‘French Anthropology in Australia, the First Fieldwork Report: François Péron’s ‘Maria Island Anthropological Observations’’, *Aboriginal History*, vol. 25, 2001, pp. 236-37. Plomley (*The Tasmanian Aborigines*, p. 79) believed some of this hostility ‘was almost certainly the outcome of other meetings between the natives and European visitors from the Colony at Sydney, in particular kangaroo hunters and sealers’.

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, I. Clark & D. A. Cahir, ‘Understanding ‘Ngamadjidj’: Aboriginal Perceptions of Europeans in Nineteenth Century Western Victoria’, *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, vol. 13, 2011, pp. 105-24.

<sup>7</sup> Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier*, p. 37. Where there is detailed indigenous testimony, we find that whites were often seen as spirit-beings. See, for instance, J. Cummins, *First Encounters: Epic True Stories of Cultural Collision and Conquest*, Lost and Found in History, Millers Point, New South Wales, 2009, pp. 204-5.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, D. K. Billings, *Cargo Cult as Theater: Political Performance in the Pacific*, Lexington Books, Lanham, Maryland, 2004. Cargo cults still exist among some southwest Pacific Islanders.

<sup>9</sup> Backhouse, *A Narrative*, pp. 181-82.

expected to re-appear as white men on an island in the Straits, and “to jump up white men.”<sup>10</sup> Walter George Arthur, an Aborigine born around 1820, wrote personally of this belief on Flinders Island, claiming ‘black people died then arose from the dead [and] became white men’.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the strongest evidence for this assumption, however, is the Aborigines’ belief, discussed in Chapter 2, that England was the ‘isle of the dead’.

It must have been an awesome experience to encounter white men for the first time, whether or not they were seen as ancestor spirits. Kickertopoller, an east coast man, told Robinson how:

he saw the first ship, that it came to Maria Island, he was a boy at this time and was with his tribe; that in the morning they saw the ship at anchor off Maria Island, that they were all frightened and run [*sic*] away, that it looked like a small island and that they could not tell what it was.<sup>12</sup>

Woorady, a Bruny Islander, also shared his experience with Robinson:

he saw the French discovery ships and that the men had white collars on. Said that the white men when they first came cut the head of a man on a tree and ... Natives call it WRAGGEOWRAPPER, and when the children saw it they were frightened and run away. Said when they saw the first ship coming at sea they were frightened, and said it was WRAGEOWRAPPER.<sup>13</sup>

This encounter took place at Recherche Bay, where the locals spent a full month watching the white men before finally revealing themselves. Indeed, it became standard practice for the Vandemonians to spend much more time scrutinising the strangers from a distance than negotiating with them face-to-face.

A significant feature of exploration to Van Diemen’s Land was that the various expeditions came ashore almost exclusively at points around the island’s southeast, which meant that most Aborigines first learnt of the white strangers by word of mouth. The visitors were no doubt the subjects of many intriguing tales that circulated throughout the island. We do not know what these tales were, but they may not have been entirely negative. For all the misunderstandings and tensions that Vandemonians had with the explorers, there was also a great deal of fun, gift giving and goodwill. These white men also had the virtue of leaving. By contrast, those who later appeared on the Derwent and Tamar rivers were just as strange, only not as friendly, and not as temporary.

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<sup>10</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 90. For a specific example, see Bonwick, *Last of the Tasmanians*, p. 185.

<sup>11</sup> *Weep in Silence*, p. 1015. Records disagree over whether Walter George Arthur came from the west or southeast of Van Diemen’s Land.

<sup>12</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 557, journal 19 November 1831. This almost certainly refers to the Baudin expedition.

<sup>13</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 408, journal 11 July 1831. See also p. 406, journal 7 July 1831.

### A Different Kind of White Man

By 1803, the white men and the bizarre items they left behind would have taken their place in the Vandemonians' rich storytelling culture. Their relations with the explorers had been mixed, but they may also have had encounters with the sealers who began venturing from Sydney into Bass Strait as early as 1798. If so, it is safe to assume these notoriously cruel and unscrupulous men did not improve the reputation of the whites.<sup>14</sup> Whatever their reasons, southeast bands came to view the first settlers with ambivalence and suspicion, choosing to stay aloof and monitor them from a safe distance. 'At last plenty of ships [came]', Woorrady told Robinson, 'the natives went to the mountains, went and looked at what the white people did, went and told other natives and they came and looked also'.<sup>15</sup> They knew there was something different about these latest interlopers. Unlike their predecessors, these whites erected large shelters and they also had several women among them, but their most distinguishing feature was that they stayed.

The period around first settlement may also have been a time of sickness for some bands. As Appendix 3 explains, there is good evidence that introduced disease took a heavy toll on at least one southern band about this time. The confusion and despair associated with such an unprecedented event must have been tremendous. The victims probably drew some connection between the new arrivals and the calamities befalling them, but even if they did not, some bewildering questions remained to be answered.<sup>16</sup>

I have suggested that many Vandemonians came to see white men as returned ancestor spirits, which had always been considered potentially dangerous. This would have made it easy for them to see the whites as evil spirits, and the evidence appears to bear this out. In 1829, for instance, Robinson recorded that the word for white man among the Bruny Island people was 'Raege', a variant of 'Raegeowrapper' (devil).<sup>17</sup> Later, he and others observed that bands from the northwest, north and east also referred to whites as evil spirits.<sup>18</sup> This interpretation was obviously not universal, but however Vandemonians came to perceive them, the white strangers were about to profoundly change their lives.

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<sup>14</sup> See Chapter 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 408, journal 11 July 1831. This regular surveillance is also evidenced by the frequent reports of Aboriginal fires on the outskirts of the settlement.

<sup>16</sup> On the mainland, Reynolds (*Other Side of the Frontier*, pp. 62-67) found Aborigines tended to blame the white men for outbreaks of venereal disease, but not epidemic diseases. In Van Diemen's Land there is no evidence that Aborigines attributed any afflictions to the white men, though this is by no means conclusive. Even if they were unsure of the link, the temporal coincidence was surely not lost on them.

<sup>17</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 63, journal 31 May 1829.

<sup>18</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 78-79, 175-76, 212-15, 404-6, journals 12 August 1829, 6 April, 21 June 1830, 7 July 1831; depositions of John Hurling & Henry Smith, 26 June 1827, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 15-27; Backhouse, *A Narrative*, p. 181.



## Early Violence

The first major encounter with the whites took place at Risdon Cove in May 1804. Most of them had relocated to Hobart, but a small contingent of marines and convicts under Lieutenant William Moore remained at the original settlement. Around midday, a large body of over one hundred Aborigines advanced on the white men.<sup>19</sup> It is not clear what their intentions were, but Moore considered them ‘very far from friendly’, and ordered his men to open fire. A cannon, reportedly loaded with grapeshot, was also fired. Beyond these details the various accounts disagree.<sup>20</sup> Reports of Aboriginal casualties ranged from two to one hundred, and everywhere in between. The whole event, as Bonwick lamented, is mired ‘in misty obscurity.’<sup>21</sup> Even the local Chaplain, who corresponded directly with those involved on the night of the incident, ‘heard different opinions’.<sup>22</sup> A careful rereading of all the known sources suggests there were at least six fatalities, though probably not many more. Whatever the exact death toll, this event must have had a significant impact on the attitudes of local Aborigines towards the invaders. It was probably not the large-scale ‘massacre’ some have suggested it was,<sup>23</sup> and it was certainly not the primary catalyst for the War as Governor Arthur later concluded, but Risdon would not have been forgotten by the numerous men, women and children who were present.

After the Risdon affray, the southern bands appear to have kept their distance until competition for kangaroo during the drought of late 1806, triggered the first wave of violence.<sup>24</sup> Six attacks were recorded in the south between June 1806 and March 1807, in which several whites were killed or wounded. Whilst local bands had hitherto tolerated small numbers of kangaroos being taken, Marie Fels argued that at least five of these attacks originated in disgruntlement over hunting, as evidenced by the confiscation of kills and the spearing of dogs.<sup>25</sup> These attacks were measured responses to specific infractions; they were not intended to dislodge the whites. Without the benefit of hindsight, the Vandemonians surely never imagined the strangers would multiply as they later did, and thus had no reason to take drastic or indiscriminate action.

In the northern settlement, frontier encounters appear to have been similar to those occurring in the south. There were five encounters in 1804 and 1805, three of which were hostile, and

<sup>19</sup> Different reports offer different reasons. Edward White insisted it was a large hunting party with no hostile intentions. The presence of women almost certainly rules out a war party, but this does not mean that, given provocation, they were not capable of violence, particularly with such weight of numbers.

<sup>20</sup> For a concise collection of the main accounts of the Risdon affray see Calder, *Levée, Line and Martial Law*, pp. 232-43.

<sup>21</sup> Bonwick, *Last of the Tasmanians*, p. 32.

<sup>22</sup> Knopwood to Aborigines Committee, 11 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 52

<sup>23</sup> Keith Windschuttle (*Fabrication*, ch. 1) mentioned several of the more extravagant estimates.

<sup>24</sup> There was an attack on some convicts in the vicinity of Risdon four days after the affray, but the settlement was shortly after abandoned, and all personnel removed to Hobart (Morgan, *Land Settlement*, p. 145).

<sup>25</sup> Fels, ‘Culture Contact’, pp. 55-58.

two amicable. The next incident, however, was not recorded until 1819.<sup>26</sup> Little is known about life in the north during the intervening years, but hunting and bushranging was prevalent, so logic implies that considerable contact occurred. If the hearsay evidence is to be believed, these encounters were often less than cordial.<sup>27</sup> In 1810, for instance, John Oxley reported that:

From the many atrocious cruelties practiced on them by the Convict Bush Rangers, they avoid as much as possible the appearance of a White Man; they are however (in consequence no doubt of the treatment they receive) very troublesome to the Solitary Hunter.<sup>28</sup>

As in the south, however, serious conflict in the north was a long time coming, thus these early clashes were presumably not marred with the implacable bitterness of the War years.

### **Interaction**

There were probably many non-violent pre-War encounters. Some bands chose to approach the newcomers for reasons such as curiosity, communication and trade. On the western shores of the Derwent, for instance, the early settler, George Lloyd, recalled that Aborigines and white men 'lived upon tolerable though very questionable terms of friendship'.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, some bands in the interior learnt they could obtain desired goods from particular white men, either as gestures of good will, or in exchange for sex. The white man's technologies and animals were of particular interest to Vandemonians. For example, they immediately realised the advantages of using glass as a cutting tool.<sup>30</sup> Blankets became sought-after items, as did tea, flour, sugar and tobacco. The most significant import, however, was the dog. Vandemonians were very quick to master the art of hunting with these novel animals, which considerably altered the economies of eastern bands by allowing them to hunt with much greater efficiency.<sup>31</sup> The reason they did not further exploit the invaders technology was probably because nothing else was of much use to them unless they relinquished their way of life.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See tallies in Appendices 2 and 3. See also Paterson to King, 8 January 1805, *Historical Records of Australia*, ser. 3, vol. 1, p. 629. Robson (*A History of Tasmania*, p. 49) made an unreferenced remark about Aborigines in the north being 'troublesome around 1813', but I have found no support for this.

<sup>27</sup> Paterson and his detachment of the infamous 'Rum Corps' had both been involved in killing Aborigines in News South Wales.

<sup>28</sup> John Oxley's report on Port Dalrymple, 1810, *Historical Records of Australia*, ser. 3, vol. 1, p. 769.

<sup>29</sup> Lloyd, *Thirty-Tree Years*, p. 55.

<sup>30</sup> Plomley, *The Tasmanian Aborigines*, p. 46. The Vandemonians were drawn to glass bottles not as vessels, but as cutting tools. They occasionally took knives from settlers, but glass shards seem to have been preferred because they were sharper and could be held like traditional stone cutting tools.

<sup>31</sup> See, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, pp. 171-72, 287-88, 685-89, journals for 29 March, 18 October 1830, 4 September 1832; J. Boyce, 'A Dog's Breakfast ... Lunch and Dinner: Canine Dependency in Early Van Diemen's Land', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers & Proceedings*, vol. 51, no. 4, 2004, pp. 194-213; R. Jones, 'Tasmanian Aborigines and Dogs', *Mankind*, vol. 7, no. 70, 1970, pp. 256-71.

<sup>32</sup> The Vandemonians' adaptability, particularly their integration of the dog, presents a challenge to Rhys Jones and Keith Windschuttle, who argued they were maladaptive and doomed them to die out.

Many of the Vandemonians who came into regular contact with whites were displaced peoples living permanently on the fringes of the towns. These fringe-dwellers had, for a variety of reasons, abandoned many elements of their traditional lives. Some were probably refugees from conflicts or plagues, while others had simply become addicted to alcohol and tobacco. There were also some intact bands that occasionally visited Hobart and Launceston in the early 1820s.<sup>33</sup> The most notable of these was the band of fifty that came into Hobart in November 1824, and the band of sixty-four that visited in October 1825.<sup>34</sup> There was also a band reportedly numbering 200 that visited Launceston in January 1825.<sup>35</sup> Given the risks involved in these town visits, we must assume the bands had strong reasons for making them. What those reasons were is largely a matter of conjecture, and different bands probably had different reasons. The desire for introduced goods was clearly important, but they could also have been seeking sanctuary from an enemy band, treatment for skin disease, or attempting to recover abducted women and children.<sup>36</sup> We can be more certain about why they left, which in most cases was because of mistreatment.<sup>37</sup> Broadly speaking, there was never a golden era of frontier relations. Even during the relative peace of the first two decades, the Vandemonians dealt reluctantly and uneasily with the whites, if they dealt with them at all.

### Women and Children

Scores of Aboriginal girls and women were eventually abducted and raped in Van Diemen's Land, but in the early years of colonisation the power dynamic was much different and the situation more complex.<sup>38</sup> In the years before 1827, some bands (probably a minority) appear to have been involved in prostituting their womenfolk to white men.<sup>39</sup> There were two reasons men did this: to gain favour and prestige with the powerful white strangers, or to procure dogs and introduced foods. The settler Charles Meredith recalled 'it was notorious to the early settlers that the blacks were in the habit of forcing their gins to visit the whites in order to

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<sup>33</sup> These visits varied in length from a few days to two years.

<sup>34</sup> See, for instance, Robinson's journal extracts for 3 November 1824 & 22 October 1825, in *Friendly Mission*, p. 118. This may have been the same band making multiple visits. Either way, one band was still there in 1826, vacating town only after the hanging of two Aborigines (probably kinsmen) in September.

<sup>35</sup> *Tasmanian and Port Dalrymple Advertiser*, 12 January 1825, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> In 1819, a group of Aborigines were treated for skin infections at a makeshift hospital in Hobart. Following their treatment Governor Sorell requested they be escorted out of town (see correspondence between Sorell and Dr. Luttrell, November-December 1819, in *Historical Records of Australia*, ser. 3, vol. 2, pp. 741, 748-51).

<sup>37</sup> See, for instance, West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, pp. 9, 15-16; *Tasmanian and Port Dalrymple Advertiser*, 12 & 19 January 1825; NLA, MS3251/2/4, pp. 31-33. See also Chapter 3.

<sup>38</sup> In the context of rapes and abductions, the term 'women' is deployed in this thesis as shorthand for women and girls, as the latter were taken with similar frequency.

<sup>39</sup> The term 'prostitution' is used here simply to describe the act of having sex in exchange for some explicit payment. Western society, then and now, associates prostitution with defilement, degradation and immorality, but such value-laden connotations were not applicable to the ways Aborigines understood such exchanges, and should not be read into the term as it is used in this thesis.

obtain what they could from them.’<sup>40</sup> In fact, a number of contemporaries remarked on the prevalence of this behaviour. About the settlement at George Town, the convict John Jones deposed:

it was well understood that [in the early 1820s] the Black men would prostitute their women to the Stockmen and others for sugar, bread and shrub like things. Always understood that the Blacks were not jealous of their women, for there they would, on the contrary, force their women to go and have carnal intercourse with the Stock Keepers for any small present the Black man could get.<sup>41</sup>

Referring to the ‘town mob’, another convict, Thomas McMinn, claimed the ‘gins were allowed to prostitute themselves to white men for bread and other things. Mosquito [a ‘Sydney black’] ordered a gin to retire with a white man and she obeyed his orders. This happened, as I was told, very often.’ McMinn had also seen these transactions in the interior:

Mr. McGregor a sawyer, had frequent intercourse with the gins [around Oatlands]. He was accused by my fellow servants of stealing their sugar to bribe the black men to allow their gins to retire with them. Frank Allen, one of Mr. Anstey’s convict servants was also suspected, and accused of doing the same.<sup>42</sup>

They were, according to McMinn, ‘the dirtiest and most diseased mob of natives I ever saw’.<sup>43</sup>

All these examples describe fringe-dwelling or detribalised groups. Such behaviour was probably much less common among bands that remained strong and intact.

Women also engaged in prostitution on their own initiative, sometimes even in defiance of their menfolk. In 1829, for example, Truggernanna, Dray and Pagerly were at south Bruny Island ‘stopping with the whalers’, much to the disgust of their suitors.<sup>44</sup> In the northwest, a band went so far as to kill a woman who was ‘cohabiting’ with a white man.<sup>45</sup> But even when men were the initiators, these exchanges were rarely intended to be permanent. A small number of women did end up living with white men, though most of these were probably desperate individuals who had been ostracised or displaced from tribal life. Some abducted women were also kept for extended periods, but this was difficult without chaining or confining them.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, some women may have initially been offered in attempts

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<sup>40</sup> C. Meredith, ‘Verbal Remarks on the Aborigines of Tasmania’, *Royal Society of Tasmania Papers and Proceedings*, 1873, p. 28.

<sup>41</sup> Deposition of John Jones, 16 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 170-72.

<sup>42</sup> Deposition of Thomas McMinn, 16 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 197-98. See also testimonies by Hudspeth & Anstey, 16 & 18 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 327-42; J. Barnes, ‘A Few Remarks on the Natives of Van Diemen’s Land’, cited in I. Gregg, ‘A Young Englishman’s Observations of the Aborigines During Five Years in Van Diemen’s Land: Who was Dr John Barnes?’, *Tasmanian Ancestry*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2000, p. 20.

<sup>43</sup> Deposition of Thomas McMinn, 16 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 197-98.

<sup>44</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 78, journal 12 August 1829.

<sup>45</sup> Plomley, *Jorgenson and the Aborigines*, p. 59.

<sup>46</sup> As later chapters attest, the evidence for abductions is plentiful, and there are several examples of women being chained up or confined (see also Appendix 1).

to establish kinship with the newcomers. However, other than one possible exception,<sup>47</sup> there is no evidence of such diplomacy. Furthermore, it seems implausible that, in exchange for introduced goods, bands would offer their wives and daughters in perpetuity.<sup>48</sup> Given the immense economic, political and emotional value of women, it is difficult to believe that any portable quantity of goods would have compensated for their permanent loss.<sup>49</sup>

As violence and distrust escalated, bands that had once prostituted women to the whites began to withdraw from the settlements. The breakdown of relationships and the increase in abductions and killings fuelled one another in an inexorable feedback-loop, and by 1827, bands in the interior appear to have all but ceased trade and fraternisation with the whites. Although women were occasionally violated and abducted in the early years,<sup>50</sup> these incidents became far more common with the colonial population boom of the early 1820s. Typically, women were taken in campfire ambushes, and after being raped, were either released, killed or pressed into some form of bondage.<sup>51</sup> The experiences of these women, although largely undocumented, must have been horrific. Likewise, the families of abducted women suffered terribly from worry and loss.<sup>52</sup> Aboriginal men felt the added indignation of being emasculated and in some cases betrayed. The settler William Brodribb claimed that, although ‘there was a constant [consensual] communication between the stock-keepers and the female Natives’, the men ‘felt enraged at the stock-keepers taking their wives by force’.<sup>53</sup> Vandemonian men were nothing if not jealous and vengeful, and they often sought retribution. In April 1819, for instance, the *Hobart Town Gazette* was informed that ‘a native woman, supposed to be the wife of a Chief, had been maltreated by two of the stock-keepers; that she escaped after much ill-usage; and that the tribes returned and attacked ... in a peculiarly ferocious manner’. The

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<sup>47</sup> K. M. Bowden, *Captain James Kelly of Hobart Town*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1964, pp. 36-38.

<sup>48</sup> There are at least two references to northeast bands stealing women from enemy bands to exchange with sealers (see Chapter 6), but this is very different to selling a member of one’s own family. There is also an ambiguous reference to an Aborigine at Macquarie Harbour who, according to Backhouse (*A Narrative*, p. 58), ‘exchanged a girl of about fourteen years of age, for a dog, with the people at the Pilot Station; but the girl not liking her situation was taken back, and the dog returned.’

<sup>49</sup> For economic importance of women, see Chapter 2. For emotional attachments, see Chapter 12. In the very beginning dogs were also important trade items, but the eastern bands appear to have possessed them in great numbers within a decade or so of first settlement.

<sup>50</sup> See, for instance, B. Hamilton-Arnold, *Letters and Papers of G. P. Harris, 1803-1812: Deputy Surveyor-General of New South Wales at Sullivan Bay, Port Phillip and Hobart Town, Van Diemen’s Land*, Arden Press, Sorrento, Victoria, 1994, pp. 97-101; White to Aborigines Committee, 16 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 53; John Oxley’s report on Port Dalrymple, 1810, *Historical Records of Australia*, ser. 3, vol. 1, p. 576 & Examination of Henry Barrett, 14 April 1820, *Historical Records of Australia*, ser. 3, vol. 3, pp. 380-81.

<sup>51</sup> For examples of campfire ambushes, see Chapters 9 and 12. For the treatment of women after they were abducted, see Chapters 5, 6, 9 and Appendix 1.

<sup>52</sup> See Chapters 6 and 12.

<sup>53</sup> Brodribb to Aborigines Committee, 11 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 52. Brodribb claimed these events occurred fourteen years earlier.

attack left the two stock-keepers with serious wounds.<sup>54</sup> Finally, the desire for retribution drew a growing number of bands into a cycle of revenge that was central to the acceleration of frontier violence in the 1820s.

Kidnapping was another major cause of Aboriginal hostility during the early years of colonisation. In the case of the 'Oyster Bay tribe', West claimed they became belligerent after 'a native had been shot in an expedition to capture some aboriginal children.'<sup>55</sup> Likewise, when children were abducted in the Coal River area in 1810, their kinsfolk responded 'by spearing cattle, and other acts of hostility'.<sup>56</sup> The attitudes of the children are evidenced by the fact that so many of them eventually escaped back to their families. James Calder, for instance, wrote in 1875 that:

they were as difficult to tame permanently as wolves or wood pigeons are, unless when taken so young as to retain no remembrance of the wild life to which they were born; and there is hardly an instance of their not rejoining their own people on reaching manhood.<sup>57</sup>

This resistance to kidnapping, both by children and their families, is probably a major reason why it appeared to decline in the 1820s.

### **Thunder Sticks**

One of the most mysterious and troubling aspects of the newcomers was their guns. When fixed with a bayonet, a gun resembled a spear, yet it was never thrown. It made a noise like thunder, a flash like lightning, and at exactly the same time produced a hole in its target – but only sometimes. Reynolds found that some mainland bands came to associate these strange weapons with familiar objects and sounds. In Southern Australia, for example, guns were called 'pandapure', which was a conjunction of words meaning crackle and sparkle. In Queensland, the term used by the Kalkatunga people translated to 'holemaker'.<sup>58</sup> Similarly intuitive interpretations were made in Van Diemen's Land. Robinson was told that, before most Aborigines had glimpsed their first gun, a rumour spread among them of 'weapons that

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<sup>54</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 17 April 1819, p. 1 & 24 April 1819, p. 2. See also, for instance, *Tasmanian and Port Dalrymple Advertiser*, 12 & 19 January 1825.

<sup>55</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 10.

<sup>56</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, pp. 9-10; *Derwent Star*, 29 January 1810, p. 2.

<sup>57</sup> Calder, *Some Accounts*, pp. 94-95. Calder also noted that, due to their treatment in 'civilized' society, abductees returned to their tribes with redoubled bitterness and hostility towards the whites. The two best-known early examples were 'Tegg' and Kickertopoller ('Black Tom'). Plomley (*Friendly Mission*, p. 27) argued that boys who 'went wild' after being raised among the whites probably did so in part because they were unable to satisfy their sexual desires within colonial society.

<sup>58</sup> Reynolds, *Other Side of the Frontier*, p. 62.

vomited forth thunder and lightning and annihilated their unfortunate race'.<sup>59</sup> Even when the whites had become a familiar presence, their weapons retained an element of wonder. After a year of getting to know Aborigines from Bruny Island and elsewhere, Robinson came to believe 'these people attribute magic qualities to firearms.'<sup>60</sup>

Nevertheless, Vandemonians became remarkably savvy at negotiating violent situations in which their opponents wielded guns. Even if they did not understand the source of a gun's incredible power, they soon realised it fired a projectile, then it lost its power for around thirty seconds, at which point an advance or retreat could be made. During an attack in 1824, for instance, 'the fire-arms being improperly discharged all at once, and not having time to charge again, the Natives one and all suddenly advanced, thereby compelling the men instantly to retreat'.<sup>61</sup> According to the *Colonial Times*, this practice was established by 1826:

when a person happens unfortunately to get surrounded by a tribe, they will rush in upon him the moment after he discharges his musket, fully aware that, before he can again load and prime his gun, they can close upon him, and thereby put him to death.<sup>62</sup>

What is more, Aborigines often taunted white men into firing, upon which the assailing band would rush their victim.<sup>63</sup> They also recognised that not all guns were the same, and thus needed to be negotiated in different ways. For example, an Aboriginal woman told Robinson that a double-barrelled shotgun was known as 'a "Lowena", a gun that would shoot twice'.<sup>64</sup> In fact, guns appear to have lost much of their power of intimidation once Vandemonians understood their limitations.

### **Untenable Coexistence**

Initially, Vandemonians seem to have believed there were not enough whites to pose a serious threat, but as West observed, '[t]he rapid colonisation of the island from 1821 to 1824 ... [meant that] on every reappearance the natives found some favourite spot surrounded by new enclosures, and no longer theirs.'<sup>65</sup> As the balance of power tipped in the white man's favour, he was seen to grow bolder and more dangerous. Every act of violence and betrayal eroded relations further, and once they had broken down entirely, suspicion and miscommunication

<sup>59</sup> Cited in Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, p. 41.

<sup>60</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 165, journal 20 March 1830.

<sup>61</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 6 August 1824, p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> *Colonial Times*, 29 September 1826, p. 3. See also *Colonial Times*, 1 December 1826, p. 2.

<sup>63</sup> See, for instance, Clark to Vicary, 8 September 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 618; *Colonial Times*, 10 November 1826, pp. 2-3; *Friendly Mission*, p. 541, Journal 8 November 1831.

<sup>64</sup> Deposition of Alexander McKay, 24 September 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 981-83.

<sup>65</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 272. West's use of the word 'enclosure' is misleading, as very little property was fenced in the 1820s.

made them difficult to restore. In 1823, for instance, William Parramore observed that '[b]etween the natives of our neighbourhood and the English there is no communication, which, I think, is owing to the barbarous manner in which they are treated by the English if they are fallen in with by chance.'<sup>66</sup> Indeed, by the middle of the decade, most bands had ceased all contact with the forbidding strangers.

Notwithstanding this general reticence, the Aborigines' pre-War response to the whites was by no means entirely passive. In fact, some bands were openly hostile. When the Russian explorer Fabian Bellingshausen investigated the situation in 1820, he found that '[t]he natives of Van Diemen's Land live in a state of perpetual hostility against the Europeans.' He recorded that the Vandemonians 'hate all Europeans generally' and that 'reconciliation is out of the question.'<sup>67</sup> Collectively, Aboriginal bands attacked the strangers at least fifty-seven times during the first two decades of settlement, and many more almost certainly went unreported.<sup>68</sup> Although these pre-War incidents constituted only six per cent of the total number of recorded attacks by Aborigines,<sup>69</sup> they were not insignificant to the people who executed them. Assaulting the whites not only suborned the wrath of powerful and dangerous beings, it also undermined any chance for fruitful cooperation, so it would not have been a decision made lightly. For this reason Aborigines were cautious in the early years. When they did retaliate, they generally appear to have followed traditional precepts of proportional justice.<sup>70</sup> But as the invaders multiplied, so too did the Vandemonians' grievances, and by the mid 1820s it was clear that targeted revenge was not having the desired effect. All bands had made concessions, and none had wanted to go to war with the strangers, but at an alarming pace the War was coming to them.

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<sup>66</sup> Parramore to family, 19 November 1823, in Parramore, *The Parramore Letters*, pp. 30-31. The Parramore's lived in the Ross district.

<sup>67</sup> F. G. T. Bellingshausen, *The Voyage of Captain Bellingshausen to the Antarctic Seas, 1819-1821*, Kraus Reprints, Nendeln, Liechtenstein, 1967, p. 355. Bellingshausen conducted his investigations from Sydney.

<sup>68</sup> Twenty-eight per cent of these attacks involved the spearing or clubbing of domestic animals, whereas during the War years, only five per cent of attacks involved such violence. See Appendix 2 for the causes of low reportage.

<sup>69</sup> See tally in Appendix 2.

<sup>70</sup> See Chapter 2.



*White*

## 5

**The Sea Frontier**

The Black War was fought on more than one frontier. Less understood than the interior conflict, but no less important, was the sea frontier.<sup>1</sup> This was where the European men who occupied the Bass Strait islands encountered the natives of northern and eastern Van Diemen's Land.<sup>2</sup> Between 1810 and 1832, sealers killed or abducted several hundred natives.<sup>3</sup> Just as the stockmen and sawyers decimated many of the inland and southern bands, the sealers were the primary destroyers of the coastal bands. Yet the term 'Black War' is generally only used to denote the conflict in the interior. Most literature on the conflict ignores the sea frontier. To understand this omission, we must first appreciate the differences between the two theatres of contact.

Firstly, the sealers were engaged not so much in a war, but a system of slavery. The violence generally consisted of sealers ambushing a band of natives, and then withdrawing to the islands where neither native nor colonial justice could reach them. Secondly, the sea frontier appeared to be physically isolated from the conflict in settled districts. And thirdly, there are far fewer sources illuminating the sea frontier, which is probably why historians rarely treat it as part of the Black War.<sup>4</sup> However, on closer inspection the warrant for this partitioning quickly dissolves.

From the natives' perspectives the two frontiers were, as Chapter 6 explains, complexly interrelated. What is more, the parallels between the two frontiers are as numerous as they are illuminating. For one, the sealers' demographic, as well as their motives and tactics, was very

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<sup>1</sup> Patsy Cameron coined the useful term 'sea frontier' in her book *Grease and Ochre: The Blending of Two Cultures at the Colonial Sea Frontier* (Fullers, Launceston, Tasmania, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Contemporaries tended to refer to all men who frequented Bass Strait as sealers, and this thesis will follow suit, but some were not engaged in that occupation. The exceptions were usually pirates or whalers (or both). Pirates will receive some mention in the text of this Chapter, but whalers will not, so a brief description is offered here. Whaling ships had been operating in the South Seas since 1775, and out of the Derwent after it was settled in 1803. From 1819, bay whalers operated at different times out of stations at Droughty Point, Tinderbox, Bull Bay, Trumpeter Bay, South Port, Recherche Bay, Adventure Bay, Maria and Shouten Islands, Eddystone Point, Oyster Bay and other bays on the southern and eastern coasts of Van Diemen's Land. Although the record is too sparse to make any firm claims, these men were of the same demographic as the sealers (often they went sealing part of the year), and they probably exploited native women as well.

<sup>3</sup> In the early 1830s, Robinson mentioned the names of 124 native women living with the sealers (Plomley & Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait*, pp. 71-73), and Plomley & Henley (pp.18-19) gave several reasons why this was probably only a fraction of the total number taken.

<sup>4</sup> Had it not been for Robinson and the missionaries Backhouse and Walker, we would have little more than rumour from which to piece together events on the sea frontier. Furthermore, these people did not arrive in the straits until the end of the period under examination, which leaves many aspects of the sea frontier mired in obscurity.

similar to those of frontiersmen in the interior. Both frontiers were poorly policed borderlands and both were populated largely by sex deprived and brutalised men. This was not a coincidence, nor was the fact that the conflict on both frontiers occurred over roughly the same period. In contrast to the northwest frontier discussed in Appendix 1, the sea frontier shared a strong temporal and geographic concomitance with the conflict in the interior. To fully understand the Black War it must be conceptualised as multifaceted and interconnected phenomenon, in which the sea frontier played a major part.

Robinson described the sealers in his journals as ‘a horde of reprobates’ who obtained their women through treachery or outright abduction, while he portrayed the women as unwilling, but stoic victims of ‘their tyrants’. Almost every contemporary account echoed Robinson’s negative description, and the logical consequence of this trend has been a fairly uniform consensus among historians.<sup>5</sup> Scholars generally offer a more nuanced and dispassionate view than Robinson’s, but they have been compelled by sheer weight of evidence to conclude that his assessment of the sealers was basically correct. Patsy Cameron and Lyndall Ryan are the only significant exceptions to this consensus. Ryan and especially Cameron euphemised or ignored the abductions and cruelties perpetrated by the sealers. The sealers are portrayed almost like hippies, alternative in their lifestyles, and accommodating in their cultural interactions. They present the women as willing ‘wives’ and pioneering matriarchs, and their relationships with the sealers are cooperative and often affectionate. In addition, both authors emphasised the harmonious nature of relations between sealers and the coastal bands.<sup>6</sup> As this and the next Chapter demonstrate, these arguments are untenable. The present Chapter defends the orthodox thesis regarding the nature of the sealers and their treatment of the natives, but it will do so in a distinctive way. It endeavours to explore the attitudes and experiences of the sealers themselves, humanising, but not romanticising them.

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<sup>5</sup> The only notable exception was Charles Jeffreys (*Van Diemen’s Land: Geographical and Descriptive Delineations of the Island of Van Diemen’s Land*, J. M. Richardson, London, 1820, pp. 118-23), who claimed the native women ‘who have united themselves to our sailors have manifested a faithful and affectionate attachment’.

<sup>6</sup> Cameron, *Grease and Ochre*, 2011; Ryan, *Tasmanian Aborigines*, 2012, pp. 59-70. James Boyce’s commentary on the sealers (see *Van Diemen’s Land*) is similarly, if less ardently apologetic. As an example of how the evidence has been strained by some of these authors, Cameron (p. 96) argued that ‘the Straitsmen and clanspeople sealed their agreements with ceremonial dancing, singing and feasting at the beachhead.’ However, nothing in the known sources supports this. Cameron cited Ryan as her source, and Ryan cited no one. The project of revising history is often fruitful, but not when it flies in the face of practically all the primary and secondary sources.

## Phases of Sealing

After the discovery of huge seal colonies in Bass Strait in 1797, sealing quickly became Australia's first major export industry.<sup>7</sup> Over the decade that followed, scores of sealing gangs, each comprising around ten men, returned seasonally from Port Jackson to exploit the newfound resource. Gangs were generally resupplied from Sydney, and had only small boats, so trips to mainland Van Diemen's Land would have been dangerous. This is not to say contact with coastal bands never occurred – it probably did – but in the absence of evidence no conclusions can be drawn.<sup>8</sup>

Sealers were not concerned with conservation, and by 1810 Bass Strait's seal colonies were so depleted that most gangs moved on. But this was not the end of sealing in the area. Between 1810 and 1832, smaller crews of three to five men in whaleboats continued to hunt the remaining fur seals. These crews can be divided into two loose categories – those who lived in Bass Strait permanently and those who came seasonally. The latter were mostly crews that operated out of the Tamar and Derwent estuaries, sealing on the islands between November and May. As late as December 1824, the *Hobart Town Gazette* noted that 'an extraordinary number of small Colonial Craft are employed this season at the sealing islands in the straits'.<sup>9</sup>

There were generally no more than eight authorised sealing crews working the straits in any one season, though contemporaries often referred to the presence of 'rogue' crews in stolen vessels.<sup>10</sup> There is also considerable evidence that criminals were routinely smuggled out of the Tamar and Derwent Rivers, even on authorised vessels.<sup>11</sup> In 1826, for example, the *Hobart Town Gazette* went so far as to claim there were 'attempts now made at concealment in every vessel about to sail' and once out of port they made for the straits where they joined 'a dangerous and increasing band of pirates'.<sup>12</sup> The authorities found it difficult to distinguish the legitimate sealers from the illegitimate ones, the 'petty scoundrels' from the wanted escapees.

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<sup>7</sup> K. Merry, 'The Cross-Cultural Relationships between the Sealers and the Tasmanian Aboriginal Women at Bass Strait and Kangaroo Island in the Early Nineteenth Century', *The Flinders University Online Journal of Interdisciplinary Conference Papers*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2003, p. 80.

<sup>8</sup> Ryan made the unreferenced claim that sealers landed at Cape Portland in 1804, but I have found no empirical support for this. In fact, other than shipping reports, there are scarcely any records for this era of sealing.

<sup>9</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 10 December 1824, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> The *Hobart Town Gazette* ran a regular section with shipping information.

<sup>11</sup> Stewart to Campbell, 28 September 1815, *Historical Records of Australia*, ser. 3, vol. 2, pp. 575-76; A. C. Begg & N. C. Begg, *The World of John Boulton*, Whitecoulls, Christchurch, 1979, pp. 53, 59; Balfour Commission report, 5 May 1826, TAHO, CSO1/36, pp. 180-96; *Friendly Mission*, pp. 86-87, journal 28 September 1829. The authorities tried to prevent this practice, but this was subverted by picking the escapees up at rendezvous points down river or along the coast.

<sup>12</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 10 June 1826, p. 4.

Perversely, the islands that imprisoned so many native women were simultaneously oases of freedom for runaway convicts. These men were well known for their lawless and unscrupulous nature. In 1826, Governor Arthur commissioned an investigation into the situation in Bass Strait, headed by Lieutenant-Colonel William Balfour. The commission found the straits:

provide[d] constant Shelter and secure retreat for runaways, and villains of the worst description. Almost every Rock throughout the Straits has become the habitation of some one or more accurately the most desperate and lawless of mankind. Robberies are frequent. Murders, there is every reason to suppose, are not uncommon. The whole of the Straits seem to present one continued scene of Violence, Plunder, and the commission of every species of Crime.<sup>13</sup>

This accords with the findings of the most thorough and dispassionate study of the sealers to date, N. J. B. Plomley and Kristen Henley's *The Sealers of Bass Strait* (1990):

The largest group appears to have comprised seamen who had deserted their ships on arrival at Port Jackson or Hobart. Making up a second group were a number of ex-convicts: having served their sentences they seem to have gone to the straits as a place where they would be out of sight as well as out of mind, and where they could continue a lawless life without much fear of retribution. Then there were the petty criminals who found the straits safer than proximity to the authorities. Lastly there were a few who just wanted a quiet life.<sup>14</sup>

Any study of the sealers must rely heavily on Robinson, and when he arrived in 1830 most of the 'wanted' criminals had already been cleared out of the straits. In 1826, Captain Whyte aided by a party of the 40<sup>th</sup> Regiment, sailed for the islands in the *Duke of York* for the purpose of 'ridding Bass's Straits of [the] many bad characters, who have so long infested it.'<sup>15</sup> Whyte apprehended eighteen prisoners, which it was hoped would cause 'a reformation among the Islands'.<sup>16</sup> It is difficult to gauge just how effective Whyte's mission was, but certainly, as the straits came within the government's sphere of influence, escapees were encouraged to seek more remote hideaways.

When Robinson and his associates arrived to establish their mission on the islands in 1830 – which is when we begin to get decent records – the remaining forty or more sealers were permanent residents, living mostly in the Furneaux Islands.<sup>17</sup> By this time seals had become too scarce to support seasonal operations, but by exploiting the skilled labour of native women, these men had managed to diversify their economy to include, hunting, cropping and mutton-birding as well. Due to empirical limitations, the following discussion will focus mostly on

<sup>13</sup> Balfour Commission report, 5 May 1826, TAHO, CSO1/36, pp. 180-96.

<sup>14</sup> Plomley & Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait*, p. 33. Their research also revealed that the sealers generally lied about their biographies, which adds weight to the suspicion that they were involved in illegal activities.

<sup>15</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 25 March 1826, p. 2. Captain Skelton of the *Governor Sorell* assisted Whyte.

<sup>16</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 18 February 1826, p. 2, 25 March 1826, p. 2, 10 June 1826, p. 4; *Australian*, 9 March 1826, p. 2; Balfour Commission report, 5 May 1826, TAHO, CSO1/36, pp. 180-96.

<sup>17</sup> This mission site was relocated three times before Wybalenna was established on Flinders Island in 1833.

how the permanent residents of Bass Strait acquired and treated their women, though much of what can be said for these men can probably be said of their predecessors.

### **Acquiring Women**

'Indigenous women had long been seen as a fringe benefit of men's maritime occupations', argued Ann McGrath in her 1990 study of 'Aboriginal/Colonial Gender Relations at Port Jackson'.<sup>18</sup> The allure of naked, exotic women to sex-deprived sailors should present no surprise. Sometimes a scrupulous captain could check the exploitation of local women, but most Bass Strait sealers were under no such restraint. Initially, sex appears to have been their primary motivation for acquiring women and young girls, but the full potential of the practice soon became apparent. According to the sealer James Munro:

when the black women was first brought over from the main, they were intended principally to gratify the sealers, but that on one occasion the sealers happening to be away for a short time, they found on their return a quantity of kangaroo which the black women had caught, at sight of which the sealers resolved to make them hunt in future.<sup>19</sup>

But their employment was not restricted to hunting. The sealers compelled women to perform a multitude of tasks, including sealing, crewing boats and diving for shellfish, as well as a range of domestic duties such as making clothes, cooking food and raising children. At most of these tasks they were more competent than their masters, who came to rely heavily on them. It was also women who introduced the sealers to mutton-birding, which became an industry in its own right by the late 1820s, and allowed occupation of the straits to continue once sealing ceased to be viable. There is no doubt that sealers became, as Robinson put it, 'dependent upon these slaves for their subsistence.'<sup>20</sup>

Some sealers, up until at least 1816, were able to establish trading relationships with coastal bands, and in doing so became partially acquainted with their language and way of life. They traded seal carcasses and a variety of European goods for women, or assistance in raiding women from other bands. In entering into these exchanges, sealers may also – wittingly or

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<sup>18</sup> A. McGrath, 'The White Man's Looking Glass: Aboriginal/Colonial Gender Relations at Port Jackson', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 24, no. 95, 1990, p. 190.

<sup>19</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 162, journal 17 March 1830. James Munro was an ex-convict who lived on Preservation Island from about 1820 until his death in 1845. A charismatic man, he gained favour with Governor Arthur, who appointed him the straits' first constable in 1825 after he informed on two runaways hiding there (though there were numerous others he did not inform on). Widely regarded among his fellow sealers, Munro gained the colloquial title 'Governor of the Straits', but like them he was not above abducting and trading women.

<sup>20</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 336-38, journal 30 December 1830.

unwittingly, sincerely or insincerely – have entered into obligatory kin relationships.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, it will be demonstrated that the sealers had no respect for the natives and no compunction about breaking agreements with them.

Trade opportunities dwindled as relations broke down, but this did not stem the flow of women into Bass Strait. Up to one hundred sealers continued to operate in the straits during the early and mid 1820s, and they all desired women.<sup>22</sup> Plomley's argument that 'the Sealers obtained their native women, largely if not entirely, by raiding', is fully supported by the primary sources examined in this study.<sup>23</sup> According to Captain James Hobbs, who knew the straits well: 'when they could not purchase women they shot the men and carried their wives away'.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the evidence presented in this and the following Chapter confirms James Backhouse's observation that '[m]ost of these women were originally kidnapped.'<sup>25</sup>

Abductions appear to have begun early in the 1810s, as Major William Stewart reported in 1815:

For several years it had been the practice for whaleboats, twenty to thirty feet long, to clear out of Hobart and Port Dalrymple apparently with only two or three men on board, but in fact with several convicts hidden ... These buccaneers raided the Tasmanian mainland for aboriginal women and they traded in them ... keep[ing] them as Slaves or Negroes, hunting and foraging for them, who they transfer and dispose of from one to another as their own property; very few of whom ever see their Native Home [again].<sup>26</sup>

If the practice was common by 1815, it was well entrenched by the early 1820s. Robinson was fully aware of how the sealers 'rushed upon them [the natives] at their fires and shot the men.'<sup>27</sup> The sealers' tactics for abducting women were basically the same as the stock-keepers' and sawyers' described in Chapter 9. They would scour the horizon for signs of a campfire, then creep up and ambush their unsuspecting victims. Although the majority of these ambushes must have gone unrecorded, they are surprisingly well evidenced. Tenkotemanener, for instance, told Robinson that she and two others were 'stole away', when the sealers 'rushed them at their fires.'<sup>28</sup> Likewise, another woman told him that 'Munro and others

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<sup>21</sup> There is only one case of this on record. See the case of Mannalargenna bestowing his daughter on George Briggs in the following Chapter.

<sup>22</sup> The approximate maximum figure of 100 is suggested because there were around 50 sealers operating in the straits in the early 1830s, and we know this number had declined significantly due to the scarcity of seals and government regulation.

<sup>23</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 1047-48.

<sup>24</sup> Hobbs to Aborigines Committee, 9 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 50.

<sup>25</sup> Backhouse, *A Narrative*, pp. 88-89. See also Chapter 6.

<sup>26</sup> Stewart to Campbell, 28 September 1815, *Historical Records of Australia*, ser. 3, vol. 2, pp. 575-76.

<sup>27</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 212-15, journal 21 June 1830.

<sup>28</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 345, journal 11 January 1831.

rushed them at their fires and took six, that she was a little girl and could just crawl'.<sup>29</sup> Sealers also stole women from the northwest.<sup>30</sup> Alexander McKay, for example, told Robinson of how nine sealers:

surrounded a tribe of natives between Cape Grim and Mount Cameron and got them hemmed in. The men resisted and some were shot. They then sent out the women, finding this was the nature of their business; and they picked out seven of the finest and departed.<sup>31</sup>

Using these tactics, the sealers ravaged the coastal bands during the 1810s and especially the 1820s. Because sealers could retreat to the islands they did not have the frontiersman's dilemma of how to keep captured women and avoid retribution by their kinsmen. This geographical fact made all the difference, as the sealers were able to use the tempestuous seas of Bass Strait to both imprison their slaves and take safety from their aggrieved families.<sup>32</sup>

## Slavery

A small-scale slave trade flourished in Bass Strait in the 1820s.<sup>33</sup> The onetime sealing captain, James Kelly, testified in 1830 that 'every man [had] from two to five of these women for his own use'.<sup>34</sup> Confirming Kelly's observation, Plomley and Henley identified fifty Bass Strait sealers who collectively had possessed at least 124 women.<sup>35</sup> However, some sealers kept more than others. 'Harrington', for instance, 'procured 10 or 15 women, placed them on different islands, and left them to procure Kangaroo skins for him'.<sup>36</sup> There can be no doubt that these women were chattel slaves. '[T]hey are slaves', Robinson unequivocally insisted,

<sup>29</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 284-85, journal 15 October 1830. For more on ambushes, see Chapters 6 and 9.

<sup>30</sup> Sealers also abducted women from the Australian mainland and New Zealand.

<sup>31</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 218, journal 1 July 1830. See also pp. 236-37, 871, journals 20 August 1830 & 20 February 1834.

<sup>32</sup> Slave owners in the Americas were protected in a similar way by the Atlantic Ocean.

<sup>33</sup> Although it was obviously on a much smaller scale, the slave trade in Bass Strait between 1810 and 1832 shared many features with the recently outlawed Atlantic slave trade (in which some sealers may even have been involved). Women and girls were abducted in raids, either by the slavers themselves or by other bands that sold them on. They were then taken from their families and homeland to a foreign place across the water, where they were either kept by their abductors or sold. They were generally fed poorly, subjected to strenuous labour and brutally maltreated. They were also forced to have sex with their owners and frequently became pregnant by them. Their masters saw them as an inferior race and treated them accordingly. In the poignant words of Robinson (*Friendly Mission*, p. 91, journal 11 October 1829), this really was 'the African slave trade in miniature'.

<sup>34</sup> Kelly to Aborigines Committee, 10 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 51; Bowden, *Captain James Kelly*, p. 37. For evidence confirming Kelly's estimate, see *Australian*, 9 March 1826, p. 2 & Stewart to Campbell, 28 September 1815, *Historical Records of Australia*, ser. 3, vol. 2, pp. 575-76.

<sup>35</sup> Plomley & Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait*, pp. 27-28. Both these figures (especially the number of women) are necessarily conservative, as they were derived largely from Robinson who came late to the scene and was unable to do an exhaustive census of the islands. Furthermore, the number of sealers had decreased significantly from the mid 1820s.

<sup>36</sup> Kelly to Aborigines Committee, 10 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 51.

compelled to ‘do all kinds of drudgery’ and gratify their masters’ lust.<sup>37</sup> In 1829, Robinson had his first chance to talk to an emancipated slave, a woman called ‘Fanny’, who informed him ‘that this slave traffic is very common in the straits’.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to abducting women, there is abundant evidence that sealers commonly bought and sold them. The price commanded for native women appears to have varied considerably. ‘Tekartee’ and ‘Isaac’, for instance, were sold at different times for ‘some seal skins’; ‘Sarah’ was sold for four skins; ‘Pung’ cost John Thomas a mere guinea, while Munro paid John Anderson £7 for ‘Emma’.<sup>39</sup> On a separate occasion, the slaver George Meredith Jr. sold four girls at £7 each to Maynard, Bailey, Munro and Proctor.<sup>40</sup> During the 1820s, seal skins sold for around 15 shillings (£0.75) each in Hobart and, according to one sealer, ‘[a] good dog that will show the game he has killed is worth £5.’<sup>41</sup> This demonstrates that women were sometimes exchanged for trifling sums. There were many other transactions for which the payment is unknown. For example, John Mira abducted ‘Maria’ and sold her to Geordy Robinson; Thompson abducted ‘Judy’ and sold her to McKenzie; Mason abducted ‘Pangum’ and sold her to Brown; Maynard abducted ‘Smoker’ and sold her to Riddle; Morgan abducted ‘Ruth’ and sold her to Williams, and further examples could be enumerated.<sup>42</sup> Not all men who abducted women sold them on; yet others, such as Meredith, Baker, Thompson and McKenzie, were clearly abducting women for commercial reasons.

Paedophilia was also a prominent feature of this system of slavery. Writing about the prevalence of child abduction, Robinson observed that ‘[m]any such instances have occurred: James Munroe [*sic*] had Jumbo ever since she was a child, and several others the same.’<sup>43</sup> These others included ‘Ruth’, who was abducted by Morgan at age nine; ‘Poll’ by Peterson at age eight; ‘Little Kit’ by Kelly ‘when a girl’; McKenzie took ‘Sally’ ‘when a little girl’ and ‘Fanny’ at age nine; ‘Tekartee’ was taken ‘when a little girl’; ‘Margaret’ when an ‘infant’; and again, this list is by no means exhaustive.<sup>44</sup> Plomley and Henley found that, of the women emancipated in the early 1830s, nearly all were in their early twenties or younger, and most

<sup>37</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 328-31, journal 19 December 1830.

<sup>38</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 91, journal 11 October 1829. Fanny was one of three women who together had escaped from the sealers.

<sup>39</sup> Plomley & Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait*, pp. 34, 50, 58, 64-65.

<sup>40</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 414; Plomley & Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait*, p. 54. George Meredith, the son of a prominent Great Swanport landowner, was later speared to death at Napean Bay. On another occasion, Munro offered up an undisclosed amount to Meredith for ‘Margery’ (*The Sealers of Bass Strait*, p. 56).

<sup>41</sup> Skin prices have been taken from the *Hobart Town Gazette*, 1820-1827, though they varied considerably. For dog price, see Begg & Begg, *The World of John Boulton*, p. 62.

<sup>42</sup> Plomley & Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait*, pp. 51, 53, 54, 55, 70.

<sup>43</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 305-7, journal 12 November 1830.

<sup>44</sup> Plomley & Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait*, pp. 36, 48, 51, 54, 60, 70; *Friendly Mission*, pp. 284-85, 328-31, 340-42, journals 15 October, 19 December 1830, 6 January 1831; *Weep in Silence*, pp. 443-44, journal 21 May 1837. All specified ages are, of course, only the observers’ conjectures.



had been mere girls when they were seized.<sup>45</sup> There were obvious reasons why the sealers preferred children to adults, and sexual gratification was only one of them. For one, their inexperience and lack of strength made them more vulnerable in ambushes. Taken young, they were also more likely to grow submissive, and if prepubescent they would not burden their masters with unwanted children. What is more, they would likely hold their value as labourers and concubines longer.

### 1826: A Revealing Year

The sealers' activities were no secret, but colonists were far more concerned about the danger these pirates posed to shipping and trade, than about their treatment of blacks.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, when the situation began to be investigated in the mid 1820s, the flourishing slave trade could not be ignored. In 1826 alone, the *Hobart Town Gazette* published five vituperative editorials on the subject.<sup>47</sup> In March, the paper claimed that 'Boatmen working in the straits ... frequently carry off the black women from the main, and compel them to labour for them.'<sup>48</sup> Then in August it declared:

The treatment these miserable black women experience from their inhuman ... masters could not be believed were it not too visible and too surely authenticated. The bruises they bear, their heads beaten and inflicted with the same clubs that are used to kill the seal, the scanty offals of opossums, kangaroo, or shell fish, which they themselves have procured, & which are thrown to them after the very dogs have been satisfied, indicate this without a contradiction.<sup>49</sup>

1826 revealed a great deal about the sealers and their conduct. In addition to Captain Whyte's voyage and the Balfour Commission, there was also the voyage of the *Helen* under the command of Captain Laughton. 'The Islands between Van Diemen's Land and the Main', Laughton reported, 'are infested with numerous gangs of runaways, whose piratical outrages render the navigation of Bass's Straits dangerous to all unarmed vessels.'<sup>50</sup> But none of these accounts were as telling as Major Lockyer's, who was sent from Sydney in 1826 to establish a

<sup>45</sup> Plomley & Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait*, pp. 18-19. This also supports their contention that there was a high mortality among island women.

<sup>46</sup> According to the *Australian* (9 March 1826, p. 2), '[e]very sealing vessel suffers more or less from the hordes of men in and about the Strait's; and the smaller description of them, by all accounts, may be considered particularly fortunate if they escape by being only plundered, and are not altogether seized and pirated.' See also *Colonial Times*, 10 February 1826, p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 18 February 1830, p. 2, 25 March 1830, p. 2, 10 June 1830, p. 4, 26 August 1830, p. 2 & 18 November 1830, p. 2. These editorials were probably fairly accurate. Not only do they agree with the wider body of evidence, they were informed by the reports of men such as Captain Whyte, the sealer, G. W. Robinson, and the recently submitted Balfour Commission report.

<sup>48</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 25 March 1826, p. 2.

<sup>49</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 26 August 1826, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> *Colonial Times*, 10 February 1826, p. 3.

settlement at King George Sound. On the way, he called at Kangaroo Island, which was frequented by the Bass Strait sealers, many of whom took their women.<sup>51</sup> Here, Lockyer discovered ‘a great scene of villainy’. The Captain described the sealers as ‘a complete set of Pirates ... [who] carry off by force native women, and when resisted make use of firearms’.<sup>52</sup> On his arrival at King George Sound, he found the body of a native man on Green Island and four starving native men marooned by sealers on Michaelmas Island. After rescuing them, Lockyer set about interrogating the local sealers, who had sailed from Bass Strait and Kangaroo Island to hunt seals in the area.

William Hook, one of the sealers involved, confessed that the local blacks had previously been friendly, but had kept their women at a distance. In order to gain access to them, the sealers had killed one man and marooned the others. Lockyer learnt that these sealers had brought with them two slaves from Van Diemen’s Land and had abducted at least four local women. One of these women had been enslaved on Eclipse Island by the sealer Samuel Bailey, who had won her by drawing straws with his companions. Bailey had beaten the woman severely and left her there with a seven-year-old girl he had abducted earlier.<sup>53</sup> This account is by no means atypical, and it gives us a powerful insight into the sealers’ attitudes. They had no compunction about killing men to gain access to their women, whom they saw fit to sell, enslave and even gamble with. They also seem to have considered it normal and acceptable to sexually and physically abuse these women, many of whom were mere children.

### **Attitudes Towards the Natives**

The sealers did not document their own racial thinking, nor did anyone else relay the specifics of their views. We are left, rather, to infer what they thought from their background and behaviour. The sealers came largely from Britain’s working-class poor, who were, as discussed in Chapter 1, inclined to hold vague, but negative preconceptions of indigenous peoples as sub-human savages. Gauging from the sealers’ behaviour, this is indeed how they perceived the natives of Van Diemen’s Land.<sup>54</sup> Remarkably though, some authors have used

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<sup>51</sup> See R. Taylor, *Unearthed: The Aboriginal Tasmanians of Kangaroo Island*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, South Australia, 2008.

<sup>52</sup> Lockyer’s journal, 17 January 1827, *Historical Records of Australia*, ser. 3, vol. 6, pp. 471-72.

<sup>53</sup> Lockyer’s journal, 11-21 January 1827, *Historical Records of Australia*, ser. 3, vol. 6, pp. 469-70.

According to Lockyer (p. 470), Bailey ‘admits he drew cuts as he terms it with the others of his Companions for the woman’. ‘Straws’ has been instantiated for clarity.

<sup>54</sup> The sealers’ treatment of mainland Australian and New Zealand natives indicates that they considered these peoples as inferiors also. Many of the sealers’ own ‘half-caste’ children shared the same fate. One sealer, George ‘Fireball’ Bates, also kept a little boy of ten years, whose arm he broke across his knee for attempting to escape (*Friendly Mission*, p. 1054).

the term 'island wives' to refer to the way sealers viewed their women.<sup>55</sup> This is empirically indefensible. The behaviour of the sealers unequivocally demonstrates that they looked upon their women primarily as commodities. One indicator of this was the sealers' tendency to prostitute their women. Wottecowidyer, for instance, told Robinson that 'the men make them cohabit with the other men for a kangaroo skin.'<sup>56</sup> Likewise, Sall told him 'that Brown sent her to sleep with the [other] sealers for one night and they gave him a kangaroo skin.'<sup>57</sup> It also appears to have been customary for men to beat women who belonged to other men.<sup>58</sup> This was not the behaviour of men towards their wives, even in the most desperate and dysfunctional corners of European society.

When the missionary George Washington Walker informed the sealers that, 'if they continued to live together, it was their duty to marry' their concubines, he was told:

that their residence in the straits was only of a temporary nature, and that should they connect themselves with the women by marriage, they would be compelled to take them away with them when the period of their departure arrived; in plain terms avowing, that they held these poor women in bondage to suit their own purposes, but did not choose to acknowledge any other ties than those of convenience or inclination.<sup>59</sup>

Robinson's papers bear this out also. William Dutton, for instance, abandoned his native woman to marry a white woman, taking their 'half-caste' child with him.<sup>60</sup> Likewise, John Anderson abandoned his concubine and child to pursue a life on mainland Van Diemen's Land.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, throughout this period it was not uncommon for sealers to sire multiple children with native women only to abandon the former and sell off the latter.<sup>62</sup> Utility, not love, was the reason native women were enslaved, and once they were no longer useful, they were expendable. In Robinson's words, the sealers 'only regard their women in proportion to the quantity of work they perform.'<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> See, for instance, Gregg Lehman ('Tyerelore Culture', in A. Alexander, *A Companion to Tasmanian History*, Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, Hobart, 2005, p. 371) and Patsy Cameron (*Grease and Ochre*).

<sup>56</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 333-34, journal 25 December 1830.

<sup>57</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 294, journal 30 October 1830.

<sup>58</sup> For instance, *Friendly Mission*, pp. 291-92, journal 25 October 1830.

<sup>59</sup> Walker, *Life and Labours*, p. 94. It is worth noting here that sealers generally gave these women very unfeminine sobriquets, such as Blind Poll, Boatswain, Bung, Duke, Dumpe, Duncan, Goose, Harpooner, Isaac, Jock, John, Jumbo, Little Buck, Long One, Peacock, Penguin, Pung, Smoker, Towser. This practice, which was also common on slave plantations in the Americas (see, for instance, T. G. Burnard, 'Slave naming patterns: Onomastics and the Taxonomy of Race in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 31, no. 3, 2001, pp. 325-46), further indicates that sealers did not look upon native women as their wives.

<sup>60</sup> Plomley & Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait*, p. 43.

<sup>61</sup> Plomley & Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait*, p. 35.

<sup>62</sup> Plomley & Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait*, pp. 25-27, 38, 68. On 19 October 1831, the *Launceston Advertiser* (p. 325) reported that the streets of Launceston were full of 'half-caste' orphans, the 'sons and daughters of sealers and others'.

<sup>63</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 364-65, journal 29 March 1831.

There is evidence that some sealers may have been fond of their 'half-caste' children, but in general this was not the case. In fact, both the sealers and their women told Robinson that the former frequently 'encouraged' the latter to kill their children.<sup>64</sup> Other times, the sealers did it themselves. On one occasion, at Cape Barren Island, a crying infant irritated a Maori sealer. Robert Gamble, one of the men in his company, returned to find he had 'stopped its crying for he had buried it alive.' Even more telling than the act itself was the response of the Maori's peers: 'Gamble laughed heartily whilst reciting the monstrous and inhuman circumstance, especially at some ludicrous expression made use of by the New Zealander at the time, and also related the story to amuse his associates.'<sup>65</sup> Children were a nuisance and a liability to most sealers, and with no legal or moral authority intruding on their activities, disposing of unwanted progeny was not difficult.<sup>66</sup>

### A Culture of Violence

Some sealers appear to have taken sadistic pleasure in torturing their victims. As early as 1815, Stewart observed that the sealers, 'by way of punishment, half hang them [their women], cut their heads with Clubs in a Shocking Manner, or flog them most unmercifully with Cats made from Kangaroo Sinews'.<sup>67</sup> One of these women told Robinson that:

the sealers beat the black women plenty; they cut a piece of flesh off a woman's buttock; cut off a boy's ear, Emue's boy. This woman is now on Woody Island with Abyssinia Jack. The boy died in consequence of his wounds. They cut them with broad sealer's knives. Said they tied them up and beat them with ropes. Bill Dutton beat her plenty.<sup>68</sup>

Munro admitted that:

the greatest and most barbarous cruelties was [*sic*] practised by the sealers at Kangaroo Island towards the black women; that the sealers cut the flesh off the cheek of a black boy and made him eat it; that Anderson told him that the sealers tied up a black woman to a tree and then cut the flesh off her thigh and cut off her ears and made her eat it [*sic*].<sup>69</sup>

<sup>64</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 333-34, journal 25 December 1830.

<sup>65</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 425, journal 1 August 1831.

<sup>66</sup> Robinson noted that the majority of sealers did not have children with their native women. The most likely explanation for this is that unwanted children were disposed of.

<sup>67</sup> Stewart to Campbell, 28 September 1815, *Historical Records of Australia*, ser. 3, vol. 2, pp. 575-76. Boyce (*Van Diemen's Land*, p. 17) quoted Stewart at length, but inserted ellipses in four places to remove all references to the abduction and torture of women.

<sup>68</sup> *Weep in Silence*, pp. 445-46, journal 2 June 1837.

<sup>69</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 389-90, journal 28 May 1831.

Munro said the latter punishment ‘was because she had run away’, but similar violence could be incurred for lesser offences.<sup>70</sup>

On 28 June 1830, Robinson was questioning a woman when her enslaver revealingly assured him: ‘She won’t tell you a lie, Sir; if we detect them in doing wrong they get flogged for it, but you know, Sir, not violently’.<sup>71</sup> However, the sealers’ understanding of what constituted ‘violently’ was much different to their less brutalised contemporaries’. According to Munro, ‘if they [the women] should happen to return with a small quantity [of game] they would tie them up to a tree and flog them’.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, if John Harrington’s harem slaves failed to procure a satisfactory amount of game while they were marooned on various islands in the straits, he ‘used to punish them’, according to Kelly, ‘by tying them up to trees for 24 or 36 hours together, flogging them at intervals’.<sup>73</sup>

Sometimes though, the sealers were not satisfied just to beat their slaves. Plomley and Henley found that, once on the islands, the women’s ‘mortality was heavy’.<sup>74</sup> Before their emancipation, there is no evidence of illness among these women, but there is good reason to believe that many died violently.<sup>75</sup> Kelly, for instance, claimed that sealers ‘not infrequently killed the women in cold blood if they were stubborn’.<sup>76</sup> Robinson learnt of specific cases, such as the killing of a woman by Jem Everitt on Woody Island. ‘[T]he rest of the men told him to shoot her because she would not get mutton birds’, recalled one of the women who had been present.<sup>77</sup> Likewise, Robert Gamble shot women on two separate occasions.<sup>78</sup> Some sealers were even ‘known to burn their women alive’.<sup>79</sup> Such evidence clearly establishes that racial prejudice, brutalisation, and the absence of legal and moral restraints, produced a culture of violence in Bass Strait.

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<sup>70</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 389-90, journal 28 May 1831.

<sup>71</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 217, journal 28 June 1830.

<sup>72</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 389-90, journal 28 May 1831.

<sup>73</sup> Kelly to Aborigines Committee, 10 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 51.

<sup>74</sup> Plomley & Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait*, p. 25. This high mortality of the children, argued Plomley and Henley (p. 25), was ‘quite apart from the killing of children by the native women.’

<sup>75</sup> This is not to suggest there was no disease among the island women, only that we have no record of it. For evidence of violent deaths, see *Friendly Mission*, pp. 281, 371-72, 424, 620, journals 11 October 1830, 9 April, 29 July 1831 & 3 March 1832.

<sup>76</sup> Kelly to Aborigines Committee, 10 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 51.

<sup>77</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 284-85, journal 15 October 1830.

<sup>78</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 281, 372, 625, journals 11 October 1830, 9 April 1831, 3 March 1832.

<sup>79</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 374-75, journal 14 April 1831. This information came from ‘Williams the pilot’.

## Explaining the Sealers

John Boulton, the rebellious son of a well-to-do Nottinghamshire family, sought adventure on a sealing vessel in 1823.<sup>80</sup> On his maiden voyage, while at anchor in Kent Bay, Boulton observed:

At night 2 sealing Boats came along side with their crews consisting of 12 half barbarous looking fellows who seemed to want no introduction but came on deck as if they were going to take the vessel & all hands. Their first inquiry was for grog ... [then] they asked me if I was not a 'swell's son run out', meaning a gentleman's son who has spent his fortune. But to their enquiries I answered with seeming indifference – some remarked I should cut a better figure amongst swells than amongst the 'likes o' them', but they 'reckoned as I had played at bowls, I must expect rubbers.'<sup>81</sup> 'What odds', said another, 'I wish all such coves were made to run the same round as ourselves, if I had my way there should be no gentlemen.'<sup>82</sup>

These sealers had clearly developed a sense of pride and solidarity based on their renegade position, beyond the hierarchical and authoritarian strictures of mainstream society. Most had suffered under oppressive systems of convictism and maritime indenture, so they were willing to endure the hardships of a sealer's life in exchange for the freedoms it offered.

Many sealers also had less cavalier reasons for avoiding authority. Given the abundance of employment opportunities in the colonies, there was little incentive for honest men to suffer the privation and rugged isolation of life in the straits – particularly as there were so few seals left from which to profit.<sup>83</sup> Consequently, the islands became home to a formidable assortment of outcasts, criminals, eccentrics and everything in between. Contemporary opinions of the sealers were often coloured by class snobbery, but the fact that they were so consistently disparaging suggests there was some truth to their characterisations of these men. Boulton described his fellow sealers as 'thieves and scoundrels fit for no society, [and] void of every good quality', and this is echoed in every other surviving reflection on the sealers' characters.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Begg & Begg, *The World of John Boulton*, pp. 21-87.

<sup>81</sup> This remark has its origin in the Shakespearean proverb: 'those who play at bowls must look out for rubbers', which warns people to be aware of the obstacles in their chosen path. In this context it seems the sealers were warning Boulton to watch his back.

<sup>82</sup> Begg & Begg, *The World of John Boulton*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>83</sup> For employment see R. M. Hartwell, *The Economic Development of Van Diemen's Land 1820-1850*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1954, p. 197 & Melville, *History of Van Diemen's Land*, p. 87. There were some examples of larger crews making decent hauls, but these were rare. By the late 1820s, sealing alone in Bass Strait could scarcely provide subsistence (*Friendly Mission*, pp. 336-38, journal 30 December 1830).

<sup>84</sup> Begg & Begg, *The World of John Boulton*, p. 52. Boulton found these men so despicable that he demanded to be marooned at Western Port not long into the voyage.

The story of how the sealers came to think and behave the way they did began in childhood. Most were raised in varying degrees of poverty, and then transported or apprenticed at a young age. Even those who had experienced the affections of families and lovers in early life had long since become hardened by their careers as sailors and prisoners.<sup>85</sup> A fondness for alcohol was also symptomatic of the sealers' buccaneer lifestyle. When trading with passing vessels, rum was the primary currency, which is indicative of what sealers valued most.<sup>86</sup> No doubt drinking was one of the few pleasures their austere lives permitted, but it also made them more violent and unpredictable, and according to their slaves, 'the sealers got drunk plenty'.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, it is not exculpatory to point out that the sealers' infamous brutality was a product of their peculiar histories and circumstances.

The freedom of the islands was something few of these men had previously experienced. Not only was there no authority to control them, there were no social pressures to shame them into controlling themselves. If they could evade the wrath of their victims, and the occasional government vessel, the sealers were basically free to live lawless lives and indulge their carnal desires. Nevertheless, there is little indication such a life brought them happiness or fulfilment. There was inevitably a tradeoff between the freedom they sought in Bass Strait and the torments this entailed. Munro claimed to have found contentedness, but most sealers appear to have eked out a rather wretched existence on the cold, windswept and mostly barren islands of Bass Strait.<sup>88</sup> Their work was hard, dangerous and uncomfortable, and it supported only the most meagre subsistence. Perhaps worst of all though, sealers' lives appear to have been almost devoid of love, and an atmosphere of distrust corroded their friendships as well.

In Bass Strait, it was every man for himself, and sealers seem to have lived in constant fear of one another. '[T]hey rob each other', Lockyer observed, 'the weak being obliged to give way to the stronger'.<sup>89</sup> According to Robinson, '[t]hese men consider it a fortunate circumstance when anyone is drowned, as they say they was [*sic*] in their debt and seize upon their

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<sup>85</sup> For a vivid description of a seaman's life and deprivations, see P. Linebaugh & M. Rediker, *The Many Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Atlantic*, Verso, London, 2000, pp. 143-73. Thomas Marslen (*The Friend of Australia: Or, a Plan for Exploring the Interior and for carrying on a Survey of the Whole Continent of Australia*, Hurst, Chance & Co., London, 1830, p. 292) was probably also correct when he wrote: 'The [sealers] themselves, it is said, are become [*sic*] brutalized through neglect and being cut off from society'.

<sup>86</sup> See, for instance, Begg & Begg, *The World of John Boulton*, p. 60. Spirits was a common currency at the time, but passing ships laden with provisions could presumably have offered the sealers a range of useful supplies.

<sup>87</sup> *Weep in Silence*, pp. 445-46, journal 2 June 1837.

<sup>88</sup> Begg & Begg, *The World of John Boulton*, pp. 21-24.

<sup>89</sup> Lockyer's journal, 17 January 1827, *Historical Records of Australia*, ser. 3, vol. 6, p. 472. See also, for instance, P. Cunningham, *Two years in New South Wales: A Series of Letters Comprising Sketches of the Actual State of Society in that Colony; of its Peculiar Advantages to Emigrants; of its Topography, Natural History, etc.*, vol. 2, Libraries Board of South Australia, Adelaide, 1966 [1827], pp. 103-4. Cunningham described the vicious infighting among sealers at Macquarie Island around the same time.

property.'<sup>90</sup> The scramble for a dead man's slaves was especially pitiless.<sup>91</sup> Sometimes, however, they could not wait until their fellow sealers were dead, as in the case of John Taylor, who had his concubine and child stolen from him while he was away sealing.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, it was not uncommon for sealers to murder their associates for their property. Robert Knight, for instance, was murdered by a fellow sealer so as to gain possession of his two slave women.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, 'numerous individuals' who fled to the islands were never heard of again, and the *Hobart Town Gazette* reported that many of them were murdered in disputes over rum and tobacco.<sup>94</sup>

Violence was so much a part of sealers' lives that they became largely inured to it. As convicts and seamen they had experienced chains, fistfights and floggings, and now they systematically clubbed and butchered seals, all of which served to normalise violence. Whilst most were probably still capable of empathy and kindness, their harsh existence was far from conducive to it. 'It is not improbable that they were sensible of kindness', wrote John West:

but it is very certain that this was not their ordinary lot. Unanimous testimony permits no doubt that they [the sealers' slaves] experienced the severity, which men of low intellect, and of fierce and capricious passions, inflict on women of an inferior race.<sup>95</sup>

In their slave women, it seems, the sealers saw an opportunity to finally be masters instead of servants. They were certainly hard, and often ruthless men, but the unforgiving world in which they lived did not favour the weak, nor reward the humane. In this sense, their inhuman legacy reveals them as all too human.

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<sup>90</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 338-39, journal 31 December 1830.

<sup>91</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 291-92, journal 25 October 1830. A number of women were redistributed in this manner (see Plomley & Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait*, pp. 33-70).

<sup>92</sup> Plomley & Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait*, p. 65. See also the case of Windeerrer (*Weep in Silence*, pp. 445-46, journal 2 June 1837).

<sup>93</sup> Plomley & Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait*, p. 50.

<sup>94</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 10 June 1826, p. 4.

<sup>95</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 24.



*Black*

## 6

**The Sea Frontier**

The Aborigines of northern Van Diemen's Land no doubt heard stories about the visitations of mysterious white men long before they ever encountered them. It was another generation before sealers gave them their first glimpse of the strangers.<sup>1</sup> Early encounters were sometimes amicable, allowing bands to gain access to dogs and other exotic goods, but just as it had in the interior, the white man's desire for women soon destroyed any chance of peaceful coexistence. Eventually, bands from Mount Cameron in the northwest to Bruny Island in the southeast felt the impact of the sealers' lust, but none suffered as greatly as the northeast bands. This Chapter explores Aboriginal relations with the sealers, and the ways coastal bands responded to the threat these strangers posed. It will also examine the experiences of the women who were sold or abducted into slavery – 'Tyereelore', as some Vandemonians called them – as well as those of their kinsfolk.

**Trade and Abduction**

There is only one first-hand account of an exchange between Aborigines and sealers, but it demonstrates that early encounters on the sea frontier were not always violent. In 1816, a band from Cape Portland encountered James Kelly and his crew, who were circumnavigating the island in a whaleboat. The band's chief, 'Lamanbunganah' – whom Patsy Cameron identified as Mannalargenna and is hereafter referred to as such – was familiar with one of Kelly's men, the sealer George Briggs.<sup>2</sup> Mannalargenna, who was at war with his brother 'Tolo', called on Briggs to join him in a campaign against his sibling.<sup>3</sup> When Briggs refused, Kelly recorded in his journal that Mannalargenna 'seemed greatly dissatisfied, and told Briggs in a very hostile tone that he had often before gone with him to fight other tribes when he (Briggs) wanted

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<sup>1</sup> The evidence suggests contact had been established in the northeast by at least 1810 (Bowden, *Captain James Kelly*, p. 36). The absence of women among the sealers must have puzzled the Vandemonians of the northeast just as the all-male explorers had confused those in the southeast (see Chapter 4).

<sup>2</sup> Bowden, *Captain James Kelly*, pp. 36-37; Cameron, *Grease and Ochre*, 2011, p. 83. I agree with Cameron that Lamanbunganah was almost certainly Mannalargenna, the chief who later gained notoriety as a member of the 'friendly mission'. Aboriginal names were discordant to Europeans' ears (even Robinson's spellings varied considerably), but the two names are phonetically similar and the biographies are a match.

Furthermore, as argued in Chapter 14, it is very likely that the chief identified as 'Limogana', who visited John Batman's property in October 1830, was Mannalargenna. There are a number of reasons for inferring this, but essentially the timing, location and details all point to this conclusion, which is also drawn by Jorgenson (Plomley, *Jorgeson and the Aborigines*, p. 113) and West (*History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 59).

<sup>3</sup> 'Tolo' was Kelly's abbreviation for 'Tolobunganah'.

women.’<sup>4</sup> Although Mannalargenna threatened to press the white men into his service, Kelly, Briggs and the others managed to steal away that evening. Tolo, who was also acquainted with Briggs, headed a large band that was congregated at Eddystone Point. He encountered the men five days after they had evaded his brother, and ordered six women to help them kill seals on nearby King George’s Island. During this time, Tolo busied his people hunting and skinning kangaroos to trade for the seal carcasses. After the exchange was complete, Tolo had his people dance on the beach as the boatmen pulled away.<sup>5</sup>

It is clear from Kelly’s account that some early trade took place on the sea frontier, and not just in seals and kangaroos. Mannalargenna’s band collaborated with Briggs in raiding neighbouring bands for women, which is probably what one of the women from his band was referring to when she told Robinson ‘that her people took the black women from the natives at Port Dalrymple and sold them to the sealers for dogs, mutton birds, flour &c.’<sup>6</sup> There are several reliable references to northeastern bands trading women for seal carcasses, dogs and various introduced goods. Captain James Hobbs, for instance, told the Aborigines Committee: ‘At one time the native men would sell a native woman for four or five carcasses of seals’.<sup>7</sup> The firsthand experience of being sold into slavery was affectingly captured in the testimony of Lowhenunhe, who told Robinson:

that the sealers at the straits carry on a complete system of slavery; that they barter in exchange for women flour and potatoes; that she herself was bought off the black men for a bag of flour and potatoes; that they took her away by force, tied her hands and feet, and put her in the boat; that white man beat black woman with a rope.<sup>8</sup>

Lowhenunhe seems to have been taken from her people by an enemy band that then sold her on to the sealers, and this appears to be how the majority of ‘exchanged’ Tyereelore ended up in Bass Strait.

In at least one case, however, a band volunteered one of their own women to the sealers. Before their meeting at Cape Portland in 1816, Mannalargenna had bestowed one of his daughters on Briggs, and in doing so he was probably attempting to secure an alliance.<sup>9</sup> He may even have looked upon Briggs as kin, especially if he believed him to be possessed of an

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<sup>4</sup> Bowden, *Captain James Kelly*, p. 36. This communication was probably in pidgin.

<sup>5</sup> Bowden, *Captain James Kelly*, pp. 40-42.

<sup>6</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 289, journal 20 October 1830.

<sup>7</sup> Hobbs to Aborigines Committee, 9 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, pp. 49-51. Hobbs made a similar observation in a letter to Reverend William Bedford, dated 20 July 1824, after circumnavigating Van Diemen’s Land (Bedford papers, SLNSW, ML, A76, pp. 13-14).

<sup>8</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 91, journal 11 October 1829. Lowhenunhe was one of three Bruny Island women taken by Baker. See also *Friendly Mission*, pp. 305-7, journal 12 November 1830.

<sup>9</sup> Bowden, *Captain James Kelly*, pp. 36-37. In the handful of references to Aborigines trading women to the sealers, it is not clear whether men sold their own women or those they had stolen from enemy bands, though the distinction was clearly important.

ancestral spirit.<sup>10</sup> The terms of the agreement are unknown, but it is difficult to believe that Mannalargenna or any other Aborigine would have relinquished his own daughter for purely commercial reasons. Unless some ongoing collaboration was expected in return, the emotional and economic value of women to Vandemonian society made it nonsensical to sell them for ‘a bag of flour and potatoes’ or ‘four or five carcasses of seals’. These trade goods might feed a band for a few days, but women provided the majority of its food, year round.<sup>11</sup> Either way, these trading relationships did not last long. One reason for this was that northeastern bands possessed dozens of dogs by 1816, meaning they no longer required the commodity they once coveted above all others.<sup>12</sup> But, more importantly, the sealers betrayed their trust. Briggs, for instance, eventually sold Mannalargenna’s daughter to a fellow sealer, and abandoned (or possibly sold) their three daughters.<sup>13</sup>

The records for the sea frontier begin to improve in the 1820s. By the beginning of the decade, the coastal bands appear to have ceased all trade with the sealers, but these men would gain access to Aboriginal women, with or without their consent. Convict Alexander McKay recalled that once:

quarrels [sprang up] between the two races, in which several of each side were killed, the natives grew chary of intercourse with the whites, and this species of barter was so much interrupted, that at last women could only be obtained by force.<sup>14</sup>

The Balfour Commission confirmed this in 1826, and in 1830 the Aborigines Committee found ‘that many aggressions were committed on the north-east coast by sealers, because the men refused to give up their wives’.<sup>15</sup> Aside from the other consequences of the sealers’ violence, it must have left a bitter feeling of betrayal in the minds of those Vandemonians who had once considered them allies.

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<sup>10</sup> Bowden, *Captain James Kelly*, pp. 36-40.

<sup>11</sup> The importance of women for food provision was even greater among coastal bands (see Hiatt, ‘Food Quest and the Economy of the Tasmanian Aborigines’, pp. 99-133).

<sup>12</sup> Kelly noted that Tolo’s people had ‘at least fifty dogs’ (Bowden, *Captain James Kelly*, p. 40).

<sup>13</sup> Plomley & Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait*, pp. 27, 65. It is not clear whether Briggs’ daughters were sold to people around Launceston or simply abandoned. Eliza and Dalrymple ended up living with settlers, while Mary is listed by Robinson as a ‘vagrant’.

<sup>14</sup> Calder, *Some Accounts*, p. 91. Calder’s paraphrasing.

<sup>15</sup> Balfour report, 30 May 1826, TAHO, CSO1/36, pp. 180-96 & Aborigines Committee report, 19 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, pp. 35-55. The Committee’s assessment was based largely on depositions from Kelly & Hobbs.

## Women's Experience

In Kelly's 1816 account, Tolo's women were enthusiastic about helping the sealers and together they managed to kill sixty-five seals in six days.<sup>16</sup> This demonstrates that Vandemonian women were sometimes happy to work with particular sealers, yet several problems arise for those who would present this example as typical of sea frontier relations. To begin with, Kelly's account is the only example we have of women labouring willingly for sealers; even so, this was probably because they were employed for just a few days. With the possible exception of Walyer (discussed below) there is no record of any woman being removed to the islands of her own volition.<sup>17</sup> Regardless of whether they were taken or traded, women's wishes appear to have been irrelevant.<sup>18</sup>

The Tyereelore were literally chattels to be bought, sold, abused or abandoned at will. Chapter 5 explains that they were initially acquired as sex slaves, forced to submit to their masters, and often shared among his associates. Patsy Cameron has tried to dismiss the gravity of this sexual exploitation by claiming that, '[i]f these women were merely the objects of sexual gratification then it appears that it was mutual.'<sup>19</sup> This attempt to somehow exculpate the sealers by claiming they were themselves sexually exploited by libidinous Aboriginal women is in direct conflict with all the evidence. Like so many slave women throughout history, the Tyereelore were forced to relinquish control over their bodies, and submission to their master's sexual urges was a central feature of their experience.

In other systems of bondage, there were usually some slaves who, by way of religion or a decent master, became content with their situation, but such exceptions appear to have been uncommon in Bass Strait.<sup>20</sup> Practically all accounts describe the Tyereelore's lives as full of violence and despair. A few were probably not treated as badly as the rest, but the majority suffered terribly.<sup>21</sup> Some of these women confided in Robinson following their emancipation, telling him:

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<sup>16</sup> Bowden, *Captain James Kelly*, pp. 40-42.

<sup>17</sup> Against this proposition, however, Kelly told the Aborigines Committee (10 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 51) that 'the women were not always unwilling to go'.

<sup>18</sup> As in most other societies at the time, Aboriginal women had little say in unions arranged for diplomatic purposes, so 'giving' women to sealers was not necessarily out of step with traditional practice, even if it was frightening and undesirable for the women.

<sup>19</sup> P. Cameron, 'Grease and Ochre: The Blending of Two Cultures at the Colonial Sea Frontier', MA thesis, University of Tasmania, Riawunna, 2008, pp. 117-18.

<sup>20</sup> Even if some sealers had treated their women humanely, the huge cultural and language barrier between them must have rendered communication extremely difficult in the beginning, and probably resulted in much tension and misunderstanding.

<sup>21</sup> Plomley & Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait*, pp. 19-20.

that the sealers flog the women, that all the women have been flogged and that they tie them up to trees and flog them on the buttock. BULL.RUB said Black Jack flogged her because she had not caught some kangaroo, gave her two dozen [lashes], and at another time Jack Brown flogged her; and TAN.LE.BONE.YER had been flogged several times.

With Robinson probing further, Bullrub continued:

'If they take biscuit or sugar they flog them; plenty women steal biscuit'. 'What do they steal biscuit for? Don't the white men give them plenty?' (starving the women) 'No, little bit, sometimes very little bit'. 'How do the women live?' 'On What they can catch; on limpets, mussels, crawfish and mutton birds. The white men flog the black women for nothing and flog the women belonging to other white men. Thomson beat the women on the head with a stick or tomahawk, plenty of blood.'<sup>22</sup>

In the same vein, the east coast woman, Looerryminer, explained to James Backhouse how the sealers:

flogged the women who did not pluck Mutton-birds, or do other work to their satisfaction. She spread her hands to the wall, to shew the manner in which they were tied up, said a rope was used to flog them with, and cried out with a failing voice till she sank upon the ground, as if exhausted. This woman's statements were confirmed by others, several of whom have escaped to the settlement.<sup>23</sup>

These examples form part of a substantial body of testimonial evidence that confirms the prevalence of gratuitous violence, and explains why the Tyreelore were so often terrified of their white masters.<sup>24</sup>

For many women, their bleak situation was not even predictable. Once removed from their bands, it was very common for women to be traded around. Makekerledede, for instance, was shuffled from Baker to Hephernet to Cooper; Perruple from Thompson to Myetye to Drew; Pleenperrenner from Brown to Parish to Smith; Nicerumpowwerrerter from Starker to Myetye to Tomlin.<sup>25</sup> The prevalence of such exchanges illustrates that the Tyreelore's condition was rarely mitigated by stability. It also highlights that there really was a slave trade in Bass Strait.

A woman sometimes had to endure the additional trauma of being separated from her children by these human exchanges.<sup>26</sup> For some women this was no doubt a dreadful experience, but others appear to have resented their 'half-caste' children. In fact, many of the women who

<sup>22</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 291-92, journal 25 October 1830.

<sup>23</sup> Backhouse, *A Narrative*, pp. 88-89. See also Walker (*Life and Labours*, pp. 108-9) for an extended and more graphic recounting of Looerryminer's testimony. 'Crawfish' is an old spelling of 'crayfish'.

<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, pp. 305, 328-31, journals 11 November & 19 December 1830. Not surprisingly, the Tyreelore appear to have loathed the sealers, in addition to fearing them. One emancipated slave was heard to say 'the white people are like snakes' (p. 708, journal 24 October 1832).

<sup>25</sup> Plomley & Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait*, pp. 49-64. This list is not exhaustive.

<sup>26</sup> For examples of this, see Plomley & Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait*, pp. 38, 68 & *Friendly Mission*, pp. 326-27, journal 17 December 1830.

became pregnant to their masters attempted crude abortions, and sometimes committed infanticide.<sup>27</sup> Bullrub told Robinson that '[p]lenty children killed ... The black women kill them in their belly, beat their belly with their fist. Kill big boys; take them in the bush to kill them'.<sup>28</sup> Some women killed their children at the behest of their masters, though others may simply have been disgusted or ashamed to bear children under such circumstances.<sup>29</sup>

According to James Calder, it was 'a remarkable fact, but vouched for by Mr. G. A. Robinson, that the black women though passionately fond of children of their own blood, as a rule detested such as they bore to white men'.<sup>30</sup>

The Tyereelore appear to have constructed a mythology, either to express resentment of forced pregnancies, or simply to rationalise their situation. Robinson noticed they 'affirm that the devil comes to the women when they are hunting on Flinders and has connection with them, and that they are with child by this spirit and which they kill in the bush.'<sup>31</sup> It seems the 'devils' here were the sealers whose children the women were forced to bear, but later kill. A minority of women did have children who lived through infancy, whom they were probably fond of, but the evidence is in any case scarce. In general, there seems to have been ambivalence towards 'half-castes' among both sealers and Tyereelore.

The *Hobart Town Gazette* was probably not wildly overstating the matter in 1826, when it asserted that all Tyereelore were enduring a 'bond of oppression and of death! – a cruel chain of unspeakable torment!'<sup>32</sup> However, such a description does oversimplify women's experiences. Like most protracted human ordeals, there were no doubt occasional moments of respite, if not laughter and enjoyment. Children must have, at least in some cases, been a source of purpose and joy, and some relationships were clearly less oppressive than others. There may even have been some exchanges of kindness between master and slave, though no record of it survives. It has also been suggested that Tyereelore found solace in each other, and they probably did.<sup>33</sup> Such questions, however, are obscured by the dearth of evidence. We can speculate on the possible consolations of island life, but since the evidence almost invariably

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<sup>27</sup> There are a number of references to this, but the following are two of the more graphic: *Friendly Mission*, pp. 291-92, 333-34, journals 25 October & 25 December 1830.

<sup>28</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 333-34, journal 25 December 1830.

<sup>29</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 333-34, journal 25 December 1830. Male children could be a threat, as well as an inconvenience to sealers.

<sup>30</sup> Calder, *Some Accounts*, p. 93.

<sup>31</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 333-34, journal 25 December 1830. This was likely connected with the 'obscene dance' witnessed on several occasions by Robinson once the women had been removed from their captors (*Friendly Mission*, pp. 316-17, 333-34, journals 24 November & 25 December 1830).

<sup>32</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 26 August 1826, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> There was also some conflict between Tyereelore (see, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, p. 281, journal 11 October 1830).

portrays the Tyereelore's condition as one of suffering and misery, we must assume that any such consolations were meagre.<sup>34</sup>

## Emancipation

In late December 1830, Robinson concluded '[t]here was not a woman kept in captivity but what [*sic*] earnestly desired and longed for their liberty, and many attempts have been made by them to get away'.<sup>35</sup> Six years earlier, James Hobbs had witnessed 'a dozen native women at Preservation Island who seemed anxious to get away from the sealers'.<sup>36</sup> Escape from the islands was very difficult, but this did not prevent significant numbers of women attempting it. Munro, for instance, had women escape from him on at least two occasions.<sup>37</sup> Backhouse recalled that when they took the government cutter to Green Island, 'two women, called Isaac and Judy, took the opportunity of escaping by it, while the sealers were asleep – Two other women waded and swam from Green Island to the Settlement – a distance of three miles'.<sup>38</sup>

Before Robinson's arrival, few women succeeded in escaping from the sealers. One notable exception to this was Tarenore, or 'Walyer'. After a violent rift within her band in the late 1820s, Walyer somehow ended up enslaved on Penguin Island with several other women. Here she plotted to kill one of the sealers and escape with his boat while the others were away, but her fellow slaves failed to rise up with her. Eventually though, she did escape to the mainland where she apparently formed a raiding party with several of her relatives. What is most peculiar about Walyer is that she is said to have been the leader of this band, perhaps because of the fowling piece she carried. Walyer probably stole this weapon from the sealers, whom she had witnessed using and maintaining guns. Robinson heard 'she was not only to be dreaded by the whites ... she was a terror to all the natives she came in contact with, a great many of whom this Amazon caused to be killed'.<sup>39</sup> Walyer's purported rampage came to an end in late 1830 when she was 'enticed' into the boat of the sealer John Dobson, and taken

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<sup>34</sup> It was presumably not just being enslaved that produced the misery in these women's lives, but also the harsh environment in which they were enslaved. The howling exposure of Bass Strait must have compounded their woes. Not only were they frequently cold and wet, but many of these women (and indeed many of the sealers) also suffered from 'a severe and obstinate purulent ophthalmia', a painful eye infection often associated with exposure to wind and sand (*Weep in Silence*, p. 917).

<sup>35</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 328-31, journal 19 December 1830.

<sup>36</sup> Hobbs to Aborigines Committee, 9 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, pp. 49-51.

<sup>37</sup> Plomley & Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait*, p. 56.

<sup>38</sup> Backhouse, *A Narrative*, pp. 88-89. For other examples of escapes, see *Friendly Mission*, pp. 328-31, 646-47, journals 19 December 1830 & 11 June 1832; Curr to Colonial Secretary, 5 September 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 950-53; Robinson to Colonial Secretary, 15 March 1832, in *Friendly Mission*, pp. 720-21; Hare, *Voyage of the Caroline*, p. 40.

<sup>39</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 330, journal 19 December 1830.

back into slavery in Bass Strait.<sup>40</sup> She was imprisoned on Bird Island before being sold to John Williams and, finally, removed to Swan Island by Robinson.<sup>41</sup>

Walyer's legacy has been variously interpreted by historians and Aboriginal community members, but the veracity of her purported exploits has never seriously been questioned. This is surprising, since there is no other evidence of women leading bands, or using violence. Walyer's band may well have killed other Aborigines, but if they had killed white men, there would almost certainly be some independent record of it, yet there is not.<sup>42</sup> Whilst there is likely some basis to the claims Robinson heard about Walyer, these were probably inflated. Notwithstanding these doubts, Walyer was clearly a brutalised and defiant woman who summoned remarkable strength in the face of adversity.

Walyer was not alone in her determination to escape the sealers, but most aspiring escapees were not as successful. Robinson's assistant and onetime sealer, Robert Parish, recounted a story from the mid 1820s of 'five black women and two black men' who were drowned trying to escape in a stolen boat.<sup>43</sup> Parish also reported that 'five women attempted to swim from Swan Island and three was drowned.'<sup>44</sup> Clearly, some Tyereelore were willing to take great risks to free themselves from their appalling circumstances. Not only could they be drowned; if they were caught, the penalty could be severe. Robinson found 'several of them had lost their lives in the attempt [of escape, and] many have been flogged by the sealers for attempting the same.'<sup>45</sup>

Fear of such consequences was not just a deterrent against escape. In some women, it appears to have almost entirely suppressed their will to resist. When George Washington Walker came to anchor at Circular Head in 1832, accompanied by the Commandant of the Aborigines establishment, William Darling, and a number of 'conciliated' Aborigines, he penned the following:

A boat came alongside to inform those concerned, that G. A. Robinson was there. The crew, two of whom were sailors, came on board, leaving a Sydney Black and an aboriginal female of this island, in the boat. This female lived with a sealer named Kelly, who had also another woman of the same description, by whom he had one

<sup>40</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 649, journal 16 June 1832.

<sup>41</sup> Plomley & Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait*, p. 85. Walyer's presence created great tension at the settlement until her death from respiratory disease on 5 June 1831.

<sup>42</sup> See tally in Appendix 2. It is telling that Robinson never recorded any specific incidence of violence against whites by Walyer's band.

<sup>43</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 333-34, journal 25 December 1830. The order of events described in Robinson's journals is confused. I believe the sequence outlined in this thesis to be the most plausible (see *Friendly Mission*, pp. 212-15, 220, 328-31, 333-34, 871-72, journals 21 June, 11 July, 19, 25 December 1830 & 24 January 1834).

<sup>44</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 333-34, journal 25 December 1830.

<sup>45</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 328-31, journal 19 December 1830.



child. We were struck with the gloomy expression of the woman in the boat, so different from that of the Aborigines we had on board. Jumbo spoke to her, but she showed no disposition to converse, though they were of the same tribe. She was invited on board, to partake of some soup. Before she returned to the boat, W. J. Darling sent for her into the cabin, and asked her, if she would like to go to the settlement on Flinders, to which she answered, No. He reminded her that he had the power to take her from him, if she chose to join her countrymen, and he said the sealers should not hurt her. Upon this declaration the countenance of the poor creature underwent a surprising change. She acknowledged that she would like to go, and that fear had induced her to express a contrary desire. Being asked why she should not converse with Jumbo, she said she durst not, having been strictly forbidden to do so by the sealers. Inquiry was made if the sealers beat her, to which she answered, Yes, plenty. With a stick? No, with a rope. From this moment, this woman, whom the sealers name Jackey, laughed and talked as gaily as the rest of her nation.<sup>46</sup>

Many Tyereelore were forced to hide when government agents came to liberate them, as the sealers knew their slaves would take the occasion to desert them. Wobberty, a northeast woman, informed Robinson of how a sealer named Peterson ‘told them to run away in the bush; that he scolded them for coming [back] and said that he would shoot them’.<sup>47</sup> Likewise, Robinson discovered that:

at the time that I was in quest of the native women, she [Mannalargenna’s daughter] and others was on Cape Barren concealed by the sealers and that Tucker, Johnson and others was with them threatening to shoot them if they attempted to run away.<sup>48</sup>

Backhouse recorded similar stories of intimidation from the Tyereelore who made it to freedom.<sup>49</sup> There are also several examples of the sealers attempting to brainwash their slaves into believing Robinson’s men were coming to murder, rather than liberate them. A sealer from Penguin Island, for instance, ‘had given one of the women a gun and had told her to shoot the first man that should attempt to take her.’<sup>50</sup> Yet it seems few women were fooled by this, probably because they communicated between one another, and imbibed more from overheard conversations than their masters realised.

The most convincing evidence that the Tyereelore were unhappy living with the sealers, is that, almost without exception, they were grateful to be free. According to Robinson:

There was five women [at Penguin Island], but they had concealed themselves on the approach of the boat – this was the sealers’ orders – but their numerous dogs led to the discovery of them by barking. TE.KAR.TEE, the black woman, went in quest of them,

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<sup>46</sup> Walker, *Life and Labours*, pp. 116-17.

<sup>47</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 309, journal 14 November 1830.

<sup>48</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 428, journal 9 August 1831. See also p. 305, journal 11 November 1830.

<sup>49</sup> See, for instance, Backhouse, *A Narrative*, pp. 88-89. ‘Freedom’ at the mission means here only freedom from the sealers, because for many Vandemonians, Robinson’s mission became like a prison.

<sup>50</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 336-38, journal 30 December 1830. Even the government agents sent to collect the women admitted they were ‘afraid for their lives, as these men threatened to shoot the first man that should attempt to take any of the women’ (pp. 336-38, journal 30 December 1830).

and after explaining the nature of the boat's coming, they accompanied her and was most anxious to get away.<sup>51</sup>

Robinson's journals contain many similar examples of women whose 'joy was un-bounded' at being emancipated.<sup>52</sup> Although these were private journals, the historian must be cautious wherever a writer's observations also legitimate their actions, as they do here. However, in this case, as in many others, various other observers echoed Robinson's sentiments.

Backhouse, for instance, also noted that '[t]he women since their liberation from slavery have been very cheerful.'<sup>53</sup> Indeed, contrary to Cameron's thesis, the evidence overwhelmingly indicates that the Tyereelore did not desire to be with the sealers, and once liberated they were overjoyed. For many, their greatest joy was being reunited with their surviving kinsfolk. These were always highly emotional occasions, sometimes moving Robinson to tears.<sup>54</sup> His assistant, Anthony Cottrell, observed one such reunion between two sisters:

Neither spoke for some time, but throwing their arms round each other's necks, they remained in that attitude, the tears trickling down their cheeks, until at length ... they began to talk and laugh, and exhibit all the demonstrations of extravagant joy.<sup>55</sup>

These reunions were often bittersweet, however, as women learnt from exiled relatives that their country had been entirely usurped, and their people decimated in their absence.

### **Shattered Families**

Women were not the only victims of the Bass Strait slave trade. Sealers frequently killed men when raiding the coastline for women, either indiscriminately or because they resisted. This was widely acknowledged by contemporaries such as Adolphus Schayer, who reported that the sealers, when raiding for women, 'often killed their parents or friends who tried to prevent this violence.'<sup>56</sup> This was also attested to by physical evidence. In his extensive travels in the northeast, Robinson found:

at every boat harbour along the whole line of the coast the bones of the murdered aborigines are strewed over the face of the earth and bleaching in the sun ... Several skulls have been found perforated by musket balls.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>51</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 328-31, journal 19 December 1830.

<sup>52</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 326-27, journal 17 December 1830. See also, for instance, pp. 305-7, 309, 328-31, journals 12 & 14 November, 19 December 1830.

<sup>53</sup> Backhouse, *A Narrative*, pp. 88-89. Although Backhouse was referring here to two women in particular, his journals refer to a number of similar cases.

<sup>54</sup> See, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, p. 356, journal 14 March 1831.

<sup>55</sup> Cottrell recounted this to Walker (*Life and Labours*, p. 119).

<sup>56</sup> Schayer, *Van Diemen's Land*, cited in McFarlane, *Beyond Awakening*, p. 56.

<sup>57</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 444-45, journal 24 August 1831. Given the inaccuracy of muskets at the time, it was the body that was aimed for in combat. Headshots suggest the execution of wounded or captive Vandemonians. Robinson also noted bones strewn along the coast in his journal for 26 December 1830 (pp.

Eyewitness testimony provides further evidence. Two recently liberated Tyereelore recounted to Robinson the details of their capture:

the sealers rushed them and took several [women], and then anchored their boat off the surf and enticed the natives to the beach and discharged several guns at them and killed several. One man, when he saw the sealers about to fire, dived under water and came up and laid hold of the stern post of the boat. They towed him out to sea and when the man let go and was swimming to shore, they fired at him. He dived and they pulled after him and shot him.<sup>58</sup>

In similar detail, Penderoin described an ambush he witnessed at Cape Grim in about 1820. The sealers had lain in ambush the previous night, knowing the Aborigines were collecting muttonbirds at this particular spot:

and when the people swum [*sic*] on shore they rushed out upon them with muskets and drove them into an angle of the high cliff, where they bound them with cords. ... They carried away those poor creatures to Kangaroo Island on the coast of New Holland in a sealing vessel. There were twelve or fourteen women carried off ... Several unfortunate natives was shot on this occasion.

On hearing this account, Robinson pondered:

what must be the poignant feelings and anguish of soul of the husbands and parents and relatives of those unfortunate victims, who had just returned [from hunting] in time to see all they held most dear thus forever forced away from them[?]<sup>59</sup>

Emotional torment, however, was not the only way Vandemonians suffered in the wake of an ambush. As Chapter 12 explains, the survivors were faced with an array of challenges. In the short-term, they had to escape, tend to their dead and wounded, and find shelter and sustenance. But in the medium and long-term, northeast bands in particular felt the profound social and economic effects of losing the majority of their wives and providers. Some bands attempted to replenish their dwindling female constitution by raiding enemy bands, but they too were short of women.<sup>60</sup> Not surprisingly, when Robinson first encountered Aboriginal men in the northeast, they ‘complained in the strongest terms ... of the hardships incumbent upon [them due to] the deprivation of their women.’<sup>61</sup> Survival became a desperate struggle for bands with insufficient women, a situation compounded by the constant fear of when the next

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334-35) and 18 August 1831 (pp. 436-38). Despite the importance they placed on funerary rites, the survivors had not cremated or entombed these victims, probably because their lives had become a chaotic struggle for survival.

<sup>58</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 226, journal 5 August 1830.

<sup>59</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 871, journal 20 February 1834. Penderoin’s brother, Tunnerminnerwait, was also an eyewitness to the ambush, and gave a matching account to Robinson (pp. 236-37, journal 20 August 1830).

<sup>60</sup> See, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, p. 345, journal 11 January 1831 & Robertson to Lascelles, 17 November 1828, TAHO, CSO1/331, pp. 171-72.

<sup>61</sup> Robinson to Colonial Secretary, 11 October 1831, in *Friendly Mission*, p. 504. Robinson recorded a number of such complaints.

attack might occur. Robinson found '[t]heir fear of the sealers is such the natives would approach the coast very cautiously, if at all.'<sup>62</sup> But this too was a tradeoff, because when bands turned their backs on the sea, they inevitably came into conflict with the white men of the interior.

Avenging a sealer ambush was rarely feasible. Survivors may not have known whether their assailants came from the islands or a nearby stock-run, but even when they did, the abovementioned considerations generally took priority in the immediate aftermath of an ambush. Aggrieved warriors could take their time in exacting revenge on stockmen or sawyers, but they could not pursue the sealers once they had reached their boats. This explains why there are only three cases on record in which Vandemonians managed to assail a party of sealers.<sup>63</sup> The first of these occurred sometime after the attack at Cape Grim described above. Penderoin told Robinson 'that the natives afterwards killed three men [apparently sealers] with waddies.'<sup>64</sup> The second took place at Cape Portland in 1824. Four sealers, led by Duncan McMillan, and accompanied by his concubine and tracker, Pernappertittwenner, set out to abduct women.<sup>65</sup> Thomas Tucker was left to mind the boat and the young son of McMillan and Pernappertittwenner. Before setting out, McMillan assured Tucker 'he would be back before night, bringing a dozen girls with him for him to choose from.'<sup>66</sup> But the raid did not go to plan. Robinson was told 'they had rushed the natives for their women, who had mustered and rushed them in return.'<sup>67</sup> All four men were killed, and Pernappertittwenner was reunited with her people.<sup>68</sup> The band then attacked Tucker on the beach, but being armed he managed to stave them off until they agreed to let him leave.<sup>69</sup>

It was probably this same band that made the third reprisal, wounding three sealers at Greystone Point the following year.<sup>70</sup> There may have been unrecorded reprisals, but they

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<sup>62</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 287-88, journal 18 October 1830.

<sup>63</sup> In addition to these three fatal reprisals there was also an incident in which Vandemonians plundered a sealers' boat that was tied up at the Leven River (*Friendly Mission*, p. 926, journal 30 June 1834).

<sup>64</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 871, journal 20 February 1834.

<sup>65</sup> In his journal for 19 October 1830 (*Friendly Mission*, pp. 288-89), Robinson recorded that '[t]he women from the islands said the four sealers was killed at Eddystone.' This may refer to another incident, or it may be a mistake, or perhaps the killings did take place at Eddystone Point, though all the other sources have them occurring at Cape Portland.

<sup>66</sup> Calder, *Some Accounts*, p. 92.

<sup>67</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 226, journal 5 August 1830. A different account was given to Boulton (Begg & Begg, *The World of John Boulton*, p. 60). Tucker told him soon after the incident that McMillan and the others had just erected their tents when they were surrounded and attacked by the Aborigines.

<sup>68</sup> Calder, *Some Accounts*, p. 93. It is possible that Pernappertittwenner sabotaged the sealers' plans.

<sup>69</sup> Accounts differ, but either Tucker or one of the Vandemonian men is said to have bashed in the child's head before the former departed. See also Calder, *Some Accounts*, pp. 92-101; *Friendly Mission*, pp. 226, 284-89, 427-45, journals 5 August, 15 & 19 October 1830, 6, 16 & 24 August 1831; Clark to Colonial Secretary, 29 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 709.

<sup>70</sup> Calder, *Some Accounts*, pp. 97-99. This second incident further enraged Tucker, who had sought unsuccessfully to exact his revenge ever since the original attack (Begg & Begg, *The World of John Boulton*, p. 60). However, at Eddystone Point around 1827, he and several other sealers seized their chance, killing

were certainly uncommon.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, the Vandemonians' inability to avenge the wrongs wrought upon them by sealers, or to rescue their women, must have been bitterly frustrating. Vandemonian men were warriors, and retribution was central to their conceptions of justice and honour, especially where women were concerned.<sup>72</sup> Hobbs certainly understated the matter when he reported that men's sense of powerlessness against the sealers 'operated upon their minds'.<sup>73</sup>

Surviving family members nonetheless strove to maintain communication with their enslaved womenfolk. At Peak Hill on the north coast, Robinson noted that male survivors would:

kindle a fire the smoke of which is a signal to the female aborigines which had been torn from them by the merciless sealers, the wife from the fond embrace of her husband, the daughter from her parent, the sister from her brother, the female from her lover, and had been transported by these lawless and cruel men to the islands. They could descry the place of their banishment, the fire kindled by their hands, and could occasionally see their countrywomen as the boats passed along the coast, perhaps a wife, a sister or relation. The females of the Island make smoke in answer to the men, and they also dance on these hills and sing an aboriginal song which is a relation to love complaints.

'What a wretched existence' the northeast men now led, Robinson observed, 'all their females gone, torn from them.'<sup>74</sup> It is, therefore, no surprise that these men were elated when Robinson promised he would restore their women to them.<sup>75</sup>

Between November 1830 and May 1831, Robinson secured the release of some two-dozen women, and the scenes of reunion described in his journals convey vividly the emotions felt by both the enslaved and the estranged. Their rejoicing, however, was short lived. Soon after the emancipations began, Governor Arthur was persuaded by the cynical, but charismatic figures of Munro and Tucker that the sealers were decent men who should be allowed to keep one woman each.<sup>76</sup> They returned to the straits waving the Governor's decree victoriously in Robinson's face. This was a great disappointment to the women who believed they had finally gained their liberty, and an unbearable blow to their menfolk.<sup>77</sup>

two Aboriginal men (*Friendly Mission*, pp. 435-36, 444-45, journals 16 August 1830 & 24 August 1831; Calder, *Some Accounts*, pp. 99-101).

<sup>71</sup> There was a case recorded at Kangaroo Island, and another at Western Port, but these were not Vandemonians (Plomley & Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait*, p. 54; *Hobart Town Gazette*, 25 March 1826, p. 2).

<sup>72</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>73</sup> Hobbs to Aborigines Committee, 9 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, pp. 49-51.

<sup>74</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 300, journal 2 November 1830.

<sup>75</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 309-12, journal 15 November 1830.

<sup>76</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 489-93. These men even brought a 'half-caste boy' as evidence they had a civilizing agenda. As soon as they were done, however, they abandoned the boy in Hobart (deposition of Thomas Crawley, 1831, QVMAG, CHS53/3/2).

<sup>77</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 384, 489-93.

When the chief Mannalargenna discovered the sealers artifice he ‘was in a rage, and said, “No, no, no, they be bad men and by and by me tell the Governor”’.<sup>78</sup> That same week, he unexpectedly met his daughter on Preservation Island. Robinson observed that:

daughter and parent was alternately in tears and on MANNALARGENNA being necessarily obliged to take his leave of his offspring, a strong emotion of kindred affection was manifest and they were both suffused in tears.

The chief ‘importuned me to get his daughter’, Robinson lamented, ‘but in this there is more difficulty than he can suppose.’<sup>79</sup> Mannalargenna had endured a great deal at the hands of the sealers, who had shot him in the thigh, and enslaved his sister and three of his daughters.<sup>80</sup> Worse still, this revered warrior had been all but powerless to stop them destroying everything he cared about. The sufferings of Mannalargenna, his daughters, and hundreds like them are incalculable.

Alexander McKay knew the sea frontier as intimately as anyone, and was probably right when he later claimed ‘the worst disasters that our [Aboriginal] opponents suffered, were inflicted on them on the north-east coast’.<sup>81</sup> By November 1830, the Vandemonian population in the greater northeast had been reduced to just seventy-four, of whom only three were women.<sup>82</sup> At the same time, no less than seventy women, mostly from the northeast, were living with the sealers.<sup>83</sup> It defies credulity to think the northeast bands consciously brought about this state of affairs. Some coastal bands were initially complicit in trading women, but without the benefit of hindsight, they could never have imagined the sealers would become so rapacious.

By the time the coastal bands became aware of the sealers’ lethal potential they had nowhere to turn, because the white men were now advancing overland as well, driving enemy bands into their territory, and launching ambushes just like the sealers. Despite the apparent isolation of the sea frontier in the minds of white observers and historians, Vandemonians experienced the white threat from both the land *and* the sea, often simultaneously. Migratory as they were,

<sup>78</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 432-33, journal 14 August 1831.

<sup>79</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 428, journal 9 August 1831. See also pp. 426-27, 644-45, journals 5 August 1831 & 3 June 1832. It is not clear which of Mannalargenna’s daughter’s this was.

<sup>80</sup> Mannalargenna was shot by the sealer David Kelly at Ringarooma Bay (*Friendly Mission*, p. 646, journal 9 June 1832).

<sup>81</sup> Cited in Calder, *Some Accounts*, p. 89.

<sup>82</sup> Robinson to Arthur, 20 November 1830, TAHO, CSO1/317, pp. 231-32. These figures are supported by independent Aboriginal testimony. ‘Mungo’, an Aboriginal guide, ‘told Batman that there were two tribes in the region and they consisted of only seventy or eighty people, mainly men, as the women had been taken by the sealers of Bass Strait’ (A. H. Campbell, *John Batman and the Aborigines*, Kibble, Malmsbury, Victoria, 1987, p. 39). Batman passed this on to Arthur on 24 August 1830, specifying ‘that among the natives of the East coast only 2 women are with 80 or 90 men. The other women belonging to the tribe having been forcibly taken away by the sealers of the Islands in the Straits who, I understand have on many occasions, barbarously murdered their children’. These abductions, Batman continued, were ‘the principal cause of the present unhappy dispute between the blacks and the whites.’

<sup>83</sup> Plomley & Henley, *The Sealers of Bass Strait*, pp. 18, 71-90.

most eastern bands spent part of their year on the coast, and all were more or less connected by culture, trade, war or marriage, so the dangers and devastations of the sealers were widely felt. On a smaller scale, the knock-on effects of the sealers' predation significantly weakened Vandemonian society in the northwest as well. Indeed, the impacts of the sea frontier reverberated throughout the island. From the Aborigines' perspectives, the coast and the interior were two fronts of the same War, the sealers and the stockmen two faces of the same enemy.





*White*  
7  
**Attitudes**

Beware! there are in him [the native] powers which inimically used may well be shrunk from, and by the aggravated exercise of which he will scatter blood and conflagration, death and ruin throughout every district in the colony.

*Hobart Town Gazette*, 8 April 1825

When the *Hobart Town Gazette* published this premonition, few shared the editor's concern that black violence would escalate. Yet, from 1825 to 1828, the number of native attacks more than doubled each year (see fig. 5), and public apathy was quickly replaced by panic as the body count grew. There was no specific point at which the War began, but certainly by 1828 colonists realised it was a war they were fighting. The violence that had crept up on them by imperceptible degrees was by now a serious concern for all frontier colonists. The Black War was no ordinary war, however, and the enemy could not be combated by conventional means. The blacks were not one people, but rather a number of disparate bands. They had no home base and no recognisable command structure. No one knew how to find them, much less how to secure an interview with them. It seemed not a single colonist understood the natives' cultures or spoke any of their languages, and even if communication had been possible, the government had no power to redress their grievances. Furthermore, the two things the government offered as compensation – Christianity and a place in the lowest ranks of colonial society – held little appeal for the natives. Although few colonists wanted a war with the native population, the inexorable march of colonisation ensured they were powerless to avoid it.

This Chapter explores colonists' attitudes towards the War, their opinions of the natives, and their ideas about how to defeat them. Various historians have touched on facets of this topic, but the existing literature furnishes no precedent for such an in-depth attitudinal survey. This Chapter, in training its focus on frontiersmen, reveals a more desperate, self-serving and violent frontier culture than previously thought – one at odds with the humanitarian voices in press and government circles. It also examines opinions regarding the roving and pursuit parties, the colony's primary defence strategies. Finally, this Chapter engages with the question of genocide in Van Diemen's Land, demonstrating that the term is not appropriate for describing either to the actions of the government or to those of the frontiersmen.

### **‘What made them so bloodthirsty’<sup>1</sup>**

What triggered native belligerence, and what caused it to augment and evolve over the course of the War? These were interrelated but distinct questions in the minds of colonists.

Contemporaries identified almost every possible motivation for black violence, with the exception of cultural affronts and broken agreements. Some believed the natives were belatedly avenging the killings at Risdon Cove in 1804, though this is highly unlikely. The Risdon affray involved only one group of blacks, and they had already had a generation to seek their revenge. The explanation was nonetheless appealing, because it placed the blame on people who were no longer in the colony.

It was also popular to attribute black violence to the killings, rapes and abductions perpetrated by stockmen and sawyers, and there was certainly truth to this. The prominent settler William Barnes, for instance, was adamant the blacks had been ‘provoked by the massacre of hundreds of their people by the stock keepers in the outstations’.<sup>2</sup> Some historians have written cynically of settlers such as Barnes who stole the natives’ country and then blamed the resulting violence on their servants. Sharon Morgan, for instance, argued that such explanations were ‘coloured by [settlers’] desire to exonerate themselves.’<sup>3</sup> But few settlers believed they had anything to be exonerated from. Owing to their preconceptions about ‘wandering savages’, most saw nothing wrong with appropriating the land, and genuinely believed the hostilities had originated with the cruelty of the ‘lower orders’.<sup>4</sup>

It was even more common for settlers to attribute native belligerence to the ‘corrupting influence’ of a mainland black called ‘Musquito’.<sup>5</sup> At Grindstone Bay on 15 November 1823, a peaceful encounter between three convict servants and a band of natives, turned deadly. Two of the stockmen were killed, and a third was badly wounded. This was the most serious native attack to date, and it had an unnerving effect on colonists, who blamed it on the malignant influence of Musquito rather than the local blacks who had carried it out.<sup>6</sup> Musquito’s role in the Grindstone Bay attack is unclear, and of the seventeen incidents recorded before his

<sup>1</sup> Deposition of John Jones, 16 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 170-72.

<sup>2</sup> Barnes to Aborigines Committee, 10 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, p. 299.

<sup>3</sup> Morgan, *Land Settlement*, p. 152.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, the evidence of various settlers to the Aborigines Committee in 1830 (TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 287-383 & Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, pp. 47-55).

<sup>5</sup> In New South Wales, after playing a pivotal role in attacks on the Hawkesbury River, Musquito was captured and exiled to Norfolk Island in 1805. When that settlement was finally evacuated in 1813, he was sent to Van Diemen’s Land where he worked on the frontier as a stockman and tracker of bushrangers. Twice his repatriation to New South Wales was approved, but for reasons that remain unclear this never eventuated. Disenchanted by the white man’s system, Musquito ‘went bush’ with a group of local blacks known for their occasional appearances about Hobart and Pittwater as the ‘tame mob’. For more on Musquito, see N. Parry, ‘‘Hanging no good for blackfellow’: Looking into the Life of Musquito’, in I. Macfarlane & M. Hannah (ed.), *Transgressions: Critical Australian Indigenous Histories*, Australian National University EPress; Aboriginal History Inc., Canberra, 2007 [unpaginated].

<sup>6</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 16 July 1824, p. 2 & 3 December 1824, p. 3.

capture in August 1824, the evidence implicates him in only one. Furthermore, the disparate times and locations at which these incidents took place, renders it extremely unlikely that he was present in all, or even most cases. Whilst Musquito probably did play a role in several attacks, contemporaries vastly overstated his role as a catalyst for the Black War.<sup>7</sup>

The potency of the Musquito myth had its origins in the way colonists came to view the island's native inhabitants. Before the War, the martial prowess of the local blacks had not impressed colonists, nor had their material and artistic culture. In a letter home to Scotland in 1826, the east coast settler Adam Amos wrote: 'The natives are the very last in the human species in the arts or anything that is like comfort.'<sup>8</sup> They were deemed the lowest form of humanity – significantly lower than even mainland blacks like Musquito. The *Hobart Town Gazette* believed the natives of Van Diemen's Land were 'distinct from those of New South Wales, possessing more barbarous habits and more confirmed in their deplorable state of ignorance.'<sup>9</sup> Although there was no doubt that local blacks were carrying out a growing number of attacks, the newspaper denied their agency:

they have never committed any acts of cruelty, or even resisted the whites, unless when unsufferably [*sic*] goaded by provocation. The only tribes who have done any mischief, were corrupted by Musquito, a Sydney black; who, with much and perverted cunning, taught them a portion of his own villainy, and incited them time after time to join in his delinquencies.<sup>10</sup>

Musquito was hanged at the Hobart gaol on 25 February 1825, alongside 'Black Jack', a local native who had participated in the Grindstone Bay attack.<sup>11</sup> It was assumed his death would extinguish the uprising and send a sobering message to his followers, yet black violence only increased after Musquito's demise. This might be expected to have dispelled the myth, but instead, the idea that the Black War was due to his corrupting influence remained popular both during and after the conflict.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 170-74, 191-92, 310-15, 337; *Tasmanian*, 28 March 1828, p. 2; *Colonial Times*, 1 December 1826, p. 3; *Examiner*, 2 October 1847, pp. 4-5. The outbreak of violence was, to a lesser extent, blamed on 'Black Tom' (Kickertopoller), whose role was similarly exaggerated by contemporaries. Black Tom probably operated independent of Musquito, despite rumours to the contrary. For more on Black Tom, see Chapter 16.

<sup>8</sup> Amos to family, 1826, TAHO, NS323/1/1.

<sup>9</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 4 February 1826, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 16 July 1824, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> For more on the Grindstone Bay incident and the executions, see K. Harman, *Aboriginal Convicts: Australian, Khoisan and Maori Exiles*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2012, ch. 1 & J. Fox, 'Constructing a Colonial Chief Justice: John Lewes Pedder in Van Diemen's Land, 1824-1854', PhD thesis, University of Tasmania, History & Classics, 2012, pp. 324-35.

<sup>12</sup> The belief that local natives were too degraded to coordinate their own resistance was remarkably resilient. Even at the height of the War, when black violence was crippling parts of the colony, many still thought them incapable of orchestrating such effective resistance without the guidance of a superior race. Nothing exemplifies this better than the myth of white men leading the blacks, discussed in Chapter 15.

The question of what sustained black violence provoked an even greater diversity of theories. After questioning twenty-nine respectable early settlers in 1830, the Aborigines Committee concluded:

that these acts of violence on the part of the Natives are generally to be regarded, not as retaliating for any wrongs which they conceived themselves collectively or individually to have endured, but as proceeding from a wanton and savage spirit inherent in them ... at the same time [we] have no hesitation in tracing to the manifold insults and injuries which these unhappy people have sustained from the dissolute and abandoned characters whom they have unfortunately encountered.<sup>13</sup>

The Committee admitted, however, ‘that they are now [in 1830] not acting the part of injured men, seeking to avenge the wrong they have sustained, but rather that of marauders stimulated by eagerness for plunder, and the desire of artificial luxuries’.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, few settlers denied that the natives had legitimate grievances. It was widely recognised that much black violence was revenge for killings, rapes and abductions. Some colonists even acknowledged that the natives were resisting encroachment onto their hunting grounds.<sup>15</sup> But despite this recognition, most colonists did nothing to address the causes of black violence.

### **Suppressing the Blacks**

In their struggle to bring the Black War to a close, colonists only ever had three options before them. One option was removing the natives, voluntarily or by force, to either a reserve or an offshore island. The *Hobart Town Gazette* first suggested this idea on 11 November 1826. The *Colonial Times* concurred: ‘We make no pompous display of Philanthropy – we say unequivocally, SELF DEFENCE IS THE FIRST LAW OF NATURE. THE GOVERNMENT MUST REMOVE THE NATIVES – IF NOT, THEY WILL BE HUNTED DOWN LIKE WILD BEASTS, AND DESTROYED!’<sup>16</sup> Despite agreeing on almost nothing else, the fractious colonial press soon united in supporting a policy of exile to an offshore island, while failing to offer any sensible advice on how this might be effected.<sup>17</sup> In the interior, where the difficulties of removal were starkly apparent, there was much less support for the idea,

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<sup>13</sup> Aborigines Committee report, 19 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 38. All but one of the settlers questioned had been in the colony since the beginning of the War. They had every reason to disparage and blame the natives, and to encourage sterner government measures, yet many respondents still attributed blame to the colonists, and affirmed the right of the natives to retaliate. For respondents’ testimonies, see TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 287-383 & Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, pp. 47-55.

<sup>14</sup> Aborigines Committee report, 19 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 46.

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 8 for examples. This should be distinguished from any acknowledgement that colonisation itself was responsible; settlers did not want to go that far.

<sup>16</sup> *Colonial Times*, 1 December 1826, p. 2. Original capitalisation.

<sup>17</sup> See Clements, ‘Wriggle, and Shuffle, and Twist’, pp. 39-41.

particularly as the War dragged on and colonists felt ever more strongly that mere removal was more than ‘these Black savages’ deserved.<sup>18</sup>

The second option was conciliation and amicable coexistence. In the early years of the War, when most believed black violence was the product of a few rogue leaders, this seemed a reasonable aspiration. Influenced by evangelical and humanitarian trends that had gained considerable traction across the Empire, the government and some in the press held onto the hope of peaceful coexistence until well after it had ceased to be a realistic option. On the frontier, however, it had been dismissed early on as utterly impracticable.

The War created a growing tension between pragmatic frontiersmen and humanitarian townfolk. ‘In the interior’, wrote John West, ‘the blacks were spoken of with intense fear, and detestation: [while] in the capital, even their depredations were questioned, and the subjects of conversation, were rather their sufferings than their crimes.’<sup>19</sup> Those on the frontier grew increasingly impatient with the government’s humanitarian stance, and they expressed this unreservedly in letters to government officials and newspaper editors, and in private writings. On 29 July 1828, for instance, a Patersons Plains settler penned in his diary: ‘these savages murder about 20 settlers or servants every year and our canting government contents itself with issuing proclamations which might as well be directed to the shark in Bass’s Strait’.<sup>20</sup>

In the public sphere, a snapshot of settler opinion can be gleaned from the *Tasmanian* of 26 February 1830. This issue presented several responses to a recent letter, published by the Aborigines Committee, urging ‘kindness’ rather than violence.<sup>21</sup> A settler from Bothwell denounced the addresses for:

imploing the settlers to act on the defensive *only* – to retreat (when attacked) to the walls, and not to seek the blacks, nor act *offensively!* I say of this document, the catalogue of atrocities committed by the Natives during the last month ... will at once open their eyes, expose the ridiculousness of their address ... God help us! Are the operations of the bush to be regulated by a Committee in Hobarton. What do they know about it? While the Committee is arguing, debating, bandying letters about from place to place, the white inhabitants are murdered, dwellings burned to the ground and terror and consternation spread over the country. The settlers in the country take quite a different view of the matter to what do the Gentlemen at Hobarton.<sup>22</sup>

In the same issue, a Clyde Valley settler asserted:

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<sup>18</sup> Archer to Arthur, 24 November 1827, TAHO, CSO1316, pp. 70-71. This attitude – exemplified by the public opposition to the friendly mission – is discussed in Chapter 15.

<sup>19</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 37.

<sup>20</sup> G. Hobler, *The Diaries of Pioneer George Hobler, October 6, 1800 – December 13, 1882*, vol. 1, C. & H. Reproductions, 1992, p. 94, diary 29 July 1828.

<sup>21</sup> Aborigines Committee to Davies, 15 February 1830, in *Tasmanian*, 19 February 1830, p. 463.

<sup>22</sup> *Tasmanian*, 26 February 1830, p. 471.

we in the interior are in the most imminent daily danger of our lives and property – of having our houses and barns burnt about our ears in all directions, and our families butchered by these savages; and are we to be smoothly informed *how* we are to act, and *that*, on the *defensive*, by a few comfortably seated Gentlemen in their well-furnished and well-protected houses in Hobart-town?<sup>23</sup>

Conciliation was all well and good in theory, but the *Launceston Advertiser* echoed popular opinion when it proposed in July 1829 that the enemy's 'audacity is protected and nourished by our forbearance.'<sup>24</sup>

The third option for ending the War was 'Total Extermination', which grew in popularity with every passing month.<sup>25</sup> In May 1828, the *Colonial Advocate* argued that:

unless the blacks are *exterminated or removed*, it is plainly proved; by fatal and sanguinary experience, that all hope of their ceasing their aggressions, is the height of absurdity ... In the name of Heaven is it not high time to resort to strong and decisive measures?<sup>26</sup>

By 1830, extermination was plainly the most favoured course of action among frontier colonists. One east coast settler believed that 'nothing short of their total destruction will put an end to their outrages'.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, the *Tasmanian* declared that the natives possessed 'something like a determination to destroy all before them, [thus] Extermination seems to be the only remedy';<sup>28</sup> while the *Colonial Times* regretted that the colony had 'no other chance of obtaining peace than [by] the annihilation of the whole race'.<sup>29</sup> Colonists were not advocating extermination for its own sake – at least not in public – but as a settler from Jericho put it, 'the only remedy [to the conflict] is their total annihilation – to save ourselves a similar fate'.<sup>30</sup>

## Rovers and Pursuers

Pursuit and roving parties was the government's primary martial response to the native problem. Chapter 9 examines the tactics they employed, but the present section focuses on public attitudes towards these parties, and participants' attitudes to serving. Pursuit parties rallied in the wake of an attack to hunt down the culprits. They occasionally 'came up with the

<sup>23</sup> *Tasmanian*, 26 February 1830, p. 471. Original italics.

<sup>24</sup> *Launceston Advertiser*, 6 July 1829, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> It was the settler Temple Pearson who told the Aborigines Committee, on 12 June 1830, that 'Total Extermination' was the only course left to take (TAHO, CSO1/323, p. 381).

<sup>26</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 1 May 1828, p. 133. Original italics.

<sup>27</sup> Brown to Aborigines Committee, 5 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 125-26.

<sup>28</sup> *Tasmanian*, 26 February 1830, pp. 470-71. Referring to a district in New South Wales where the slaughter of the black population had succeeded in restoring tranquility, the editor suggested that 'such a measure is now becoming of absolute necessity' in Van Diemen's Land.

<sup>29</sup> *Colonial Times*, 27 August 1830, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Hudspeth to Aborigines Committee, 16 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, p. 331. See also, for instance, Steel to Arthur, 15 June 1829, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 281-83.

natives' and managed to shoot some, but for every success, they experienced dozens of failures. 'In truth', West reflected, 'the pursuit of a party of aborigines, was a very hopeless affair'.<sup>31</sup> There were two main reasons for this. Firstly, when the natives knew they were being pursued, 'their well known caution and cunning' put pursuers at a considerable disadvantage.<sup>32</sup> Secondly, participants had little incentive to exert themselves. Pursuit parties were mostly comprised of soldiers and convicts,<sup>33</sup> neither of whom had a choice in participating.<sup>34</sup> Their bleak prospects of success must also have dulled their enthusiasm. Rewards might have sweetened the deal, but they were never offered.<sup>35</sup>

Public attitudes towards pursuit parties were understandably pessimistic, though it was never suggested that natives ought *not* be pursued. Indeed, whilst there were certainly criticisms of individual parties, there was relatively little disapproval of the system. Whatever their failures, pursuit parties at least gave colonists a sense of agency at a time when many felt powerless in the face of increasing black violence. Some pursuers also gained the impression – not always wrong – that, even if they were unable to assail the perpetrators, they at least drove them from the district.<sup>36</sup>

Roving parties – or 'guerilla parties' as they were sometimes called – were full-time patrols in search of the blacks.<sup>37</sup> They were of two types, both under the direction of local magistrates. Military parties (as they will be termed here) comprised soldiers and convict field police, while the civilian parties were composed almost entirely of assigned convicts contracted to serve on the promise of reduced sentences.<sup>38</sup> Their leaders were 'trustworthy individuals' such as Jorgen Jorgenson, Gilbert Robertson and John Batman, who offered their services in

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<sup>31</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 37. See, in particular, TAHO, CSO1/316 for numerous examples of pursuit party failures, and the despondent attitudes that developed.

<sup>32</sup> Steel to Arthur, 15 June 1829, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 281-83. See also, for instance, Brown to Aborigines Committee, 5 February TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 137-38; *Hobart Town Courier*, 9 October 1830, p. 2 & Reid to Arthur, 20 August 1829, TAHO, CSO1/323, p. 77.

<sup>33</sup> Settlers were expected (though not always willing) to contribute convict servants to these parties. They often felt their men were better off protecting their establishments than heading off on a wild goose chase.

<sup>34</sup> Jorgenson (letter to Aborigines Committee, 30 November 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, p. 265) noted that the frontiersmen most eager to serve in the roving and pursuit parties were 'some of the worst characters in the country'. Leadership of pursuit parties generally fell to constables, or to whomever in that vicinity was of the highest social or military rank.

<sup>35</sup> There was one convict, a constable named Fisher, who received a ticket-of-leave for capturing a native man on the Shannon River on 5 August 1830 (Arthur's notation of 13 August on letter from Vicary to Colonial Secretary, 9 August 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 550-58). Fisher and his two companions admitted to killing a man and a woman in the ambush, but Arthur made no mention of this in his public address.

<sup>36</sup> See, for instance, *Colonial Times*, 19 March 1830, p. 3; *Hobart Town Courier*, 20 December 1828, p. 2 & 7 March 1829, pp. 1-2.

<sup>37</sup> For the term 'guerrilla' applied to roving parties, see *Colonial Times*, 19 February 1830, p. 2 & 31 December 1830, pp. 3-4.

<sup>38</sup> The process of recruiting convicts was fairly selective and thorough. Convicts applied or were recommended to the service, often in the teeth of opposition from their masters. See, for instance, TAHO, CSO1/330, pp. 23, 112, 121.

exchange for land grants.<sup>39</sup> This might have solved the problem of incentive, but for a critical flaw. In almost all cases, rewards were linked to the duration of service, rather than the results achieved. This was, according to some, the chief reason for the failure of the roving party system.<sup>40</sup> Roving parties did on several occasions execute successful ambushes, but generally only when accompanied by a cooperative native guide. One leader who had ‘never been able to fall in with them’, maintained that ‘there is little probability of meeting with the perpetrators except by mere chance.’<sup>41</sup>

Roving parties received more public criticism than pursuit parties, despite their similarly unimpressive catalogues of successes. A settler writing to the *Hobart Town Courier* remarked:

How often do we hear from the parties that they came on the Natives’ fires and half cooked opossums, &c., and yet they never saw one Black. For why? They make so much noise by talking and blundering over the dead wood and bark with a heavy tread.<sup>42</sup>

In his evidence to the Aborigines Committee, James Hobbs accused one leader of being ‘more employed in looking for grants of land than the Natives’.<sup>43</sup> Confronted with this and other evidence, the Committee recommended the discontinuation of the roving parties in March 1830, citing their tactical blunders, meagre results and the problems of finding suitable leaders.<sup>44</sup> But, having conceived of no alternative, the government did not heed this recommendation until the following year.

Participants also held negative attitudes towards the roving party system. The tormenting hardships and incessant failures drove many to despondency, especially the leaders. In November 1829, Oatlands’ police magistrate observed that ‘Jorgenson was really insane many days last week [and] Mr Robertson too, is evidently mad’.<sup>45</sup> The latter confessed:

I do not know what to do, for I have no hopes of their being captured and I have no doubt, but the parties sent out in pursuit of them have [actually] driven them in upon the settled districts ... my mind is so worn out with disappointment, vexation, and anxiety, that I can hardly write common sense.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The government entered into separate contracts with the different leaders, so their incentives varied (see, in particular, TAHO, CSO1/322). These men were also seeking the prestige they hoped success would bring.

<sup>40</sup> See, for instance, letters to the editor, *Tasmanian*, 5 March 1830, p. 479.

<sup>41</sup> Curtain to Colonial Secretary, 5 March 1828, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 113.

<sup>42</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 13 March 1830, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> Hobbs to Aborigines Committee, 9 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 51.

<sup>44</sup> Aborigines Committee report, recommendation no. 8, 19 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 45.

<sup>45</sup> Anstey to Colonial Secretary, 16 November 1829, SLNSW, ML, A1771, vol. 28, p. 101.

<sup>46</sup> Robertson to Anstey, 12 November 1829, SLNSW, ML, A1771, vol. 28, pp. 94-99.



Faced with similar disappointments the following year, John Batman's neighbour reported that he 'is almost frantic and now gives up all hope of doing any good with them'.<sup>47</sup>

The military roving parties appear to have been no more effective.<sup>48</sup> One settler claimed that 'soldiers are quite useless in pursuit of the Natives; they will not exert themselves.'<sup>49</sup> However, it was no wonder they 'do not overtake, capture, or kill any of the natives', wrote another settler, since 'out of their own pay they must provide extra bush dress, as well as extra shoes'.<sup>50</sup> F. G. D. Brown, who coordinated parties on the east coast, reported that the soldiers complained loudly about having to 'wear out their things by running about the Hills after the Blacks.'<sup>51</sup> Even when they could get government-issue clothing and footwear, it was of such a poor standard that most men soon ended up 'barefoot and ragged'.<sup>52</sup> Another complaint among troops was the withholding of their rum rations while out on roving duty.<sup>53</sup> There were, nonetheless, good reasons for this 'infringement of the men's liberties'. Frequent complaints of inebriation and ill-discipline made their way to the Governor's desk. This behaviour was often attributed to fraternisation between soldiers and convicts, and in 1826, the Executive Council reported:

It is a painful and distressing truth that notwithstanding every effort to prevent it, the Soldiers are continually prone to form acquaintances with the Prisoners, and like them are addicted to the common vice of drinking to the extreme. The spreading of the Military and Field Police in small parties over the face of the settled districts of the Colony, the very circumstance of the vagrant life they must follow, has a tendency to encourage the propensity to association and drinking.<sup>54</sup>

Despite efforts to keep them apart, the War inevitably brought soldiers and convicts together. In a strange inversion of authority, convict field police were sometimes placed in charge of military roving parties. The police magistrates were in charge of defending their respective districts, and their permanent civil force was the field police. Local constables knew the country better than soldiers, who were regularly cycled among the colonies and districts, but the latter were naturally reluctant to recognise the authority of the former.<sup>55</sup> Brown observed

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<sup>47</sup> Gray to Arthur, 24 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 696. For a rich account of the harrowing trials of roving party life, see William Grant's journal, 2 February-13 March 1829, TAHO, CSO1/331, pp. 124-31.

<sup>48</sup> Though their *recorded* successes were few, circumstantial evidence suggests this dearth of evidence may be deceptive. See, for instance, Roth, *The Aborigines of Tasmania*, pp. 171-72 & Chapter 9.

<sup>49</sup> Robertson to Aborigines Committee, 4 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 48.

<sup>50</sup> *Tasmanian*, 5 March 1830, p. 479.

<sup>51</sup> Brown to Aborigines Committee, 5 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 145-46. In consequence, Brown noted, 'the parties turn out dressed in all colours, red, blue, black, white & grey – this renders them too conspicuous.'

<sup>52</sup> Jorgenson to Anstey, 18 January 1830, TAHO, CSO1/320, section D.

<sup>53</sup> Garrison Order, 12 December 1828, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 31.

<sup>54</sup> Minutes of the Executive Council, 14 June 1826, cited in Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, p. 102. See also Chapter 1.

<sup>55</sup> Brown to Aborigines Committee, 5 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 140-49; Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, p. 102.

that ‘the soldier imbibes a natural prejudice against the prisoner who he thinks infinitely below him in the grade of life’, while convicts ‘think of a private soldier as a private soldier thinks of them’. ‘The result’, Brown concluded, ‘is a jealousy, a general insult on both sides, and finally hatred.’<sup>56</sup>

The ineffectiveness of the roving parties was not due solely to bickering and ill discipline. Roving expeditions lasted ‘for 12 or 18 days at a time’, and according to Sergeant Armstrong, ‘the men had frequently to march 30 or 40 Miles in a day’. Roving, which entailed trudging all seasons through trackless swamps, gullies and forests, was as onerous as it was arduous. Military roving parties received ‘no more rations for the Bush, than in garrison’.<sup>57</sup> Even Brown admitted that ‘the ration is not enough to support a hearty man on the fatiguing and harrowing duty of “Black Hunting”’.<sup>58</sup> In addition to being insufficient and unappetising, two weeks army rations was also extremely heavy. Some rovers chose to travel lighter in the hope of being fed along the way, but in a number of cases, attitudes towards the parties were so disapproving that settlers refused to feed or house them.<sup>59</sup> There was also the problem that parties ‘were very frequently lost in the bush for 3 to 4 days together’, which introduced a real danger of starvation.<sup>60</sup> Sometimes they were so hungry and exhausted that rovers were ‘unable to pursue’ the natives, even when they caught sight of them.<sup>61</sup> Fit men with good equipment were pushed to their limits in the backcountry of Van Diemen’s Land, thus it is no surprise that these ill-clothed, ill-shod and ill-fed rovers took a skulking attitude to their missions.

### **Killing Blacks: Motivations and Attitudes**

Not all colonists were hostile towards the blacks. The urban middle-class in particular displayed a remarkable level of sympathy for ‘this much wronged people’.<sup>62</sup> This generally took the form of recognising the injustices inflicted on the natives, calling for conciliation, and excusing their ‘outrages’ as the natural response of a child-like people.<sup>63</sup> Newspaper editors such as Henry Melville and Robert Murray, although their opinions constantly shifted, printed

<sup>56</sup> Brown to Aborigines Committee, 5 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 144. Brown (p. 143) insisted that ‘a Private Soldier without a leader is like a man without a head’. See also, Arthur to Murray, 4 April 1831, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 79.

<sup>57</sup> Brown to Aborigines Committee, 5 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, p. 145.

<sup>58</sup> Brown to Aborigines Committee, 5 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, p. 146.

<sup>59</sup> See, for instance, deposition of Corporal Westwood, 17 January 1829, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 220-22.

<sup>60</sup> Deposition of Sergeant Armstrong, 1 April 1829, *Historical Records of Australia*, ser. 1, vol. 15, p. 317.

<sup>61</sup> See, for instance, Simpson to Colonial Secretary, 2 December 1828, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 207 & Brown to Aborigines Committee, 5 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 149-50.

<sup>62</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 23 January 1830, p. 4.

<sup>63</sup> Some colonists genuinely cared about the natives’ welfare, and a rare few even acknowledged that their way of life might hold some virtue, but no colonist could disavow the assumption that their own religion was superior, or that the British had a right to the land. These ideas went to the core of British identity and imperial thinking, and they could not, without glaring hypocrisy, be dispensed with.

a considerable amount of sympathetic commentary – even at the height of the War.<sup>64</sup> Government rhetoric also tended to be sympathetic, especially in dispatches to London.<sup>65</sup> There were even some settlers in the interior who expressed compassion for the natives. They could do little to restrain their servants though, and among these men there is no compelling evidence of sympathetic attitudes.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, the level of sympathetic sentiment in the colony can appear greater in hindsight than it actually was, because it was mostly expressed by literate urban-dwellers, who are disproportionately represented in the surviving accounts. In reality, sympathisers were the exception, particularly in places where first-hand experience of black violence was a frequent occurrence.

Disinterest in the natives shifted to distrust in the initial years of the War, and thereafter, to hatred and fear. There was an unmistakable rise in the number of their attacks from the middle of the decade, and there appears to have been a comparable rise in the level of violence orchestrated by colonists (see figs. 5 and 13). There were four main reasons for this, namely the desire for women and children, the need to suppress the native threat, revenge, and killing for sport. These motives varied in significance as the conflict progressed.

Van Diemen's Land's enormous gender imbalance, and the voracious demand for native women it created, was the most important proximate trigger for the Black War.<sup>67</sup> According to Melville, frontiersmen 'thought little or nothing of destroying the men for the sake of carrying to their huts the females of the tribes.'<sup>68</sup> Sex continued to be a central motivation for attacking natives until around 1828, by which time killing the enemy had probably taken priority over raping them. There is no indication that sexual assaults decreased after this, though they probably became more a 'fringe benefit' of ambushes that had as their primary goal the eradication of a dangerous enemy.<sup>69</sup> By then, the physical and psychological effects of black violence had become insufferable. While the government and the press spoke of conciliation, an increasingly frustrated and fearful frontier community turned to more reliable methods of removing the threat.

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<sup>64</sup> See Clements, 'Wriggle, and Shuffle, and Twist'. Even within the same issue, newspaper editors frequently contradicted themselves, implacably wrestling with their conflicting desires to be seen both as humane, and as the advocate of their readers' interests.

<sup>65</sup> See, for instance, Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*.

<sup>66</sup> The closest we have is two recorded examples of killers of blacks expressing regret (*Friendly Mission*, p. 254, journal 25 September 1830 & Walker, *Life and Labours*, p. 124, journal 19 December 1832). This is of course not to suggest that none of these men had compassion for the natives, only there is no evidence of it.

<sup>67</sup> Young boys were probably not safe from the carnal desires of these men either, though the evidence for this is merely circumstantial.

<sup>68</sup> Melville, *History of Van Diemen's Land*, pp. 31-32. See also, for instance, H. Emmett, 'Reminiscences of the Black War', 1873, TAHO, NG1216, p. 8.

<sup>69</sup> Michael Sturma ('Myall Creek and the Psychology of Mass Murder', p. 66) found that throughout history rape has been 'the frequent concomitant of massacres'. See also Pinker, *Better Angels of our Nature*, pp. 394-415.

As black violence grew in intensity, so too did the frequency of revenge attacks and pre-emptive strikes by frontiersmen. The *Colonial Advocate* wrote:

There can be little doubt that many scores of the unhappy and useless race are themselves frequently shot by stock-keepers and others, not only when attacked, but in revenge for the death of their fellow countrymen, who have fallen by the blacks.<sup>70</sup>

Similarly, the *Colonial Times* reported that, ‘once in pursuit, with the murder of a Colonist fresh in their memory, the people will kill, destroy, and if possible exterminate every black in the Island’.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, by December 1827, Roderic O’Connor was convinced that colonists were ‘now so exacerbated at the murders that have been committed, that no mercy will be shown when an opportunity offers for retaliation.’<sup>72</sup>

At night it was not easy for ambush parties to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants. ‘[T]he difficulty of securing the leader without injury to some of his less guilty companions’ was first raised by Captain William Clark in 1826, and contemporaries returned to this point on a number of occasions.<sup>73</sup> However, this fails to fully explain the indiscriminate nature of violence against blacks, for there is no evidence that colonists ever attempted to distinguish the innocent from the guilty.<sup>74</sup> The scores of non-combatants that were killed in their attacks were considered, as Michael Sturma put it, ‘surrogate victims’.<sup>75</sup>

For some frontiersmen, however, the guilt or innocence of their victims was irrelevant. To men ‘distinguished for their malicious vigour’,<sup>76</sup> the blacks were merely dangerous animals and their attitude to killing them resembled that of a game hunter. As early as 1824, Adam Amos noted without fuss in his diary that ‘my son James returned from hunting the blacks’, while on another occasion Amos himself ‘had a hunt after the natives’.<sup>77</sup> Such practices became far more prevalent as the decade progressed.<sup>78</sup> In 1830, the *Colonial Times* lamented:

the custom that has been almost universal amongst certain Settlers and their servants, whenever the Natives have visited their neighbourhood, to consider the men as wild

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<sup>70</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 1 April 1828, p. 94.

<sup>71</sup> *Colonial Times*, 8 December 1826, p. 2.

<sup>72</sup> O’Connor to Parramore, 11 December 1827, TAHO, CSO1/323, p. 75. See also Barnes to Aborigines Committee, 10 March 1830, p. 301.

<sup>73</sup> Clark to Arthur, 8 November 1826, SLNSW, ML, A1771, vol. 28, p. 20. See also, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, p. 207, journal 16 June 1830.

<sup>74</sup> It is both a curious fact and a staggering hypocrisy that the most common complaint about black violence was its indiscriminate nature. Much of it certainly was, but the evidence suggests that almost all white violence was indiscriminate.

<sup>75</sup> Sturma, ‘Myall Creek and the Psychology of Mass Murder’, pp. 69-70.

<sup>76</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 18.

<sup>77</sup> Amos diary, 12 July & 10 January 1824, TAHO, NS323/1/1. See also entries 14, 15 December 1823, 25, 28, 29 March, 23 May 1824.

<sup>78</sup> See, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, p. 460, journal 18 September 1831 & Hobler, *The Diaries of Pioneer George Hobler*, p. 176, diary 11 May 1830.

beasts whom it is praiseworthy to hunt down and destroy, and the women as only fit to be used for the worst purposes.<sup>79</sup>

James Bonwick claimed that ‘on several occasions [he] heard men declare that they thought no more of shooting a Black than bringing down a bird’, and that during the War, ‘it was common enough to hear men talk of the number of black crows they had destroyed.’<sup>80</sup>

Hugh Hull, who had lived in the colony since arriving as a child in 1819, recalled ‘it was a favourite amusement to hunt the aborigines ... Sometimes they would return without sport; at others they would succeed in killing a woman, or, if lucky, mayhap a man or two.’<sup>81</sup>

Undoubtedly, there were those for whom the ‘black hunt’ elicited all the exhilaration of stalking dangerous and elusive game. This echoes Sturma’s point that violence brought excitement and significance to the lives of men suffering from isolation, monotony and anonymity.<sup>82</sup>

The phenomenon of men taking a competitive attitude to killing enemy combatants and civilians is by no means new in the history of war. Nevertheless, such attitudes have always come easier to those who could dehumanise their enemy, and the colonists of Van Diemen’s Land were particularly successful at this. Central to the way they reacted to black violence was their perception of who (or what) the blacks were. As discussed in Chapter 1, the notion of savagery was especially popular among frontiersmen, conjuring an image of the natives of sinister and bestial creatures. This again aligns with Sturma’s finding that men ‘who commit inhuman acts almost invariably perceive their victims as sub-human.’<sup>83</sup> In Van Diemen’s Land, the natives were variously denigrated as ‘beasts’, ‘monsters’, ‘devils’, ‘crows’, ‘reptiles’, ‘orangutans’, ‘monkeys’ and the like, which no doubt eased the consciences of the men who killed them.<sup>84</sup> Among frontiersmen, Robinson found, the natives were considered ‘a bare remove from the brutes’.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, West claimed it was ‘the serious conviction of stockmen, that blacks are brutes, only of a more cunning and dangerous order’.<sup>86</sup> In fact, according to John Stokes, Hydrographer on the *Beagle*:

<sup>79</sup> *Colonial Times*, 2 July 1830, p. 2.

<sup>80</sup> Bonwick, *Last of the Tasmanians*, pp. 57-58. Bonwick did not arrive in Van Diemen’s Land until 1841.

<sup>81</sup> Cited in Roth, *The Aborigines of Tasmania*, p. 172. We must assume that some of these stories were coloured by bravado or even fabricated, but they are too numerous to be dismissed en masse.

<sup>82</sup> Sturma, ‘Myall Creek and the Psychology of Mass Murder’, p. 67.

<sup>83</sup> Sturma, ‘Myall Creek and the Psychology of Mass Murder’, p. 67.

<sup>84</sup> Such epithets were commonplace. For a selection of typical examples from the press, see *Hobart Town Gazette*, 26 December 1818, supplement; *Tasmanian*, 25 June 1831, p. 197; *Colonial Advocate*, 1 April, p. 94 & 1 May 1828, p. 133; *Colonial Times*, 8 October 1830, p. 3; *Friendly Mission*, p. 95, journal 29 October 1829. See also Clements, ‘“Wriggle, and Shuffle, and Twist”’, pp. 16-21 & Reynolds, ‘Racial Thought in Early Colonial Australia’.

<sup>85</sup> Quotation from draft of Robinson’s unfinished book, cited in N. J. B. Plomley, ‘Robinson’s Adventures in Bass Strait’, in S. Murray-Smith, *Bass Strait: Australia’s Last Frontier*, Australian Broadcasting Commission, Sydney, 1987, p. 43.

<sup>86</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 269.

such is the perversion of feeling among a portion of the colonists, that they cannot conceive how anyone can sympathise with the black race as their fellow men. In theory and practice they regard them as wild beasts whom it is lawful to extirpate.<sup>87</sup>

As the conflict augmented, so too did the perception and portrayal of blacks as a race of faceless, sub-human killers. The devastating effectiveness of their tactics was undeniable, but this was generally explained away as mere animal instinct.<sup>88</sup> The *Hobart Town Courier*, for instance, asserted that the blacks possessed ‘a craft and cunning never exceeded in any of the human race’, but only because they possessed ‘more savage rage than the hyena or the ravenous wolf’.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, the success of what were considered the ‘barbarous’ and ‘cowardly’ tactics of ‘bloodthirsty marauders’ seems only to have magnified the degree to which they were dehumanised.<sup>90</sup> In a rare surviving letter penned by an assigned convict during the War, Richard Bradstreet wrote to his family in England: ‘friends there are some dangerous animals in this country[;] the country is overrun with black men and women who are so wild they kill every white man they see’.<sup>91</sup>

Colonists’ attitudes towards killing blacks were rarely reluctant. ‘The bushrangers, shepherds, and stockmen’, wrote James Fenton in 1881, would:

kidnap the native girls and oppress the tribes in the most inhuman manner. Horrible tales were told of these abominable deeds by the perpetrators themselves, many of whom were in the habit of boasting of the part they took in annihilating the aboriginal inhabitants.<sup>92</sup>

For some of the men involved, these ‘deeds’ became less a chore than a pleasure. William Barnes, who had endured the War from its beginning, admitted:

The depredations committed upon them by the white people have been carried on for many years and has been upon so large a scale the slaughter has been so indiscriminate and attended with such heart rendering and unheard acts of barbarity that it is impossible to describe them. These acts are never published in the papers, but are recounted by the perpetrators and are made the subject of exultation – when the killing of from two to twenty blacks is spoken of without the least remorse.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>87</sup> J. L. Stokes, *Discoveries in Australia*, T. & W. Boone, London, 1846, vol. 2, pp. 459-60. Stokes toured the island in 1836.

<sup>88</sup> Aborigines Committee report, 19 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 41.

<sup>89</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 13 November 1830, p. 3.

<sup>90</sup> *Launceston Advertiser*, 13 September 1830, p. 2. The denigration of native tactics as barbarous and cowardly was extremely common in both the newspapers, and in private correspondence. See West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 84.

<sup>91</sup> Bradstreet to family, 16 January 1824, TAHO, NS690/1/9.

<sup>92</sup> T. W. H. Leavitt & J. Fenton, *The Jubilee History of Tasmania Illustrated*, vol. 2, Wells & Leavitt, Melbourne, 1881, p. 53.

<sup>93</sup> Barnes to Aborigines Committee, 10 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, p. 300.

The presence of this type of attitude is widely evidenced. When investigating the killing of women and children at Cape Grim, for instance, Robinson interviewed a convict named Chamberlain, who described his role ‘with such perfect indifference my blood chilled.’ So disturbing was the man’s attitude, that Robinson was ‘sickened at the remembrance of it.’<sup>94</sup>

Not only were many frontiersmen comfortable with killing blacks, some appear to have seen themselves as providing a valuable public service. According to the *Colonial Times* of 2 July 1830, ‘the shooting of blacks is spoken of as a matter of levity – indeed, it is considered a meritorious service to the State’.<sup>95</sup> Likewise, Fenton spoke after the War to a convict who insisted he had been ‘doing a noble service to shoot them down.’<sup>96</sup> The belief was, one settler wrote, that ‘the exterminating zeal, of some, may engender the success and safety of others.’<sup>97</sup>

Colonists possessed of such attitudes were capable of truly ghastly acts of violence. For example, it was not uncommon for colonists to collect trophies from the bodies of their native victims in the form of ears, digits and heads. Robinson was told that some convicts would ‘cut off the ears and noses of their murdered victims, which with horrid complacency they have exhibited to their depraved associates, and even gloried in their diabolical achievement.’<sup>98</sup> Likewise, in his memoir, Hull recalled that ‘one European had a pickle tub in which he put the ears of all the blacks he shot.’<sup>99</sup> No less disturbing was the account Hobbs gave to the Aborigines Committee of a convict named Carrotts who ‘had once cut off a Native man’s head at Oyster Bay, and made his wife hang it round her neck, and carry it as a plaything’.<sup>100</sup> What is more, this macabre fascination with severing body parts could be applied to living victims. A ‘gentleman’ informed Robinson that ‘it was a practice with the stockkeepers to get the men into the huts and cut off their penis and testicles with a knife, when they would run a few yards and fall down dead.’<sup>101</sup> The men who perpetrated such deeds were not merely comfortable with killing and mutilating natives; they positively relished it.

The killing of restrained or otherwise defenceless victims also seems to have excited some frontiersmen. Robinson claimed some shepherds were known to ‘ravish the [natives’] wives

<sup>94</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 207, journal 16 June 1830.

<sup>95</sup> *Colonial Times*, 2 July 1830, p. 2.

<sup>96</sup> P. Fenton, *James Fenton of Forth: A Tasmanian Pioneer 1820-1901: A Collection of Essays by and about James Fenton (1820-1901) his Family and Friends*, Educare, Melbourne, 2001, pp. 201-2.

<sup>97</sup> *Launceston Advertiser*, 28 March 1831, p. 99.

<sup>98</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 100, journal 23 November 1829.

<sup>99</sup> Cited in Roth, *The Aborigines of Tasmania*, p. 172. See also, for instance, West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 9; *Colonial Times*, 17 September 1830, p. 3 & 8 October 1830, p. 3. Another impetus for collecting native body parts was their value as scientific specimens, of which a large number ended up in European museums, especially skulls.

<sup>100</sup> Hobbs to Aborigines Committee, 9 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, pp. 49-51. Hobbs stated that ‘from Carrotts’ manner he credited the story.’

<sup>101</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 629, journal 29 March 1832.

and daughters ... and set up their children as targets to shoot at.'<sup>102</sup> Similarly, Fenton learnt of a gang of bushrangers that 'was in the habit of binding them to trees, and using them as targets for practice.'<sup>103</sup> Some acts of violence were of an unquestionably pathological nature. William Lawrence, for instance, related 'several horrid atrocities' to Robinson. One case involved a stock keeper with 'two pistols, one loaded and the other unloaded; he snapped the unloaded one in his mouth, and the black did the same with the loaded one and was shot dead.'<sup>104</sup> Just as there can be little doubt that the details of some of these stories were embellished in transmission, we can be equally sure that many other instances of gratuitous violence were never recorded at all.<sup>105</sup>

### **Deterrents to Violence**

It has been argued above that the desires for sex, revenge and safety offered powerful motives for violence against blacks, but at this juncture it will be instructive to consider the deterring forces as well. In 2000, Keith Windschuttle published an article in the journal *Quadrant*, arguing that two key factors deterred colonists from killing natives in any significant numbers: their Christian beliefs, and the fact that killing was illegal.<sup>106</sup> It will be shown that the evidence does not support such assertion, and that moral and legal constraints were of limited importance to colonists engaged in the Black War.

The legality of killing blacks was never made clear to colonists. Government proclamations initially forbade harming natives, but as the War heated up, settlers demanded the right to defend themselves. The government responded in 1826 by outlining six conditions under which settlers could legitimately treat blacks 'as open enemies'. This permitted military parties to forcibly 'drive off' natives intending 'to attack, rob, or murder the white inhabitants', but the licence of settlers and their servants remained unclear.<sup>107</sup> In April 1828, the 'Demarcation Proclamation' legalised limited violence against blacks who were found in the

<sup>102</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 100, journal 23 November 1829.

<sup>103</sup> Leavitt and Fenton, *Jubilee History*, pp. 53-54. See also West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 32 & *Friendly Mission*, p. 629, journal 29 March 1832.

<sup>104</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 379, journal 28 April 1831. Similar stories were recorded by James Holman, *Travels in China, New Zealand, New South Wales, Van Diemen's Land, Cape Horn, &c. &c.*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., Smith, Elder, & Co., London, 1840, p. 403 & West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 89.

<sup>105</sup> See Appendix 3.

<sup>106</sup> K. Windschuttle, 'The Myths of Frontier Massacres in Australian History: Part 2: The Fabrication of the Aboriginal Death Toll', *Quadrant*, vol. 44, no. 11, 2000, pp. 23-24

<sup>107</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 29 November 1826, p. 1. In a memorandum to the Colonial Secretary (30 November 1827, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 76) Arthur indicated that, on his tour of the settled districts, he had explained to all the magistrates that 'the gov. order of the 26 Nov. points out the resistance which may be made to the natives and gives large scope for the exercise of the authority of the magistrates who are thereby relieved from doubts and apprehensions which they may otherwise have entertained of the lengths to which they would be justified in going to repress the irruptions of the Aborigines.'



settled districts without a government issued pass.<sup>108</sup> One observer rightly ventured that ‘a greater piece of absurdity can scarcely be imagined.’<sup>109</sup> No one really knew where the settled districts began or ended, least of all the natives, who had no way of knowing about the Proclamation, let alone how to acquire a pass.

Yet again, colonists were left confused as to the legality of killing. At points the proclamation seemed to offer great scope for using violence, but elsewhere it read:

Nothing herein contained shall authorize, or be taken to authorize, any settler or settlers, stock-keeper or stock-keepers, sealer or sealers, to make use of force, (except for necessary self-defence) against any Aboriginal, without the presence and direction of a magistrate, military officer, or other person of respectability, named and deputed to this service by a magistrate.<sup>110</sup>

These orders were superseded in November 1828 by the declaration of martial law, which removed all common law restrictions on killing natives, and might have given colonists the confidence to do so openly, were it not for the Governor’s emphatic qualification:

BUT, I DO, nevertheless, hereby strictly order, enjoin, and command, that the actual use of arms be in no case resorted to, if the Natives can by other means be induced or compelled to retire into the places and portions of this Island herein before excepted from the operation of Martial Law; that bloodshed be checked, as much as possible; that any Tribes which may surrender themselves up, shall be treated with every degree of humanity; and that defenceless women and children be invariably spared.<sup>111</sup>

The abovementioned proclamations were the most important, but they were by no means the only official promulgations regarding the blacks, and together they sent mixed messages to colonists. In hindsight, the fact that no colonist was ever punished for killing natives – despite a number of egregious cases coming before the government – confirmed that, in practice, martial law entirely decriminalised killing.<sup>112</sup> At the time, however, colonists were genuinely unsure. Even for the literate minority, the published orders were confusing and often contradictory litanies of legalistic jargon. For example, the Governor frequently castigated settlers for not suppressing the violence with more vigour, while simultaneously demanding greater kindness and forbearance.<sup>113</sup> This vagueness was the inevitable result of Arthur

<sup>108</sup> See *Hobart Town Courier*, 19 April 1828, p. 1

<sup>109</sup> This was Henry Melville, in his *History of Van Diemen’s Land*, p. 73.

<sup>110</sup> Government Proclamation, 15 April 1828, in *Hobart Town Courier*, 19 April 1828, p. 1.

<sup>111</sup> Government Proclamation, 1 November 1828, in *Hobart Town Courier*, 8 November 1828, p. 1. Original capitalisation.

<sup>112</sup> There are only two references to punitive action. John West claimed that, during the first decade of settlement, ‘a man was severely flogged for exposing the ears of a boy he had mutilated; and another for cutting off the little finger of a native’ (*History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 9). Robinson was also informed of the ear-slicing incident by a settler who had witnessed it (*Friendly Mission*, p. 100, journal 23 November 1829). For egregious examples, see the Batman case in Chapter 9, and the Goldie case in Appendix 1.

<sup>113</sup> These demands were made both in public orders and in official correspondence. Perhaps most frustrating to settlers was the response they so often received from their Governor after reporting an instance of black

attempting to marry the irreconcilable humanitarian demands of his superiors (and his conscience), with colonists' demands for protection and the right to protect themselves. The colonial newspapers were regularly headed with new orders, sometimes clarifying previous ones, other times adding further conditions, and always couched in humanitarian language. So, whilst the law ultimately protected killers, they were understandably hesitant about reporting their actions to the authorities.<sup>114</sup> In doing so, they had everything to lose and nothing to gain, especially since campfire ambushes were difficult to characterise as self-defence.

'What is it that is really intended, by Order after Order, so quickly following each other in succession'?, asked the *Colonial Times* in 1830.<sup>115</sup> The *Launceston Advertiser* correspondent, 'TOM TOUGH', expressed similar bewilderment, demanding to know 'which of the 999 orders relative to them [the natives] is it intended should be obeyed?'<sup>116</sup> Frustrations peaked on 21 August 1830, when Government Notice no. 160 appeared in the *Hobart Town Courier*, announcing 'with much satisfaction ... that a less hostile disposition towards the European inhabitants has been manifested by some of the aboriginal natives' and imploring colonists to 'abstain from acts of aggression', and 'endeavour to conciliate them wherever it may be practicable.'<sup>117</sup> In the same issue was Government Notice no. 161, which also threatened that, 'if any wanton attack or aggression against the Natives becomes known to the Government, the offenders will be immediately brought to justice and punished.' Appearing as they did, during the most violent month of the War, orders 160 and 161 produced a vociferous response. The settlers of Jericho went so far as to petition the Governor: 'We contemplate with inexpressible alarm of the consequences of Government Notice no.161 at a time when the aggressions of the Aborigines are becoming daily more and more systematic and ruinous.' As a result of such equivocation, they lamented, 'gloom, misery and apprehension now pervades the whole community'.<sup>118</sup>

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violence. For example, when Hugh Macguinnas was robbed in March 1830, Arthur requested the Colonial Secretary (13 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 455) to '[i]nform Mr. Macguinnas that if he suffers his property to be left in a manner so unprotected I am neither surprised at the consequences nor the least disposed to relieve any individual who acts so carelessly, so imprudently.'

<sup>114</sup> It must also be recalled that the government was generally despised, both by the convicts, who tended to consider themselves victims of an oppressive regime, and settlers, most of whom resented Arthur's dictatorial style of governance. See M. C. I. Levy, *Governor George Arthur: A Colonial Benevolent Despot*, Georgian House, Melbourne, 1953.

<sup>115</sup> *Colonial Times*, 24 September 1830, p. 2.

<sup>116</sup> *Launceston Advertiser*, 5 October 1831, p. 309.

<sup>117</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 21 August 1830, pp. 2-3.

<sup>118</sup> Inhabitants of Jericho to Arthur, 24 August 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 599-601. The governor responded by issuing a clarification notice (Government Order no. 166, 27 August 1830), but this was equally ambiguous.

The fact that so many of the killings recorded in private documents were not reported, suggests there was a general reluctance to notify the authorities of such acts.<sup>119</sup> The main reason for this was surely fear of punishment. For the most part, these men were not trying to capture blacks, they were trying to rape or kill them, and there was nothing in the government's rhetoric (insofar as they understood it) that encouraged them to advertise their deeds beyond their own cliques. This is not to suggest, as Windschuttle did, that the *apparent* illegality of killing blacks did much to deter it. It merely highlights the reasons why colonists were reticent about such acts, even after the proclamation of martial law.

In addition to the government's lack of willingness to prosecute, there were several other factors – all of them well known to frontiersmen – that militated against a conviction for killing blacks. A crime first had to be discovered, and the poorly policed frontier made concealing the evidence easy. Then the guilty parties had to be identified, which was also difficult since the only witnesses were those involved, and the people they told were more likely to applaud than report them.<sup>120</sup> Settlers often knew about the cruelties perpetrated by their servants, but there was not a single recorded case in which they sought to punish or even rebuke their men for such acts.<sup>121</sup> Some years after the War, a man once accustomed to killing natives was asked whether he believed he was 'allowed to murder the natives in cold blood?' He responded: 'Allowed! No body was there to see – nobody knew, and nobody cared. It was war to the hilt on both sides.'<sup>122</sup>

The other deterrent cited by Windschuttle was Christianity, with its injunction not to murder.<sup>123</sup> A brief glance at history, however, reminds us that professions of Christianity are perfectly compatible with all manner of atrocities. Humans have always manipulated or ignored their holy books in convenient ways. Read selectively, the Bible provided ample justification for killing heathens, taking their land and enslaving them. If Christianity had been strong on the frontier, it would have posed no significant deterrent to killing blacks.

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<sup>119</sup> See Appendix 3. As noted in Chapter 15, bounties were offered in 1830 and 1831 for the capture of unharmed natives. Several settlers collected on these, but the government notices announcing their success invariably emphasised their humaneness as the praiseworthy factor (even in the cases where blood was shed). Some frontiersmen may have been tempted by these rewards, but by this stage there were very few natives left to capture.

<sup>120</sup> Informing, or 'dobbing', was highly frowned upon in convict society. See P. MacFie, 'Dobbers and Cobbers: Informers and Mateship among Convicts, Officials and Settlers on the Grass Tree Hill Road, Tasmania 1830-1850', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers & Proceedings*, vol. 35, no. 3, 1988, pp. 112-127.

<sup>121</sup> As Chapter 9 demonstrates, settlers often actively encouraged their servants to kill blacks.

<sup>122</sup> Fenton, *James Fenton of Forth*, p. 201.

<sup>123</sup> Alan Lester (*Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth-Century South Africa and Britain*, Routledge, London, 2001, p. 24) has also argued that evangelicalism had a significant mitigating effect on violence towards indigenes.

But Christianity does not appear to have been very influential in Van Diemen's Land. Frontiersmen were predominately convicts – lawbreakers hardened by the penal system and serving their time in remote places with few churches or ministers to pacify their souls. Most were nominally Christian, but historian Allison Alexander found that ‘many were not influenced by religion at all.’<sup>124</sup> Moreover, the countless descriptions of frontiersmen as lawless inebriates suggest their faith – if they had any – rarely translated into scrupulous behaviour.<sup>125</sup> Certainly, there is no evidence that colonists were ever deterred from killing or raping blacks on account of their faith, or any other scruple.

If anything was likely to moderate behaviour, it was social pressure. Colonists' behaviour had been to some extent checked by moderating socio-cultural forces before emigrating or being transported to Van Diemen's Land,<sup>126</sup> but once there, these forces and the surveillance that maintained them were largely removed. Away from home, these men were not concerned that loved ones would discover their ill deeds. Even settlers, whilst they sought to establish a good standing in the colony, experienced dislocation from the family and community networks that had once patrolled the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. In Sturma's words: ‘It is irrefutable that violence is more likely to occur in situations where the normal restraints of social relations are absent.’<sup>127</sup> Isolated as they were at the edge of a settlement that was itself at the edge of the known world, colonists experienced few barriers to killing blacks beyond the difficulty of surprising them.

## Genocide?

The Black War literature has long focused on the idea of a government sponsored ‘genocide’ in Van Diemen's Land. In his 2001 book *Indelible Stain: The Question of Genocide in Australia's History*, Henry Reynolds listed a number of prominent twentieth century historians and commentators who claimed the British committed genocide in Van Diemen's Land.<sup>128</sup> To that list could be added three of the most prominent historians in the field, James Boyce, Ann Curthoys and Lyndall Ryan, the latter claiming that the natives ‘were victims of a conscious

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<sup>124</sup> Alexander, *Tasmania's Convicts*, p. 24.

<sup>125</sup> See, for instance, Laing, ‘Reminiscences’, pp. 1-8; Parramore to family, 5 October 1824, in W. Parramore, *The Parramore Letters*, p. 54. According to Laing, Parramore and numerous other contemporaries, the 1820s were a period of rampant crime and drunkenness, a time when ‘the drunkard's yell’ (Laing) echoed constantly through the streets.

<sup>126</sup> Admittedly, around a quarter of the convict population came from London, but even in the city, family and friends would have exerted moral influence.

<sup>127</sup> Sturma, ‘Myall Creek and the Psychology of Mass Murder’, p. 66.

<sup>128</sup> Reynolds, *An Indelible Stain?*, pp. 49-52. See also H. Reynolds, ‘Genocide in Tasmania’, in D. Moses (ed.), *Genocide and Settler Society: Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australian History*, Berghahn Books, New York, 2004, pp. 127-29 & J. Dawson, *Washout: On the Academic Response to the Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, expanded edn., Macleay Press, Sydney, 2008 [2004], pp. 302-40.

policy of genocide'.<sup>129</sup> Many more historians of genocide have also flirted with the notion that the colonial government supported the extermination of blacks in Van Diemen's Land, and whilst they are rarely explicit, their implication is generally unmistakable.<sup>130</sup> The prevalence of such views is unsurprising. After all, colonisation did virtually destroy Van Diemen's Land's native population. On closer inspection, however, the question of genocide is more complicated.

One way to approach the question is to ask: was the government guilty of genocide? Answering this question would involve delving deep into government policy, which is beyond the scope of this thesis. Suffice to say though, Reynolds has demonstrated convincingly that the government did not intend to destroy the native population. Indeed, it sought desperately to avoid such an outcome, knowing full well that it would 'leave an indelible stain upon the character of the British Government.'<sup>131</sup> Reynolds did not exonerate the government, but he highlighted some important ways in which it did not resemble a genocidal regime.<sup>132</sup>

The pertinent question for this thesis is: were the colonists guilty of genocide? Certainly, by 1830, many frontier colonists appear to have accepted the necessity of exterminating the native population. When we also consider that colonists were collectively responsible for killing several hundred natives, the accusation of genocide begins to look damning. Nevertheless, there are some significant points to consider before passing such a weighty judgment.

Firstly, absent from Van Diemen's Land were the kinds of dogma that inspired, for example, Ottomans to massacre Armenians in present-day Turkey, Nazis to exterminate Jews throughout Europe, or Hutus to slaughter Tutsis in Rwanda. These groups were targeted for specifically ideological reasons. The natives of Van Diemen's Land, on the other hand, were not killed because of their politics, race or religion. As we have seen, colonists considered them racially and culturally inferior, and this no doubt eased their consciences, but they did not kill them *because* of this. Those who participated in the violence did so largely out of

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<sup>129</sup> Boyce, *Van Diemen's Land*, pp. 258-322; A. Curthoys, 'Genocide in Tasmania: The History of an Idea', in A. D. Moses (ed.), *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation and Subaltern Resistance in World History*, Berghahn Books, New York, 2008, pp. 244-46; Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*, p. 255. Robert Hughes (*The Fatal Shore*, Pan, London, 1988, p. 120) went even further, claiming that Van Diemen's Land 'was the only true genocide in English colonial history.'

<sup>130</sup> See, for instance, Curthoys, 'Genocide in Tasmania', pp. 228-51; A. D. Moses (ed.), *Genocide and Settler Society: Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australian History*, Berghahn Books, New York, 2004, pp. 3-48; B. Kiernan, 'Australia's Aboriginal Genocide', *Yale Journal of Human Rights*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2001, pp. 49-56; A. R. Sousa, "'They will be hunted down like wild beasts and destroyed!': A Comparative Study of Genocide in California and Tasmania", *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2004, pp. 207-8; B. Madley, 'From Terror to Genocide: Britain's Tasmanian Penal Colony and Australia's History Wars', *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 47, no. 1, 2008, p. 106.

<sup>131</sup> Murray to Arthur, 5 November 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of All Correspondence*, p. 56.

<sup>132</sup> Reynolds, *An Indelible Stain?*, pp. 13-33, 49-86.

revenge and self-preservation. Even those who were motivated by sex or morbid thrill seeking lacked any ideological impetus to exterminate the natives.

Secondly, and most importantly, genocides are inflicted on defeated, captive or otherwise vulnerable minorities. The Tutsis were not at war with the Hutus in Rwanda, nor were the Jews at war with the Nazis during the Holocaust. These, like all indisputable genocides, were not wars, but centrally coordinated slaughters of helpless noncombatants. In Van Diemen's Land, although both sides killed noncombatants, they did so without coordination, and in the context of a war. Independently acting colonists were engaged in a serious conflict against a capable and terrifying enemy. It was not the natives' colour or creed that convinced them of the necessity of extermination; it was the effectiveness of their attacks, and the strength of their resolve. Likewise, many natives also wanted to exterminate the colonists, as Chapter 8 reveals, but it is obviously absurd to call their attitudes or actions genocidal. For the same reasons it seems inappropriate to apply the word to colonists.

Moreover, the Black War was fought on an island, from which permanent retreat was practically impossible for most colonists. Avenues for negotiation appeared nonexistent, and with every year the enemy became more dangerous. In other words, colonists felt entrapped, powerless and terrified, and the natives were in essentially the same predicament. It is surely not surprising that there were people on both sides who believed exterminating the enemy as the only way to restore peace.

So was genocide committed in Van Diemen's Land? It depends entirely on what is meant by that word. In 1948, the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide defined it as 'acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group'.<sup>133</sup> Read in isolation, this is extremely broad, which is why the UN definition must be understood in the context of the debates that surrounded and continue to surround it.<sup>134</sup> In particular, the feature that primarily distinguishes genocide from war crimes and other crimes against humanity is *dolus specialis*, or specific intent.<sup>135</sup> There is not the space here to unpack the legal definition of genocide, but regardless of terms, we must at least acknowledge that the attitudes and circumstances that provoked colonists to kill natives in Van Diemen's Land were very different from those typically associated with genocide.

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<sup>133</sup> Quotation from Article 2 of the convention. For more on the United Nations' definition see Reynolds, *An Indelible Stain?*, pp. 13-34 & A. Curthoys & J. Docker, 'Defining Genocide', in D. Stone (ed.), *The Historiography of Genocide*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2008, pp. 9-41.

<sup>134</sup> Reynolds, *An indelible stain?*, pp. 15-32.

<sup>135</sup> Y. Aksar, 'The Specific Intent (*Dolus Specialis*) Requirement of the Crime of Genocide: Confluence or Conflict between the Practice of Ad Hoc Tribunals and the ICJ', *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, vol. 6, no. 23, 2009, pp. 113-126.

***Black***  
8  
**Attitudes**

The Vandemonians had learnt much about the white strangers after two decades of sharing the island with them. Insofar as the vast cultural and linguistic differences between them allowed, some bands had managed to sustain periods of amicable contact with particular white men, usually in the context of prostitution or seeking food from friendly settlers.<sup>1</sup> Whether through such contact or by observation and word of mouth, most Aborigines came to understand something of the white man's habits, strengths and weaknesses. Nevertheless, it seems at least some still believed the whites were ancestors returned from the dead. There was no inconsistency in holding this belief and treating whites as fallible real-world actors, as the spirit-world permeated the mundane as well as the mystical. This interpretation of the invaders as reincarnated ancestors seems to have remained powerful well into the 1830s, thus it must have been a change in circumstances, rather than a fundamental perceptual shift, that roused the Vandemonians to war.<sup>2</sup> The change in question was the rising torrent of white men that swept into the interior during the 1820s. Invasion was the ultimate cause of Aboriginal belligerence, and can serve as shorthand for a suite of more proximate causes or motivations, which included the desire to evict the invaders, the inability to hunt in hostile territory, and the desire to avenge killings, rapes and other offences. Examining these motivations, and how they changed over the course of the War, is the central purpose of this Chapter.

### **Patterns of Violence**

The Black War did not erupt so much as it germinated. The pattern described in fig. 5 is revealing. In 1823 there were just three recorded attacks, all on the east coast. In 1824, however, there were eighteen attacks, and sixteen the following year, all widely distributed through the central and southeastern parts of the island.<sup>3</sup> This was not one band drastically increasing its belligerence, but several bands engaging in occasional acts of violence. The War had begun, and with it a pattern of distrust, revenge and dependence on plunder that quickly spread throughout the interior. Every time Vandemonians were killed or abducted, their

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<sup>1</sup> For prostitution, see Chapters 3 and 4. For accounts of early interaction with settlers, see Wood to Aborigines Committee, 7 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 295-98; Barnes to Aborigines Committee, 10 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, p. 299; Clark to Aborigines Committee, 15 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 319-325 & Anstey to Aborigines Committee, 18 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, p. 340.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>3</sup> See tally in Appendix 2.

friends and family were given greater economic and emotional incentive to perpetrate violence against the whites.

These features of the Black War gave it an inevitability that has been largely overlooked by historians. Although a variety of motives goaded them to fight, continued peace was never a serious option for the Vandemonians. In the years before the War, the white man's lust, his disrespect for custom, and his increasingly obtrusive presence, had steadily eroded the foundations of an uneasy, but relatively non-violent coexistence. Eventually, as the invasion ratcheted up and their grievances mounted, Aborigines in the settled districts were left with no choice but to fight. By 1827, every eastern band seems to have been drawn into the escalating conflict. What alternative did they have? Their experiences were of stockmen and sawyers, and nothing in the behaviour of these men suggested a peaceful solution.

### **Resistance**

In his book, *Fate of a Free People* (1995), Henry Reynolds argued that Aborigines had carried on a war of resistance against the invaders of their country. He presented evidence that the various bands and affiliates believed the land to be theirs and fought to remove the aliens who had invaded it. Most historians accept Reynolds' case, but not all. In *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History* (2002), Keith Windschuttle argued that Aborigines had no problem with thousands of strangers, and tens of thousands of sheep and cattle, occupying their most important camping and hunting grounds: 'Far from generating black resentment, the expansion of settlement instead gave the Aborigines more opportunity and more temptation to engage in robbery and murder, two customs they had come to relish.'<sup>4</sup> As 'thieves', Windschuttle claimed they were motivated almost exclusively by their addictions to European luxuries, especially flour, tea and sugar.<sup>5</sup> In other words, they were grateful for the invasion because it allowed them to indulge both their voracious appetites and their murderous passions. This might give Aborigines the honour of being the first and only people in recorded history to enjoy being dispossessed. Unsound as this argument is, two of Windschuttle's key premises deserve to be examined in more detail.

Firstly, Windschuttle claimed that Aborigines did not have a word for land or property, and they did not understand land ownership in the legalistic way Europeans did. Secondly, he argued that dispossession could not have been a cause of Aboriginal hostility because the

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<sup>4</sup> Windschuttle, *Fabrication*, p. 129.

<sup>5</sup> Windschuttle, *Fabrication*, pp. 124-28.



whites had arrived twenty years before it began in earnest.<sup>6</sup> There are elements of truth in both these claims. The first is trivially true. It would be incredible if Aborigines – or for that matter any hunter-gatherer people – had the same relationship to place as Western Europeans. But legalistic ownership is neither the only, nor the most meaningful way in which humans relate to place. Vandemonians, as established in Chapter 2, identified strongly with their respective tracts of country, for which they had many names.<sup>7</sup> They did not see themselves as the ‘proprietors’ of the land, but this does not imply that they were devoid of powerful cultural or emotional attachments to it, and it certainly does not suggest they would be indifferent to invaders.

The historiographical debate over dispossession has traditionally centred on the correlation between the level of violence, and the amount of alienated and fenced land, but this is a mistake.<sup>8</sup> There were almost no fences at the time the War began, and the line between alienated and non-alienated land was difficult to discern.<sup>9</sup> Crops covered a tiny portion of the land, and cattle and sheep were scattered over large estates. The physical infrastructure of settlement did not significantly impede Aboriginal movement or hunting. As argued below, it was the size and distribution of the white population that mattered. The Vandemonians could not tell whether land had been alienated, but saw plainly the white men pouring into their country.

Windschuttle’s second claim, regarding the timeline of the Black War, is more interesting. As noted above, there were only three attacks reported in 1823, yet at this time, whites outnumbered Aborigines in the interior probably 3:1.<sup>10</sup> Windschuttle rightly concluded that they could not have been as fiercely territorial as some indigenous people who repelled any and all trespassers with lethal violence; but the situation was not as one-dimensional as he suggested. There is an enormous space of possibility between the notion that Aborigines were ‘fiercely territorial’ and Windschuttle’s suggestion that they ‘did not regard the colonists as invaders’.<sup>11</sup> Tolerating some intrusion by foreigners is one thing, but casually accepting wholesale dispossession is another thing entirely. Before the weaknesses of the strangers had been exposed, and before they had overtaken the good hunting grounds, most Aborigines probably considered it safer to avoid these dangerous beings. However, the passionate and clearly political nature of their later resistance cannot possibly be squared with the idea that they had no attachment to place.

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<sup>6</sup> Windschuttle, *Fabrication*, pp. 103-13.

<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>8</sup> See Windschuttle, *Fabrication*, pp. 77-82.

<sup>9</sup> Windschuttle, *Fabrication*, pp. 79-82.

<sup>10</sup> For white population, see fig. 1. For Aboriginal population, see Appendix 3.

<sup>11</sup> Windschuttle, *Fabrication*, pp. 112-13.

The word resistance needs to be defined in this context to avoid confusion. At its most basic level, a violent resistance movement is simply the use of force against an invading or occupying enemy, but this does not entail that the resisting forces must have as their *only* objective the expulsion of the invaders or occupiers. In fact, complete expulsion need not even be considered achievable. Plomley argued that, from the Aborigines' perspectives, the War was 'an attempt to dislodge them [the whites] from their lands.'<sup>12</sup> Much of the evidence presented below appears to vindicate this, but at some point the surviving bands realised the hopelessness of their situation. In the final days of the War, Robinson found they had given up all hope of repulsing the invaders,<sup>13</sup> and they probably felt the imminence of defeat long before, but this does not refute the claim that Aboriginal bands resisted invasion. The Vandemonians were not the first people to press a lost war – particularly when surrender was presumed tantamount to suicide.

The resistance thesis is evidenced in dozens of reports, articles, letters and diaries, and what follows are some of the more explicit examples. Robinson observed that Vandemonians:

have a tradition amongst them that white men have usurped their territory, have driven them into the forests, have killed their game and thus robbed them of their chief subsistence, have ravished their wives and daughters, have murdered and butchered their fellow countrymen; and are wont whilst brooding over these complicated ills in the dense part of the forest, to goad each other on to acts of bloodshed and revenge for the injuries done to their ancestors and the persecutions offered to themselves through their white enemies.<sup>14</sup>

Robinson also made several other explicit statements confirming that 'love of liberty is a ruling passion with these people', and that '[p]atriotism is a distinguishing trait in the aboriginal character'.<sup>15</sup> He was emphatic that Aborigines were 'patriots, [and] staunch lovers of their country'.<sup>16</sup> Roving party leader Gilbert Robertson also discovered, from conversations with six Aborigines, including the chiefs Umarrah, Jemmy and Kickertopoller, that 'they consider every injury they can inflict upon the white men as an act of duty and patriotism'; adding that 'they are in reality a shrewd, cunning race having ideas of their natural rights which would astonish most European statesmen.'<sup>17</sup> Commandant William Darling concluded from discussions with Aborigines after the War, that they had 'vowed vengeance against their

<sup>12</sup> Plomley, *The Tasmanian Aborigines*, p. 87.

<sup>13</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 585, journal 14 December 1831. 'They entertain no such idea', Robinson observed.

<sup>14</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 101, journal 23 November 1829. At this time Robinson had only conferred intimately with the people from Bruny Island and several others, so he did not yet have a broad range of testimony upon which to base this generalisation.

<sup>15</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 762-63, 891, journals 21 May 1833 & 8 March 1834.

<sup>16</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 335, journal 28 December 1830.

<sup>17</sup> Robertson to Lascelles, 17 November 1828, TAHO, CSO1/331, p. 175. Kickertopoller was able to translate their testimony into English.

persecutors', and considered themselves 'engaged in a justifiable war against the invaders of their country'.<sup>18</sup>

Some evidence explicitly indicates that the Vandemonians were challenging the presence of the invaders in their country. In the Meander Valley, for instance, surveyor Henry Hellyer told Robinson 'that a native named Quamby had disputed the land occupied by the whites and that he had successfully driven them off, but he was afterwards killed with others.'<sup>19</sup> Sometimes Aborigines articulated their grievances in broken English. When Aborigines killed three men on the Shannon River in November 1826, they yelled at their victims to 'go away, go away.'<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the warriors who set fire to John Sherwin's house in January 1830 retreated to a distance and began yelling "'parrawar", "parrawar", go away you white buggers, what business have you here?'"<sup>21</sup>

Resistance movements are inherently political, and the campaigns mounted by Vandemonian bands were no exception. Nothing illustrates this more than their use of sabotage, in the form of arson and stock killing.<sup>22</sup> Arson was a largely political tactic, whose main purpose was to intimidate and sabotage the white invaders.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, the intent of the stock killing was wholly symbolic. Attacks on stock almost always occurred independent of other violence, and Vandemonians never ate the carcasses.<sup>24</sup> As the Russian explorer Fabian Bellingshausen noted in 1820: 'They often destroy their flocks of sheep, not that they need meat, but solely to inflict material damage on their enemies.'<sup>25</sup> Moreover, as Chapter 10 explains, both arson and stock killing entailed considerable risk to the perpetrator, and thus cannot be dismissed as mindless vandalism. This is obviously incongruous with Windschuttle's argument that Vandemonians were not resisting the invaders, but merely indulging in 'robbery, assault and murder'.<sup>26</sup> He offered no explanation for why 'criminals' with no political agenda would bother burning huts

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<sup>18</sup> Darling to Arthur, 4 May 1832, cited in Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, p. 32. There is also evidence that some Aborigines saw those who cooperated with the whites as traitors (see, for instance, Jeffreys, *Van Diemen's Land*, pp. 120-22).

<sup>19</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 231, journal 12 August 1830. On 14 March 1829, the *Hobart Town Courier* (p. 1) suggested an alternative story, but Hellyer was intimately familiar with the region and more likely to have been correct.

<sup>20</sup> *Colonial Times*, 10 November 1826, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Deposition of John Sherwin, 23 January 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 430-33.

<sup>22</sup> Stock killing is used in this thesis to refer to the killing or maiming of any domesticated animal. Aborigines mostly killed cattle and sheep, but they occasionally killed horses, bullocks and dogs.

<sup>23</sup> There were some cases in which arson served the purpose of dispersing the occupants of a dwelling, and to this extent it had practical rather than symbolic function. See Chapter 10.

<sup>24</sup> It is something of a mystery why no Vandemonians ate the flesh of cattle and sheep. Perhaps it became tabooed for spiritual reasons, or maybe they just found it repugnant. Windschuttle (*Fabrication*, p. 95) made the intuitive observation that if the Aborigines 'really were starving they would have expanded their cuisine to a leg of lamb or a filet of beef.' This may be true, but they were never put in this situation, as there was a ready supply of flour, sugar and potatoes to be found in the hundreds of stock huts littering the interior. These foods appealed to the Vandemonians' tastes, but they were also easily stored and required no butchering.

<sup>25</sup> Bellingshausen, *The Voyage of Captain Bellingshausen*, p. 355.

<sup>26</sup> Windschuttle, *Fabrication*, p. 399.

and stacks, or spearing sheep and cattle, but simply pointed out that such tactics were recorded in only around ten per cent of cases.<sup>27</sup> However, ten per cent represents over one hundred incidents, most of which were clear and deliberate acts of resistance.<sup>28</sup>

Having evaded the question of sabotage, Windschuttle asserted that no contemporary ‘ever provided a direct quotation from an Aborigine objecting to his dispossession’.<sup>29</sup> The problem for this argument is that few Aborigines spoke English, and even fewer spoke it well, so it is entirely understandable that most of their statements were paraphrased. Nevertheless, several direct quotes were recorded that could be interpreted as objecting to dispossession. Robinson reported one such example in 1834, in which an Aboriginal women ‘asked Mr Vaughan for a dog. On his refusing she sharply told [*sic*] him, “what he took her country for?”’<sup>30</sup> But, even without any testimony – quoted, paraphrased or otherwise – the patterns of behaviour mentioned above demonstrate that Aborigines strongly objected to being dispossessed. Indeed, the claim that they were indifferent to being uprooted from their homelands is surely so extraordinary as to bear a heavy burden of proof.

## Revenge

Aboriginal violence, Windschuttle argued, was inspired purely by criminality and revenge, and thus cannot be classified as resistance or even warfare.<sup>31</sup> The criminality charge is nonsensical and can be dismissed at the outset, because, as an invaded people, the Vandemonians knew nothing of British law, and even if they had understood it, they could be under no obligation to respect it. The *Hobart Town Courier* made this clear enough in September 1830, when it insisted that a captured Aborigine:

can only be considered the captive of legitimate warfare. For we must not forget, while we denounce the craft, the cunning, and the murderous habits of the poor creatures, that these are but the natural tactics of war which providence has supplied them. They are as yet strangers to the European notions of honour, and the blunt, straight forward, but not always prudent mode of battle of a generous Englishman, who thinks it unfair to give a blow without affording his adversary a chance to return it. Such refined notions of honour would appear madness and folly ... and when he adopts stratagem, treachery and even murder, his conscience will hardly tell him that he is using more than the natural weapons of his condition. And it must be acknowledged that he does use them, and that with wonderful dexterity.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Windschuttle, *Fabrication*, p. 124.

<sup>28</sup> See figs. 11 and 12.

<sup>29</sup> Windschuttle, *Fabrication*, p. 105.

<sup>30</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 871, journal 19 January 1834. See also the two cases cited above of Aborigines telling colonists to ‘go away’.

<sup>31</sup> Windschuttle, *Fabrication*, p. 99. This was Windschuttle’s central thesis.

<sup>32</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 11 September 1830, pp. 2-3.

Revenge, on the other hand, was definitely one of the factors that motivated Aborigines, but how might this disqualify them as people who resisted the invaders of their country? Was there ever a resistance movement – which by definition comprises aggrieved people – that was not in part fuelled by revenge? The notion that revenge and political motivation are mutually exclusive is illogical. Vengefulness is a natural emotion among people who feel they have been wronged, and, needless to say, the Vandemonians felt wronged.<sup>33</sup>

No European understood the Vandemonians' grievances better than Robinson. In July 1830, he informed Reverend Bedford that there was 'not one aboriginal native that I have visited but what [*sic*] have dire wrongs to complain of'.<sup>34</sup> The following year, he recorded in his journal that the reason Aborigines 'bear a deadly animosity to the white inhabitants' was because 'there is scarcely one among them but what [*sic*] has some monstrous cruelty to relate which had been committed upon some of their kindred or nation or people'.<sup>35</sup> This was confirmed five days after the last hostile band surrendered, when Robinson learnt that:

The chiefs assigned as a reason for their outrages upon the white inhabitants that they and their forefathers had been cruelly abused, that their country had been taken from them, their wives and daughters had been violated and taken away, and that they had experienced a multitude of wrongs from a variety of sources. ... They Complain loudly of the injuries done to them and their progenitors by the whites.<sup>36</sup>

Revenge, then, was never far from the Vandemonians' minds. Before about 1827, most of their attacks appear to have been directed at the particular frontiersmen who had wronged them (mostly convicts and bushrangers).<sup>37</sup> Some historians have even contended that Aborigines inflicted 'ritual punishment' on some of their victims, namely by spearing them in the thigh – a punishment common among mainland Australian tribes. Drawing on a couple of well-known examples, they have been quick to extrapolate the practice to Van Diemen's Land. The idea was first proposed in 1982 by Marie Fels, who argued that the 1807 spearing of Robert Waring in the thigh bore 'the distinguishing characteristics of a ritual spearing, the settling of a private quarrel between persons who share some kind of reciprocal relationship.'<sup>38</sup> Historians John Connor, Graeme Calder and James Boyce all repeat this argument

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<sup>33</sup> For an excellent discussion of the psychology of revenge and self-control, see Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, pp. 483-670.

<sup>34</sup> Robinson to Bedford, July 1830, in *Friendly Mission*, p. 269.

<sup>35</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 585, journal 14 December 1831.

<sup>36</sup> Robinson to Colonial Secretary, 5 January 1832, in *Friendly Mission*, pp. 602-3.

<sup>37</sup> Lloyd Robson (*A History of Tasmania*, p. 142) found there were more than 100 mounted bushrangers at large in 1825. Given the conduct of these men described in Chapter 3, it is fair to assume that they played a significant role in provoking Aboriginal hostility.

<sup>38</sup> Fels, 'Culture Contact', pp. 57. This may have been the incident mentioned by Woorrady on 11 July 1831 (*Friendly Mission*, p. 408).

uncritically.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Ian McFarlane argued that, when Thomas John was speared in the thigh at Cape Grim in December 1827, it was ‘the type of wound often inflicted by Aborigines as punishment for a breach of tribal custom.’<sup>40</sup> There were also several examples of men being speared in the thigh later in the War.<sup>41</sup> However, the presence of ritual violence cannot be inferred from a handful of cases. Between 1803 and 1831, whites received literally hundreds of spear wounds, so it would be highly improbable if some of these wounds were not in the thigh (one of the largest parts of the body). Furthermore, there was never any suggestion by a victim or contemporary observer that ritual violence was involved. There is no good reason to think that the several recorded thigh-spearings were anything more than poor aim.<sup>42</sup>

Nonetheless, Aborigines did have a sense of proportional retribution, which many bands seem to have applied to white men. Robinson ‘heard them boast with much pleasure of the murders they have committed on the whites, and has known them to be revenged on particular persons for inflicting injuries on them.’<sup>43</sup> One Aboriginal woman told him ‘that her brothers was [*sic*] killed, that when one was shot the other attempted to avenge his death and speared the man that shot him’.<sup>44</sup> Sometimes they even knew their victims by name. When some twenty Aborigines besieged a hut on the South Esk River in September 1828, they used:

opprobrious language and threats calling upon the men by name and upon a man who was murdered by the Aborigines about six months before at the same hut. They pelted the hut frequently with stones.<sup>45</sup>

The most notorious case was that of James Cupid, who received nine spear wounds between 1826 and 1831, one settler noting that they had ‘long avowed vengeance on Cupid who has been a terror to them’.<sup>46</sup>

It seems, however, that Aborigines reserved a particular hatred for soldiers. Robinson found they possessed ‘a rooted antipathy’ and ‘an unconquerable aversion to soldiers’.<sup>47</sup> Likewise,

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<sup>39</sup> J. Connor, ‘Recording the Human Face of War: Robinson and Frontier Conflict’, in A. Johnston & M. Rolls (ed.), *Reading Robinson: Companion Essays to Friendly Mission*, Quintus, Hobart, 2008, p. 172; Calder, *Levée, Line and Martial Law*, p. 111; Boyce, *Surviving in a New Land*, p. 45.

<sup>40</sup> I. McFarlane, ‘Aboriginal Society in North West Tasmania: Dispossession and Genocide’, PhD thesis, University of Tasmania, 2002, p. 102

<sup>41</sup> See, for instance, *Hobart Town Courier*, 13 November 1830, p. 3 & *Friendly Mission*, pp. 397-401.

<sup>42</sup> I do not mean to imply here that Vandemonians did not have systems of normative behaviour that were maintained through ritual – what we know as ‘Law’ on the Australian mainland – only that there is no good evidence of them applying ritual punishments to colonists.

<sup>43</sup> Robinson to Executive Council, 23 February 1831, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 81.

<sup>44</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 318, journal 29 November 1830. See also, Robinson to Arthur, 20 November 1830, TAHO, CSO1/317, p. 227.

<sup>45</sup> Simpson to Colonial Secretary, 4 September 1828, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 160.

<sup>46</sup> Moriarty to CS, 25 August 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 941; Smith to Colonial Secretary, 7 September 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 954-57. See also McKay, *Journals of the Land Commissioners*, p. 80, journal 6 March 1828 & *Colonial Times*, 6 January 1826, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> Robinson to Colonial Secretary, 24 February 1831, in *Friendly Mission*, p. 470. In this report, Robinson reported that, among Aborigines ‘who have had but little intercourse with the white inhabitants, all men

the Oyster Bay settler George Story recalled that they harboured 'great antipathy to the Redcoats'.<sup>48</sup> This was probably because soldiers were easily recognisable, always armed, and responsible for many acts of frontier violence.<sup>49</sup> The experiences of Robinson's informants exemplify why they felt this way:

[Tunnerminnerwait] stated that a soldier stole upon some natives unperceived and shot a woman. The white savage then took out his knife and cut her throat and cut open her belly and then burnt her in the fire. LACKLAY further stated that on another occasion some soldiers stole upon the natives at their encampment and fired upon them and shot one man and one woman; and an helpless infant belonging to the murdered woman they also killed, by beating it on the head with a stick.<sup>50</sup>

Such treatment did result in several attacks on soldiers when they could be isolated on their own or in pairs, but generally fear seems to have induced most Aborigines to take a wide berth of these men in red.<sup>51</sup> Desire for revenge, it seems, did not tempt them to make suicidal attacks on targets beyond their capabilities.

### **Violence over Women**

Of all the injuries Aborigines received at the hands of white men, nothing fuelled their thirst for revenge like violence towards women and children.<sup>52</sup> This can seem difficult to square with the role some men played in prostituting their wives, but to them, sex was not a sacred act, and a woman's virtue was not predicated on her chastity. Sex no doubt had its meanings, but virginity was not an important concern. This is not to say that frontier prostitution never contravened traditional customs, or that greed never encouraged men to exploit their womenfolk, it is merely to say that the Aborigines' attitudes towards women and sex were very different to those of British middle-class observers.

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carrying arms are supposed to be soldiers, but the distinction is well known amongst them [*sic*] who have infested the settled districts.'

<sup>48</sup> G. F. Story to J. Bonwick, n.d., University of Tasmania Library Special and Rare Materials Collection, ePrints no. 2228. <http://eprints.utas.edu.au/2228/> (retrieved 17 May 2012). According to the traditions of the Cotton family, with whom Story lived, he had a great deal of intimate contact with a number of Aborigines on the east coast (see W. J. Cotton, *Land of the Sleeping Gods*, J. Cooper (ed.), to be published by Fullers, Launceston, Tasmania, 2013).

<sup>49</sup> See, for instance, O'Connor to Aborigines Committee, 17 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, pp. 54-55 & *Friendly Mission*, pp. 298-300, 309-12, 412, 451-52, journals for 2 & 15 November 1830; 17 July & 3 September 1831. See also Chapter 9.

<sup>50</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 585, journal 14 December 1832.

<sup>51</sup> See, for instance, *Hobart Town Courier*, 20 December 1828, p. 2 & 26 March 1831, p. 3; *Colonial Times*, 1 October 1830, p. 3; Williams to Colonial Secretary, 16 December 1828, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 210-12; Robinson to Arthur, 20 November 1830, TAHO, CSO1/317, pp. 216-33.

<sup>52</sup> Chapter 9 describes the character and extent of violence against women, and to this must be added the systematic raiding for women by sealers along the northern and eastern coasts (see Chapters 5 and 6). Chapter 2 demonstrates the enormous importance of women to Aboriginal society, while Chapter 12 describes the loving and jealous emotions of their men.

In 1826, stockmen at the junction of the Shannon and Ouse Rivers bartered 'blankets and sugar' for sex with some local Aboriginal women. This might have been a fair arrangement, had the men not repossessed the women's payment as they departed, provoking their menfolk to attack the stockmen in retaliation.<sup>53</sup> This was probably characteristic of how broken prostitution agreements could trigger violence. William Barnes described another possible example from 1825. A band of Aborigines 'were encamped on the hill by [Launceston's] Government House', he recalled, when 'their women were grossly abused by the Prisoners who were that day exempted from work (it being on a Saturday) and the men assaulted and beaten in the most cruel manner'.<sup>54</sup> This incident was also witnessed by a cooper named George Pyle, who claimed that:

one of the Black Woman was thrown down by a white man there were several other white men near who held the Black Woman down whilst the white man first mentioned laid upon her his trousers or breeches were unbuttoned ... I saw four or five Black Native Women lying upon the ground and white men lying upon them.<sup>55</sup>

Pyle also stated there 'were two or three soldiers near these last mentioned people' who 'did not interfere'. This incident was probably a prostitution arrangement gone sour. Pyle noted that one man attempted to rescue a woman by rushing her attacker with a stick, but was resisted by one of the spectators. Certainly, by the end of the affair the women were not consenting and when a conscientious bystander interrupted the scene they promptly ran away.<sup>56</sup> Barnes claimed 'they never appeared in Launceston Afterwards'.<sup>57</sup>

The Government House incident forms part of a large body of evidence supporting the claim that assaults on women were a key proximate cause of Aboriginal violence. Robert Thirkell, who claimed to have been 'constantly among the natives', believed that 'any injury sustained by the white people was entirely occasioned by their own ill-usage of the females'.<sup>58</sup> George Lloyd also observed that 'the thoughtless conduct of the farm-servants, stock-keepers, and others, in their immoralities with the "gins," embittered in the native mind a sense of wrong already unendurable'.<sup>59</sup> Likewise, Robinson suggested that 'the principal cause of unfriendly feeling and animosity has generally arisen from an improper interference with the Women of the Country'.<sup>60</sup> This is certainly consistent with his earlier observation that an Aboriginal man 'without a female partner is a poor dejected being. When arrived at the years of maturity his

<sup>53</sup> Plomley, *Jorgenson and the Aborigines*, p. 70.

<sup>54</sup> Barnes to Aborigines Committee, 10 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 299-300.

<sup>55</sup> Deposition of George Pyle, 6 January 1825, NLA, MS3251/2/4, pp. 31-33.

<sup>56</sup> Deposition of Alexander Cumberbeach, 8 January 1825, NLA, MS3251/2/4, pp. 31-33. Cumberbeach saw only two women with white men on top of them, but he appears to have been the man who broke up the scene, and may have missed some of what occurred earlier.

<sup>57</sup> Barnes to Aborigines Committee, 10 March 1830, CSO1/323, p. 300.

<sup>58</sup> Meredith, 'Verbal Remarks on the Aborigines of Tasmania', p. 28.

<sup>59</sup> Lloyd, *Thirty-Three Years*, p. 57. Lloyd, who had been in the colony since 1820, claimed to have had considerable experience with Aborigines in the southeast.

<sup>60</sup> Robinson to Colonial Secretary, 27 October 1836, SLNSW, ML, A2188, vol. 28, p. 310.



tantamount [paramount] object is a wife who can provide [for] himself and family'.<sup>61</sup> These hardships, together with the emotional cost of losing their loved ones, understandably goaded men to retaliate. When asked by a stock-keeper 'why they killed white men', a Vandemonian 'who spoke English' replied rhetorically: 'if black man came and took away his lubra [wife] and killed his piccaninnies [children], would he not kill black man for it?'<sup>62</sup>

Where the location of a captive woman was known, Aborigines sometimes sent in a rescue party, as happened at a farm near Ben Lomond in March 1831. Two Aborigines stole upon the hut and 'attacked the sawyers, hand to hand ... [while a third was] occupied in capturing a native girl who was living with them. The sawyers escaped after receiving several severe wounds'.<sup>63</sup> When a woman was able to escape and tell her story, the revenge of her menfolk could be vicious. In 1826, for instance, Mr Thomson's servant testified that:

Dune the bush-ranger, brought a native woman to our hut; he brought her by force. The same woman was with the tribe of Natives when they attacked and plundered our hut, and she was with the party who threatened us with death on the following day, about which time Scott was killed.<sup>64</sup>

Often though, the fates of the women are unknown, and the source records only the retaliation. For example, one settler recounted the story of one man who shackled a woman to a log with a bullock-chain and 'was afterwards found speared to death at a water hole.'<sup>65</sup> Likewise, the settler Richard Dry recalled an incident in which two convicts at the Western Marshes 'had forced some black women to their hut and that in revenge for this outrage the natives waylaid and killed the two stockmen.'<sup>66</sup> Some Aboriginal testimony was also recorded. When Temina was captured near the South Esk River in 1825 and asked 'why he killed the white men he said the white men wanted to get the women away from his Tribe'.<sup>67</sup> Clearly, the abduction and abuse of women was common, and the ensuing revenge and rescue missions constituted a substantial portion of the violence perpetrated by Aborigines during the War.

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<sup>61</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 87, journal 28 September 1829.

<sup>62</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 253-54, journal 24 September 1830.

<sup>63</sup> Simpson to Colonial Secretary, 8 March 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 890-93. See also, *Friendly Mission*, p. 405, journal 7 July 1831.

<sup>64</sup> Aborigines Committee report, 19 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, pp. 39-40. See also Clark to Arthur, 8 November 1826, SLNSW, ML, A1771, p. 19; *Hobart Town Gazette*, 14 October 1826, p. 2 & 21 October 1826, p. 2.

<sup>65</sup> Bonwick, *Last of the Tasmanians*, p. 60.

<sup>66</sup> Dry to Aborigines Committee, 7 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, p. 289.

<sup>67</sup> Deposition of David Roberts, 16 July 1825, NLA, MS3251/1/4, p. 10. Roberts, a stockman, claimed to speak the prisoner's language. This interview was in relation to the killing of two stockmen at James Cox's property, Clarendon.

## Torture and Intimidation

In many of their attacks, Aborigines displayed intense fury and brutality, often ensuring that their victims died slowly and agonisingly. This was an expression of vengefulness and possibly also a method of intimidation. In February 1830, the *Hobart Town Courier* reported that the convict James McCarty was discovered:

almost lifeless, in a most shocking state, having several severe wounds on his head, back and breast, and his little finger nearly beaten off,<sup>68</sup> and even maggots had engendered in several parts of his body. ... McCarty was found 18 hours after the attack upon him by the blacks, lying at the back of the big Lagoon, in a state of insensibility.<sup>69</sup>

Six months earlier, Charles Chadwick testified that Aborigines surrounded his hut on the Jordan River. They demanded he remove his clothes, then mocked and toyed with him until one took a waddy from behind his back and proceeded to beat him viciously. The band then left their victim, but soon after one of the men returned, rolled him onto his back and drove a spear through his arm.<sup>70</sup> Similar methods of torture were described to Robinson: ‘The woman with whom I was conversing on this subject described the manner of torture they adopted towards their fated victims, via breaking their arms or legs or cutting their heads, and when they did not kill they disabled or maimed.’<sup>71</sup>

This is not to say that Aborigines were incapable of mercy.<sup>72</sup> When Montpelliatta’s band ‘attacked Shone’s hut and set it on fire, and the woman run out from the flames and begged of them not to kill her. MONTPELLIATTA the chief took her in his arms and carried her away and would not let the rest hurt her.’ There was a limit to such magnanimity, however, for in this very same attack they decapitated a man, and burnt his body.<sup>73</sup> Torture and mutilation of the dead were not the norm, but they were not uncommon either. Some cases were no doubt vendettas animated by grief and rage, and targeted at particular individuals, though many Vandemonians had clearly developed a deep-seated hatred towards all white men.

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<sup>68</sup> Indeed, there were several cases in which victims had their fingers cut or beaten off (see, for instance, Meredith to Arthur, 26 July 1824, cited in FitzSymonds, *A Looking Glass for Tasmania*, pp. 35-36 & deposition of James Cox, 25 March 1825, NLA, MS3251/2/4, pp. 1-14, 25-26).

<sup>69</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 13 February 1830, p. 2.

<sup>70</sup> Deposition of Charles Chadwick, 31 August 1829, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 296-300.

<sup>71</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 70-72, journal 11 July 1829.

<sup>72</sup> For some examples of merciful conduct see, for instance, Anstey to Colonial Secretary, 31 December 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 771; Vicary to Colonial Secretary, 9 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 402-3; Jorgenson to Anstey, 24 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/320, section D; *Colonial Times*, 12 & 19 November 1830. A glance at the incident reports (especially those in TAHO, CSO1/316) suggests that Vandemonians often inflicted less harm than they could have.

<sup>73</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 562, journal 24 November 1831. See also Tyrell to Anstey, 23 November 1829, TAHO, CSO1/320, section F. Gender appears to have been significant here, but it is not clear how.

As the 1820s drew on, the size of the settlement, together with the number of ‘unscrupulous types’ on the frontier, grew to a level that made targeted revenge less manageable. Consequently, although they continued to target certain white men, many bands began to unleash their vengeance indiscriminately.<sup>74</sup> Robinson told the Executive Council in 1831 that ‘the Natives can distinguish between stock-keepers and settlers, and attack the latter, although they are conscious of not having received an injury from them.’<sup>75</sup> Some Vandemonians stated as much themselves. Warriors attacking huts along the Shannon River in 1827 ‘repeatedly said they will, sooner or later, murder every *WHITE* man in the Island!!!’<sup>76</sup> Similarly, in 1828, a band attacked two stockmen at ‘the Lakes’, threatening to ‘settle them and all the white men’.<sup>77</sup> Maybe it was the bitterness, the attrition of suffering incessant ambushes, or perhaps the realisation that all whites were contributing to their destruction, but by the height of the War, many Vandemonians seem to have stopped caring about who their victims were.<sup>78</sup>

## Resources

During the latter years of the War the Vandemonians’ priorities shifted. Roderic O’Connor observed in 1830 that they became ‘more anxious to plunder than to murder’, and this is born out by the data presented in fig. 7.<sup>79</sup> Clothing, bedding, and particularly blankets were carried off with increasing frequency as a means of keeping warm, which was a constant problem, because a warm fire was also a conspicuous fire. The white man’s foods were even more popular, especially flour, sugar and potatoes. Aborigines throughout the island liked the taste of these novel foods, and Windschuttle has argued this was the only reason they took them. He cited the testimony of a man captured near the Clyde River in 1830, who revealed with the aid of a translator:

that the white man had destroyed one of his companions, and that he had most reason to complain; that when the tribe attacked the hut it was in order to obtain food, and such article as the whites had introduced amongst them, and which now instead of being luxuries as formerly, had become necessities, which they could not any other way procure.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Colonists became increasingly aware of this feature of Aboriginal resistance from 1827. It is also reflected in the data regarding attacks on women and children (see fig. 10).

<sup>75</sup> Minutes of the Executive Council, 23 February 1831, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, pp. 80-82.

<sup>76</sup> *Colonial Times*, 26 January 1827, p. 3. Original italics.

<sup>77</sup> *Tasmanian*, 12 September 1828, p. 3. See also, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, p. 445, journal 24 August 1831.

<sup>78</sup> Many even turned on those whites who claimed to have shown them kindness. See, for example, Barnes to Aborigines Committee, 10 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 299-305; O’Connor to Aborigines Committee, 17 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, pp. 54-55. See also the killing of Thomas and Parker discussed in Chapter 16.

<sup>79</sup> O’Connor to Aborigines Committee, 17 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, pp. 54-55. This trend reversed in 1831 (see discussion in Chapter 16).

<sup>80</sup> *Colonial Times*, 3 September 1830, p. 3, cited in Windschuttle, *Fabrication*, p. 129.

Windschuttle believed this ‘clinch[ed]’ his argument that Aborigines had only the basest motives for making their attacks. However, ‘necessities’ in this context is most likely a reference to the fact that these foods had become essential to the Vandemonians’ survival, rather than an addiction they were willing to die for. ‘The Aborigines had in a great measure changed their system of warfare and depredations’, wrote Jorgen Jorgenson in February 1830:

instead of resorting to their usual method of obtaining subsistence, they closed in upon the settlement, robbing the huts of flour and other provisions in very large quantities, thus in fact that food was formerly disregarded by them had now become to them actual necessities of life, scarcely to be dispensed with.<sup>81</sup>

It could be retorted that, since tea and tobacco – which have no caloric value – were also among the goods commonly taken, the motive for taking them must have been desire, rather than need. This is almost certainly true, but dried leaves are no great additional burden to men carrying off loads of flour and sugar that *were* crucial to their survival.

So why did flour, sugar and potatoes become necessities for the remnant Vandemonians? Plomley claimed that starvation was a primary cause of the War, but did not say why he thought the Aborigines were starving.<sup>82</sup> Sharon Morgan was more specific, claiming that across large areas the whites had reduced the numbers of native game to levels that could not sustain Aboriginal bands.<sup>83</sup> There is some evidence to support this contention. The *Hobart Town Courier*, for instance, reported in January 1829 that ‘the number of kangaroos killed lately exceeds any thing [*sic*] before known in the island.’<sup>84</sup> Around the same time, an Aboriginal man told Jorgenson that when ‘I returned to my country I went hunting but did not kill one head of game. The white men make their dogs wander, and kill all the game, and they only want the skins.’<sup>85</sup> There is no doubt that extensive hunting reduced the wallaby and kangaroo populations in many areas, but to what extent is unclear.<sup>86</sup> Certainly, in some areas kangaroo numbers remained strong.<sup>87</sup> However, it was not primarily a shortage of game that forced Aborigines to plunder food from the white man.

Far more important was the danger of hunting in the vicinity of the ever-expanding settlements. At the height of the War, the retired officer Thomas Marslen wrote with admirable perceptiveness:

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<sup>81</sup> Jorgenson to Anstey, 24 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/320, section D.

<sup>82</sup> N. J. B. Plomley, *The Aboriginal/Settler Clash in Van Diemen’s Land, 1803-1831*, QVMAG; Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, Launceston, Tasmania, 1992, p. 6.

<sup>83</sup> Morgan, *Land Settlement*, pp. 155-56.

<sup>84</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 31 January 1829, p. 2.

<sup>85</sup> Plomley, *Jorgenson and the Aborigines*, p. 63.

<sup>86</sup> These animals were hunted for their meat and skins, but also because they competed with stock for grasslands.

<sup>87</sup> See examples given by Windschuttle (*Fabrication*, pp. 90-92).

their latitude for procuring food by hunting and fishing, becomes more and more circumscribed every year, exactly in the same ratio as the farms are extended over the island; and in less than the period of one generation they will not have a single untenanted spot left. Starve they cannot, therefore it will always be a war of extermination.<sup>88</sup>

Marslen was right. From the mid 1820s, white encroachment eroded the Vandemonians' capacity to move safely over much of their country, until it became simply too dangerous to hunt, and they were forced to adopt a war economy based on plunder.<sup>89</sup>

In December 1830, the *Hobart Town Courier* remarked that it was 'well known' how the 'extension of the settled districts upon their [the Vandemonians'] usual hunting grounds has either driven them entirely from them or removed the kangaroo.'<sup>90</sup> Around the same time, the *Launceston Advertiser* predicted 'that as the Aborigines find themselves, more and more hemmed in, and disconcerted in their annual excursions and means of subsistence, they will be more apt to commit outrages.'<sup>91</sup> A similar sentiment was expressed by the captured chiefs Umarrah and Jemmy, who 'said that the several tribes are quite unhappy in their present situation, from the manner in which their hunting grounds, their principal means of subsistence, have been circumscribed'.<sup>92</sup> Eventually, the invasion became unbearably claustrophobic. Following his surrender in 1831, the chief Montpelliatta stated 'that when the Aborigines left any place to go hunting elsewhere, and they returned in the course of eight days, they found a hut erected.'<sup>93</sup>

The Vandemonians, therefore, had a variety of motivations for attacking white men, including resisting the invasion of their country; avenging the killings, rapes and abductions perpetrated by white men; and plundering the food and blankets they both wanted and needed. This suite of claims is further buttressed by comparison with the contemporaneous settlement at King George's Sound. Here encroachment was restricted to the beachhead, hunting was limited, and women were left alone. Consequently, violence was almost entirely avoided. Tiffany Shellam has noted that the settlement's small number of soldiers and convicts were closely controlled by several humane officers, while the Aboriginal men never allowed their women near the

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<sup>88</sup> Marslen, *The Friend of Australia*, p. 241. It is not clear that Marslen had travelled to Van Diemen's Land. He probably gained his information via correspondence.

<sup>89</sup> The threat of the sealers meant that resorting to a coastal economy was also dangerous. Furthermore, as noted in Chapter 2, vegetable foods were only a tiny part of the diet of eastern bands, so a reduced ability to hunt had acute economic consequences.

<sup>90</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 11 December 1830, p. 2.

<sup>91</sup> *Launceston Advertiser*, 25 October 1830, p. 3.

<sup>92</sup> *Tasmanian*, 28 November 1828, p. 2. As noted in Chapter 6, the Vandemonians' economies were also strained by the loss of women, who were essential to the function of a hunter-gatherer unit.

<sup>93</sup> Plomley, *Jorgeson and the Aborigines*, p. 114. Jorgenson paraphrasing. See also, for instance, Arthur to Goderich, 10 January 1828, *Historical Records of Australia*, ser. 3, vol. 7, p. 28 & O'Connor to Aborigines Committee, 17 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, pp. 54-55.

settlement unless chaperoned.<sup>94</sup> Thus, a comparison with King George's Sound – and to a lesser extent, Van Diemen's Land during the early years of settlement – confirms that the variables of encroachment, resource restriction, and violence against women were those most responsible for determining the character and tenacity of Aboriginal resistance during the Black War.

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<sup>94</sup> T. Shellam, *Shaking Hands on the Frontier: Negotiating the Aboriginal World at King George's Sound*, University of Western Australia Press, Crawley, Western Australia, 2009.

*White*  
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**Warfare**

The Black War was fought on both sides by war parties conducting small-scale ambushes. This Chapter focuses on the colonists' tactics, and explores how several hundred convicts, settlers and soldiers were able, with little coordination, to kill some 600 blacks in less than a decade.<sup>1</sup> The Black War literature talks freely of the 'atrocities' committed by colonists against the natives, but there is little discussion of the minutiae surrounding these acts. This reflects the fact that the War has traditionally been examined through the lens of high-level government correspondence, which usually omitted such details. Furthermore, whilst historians have given considerable attention to the natives' guerrilla warfare, they have overlooked the fact that many colonists employed their own guerrilla-style tactics.<sup>2</sup> Their numerical superiority gave the colonists an insurmountable advantage, but their tactics won them the War.

### **Gin Raiding**

By the mid 1820s, the 'gin' raid had become an established tactic whereby frontiersmen would ambush native campsites in order to acquire women for sex. Technically, this was not warfare, but it was a systematic form of violence that provided the tactical template used throughout the Black War. Gauging by the copious references to it in both private and public sources, gin raiding appears to have been general knowledge among contemporaries.<sup>3</sup> In 1826, for example, the *Hobart Town Gazette* reported: 'No one disputes that many, very many, needless acts of cruelty have been committed ... [in instances where] stock-keepers have pursued and carried off their women'.<sup>4</sup> A settler told historian James Fenton that '[i]t was the custom of the sons and servants of the settlers to lie in ambush for 'a mob' of native women and girls, and to seize and carry away the younger ones whenever an opportunity offered.'<sup>5</sup> The Governor too was aware that convicts and bushrangers 'treated [blacks] with the most unnatural cruelty, taking

<sup>1</sup> The case for an estimated death toll of 600 is made in Appendix 3.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter 10 begins with a discussion about guerrilla warfare and its meanings.

<sup>3</sup> Numerous examples could be presented in addition to those examined here. See, for instance, *Hobart Town Gazette*, 17 April 1819, p. 1 & 14 October 1826, p. 2; J. E. Calder, *Brady: McCabe, Dunne, Bryan, Crawford, Murphy, Bird, McKenney, Goodwin, Pawley, Bryant, Cody, Hodgett's, Gregory, Tilley, Ryan, Williams, and their Associates, Bushrangers in Van Diemen's Land, 1824-1827*, Sullivans Cove, Adelaide, 1979 [1873], pp. 16, 145, 161; Bonwick, *Last of the Tasmanians*, pp. 60-61; *Friendly Mission*, pp. 83, 405, 750-51, journals 21 September 1829, 7 July 1831, 7 April 1833. The fact that so many cases made it into the written record is remarkable, and is indicative of a much wider practice.

<sup>4</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 11 November 1826, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Leavitt & Fenton, *Jubilee History*, p. 53.

away their women, and often murdering the men.’<sup>6</sup> The strongest evidence, however, comes from the settlers questioned by the Aborigines Committee in 1830. This was a time when hatred of the blacks was at its most intense, and the respondents had every reason to blame them for initiating the conflict, but instead they convinced the Committee that attacks were:

frequently made by lawless and desperate characters for the purpose of carrying off the Native women and children; attempts which, if resisted, the aggressors did not scruple to accomplish with circumstances of dreadful and unnecessary barbarity.<sup>7</sup>

If an ambush was successful, the raiders might keep their captive women chained up for a day, a week or longer, depending on the circumstances. Examples of this type of behaviour abound, but a few will suffice to make the point.<sup>8</sup> William Clark of Bothwell told the Aborigines Committee that, in around 1824, ‘a stock keeper belonging to Mr Lord, named Jenkins, seized a native woman and kept her confined for some days in his hut, always chaining her with a bullock chain to his bed post whenever he went abroad.’<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Mr Weeding, a settler from Oatlands, claimed that in his neighbourhood ‘the stock keepers had chained the females to their huts with bullock chains for the purpose of fornication.’<sup>10</sup> A more explicit example followed the capture of a woman and her six-year-old daughter at Emu Bay by Alexander Goldie and his two companions. ‘The woman is in irons’, Goldie wrote in a letter to his employer four weeks later:

I make her wash potatoes for the horses and intend taking her to the hills and making her work ... the woman will not speak and is very often sulky. She broke her irons once and was very nearly getting away I think she is about 20 or 22 years old. I have no doubt she will work. Barras can make her do anything.<sup>11</sup>

Later that year, the woman was removed to Launceston, though Goldie retained the little girl until she died the following year.<sup>12</sup> Robinson admitted the survivor of one of these ordeals to hospital in Hobart, observing that she ‘bore marks of the lash on her back and had contracted a

<sup>6</sup> Arthur to Murray, 20 November 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 60.

<sup>7</sup> Aborigines Committee report, 19 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 36. Several of the settlers questioned by the committee believed the natives’ violence was not justified (see Appendix 3).

<sup>8</sup> The fact that so many cases made it into the written record is remarkable, and is surely indicative of a much wider practice.

<sup>9</sup> Clark to Aborigines Committee, 15 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 319-25.

<sup>10</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 105, journal 14 December 1829. See also, for instance, J. Ross, *Dr. Ross’s Recollections of a Short Excursion to Lake Echo in Van Diemen’s Land 1823*, Sullivan’s Cove, Adelaide, 1992, pp. 41-42.

<sup>11</sup> Goldie to Curr, 16 September 1829, cited in McFarlane, *Beyond Awakening*, p. 110. The meaning of ‘Barras’ is unknown. It is indicative of the attitudes of both sender and receiver that this letter evinced an almost boastful tone.

<sup>12</sup> *Launceston Advertiser*, 26 October 1829, p. 3; *Friendly Mission*, p. 278, journal 4 October 1830. The circumstances under which this woman came to be shipped to Launceston and imprisoned are not clear. Goldie worked for the Van Diemen’s Land Company, and his employer was the director, Edward Curr. See also Appendix 1.



loathsome [venereal] disease.’<sup>13</sup> Such examples indicate that slavery – generally short-term bondage for sexual purposes – was far from uncommon in the interior; something previous scholars have failed to recognise.

Once frontiersmen had finished with their captives, they generally either let them go or killed them, though the latter option was the safest and probably the most popular.<sup>14</sup> There were many cases in which, according to the *Colonial Times*, ‘[t]heir women have been contaminated [raped], and then had their throats cut, or been shot’.<sup>15</sup> Sweeping remarks such as this might be dismissed as exaggeration if it were not for the many specific examples that confirm them. Captain Donaldson, for instance, recounted a story to Robinson, told to him by:

a man at the westward at a remote stock hut [who said] that the natives had been shamefully treated: said he had no right to speak well of them as they had killed his wife, but he said that he was witness of a barbarous transaction, that two stockkeepers kept a black woman and cohabited with her for some time, when they afterwards tied her up by the heels and left her to perish.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, the colony’s largest landowner, William Effingham Lawrence, was told about ‘two stockkeepers [who] took a black woman, ravished her and then bound her on the ground by each hand and foot, stretching her spreadeagle, and then left her to perish.’<sup>17</sup>

Some years after the War, Fenton recorded the testimony of a convict who told him of when he and his fellow stockmen used to hunt blacks around their campfires, adding that: ‘Of course we used to spare a young female occasionally when we got a chance, and kept her for a few days before we shot her’.<sup>18</sup> The captured escapee John Perry described an especially graphic case during a police interview in March 1826. Perry confessed (though later denied) that Jeffries, Russell and himself, who had absconded to the island’s northeast:

fell in with four men [sealers] and a black woman ... after we shot the men, the black woman came to us, and told us they were Boatmen, and were going after Jins we could not understand her sufficiently to make out where the Boat was, after searching the Bodies we left them, and took the black woman to a Lagoon about a quarter of a mile off, where all three of us had connexion with her, Jeffries first, then I and afterwards Russell, we then all four dined together off some fat cakes and kangaroo steamer, neither of us had any further connexion with the woman; about three or four o clock in the afternoon Jeffries said the Blacks were all treacherous that he had been taken by them at Sydney, and shot her through the head with a pistol.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 107, journal 24 December 1829.

<sup>14</sup> A chained woman had the potential to land her captors in trouble. If they were convicts, their master might not approve of such behaviour; but the screams of captive women might also alert their menfolk.

<sup>15</sup> *Colonial Times*, 5 April 1836, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 377, journal 22 April 1831.

<sup>17</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 379, journal 28 April 1831. It is possible this was a retelling of the story above, though Robinson clearly did not think so. See also, for instance, p. 629, journal 29 March 1832.

<sup>18</sup> Fenton, *James Fenton of Forth*, p. 201.

<sup>19</sup> Deposition of John Perry, 14 March 1826, NLA, MS3251/2/2, pp. 215-17.

Such behaviour is reminiscent of armies throughout history that have considered the sexual enjoyment of captive women a perquisite of military success.<sup>20</sup>

### Official Armed Parties

Pursuit parties were raised to hunt down natives in the immediate aftermath of their attacks.<sup>21</sup> They usually spent between twelve and forty-eight hours in the field. In most cases the nearest constable or officer would be alerted, who would in turn rally a party from local military detachments and settlers' establishments. Pursuers sometimes rode horses if they could be procured, but they rarely used dogs, as those imported to the colony were inappropriate for tracking humans.<sup>22</sup> Generally, pursuers had no idea which direction the blacks had gone, so local knowledge and intuition was pooled in an effort to deduce their most likely course. Jorgen Jorgenson reported that when the blacks committed their depredations they were 'lost sight of in a moment, as if by magic', so speed was paramount if pursuers were to have any hope of picking up their trail.<sup>23</sup> Some communities even had a 'prearranged signal' to announce a pursuit and, by 1829, response times were remarkably short.<sup>24</sup>

When sightings or attacks occurred in populous areas, several parties could be deployed within a matter of hours. Following a siege on the South Esk River, probably in 1827, on the house of the emancipist farmer, Thomas Beams:

The neighbours then began to arrive, some on foot others mounted, they had heard the firing and guessed the blacks were attacking the Beams home. A war party was quickly got together, two of the older men was [*sic*] left to guard the house, powder and swan drop was served out and fourteen men crossed the ford ... [They] searched the hills and gullies, but could not find the blacks, so they sat down and waited for darkness, about 10 o'clock a faint glow was seen in the sky, one of the party took his boots off and borrowed socks from the others tied them to his feet so as not to make a sound and crept away into the darkness, he came back again in about two hours and reported that he had found the blacks in a deep dark gully, there was about a dozen, one of them was sitting on a boulder apparently on the lookout, the party was now

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, E. L. Zurbruggen, 'Rape, War, and the Socialization of Masculinity: Why Our Refusal to Give Up War Ensures that Rape Cannot be Eradicated', *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, vol. 34, 2010, pp. 538-49.

<sup>21</sup> In her recent PhD thesis, Jacqueline Fox explained that the common law mechanisms for responding to native attacks were the *posse comitatus* and the 'hue and cry' – the former when the field police or military were available to raise a party, and the latter when colonists rallied and responded on their own (Fox, 'Constructing a Colonial Chief Justice', pp. 352-66).

<sup>22</sup> See Vicary to Colonial Secretary, 26 July 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 538-41. The idea of using bloodhounds, however, was widely discussed (see, for instance, Davies to Aborigines Committee, 27 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 114-16 & Siemens to Aborigines Committee, 21 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 98-101).

<sup>23</sup> Jorgenson to Arthur, 5 January 1828, cited in Plomley, *Jorgenson and the Aborigines*, pp. 33-37.

<sup>24</sup> Simpson to Colonial Secretary, 18 March 1828, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 122-24. Dozens of these pursuits are described in TAHO, CSO1/316.

divided into four to come in from each side, the signal for attack was the call of a [?], a charge of swan drop was to be fired and then the camp was to be rushed with clubbed muskets, every thing went off as arranged, at 3 A.M. fourteen muskets poured a charge of swan drop into the blacks, the camp was rushed and when daylight came eleven dead blacks was [sic] counted, only one got away.<sup>25</sup>

This pursuit was typical in the way it was organised, but atypical insofar as it succeeded. Because the natives were extra wary in the wake of their attacks, most pursuits came to nothing.<sup>26</sup>

Roving parties differed from pursuit parties in that they were proactive rather than reactive, scouring the countryside for weeks at a time in the hope of ‘capturing or destroying the Natives’.<sup>27</sup> The idea to contract civilians (settlers and convicts) into roving parties was developed by Governor Arthur and Oatlands’ police magistrate Thomas Anstey.<sup>28</sup> Familiar with the tried and tested methods of the stockmen, Anstey suggested to Arthur in November 1828 that ‘a few parties each consisting of 10 or 12 active men, should look for the native fires *at night* – cautiously approach them, and wait with caution till the dawn of day, when many of the poor creatures might, thus, be captured.’<sup>29</sup> Desperate to try something, Arthur agreed. By September 1829, Anstey had fitted-out seven civilian parties, and four more were added the following year.<sup>30</sup>

Far more numerous were the military roving parties comprising soldiers and constables, which had been independently embarking on roving missions from at least the winter of 1828.<sup>31</sup> In the Oatlands district, for instance, there were six military detachments ‘searching for the natives’ in December 1828.<sup>32</sup> Bothwell’s police magistrate had seventy-seven soldiers at his

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<sup>25</sup> Unpublished family account by J. R. Beams (b.1868), 1947, Beams family papers, Flowery Gully, private collection. Many of the details in Beams’ account have been verified, and with the exception of a few points of probable embellishment, it has great verisimilitude. ‘Swan drop’ was a colloquialism for small shot fired from a musket. This was usually used for hunting birds (hence the name), but could also inflict dreadful injuries on humans at close range. ‘Clubbed muskets’ referred to the stocks of muskets being used as a club. Brown Bess muskets had a large stock for exactly this purpose.

<sup>26</sup> There were some exceptions (see, for instance, *Hobart Town Courier*, 27 November 1830, p. 3), but of the hundreds of parties sent out, there are very few references to them capturing or killing their quarry.

<sup>27</sup> This quotation is John Batman referring to his objectives as a roving party leader (cited in Campbell, *John Batman and the Aborigines*, p. 54).

<sup>28</sup> Official man-hunting parties were first used in Van Diemen’s Land in 1814 when Governor Thomas Davey employed them to track bushrangers.

<sup>29</sup> Anstey to Arthur, 14 November 1828, cited in Plomley, *Jorgenson and the Aborigines*, pp. 81-82. Original italics. See also Dumaesq to C. Arthur, 6 November 1829, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 355-60.

<sup>30</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 12 September 1829, p. 3; Jorgenson to Arthur, 5 January 1828, cited in Plomley, *Jorgenson and the Aborigines*, pp. 33-37.

<sup>31</sup> Most military records from this period are lost or unrecovered. Although the colony was under military governance, most military correspondence appears to have bypassed the Colonial Office. For instance, the general correspondence between officers that would tell us volumes about the day-to-day operations of the military has never been found. A thorough search of the British Library, the Imperial War Museum, and the British National Archives might prove fruitful, though my own correspondence with the wonderfully helpful archivists at these institutions has uncovered little.

<sup>32</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 13 December 1828, p. 2.

disposal in 1829, twenty-five of whom operated constantly in roving parties.<sup>33</sup> In the Campbell Town district, 'numerous' military parties were 'scouring the country in all directions' by 1830.<sup>34</sup> The same was true in Great Swanport, where a 'considerable number' of military parties were in 'constant pursuit of the Blacks'.<sup>35</sup> Military parties were better trained than their civilian counterparts, but their tactics were very similar. It was well understood that the only way to 'come up with the blacks' was to spot their campfires and ambush them in their repose. The Russian explorer Lieutenant E. A. Berens, who visited Australia in 1829, recorded a telling conversation:

I was told by one of the officers, who served in Van Diemen's Land in a detachment, about the means they use to move the native inhabitants off the colony. Usually such a detachment sets out for the bush, as if to hunt game; on seeing the natives, they surround them and kill them without any regret.<sup>36</sup>

Hunting natives, however, was more difficult than hunting game. Sergeant Armstrong, who conducted roving missions out of Bothwell, explained to his superiors that every morning 'they had to rise before daylight to get on the top of a Tier by break of day [to look for native fires].'<sup>37</sup> If a campfire could be descried, and the sleeping band surrounded, rovers had orders to capture them if they would submit, but otherwise to 'drive them by force to a safe distance, treating them as open enemies.'<sup>38</sup> In practice, ambushes almost always ended in violence. If capture was attempted, the natives ran and were therefore fired at. More commonly, attackers fired before announcing themselves, so either way, ambushes resulted in natives being fired upon. The treatment of wounded or captured natives, according to Melville, 'depended on the leaders of the party ... occasionally they were all shot, or had their brains knocked out by the butt-end of the muskets – other more merciful leaders captured them'.<sup>39</sup>

An examination of two successful ambushes – one military, one civilian – will help elucidate these points. The first occurred on 6 December 1828, when a party of the 40<sup>th</sup> Regiment, guided by constables Danvers and Holmes, fell in with a band near Tooms' Lake, east of Oatlands. Danvers described how 'we got near as possible to them that night', and the next day:

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<sup>33</sup> Deposition of Sergeant Armstrong, 1 April 1829, *Historical Records of Australia*, ser. 1, vol. 15, p. 317. Roving was never the military's primary occupation on the frontier. Most troops were posted to remote outstations in detachments of two to four men, where they were to protect the settlers and respond to crises, though they did go on short patrols.

<sup>34</sup> Simpson to Colonial Secretary, 23 August 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 581-95.

<sup>35</sup> Brown to Aborigines Committee, 5 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 117-52.

<sup>36</sup> E. Gover, *Australia in the Russian Mirror: Changing Perceptions, 1770-1919*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria, 1997, p. 45.

<sup>37</sup> Deposition of Sergeant Armstrong, 1 April 1829, *Historical Records of Australia*, ser. 1, vol. 15, p. 317. There are many references to roving and pursuit parties using this tactic.

<sup>38</sup> Government Notice, in *Hobart Town Gazette*, 29 November 1826, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> Melville, *History of Van Diemen's Land*, pp. 78.

at daybreak we formed ourselves to surround them, one of them getting up from a smaller fire to a larger one discovered us and gave the alarm to the rest, and the whole of them jumped up immediately and attempted to take up their spears in defence and seeing that, we immediately fired and repeated it, because we saw that they were on the defensive part, they were about twenty in number, and several of whom were killed, only two [a woman and a boy], unfortunately, were taken alive.<sup>40</sup>

Officially, 'several' turned out to be 'ten',<sup>41</sup> but witnessing the soldiers returning triumphantly to Oatlands, Corporal Robert Ayton:

heard many of them boast that they had killed sixteen of the natives, one man in particular boasted that he had run his bayonet through two of them, and that they had gathered them into a heap and burned their bodies.<sup>42</sup>

Clearly, some soldiers took great pride in executing these attacks. Many were young men who had never seen combat, so a successful ambush may have been the closest thing to 'victory' they had experienced. Whatever their reasons, the men's boastfulness says volumes both about their attitudes, and what they presumed would be the attitudes of bystanders.

The following August, a civilian roving party under John Batman came across a large native camp. They crept as close as they could before one man 'struck his musket against that of another party [member], which immediately alarmed the dogs'. According to Batman's report, the blacks:

were in the act of running away into the thick scrub, when I ordered the men to fire upon them, which was done, and a rush by the party immediately followed, we only captured that Night one woman and a male child about Two years old, the party was in search of them the remainder of the Night, but without success, the next morning we found one man very badly wounded in his ankle and knee, shortly after we found another 10 buckshot had entered his Body, he was alive but very bad, there was a great number of traces of blood in various directions and learned from those we took that 10 men were wounded in the Body which they gave us to understand were dead or would die, and Two women in the same state had crawled away, besides a number that was shot in the legs ... on Friday morning we left the place for my Farm with the two men, woman and child, but found it quite impossible that the Two former could walk, and after trying them by every means in my power, for some time, found I could not get them on. I was obliged therefore to shoot them.<sup>43</sup>

The only major difference between the two attacks was that the 40<sup>th</sup> Regiment's kill rate was much higher than Batman's, which no doubt reflected their arms training. Tactically, however, the ambushes appear to have been basically identical. Although neither had been specifically

<sup>40</sup> Danvers to Anstey, 9 December 1828, TAHO, CSO1/320, section E.

<sup>41</sup> See Anstey to Colonial Secretary, 9 December 1828, TAHO, CSO1/329, p. 269 & *Hobart Town Courier*, 13 December 1828, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Deposition of Corporal Ayton, 15 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/330, p. 109.

<sup>43</sup> Batman to Anstey, 7 August 1829, TAHO, CSO1/320, section B.

trained to execute such ambushes, the tactics of the gin raiders were well established on the frontier by the time the roving parties were formed.

There were also important similarities in the ways the attacks were reported. Both Danvers and Batman conveyed their reports to the Governor without the slightest concern that they might attract censure for firing on masses of sleeping men, women and children – and none was forthcoming. Arthur wrote a margin note indicating that he believed Batman had ‘much slaughter to account for’, but the roving parties were the colony’s main defence against the blacks, and he was unwilling to compromise their authority by indicting Batman.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, he went so far as to reassure rovers that their rewards would be safe, even if they were ‘unavoidably compelled to use violence, and loss of life ensue[d]’.<sup>45</sup>

### **Vigilantes and the Campfire Ambush**

But if the authorised [roving party] system was attended with a sad sacrifice of native life, no one will question the atrocities committed by commandoes, first formed by stock-keepers, and some settlers, under the influence of anger, and then continued from habit. The smoke of a fire was the signal for a black hunt. The sportsmen having taken up their positions, perhaps, on a precipitous hill, would first discharge their guns, then rush towards the fires and sweep away the whole party. The wounded were brained; the infant cast into the flames; the musket was driven into the quivering flesh; and the social fire, around which the natives gathered to slumber, became, before morning, their funeral pile [*sic*].<sup>46</sup>

John West, *A History of Tasmania*, 1852

West was right. The unofficial vigilante parties raised on the initiative of frontiersmen took a greater toll on the native population than the official roving or pursuit parties. Vigilantes used the same tactics as the official parties – indeed, they developed them – but overall they had more opportunities and stronger motives for succeeding.

If colonists were actively looking for blacks, they would ascend the nearest hill at dusk or dawn looking for signs of smoke, but most ambushes were probably more spontaneous,

<sup>44</sup> Cited in C. Billot, *John Batman: The Story of John Batman and the Founding of Melbourne*, Hyland House, Melbourne, 1979, p. 48. Batman’s assumption that he was acting appropriately probably stemmed from the fact that martial law was in force, and he was leading a party whose official remit was to suppress the blacks.

<sup>45</sup> Colonial Secretary to Simpson, 4 August 1830, cited in Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, p. 114. The rovers had apparently already imbibed this loose attitude towards collateral damage. Jorgenson (letter to Anstey, 18 June 1829, TAHO, CSO1/320, section D), for example, insisted that ‘indiscriminate slaughter is not the principle aim, but while capture is desirable, the enemy must be driven from the wild and extended parts of the country’, and in the process some ‘may undoubtedly be fallen in with, and many killed’.

<sup>46</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, pp. 31-32. West’s description of a typical campfire ambush may appear hyperbolic, yet it resembles a substantial list of specific cases.

beginning with a chance sighting of smoke on the horizon. Experienced frontiersmen knew that, unlike smoke from a stockman's camp, the natives' smoke ascended in multiple columns.<sup>47</sup> The news would pass around neighbouring stock huts and an ambush party would be raised. The sizes of such parties varied considerably, but typically consisted of four to eight men.<sup>48</sup> Communication was difficult once a camp was surrounded, so plans and signals had to be prearranged, and arms and ammunition checked. When night fell, the men made their way to where the smoke had been sighted, looking now for glowing fires, and the characteristic sounds of a native camp.<sup>49</sup> If the camp could be located, they would split up, take a wide berth, and surround it, generally waiting till first light to attack when the targets were visible, but not conscious.<sup>50</sup>

Men's hearts must have raced with fear and excitement in the critical moments before an ambush, but even as they were poised to attack, success hinged on several factors.<sup>51</sup> For one, the blacks often slept in huts, which made them harder to pick off from a distance, but easier to surprise.<sup>52</sup> Robinson's envoys told him 'that the white men about those parts [the Blue Hills] had killed plenty of the natives, that they used to shoot them in their huts in the winter time.'<sup>53</sup> More importantly though, men had to ensure their weapons would fire. The most common weapon, among both soldiers and civilians, was the Brown-Bess musket.<sup>54</sup> This was a notoriously unreliable and inaccurate weapon, and at 159 centimeters in length and 4.7 kilograms in weight, it was also extremely cumbersome.<sup>55</sup> The ammunition of choice for close-range encounters was grapeshot (lead pellets), but to be effective, the gun needed to be well maintained, and the powder kept dry. The latter was a constant problem in Van Diemen's Land's temperate maritime climate, particularly if the men had chosen a misty or dewy morning to attack.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, guns were generally only good for one shot before the

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<sup>47</sup> See, for instance, Lloyd, *Thirty-Three Years*, pp. 107, 157 & Plomley, *Jorgenson and the Aborigines*, p. 56.

<sup>48</sup> Alcohol undoubtedly played a role on some occasions. William Parramore (letter to family, 13 August 1823, in Parramore, *The Parramore Letters*, p. 23) observed that convicts and emancipists on the frontier, 'to make up for want of domestic comfort, drink spirits whenever they can procure them.' Nevertheless, these attacks required considerable skill and coordination, so inebriation would have reduced their chances of success.

<sup>49</sup> Sometimes ambush parties were disappointed to find the fires they surrounded were those of their fellow colonists. See, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, pp. 640-41, journal 13 May 1832 & *Hobart Town Courier*, 9 July 1831, p. 2. See also Lawrence incident in Chapter 13.

<sup>50</sup> If a camp was stormed at night, the assailants placed themselves in the firelight, while the blacks escaped into the surrounding darkness, introducing the risk of counter-attack (see Chapter 12). Dawn attacks reduced this risk.

<sup>51</sup> For a pictorial example of men preparing to execute a campfire ambush in South Australia, see fig. 22.

<sup>52</sup> There is some evidence that winter ambushes, when natives were generally confined to their huts, were more successful (see, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, pp. 525-27, journal 25 October 1831).

<sup>53</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 527, journal 25 October 1831. See also p. 535, journal 4 November 1831.

<sup>54</sup> A gun called a fowling piece was also common in Van Diemen's Land. This weapon had a thinner bore and stock than a musket.

<sup>55</sup> Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, p. 72. Reynolds lists several sources that discuss the types of firearms used during the War.

<sup>56</sup> See, for instance, *Launceston Advertiser*, 2 August 1830, p. 3 & Curr to Directors, 14 January 1828, cited in McFarlane, *Beyond Awakening*, p. 91.

targets dispersed. A proficient soldier could fire and reload three times a minute, but few colonists could achieve that sort of speed.<sup>57</sup> There was simply not the time for repeated firing unless the assailants had more than one weapon, as they sometimes did.<sup>58</sup> More commonly, the party rushed the camp following the first shots, and resorted to bayoneting their victims, or clubbing them with their musket stocks.

None of this mattered unless the party could first get close enough to execute the attack. To achieve this, a number of obstacles had to be overcome. Before the black population collapsed, camps consisted of up to a dozen separate hearths, spread out over a substantial area. During the War though, these camps were generally much smaller, and situated in places that made it difficult to launch surprise attacks.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, if the night was too cold, assailants would not be able to lie in wait until dawn; if the morning was too foggy, they would be unable to see each other or their targets; too bright and the men might be seen; too dark and they might fumble noisily in the bush. A windy night might drown out some of the noise, but it might also alert the native's dogs to their scent.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, approaching assailants were often given away by barking dogs, and on some occasions they were even mauled by these animals.<sup>61</sup> Thus, with so many contingencies, success was far from assured. Many, if not most ambush attempts failed, and it was only their frequency that eventually broke the native resistance.<sup>62</sup>

Campfire ambushes were generally perpetrated by convicts, but they did not always act alone. The son of one of the earliest east coast settlers gave the following account to Fenton, who, having 'no doubt whatever of its truth', recounted the incident as spoken by his informant:

As soon as evening approached, I mustered our men to watch for the resting-place of the natives on the tiers. We had six muskets in good working order, and a good supply of ammunition, with ball and heavy slugs. The men posted themselves in good positions for making observations; and at last, in the grey twilight, one of them detected a light smoke rising from a gully two miles distant. We carefully noted the spot and waited until near midnight, when we all sallied out together in search of our game. We took no dogs with us, lest they might be heard by the watchful dogs of the natives. Keeping the open country we soon reached the tier, and proceeded stealthily along until we stood over the little gully, from whence we then distinctly saw the smoke arising. It was now necessary to move along as quietly as possible; and, by observing every precaution, we succeeded in getting a pretty near view of the lighted fire, with a mob of natives and their dogs fast asleep around it. Having arranged our

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<sup>57</sup> Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, p. 72.

<sup>58</sup> Pistols were good weapons for the second shot, and the frequency with which they are mentioned in contemporary sources suggests that many settlers owned them, though they were not often given to convicts.

<sup>59</sup> See Chapter 10.

<sup>60</sup> By the mid 1820s, only a small number of bands on the western and southern coasts were without dogs.

<sup>61</sup> See, for instance, Melville, *History of Van Diemen's Land*, pp. 78-79; *Colonial Times*, 19 March 1830, p. 3 & deposition of Thomas Williams, 30 June 1827, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 28-33.

<sup>62</sup> See, for instance, *Hobart Town Courier*, 9 October 1830, p. 2; *Tasmanian*, 11 June 1830, p. 591 & Robertson to Lascelles, 17 November 1828, TAHO, CSO1/331, pp. 170-71. See also TAHO, CSO1/316, which contains many examples.



muskets and pistols for the fray, the former being loaded with heavy charges of slug and grape shot, we all six noiselessly approached to within a few yards of the wretches, when all of a sudden the dogs gave the alarm by raising a great commotion and furious barking. The natives were on their feet like electricity, but they looked stupefied, and never attempted to run. It would have been all the same if they had, for we had them nearly all under cover of our guns, which we discharged at once, and dropped some eight or ten like crows. Then there was a jolly scramble to make off, but we dropped a few more as they bolted away into the scrub. Our night's sport made a dozen less natives, whom we left there to rot, and we sent away several wounded.<sup>63</sup>

Even if settlers did not personally participate in ambushes, many condoned, if not encouraged their assigned servants in the practice. Robinson reported in November 1830 that 'many persons [settlers], instead of suppressing any wanton attack of this kind – upon this benighted race, have encouraged their people to the perpetration of the same.'<sup>64</sup> Large landowners, like George Hobler, could raise a substantial party from among their own servants. After one of his splitters was speared, Hobler 'armed four men who I hope will get sight of their night fire and slaughter them as they lie around it.'<sup>65</sup> Nor did he express any disapproval when he discovered 'it was arranged among [his neighbour's] stock keepers that if the natives made their appearance in that quarter they were to muster a strong party and endeavour to surprise them around at their fires after night'.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, settler complicity of this sort seems to have increased in the later years of the War, when the economic and psychological toll of black violence was at its most taxing.

The effectiveness of the campfire ambush as a means of expunging the native threat was widely recognised. A settler writing to the *Tasmanian* in 1828 was explicit about what he believed needed to be done:

From experience (and I have for several years been among cattle and stock-keepers in the interior, and seen and know more of the savages than I think necessary to state at this time) I venture to assert that, to the stock-keepers, the Colony will at length owe its relief from the depredations of the Black Natives – None know so well as stock-keepers, how to track them by their fires, and come upon them when asleep. This knowledge, melancholy as has been the effect, is not less true.<sup>67</sup>

A similar formula was proposed to the Aborigines Committee by Roderic O'Connor:

Douglas Ibbens [Hibbens] would soon put an end to the eastern mob if he were employed; he has killed half that tribe by creeping upon them and firing amongst them

<sup>63</sup> This story was articulated by Fenton in Leavitt & Fenton, *Jubilee History*, pp. 53-54. Fenton later published it in the *North West Post*, 9 May 1893, p. 4. The accounts are consistent and almost identical, though both include small details omitted in the other.

<sup>64</sup> Robinson to Arthur, 20 November 1830, TAHO, CSO1/317, p. 223.

<sup>65</sup> Hobler, *The Diaries of Pioneer George Hobler*, p. 40, diary 15 December 1827. See also, for instance, *Hobart Town Courier*, 13 December 1828, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> Hobler, *The Diaries of Pioneer George Hobler*, p. 60, diary 24 April 1828. The neighbour in question was Richard Dry. See also p. 31, diary 28 July 1827.

<sup>67</sup> *Tasmanian*, 16 May 1828, pp. 2-3. This measure was recommended by several editors and correspondents (see, for instance, *Hobart Town Courier*, 17 November 1827, p. 1, 7 March 1829, p. 2, 26 March 1831, p. 3).

with his double-barrelled gun; some of the worst characters would be the best to send after them ... stratagem must be resorted to, and ambushes formed.<sup>68</sup>

But by the time O'Connor was recommending that the government adopt these tactics as a means of eradicating the natives, vigilantes had already done most of the work. They like the roving and pursuit parties that emulated them realised the only way to counter the 'excessive cunning of the natives' was to attack them at their most vulnerable – when they were asleep.<sup>69</sup> The government considered it beneath British honour to slaughter families as they slept, thus it never became the official policy. Tacitly, however, it was very much endorsed, and the reason for this was simple: although it may not have been the most 'honourable' mode of warfare, the campfire ambush was by far the most effective.

The role of the campfire ambush in the depopulation of Van Diemen's Land's blacks can scarcely be overstated. Of the 436 recorded native casualties, 145 were specifically described as resulting from such ambushes (see fig. 14). Furthermore, many of the remaining 284 casualties were killed or wounded in uncertain circumstances, but in around half these cases the evidence suggests a campfire ambush without explicitly saying so. There is also a great deal of circumstantial and hearsay evidence that emphasises the prevalence of these ambushes. For example, the surveyor John Helder Wedge, after travelling much of the island during the War, claimed that 'in one solitary instance he knew of 15 to 17 having been killed and wounded, most of them killed; and in another instance there had been more killed.'<sup>70</sup> Similarly, in 1829, a correspondent from Great Swanport, told the *Colonial Times* that '[n]ine were killed and three taken, near St. Paul's River'.<sup>71</sup> These cannot be counted as campfire ambushes in fig. 14, but given how difficult it was to kill large numbers of blacks any other way, they probably were.

## Horses

The superior bushcraft of the natives made them extremely difficult to attack during the day. With the aid of horses, however, colonists could dramatically increase their success rate. Due to the large acreages of some of the island's cattle runs, particularly west of Norfolk Plains (today's Longford district) and north of Bothwell, many stockmen were provided with guns

<sup>68</sup> O'Connor's Evidence to the Aborigines Committee, 17 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, pp. 54-55. O'Connor probably did not mean that Hibbens acted alone.

<sup>69</sup> *Tasmanian and Port Dalrymple Advertiser*, 19 January 1825, pp. 2-3. Ironically, the people who suggested these tactics were often those who railed loudest against the treachery and barbarism of the blacks.

<sup>70</sup> *Launceston Examiner*, 2 October 1847, pp. 4-5. Appendix 3 tallies only seven deaths for this incident, as it has the hallmarks of an account exaggerated in transmission.

<sup>71</sup> *Colonial Times*, 30 January 1829, p. 3. The correspondent made it clear that he was not referring to the ambush (discussed above) by John Danvers and the 40<sup>th</sup> Regiment the previous year.

and horses.<sup>72</sup> ‘When they saw the natives’, West claimed that ‘these armed murderers galloped after them, and delivered their fire without danger to themselves.’<sup>73</sup> Similarly, O’Connor reported that ‘stock-men used to shoot and hunt the Natives; Captain Ritchie’s men, to the westward of Norfolk Plains, used to hunt them on horseback, and shoot them from their horses’.<sup>74</sup> It was in this area that, according to Robinson’s local informant, ‘Lyons and some others on horseback, who were in quest of cattle, fell in with a tribe of natives and drove them into a small lagoon and shot several’.<sup>75</sup> The value of horses in pursuing blacks did not escape the Aborigines Committee, which recommended in March 1830 that ‘every station’ be furnished with ‘a number of Mounted Police’.<sup>76</sup> Had horses been more common and less expensive they might have significantly altered the course of the War, but as it was, they played only a minor part in the overall conflict – albeit to great effect.

### Shooting on Sight

Many natives were killed in accidental encounters with armed colonists, who learnt early in the War to shoot on sight. In January 1827, for instance, the *Colonial Times* claimed that:

little more is necessary to occasion the work of destruction than for them to meet ... The Settler, recollecting the recent murders of his fellow Colonists and servants, will, in our opinion, omit no step whereby he may destroy the black tribes even to utter extermination.<sup>77</sup>

Three years later the paper confirmed ‘that at this very day, and for a long time past, the approach of a single Native near any of the stock-runs in the interior, is the signal for every piece being cocked that is within hail’.<sup>78</sup> The surveyor Clement Lorymer recounted a typical case to Robinson in 1830. His party sighted a group of natives unaware of their presence:

One of his men said he would shoot at them and Mr L said if he did he would tell the Governor. This, the man said, he did not care for, and was about to shoot when Mr L fired off his gun and the natives hearing the report fled.<sup>79</sup>

Similarly, Melville described an instance in which a:

*respectable* young gentleman who was out kangaroo hunting, in jumping over a dead tree, observed a black native crouched by the stem, as if to hide himself. The

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<sup>72</sup> This was highly unpopular with middle-class colonists who considered horse riding the preserve of gentlemen.

<sup>73</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 32.

<sup>74</sup> O’Connor to Aborigines Committee, 17 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>75</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 253, journal 24 September 1830.

<sup>76</sup> Aborigines Committee report, 19 March 1830, recommendation 5, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 44.

<sup>77</sup> *Colonial Times*, 5 January 1827, p. 2.

<sup>78</sup> *Colonial Times*, 2 July 1830, p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 236, journal 20 August 1830.

hunter ... placed the muzzle of his piece to his breast, and shot him dead on the spot.<sup>80</sup>

In contrast to these examples, most colonists probably only fired in what they believed to be self-defence. Governor Arthur reported to London in 1828 that 'it was a constant practice' among the stockmen and sealers 'to fire upon them [the blacks] whenever they approached'.<sup>81</sup> Arthur was condemning the practice, but these men no doubt considered it necessary, especially if they had harmed blacks in the past, and anticipated revenge. Gauging from a survey of the incidents tallied in Appendix 2, from around 1827 the vast majority of colonists deemed it appropriate, if not essential to fire on natives whenever they were encountered. The colonists' readiness to use lethal force can seem callous by today's standards, until we appreciate that they were generally afraid for their lives. This was a War, and as the following chapter demonstrates, it was entirely reasonable for colonists to fear their enemy.

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<sup>80</sup> Melville, *History of Van Diemen's Land*, p. 31. Original italics. Melville claimed '[h]undreds of similar cases might be adduced.'

<sup>81</sup> Arthur to Goderich, 10 January 1828, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 3. The main reason frontiersmen did this, Arthur believed, was to 'deprive them of their women'.

**Black**  
**10**  
**Warfare**

They can subsist on roots and small animals and they know the passes and are well acquainted with the topography of the country. They will travel over rocky ground where no traces are to be seen, and it is only owing to their incautious conduct and their going to huts that the white people have at any time met with them. Their mode of attack is by surreptition. They lay in ambush for some time before they make their attack, a sudden and unperceived invasion, or by surprising. Their warfare is that of a predatory nature.

George Augustus Robinson, journal 14 December 1831

Contemporaries describing Aboriginal modes of warfare used words like ‘system’, ‘skill’ and ‘cunning’ with mantra-like repetition. Usually they expressed a mix of both admiration and anger. ‘You can not think how cunning the black devils are’, wrote one furious, but impressed east coast settler.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, the *Colonial Times* admitted they ‘evinced a degree of craft and cunning which shews, that although savage, they are not of that inferior order of beings which we have so often been told.’<sup>2</sup> The abundance of such remarks underscores the effectiveness of Aboriginal tactics, and the skill with which they were executed.<sup>3</sup> This Chapter examines the warrior culture that existed among Vandemonian bands, and explores its adaption to combatting and exploiting the invaders. It also looks at conflicts and collaborations between bands during their struggle against white invasion. First though, I must engage with the fraught question of guerrilla warfare.

Henry Reynolds argued in *Fate of a Free People* that the Vandemonians fought a ‘guerrilla war’, which he defined simply as ‘small war’.<sup>4</sup> Most historians weighing in on the debate have agreed with this characterisation. The chief detractor has been Keith Windschuttle, who contended that guerrilla warfare is the wrong way to describe Aboriginal violence in Van Diemen’s Land.<sup>5</sup> Prominent archaeologist and historian, Josephine Flood, agreed with Windschuttle that it ‘was not a regular or true guerilla war’.<sup>6</sup> This thesis, however, argues on both semantic and empirical grounds that guerrilla warfare is the most appropriate way to describe the tactics employed by Vandemonians.

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<sup>1</sup> *Colonial Times*, 30 January 1829, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 13 November 1830, p. 3; *Colonial Times*, 1 June 1831, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Brown to Aborigines Committee, 5 February TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 137-38, 147; Hudspeth to Aborigines Committee, 16 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, p. 327; *Colonial Advocate*, 1 April 1828, p. 94; *Tasmanian*, 11 April 1828, p. 3; *Colonial Times*, 16 July 1830, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, p. 66.

<sup>5</sup> Windschuttle, *Fabrication*, ch. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Flood, *The Original Australians*, p. 82. Flood did not say what type of guerrilla war constituted a ‘true’ one.

The first definition of ‘guerrilla warfare’ in the *Oxford English Dictionary* reads: ‘An irregular war carried on by small bodies of men acting independently.’<sup>7</sup> This perfectly describes the Vandemonian resistance, as the following discussion will show. In addition, guerrilla warfare throughout history has tended to exhibit several common features, against which the Vandemonian resistance can be compared. Firstly, the trademark tactics of guerrilla units are hit-and-run raids, ambushes and sabotage, which were exactly those used by Aborigines. Secondly, those waging guerrilla war almost invariably have a common set of objectives and less military might than their enemies, which is why it is often referred to as ‘asymmetric warfare’.<sup>8</sup> And thirdly, as Chapter 8 explains, guerrilla wars are usually resistance movements aimed at impeding or defeating invaders or tyrannical rulers. Whilst these additional features are not necessary in order to categorise the Vandemonian resistance as guerrilla warfare, they demonstrate that it was not on the definitional fringe.

The term ‘guerrilla’ was contemporaneous and occasionally used by writers in Van Diemen’s Land. The colonial newspapers applied it to several different campaigns in Europe, but also to the armed parties pursuing the Aborigines.<sup>9</sup> The first surviving application of the term to *Aboriginal* warfare appeared on 12 October 1830, as dozens of military and civilian parties were amassing against them.<sup>10</sup> An east coast settler writing under the pseudonym William Penn, warned readers of the *Tasmanian* that they should ‘be well aware from thou experience in the Peninsula War that a regular army cannot succeed against a Guerrilla force’.<sup>11</sup> The evidence presented here and in Chapter 13 reveals Penn was right in more ways than one. The Vandemonians were indeed a guerrilla force, and regular troops deployed in textbook formations were clearly not going to defeat them.

Windschuttle rejects the term guerrilla warfare by using a very narrow definition, limiting it to ‘centrally coordinated’ forces with ‘advertised’ political objectives, acting against ‘regular troops’. According to this definition, Vandemonian bands did not engage in guerrilla warfare, as they seldom coordinated their efforts, rarely attacked soldiers, and did not advertise their

<sup>7</sup> J. A. Simpson, & E. S. C. Weiner (ed.) *Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. 13, Clarendon Press, London, 1989, p. 923.

<sup>8</sup> For an excellent analysis of this form of warfare in a range of historical and cultural contexts, see J. Schroefl, S. M. Cox & T. Pankratz, *Winning the Asymmetric War: Political, Social and Military Responses*, Peter Lang, New York, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, *Hobart Town Courier*, 8 November 1823, p. 2; *Colonial Times*, 19 August 1825, p. 2; *Colonial Times*, 25 December 1830, p. 2 & *Hobart Town Courier*, 30 July 1831, p. 4. See Chapter 7 for roving parties referred to as guerilla parties.

<sup>10</sup> This was the so-called ‘Black Line’ (see Chapters 13 and 14). The first time the conflict was referred to generally as a ‘guerrilla war’ was in 1835 (Melville, *History of Van Diemen’s Land*, p. 33).

<sup>11</sup> *Tasmanian*, 10 December 1830, p. 796. This was a reference to the elusive Spanish militias that harassed and helped turn back the French invasion (1807-1814), which is where the term originated. William Penn was the Quaker who founded the province of Pennsylvania in 1677. The author was almost certainly Francis Cotton or George Story, the only Quakers then on the east coast.

political objectives in public speeches or proclamations.<sup>12</sup> But such an arbitrary definition excludes many of history's guerrilla wars.<sup>13</sup> There have been numerous permutations of guerrilla warfare throughout history, which is why the most respected dictionary in the English-speaking world (cited above) describes only its *essential* characteristics – small, irregular forces acting independently. The Vandemonians, of course, would not have drawn distinctions between quarrels in the way that modern historians do, so it makes little sense to ask whether they considered themselves engaged in a guerrilla war. They were nonetheless well acquainted with the tactics of raiding and ambushing long before the white strangers arrived.

### Warrior Culture

The Vandemonians were warrior peoples who celebrated martial prowess and triumph in a variety of ways. Around the campfire, Robinson and his party were regularly entertained by stories of wartime exploits, assassinations and raids. Bravery, skill and honour were central themes animated by the raconteur. In describing how his band 'track out the PYE.DARE.RER.ME and kill them and take their women to Brune', Robinson recorded that 'MUTTEELE appeared animated. He considered them as great achievements and honourable to his nation.'<sup>14</sup> On another occasion:

One of the aborigines belonging to the north coast was entertaining me and the other natives with a relation of the exploits of his tribe with the Swanport. He said the two nations had met to fight and that the Swanport, apprehensive of their own prowess, had resolved the night previous to the battle to go away, which was assented to with the exception of two fine young men who most positively refused, declaring they would await the result of the forthcoming morn, considering it would stamp an indelible disgrace on their nation should they decline this combat.

The following morning the two warriors met their fates in 'a showers of spears', the victorious band 'exalting in the bloody deed'.<sup>15</sup>

The veneration of war heroes was common. Robinson observed that Mannalargenna 'was universally admitted by all the native tribes who knew him as being the most able and

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<sup>12</sup> In one of his more myopic arguments, Windschuttle (*Fabrication*, p. 101) claimed that, '[i]f the Aborigines really had political objectives, then, to give themselves at least a platform for negotiation, they would have made the colonists well aware of them.' This point is refuted in Chapter 8, which argues that the Aborigines could not have known negotiation with the government was an option.

<sup>13</sup> For example, the notorious guerrilla warfare of the Lord's Resistance Army in East Africa falls outside the pale of Windschuttle's definition, because it has no political objective (advertised or otherwise) and is almost entirely directed at civilians.

<sup>14</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 292, journal 25 October 1830. 'Mutteele' was another name for Woorady.

<sup>15</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 425, journal 1 August 1831.

successful warrior of all the aborigines.’<sup>16</sup> The chief was said to have evinced ‘astonishing skill in battle’ and ‘undaunted courage’. Mannalargenna was widely ‘considered invincible’, and Robinson received ‘accounts from himself and others of his exploits in war, in which all the natives agree.’<sup>17</sup> Even the feared chief Umarrah ‘was frightened of him and begged for mercy.’<sup>18</sup>

Before the white invasion, internecine conflicts were probably the most dangerous and dramatic events in Vandemonians’ lives, thus it was a primary subject of their games, art, stories, songs and dances.<sup>19</sup> Robinson observed that their ‘dances related the hunting of kangaroo or some battle or an amorous story.’<sup>20</sup> In one such dance, ‘[t]he motion of the body is the shifting attitude to avoid the spear in fighting; sometimes they call out ‘the spear is coming’’.<sup>21</sup> In July 1831, Robinson witnessed a typical performance:

Tonight WOORRADY entertained us with a relation of the exploits of his nation and neighbouring nations or allies. ... Said that the BRAYHELUCQUONNE natives spear plenty of his and neighbouring tribes, that they stop behind trees and when they see a native by himself they go and spear him. When the natives relate those exploits they do it by singing it, accompanying the same with different gestures corresponding with the circumstances of the story – the manner of fighting, the blows given, where inflicted and how, whether by spear, waddy or stones, or wrestling, or cutting with sharp stones, pointing to the parts of the wounded. WOORRADY is very animated in his relation of the circumstances of his nation, and having a good voice it is peculiarly interesting to attend to him.<sup>22</sup>

This same culture was speedily adapted to the conflict with the whites. In 1831, Robinson observed that ‘the circumstances of their plundering expeditions on the whites would often engage their conversation’, and ‘the most popular of their songs were those in which they recounted their attacks on and their fights with the whites’.<sup>23</sup> Three months later, he described a ‘horse dance’, in which a man was ‘chased by a man on horseback with a long whip, and of his out-running the horse.’<sup>24</sup> On another occasion, after hearing one of their songs, Robinson asked them to explain its meaning:

This story consisted of a relation of circumstances relating to the white people, of their seeing a bullock cart going along the Port Dalrymple road heavy loaded with flour,

<sup>16</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 431, journal 13 August 1831.

<sup>17</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 448-49, journal 30 August 1831.

<sup>18</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 425, journal 1 August 1831.

<sup>19</sup> For games, see *Friendly Mission*, pp. 452, 518, 692, journals 5 September & 13 October 1831, 15 September 1832; Bowden, *Captain James Kelly*, pp. 42-43. For art, see Calder, *Some Accounts*, p. 33. Examples of stories, songs and dances are provided in text.

<sup>20</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 531, journal 1 November 1831.

<sup>21</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 531, journal 1 November 1831.

<sup>22</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 395, journal 15 July 1831. See also p. 528, journal 27 October 1831.

<sup>23</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 523, journal 23 October 1831; Robinson’s report, 6 August 1831, cited in Calder, *Some Accounts*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>24</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 297, journal 1 November 1830.



and also of their robbing a hut and taking away muskets, making damper and their concealing the muskets. The song is popular with all the eastern tribes.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, the Vandemonians' warrior culture persisted during the white invasion, expanding to incorporate the new threat, and the new modes of warfare that came with it.

### Arming for War

The Vandemonians used three types of weapon: stones, spears, and waddies. Stones were only occasionally used against the whites, either in ambushing them from a high position, or in bludgeoning them once disabled.<sup>26</sup> Their spears were made from several types of timber, and varied in length from 1.25 to 4.9 meters, depending on their purpose.<sup>27</sup> George Washington Walker remarked that the:

natives are very dexterous in the use of these weapons, which are of wood, from nine to twelve feet in length. They throw them with such force and skill, at from fifty to one hundred yards, as rarely to fail in transfixing the object of their aim.<sup>28</sup>

Spears were very effective at killing game, but without barbs, hafted points or spear-throwers, a peripheral spear wound was usually not fatal. For this reason, many of the white men killed in the Black War were also bludgeoned with waddies, which were sticks around sixty centimeters in length with a bulbous end that could be used as a club or a throwing stick.<sup>29</sup> Robinson observed that Aborigines were 'remarkably dextrous [*sic*] in using this missile and seldom fail to hit their object.'<sup>30</sup> Indeed, Aborigines gained a formidable reputation for their skills with traditional weaponry, the result of training from an early age.<sup>31</sup>

At the height of the War, bands required great quantities of spears and waddies. Following an ambush by a roving party on the Macquarie River in 1828, twenty-nine waddies and fifty-two spears were abandoned by the fleeing band.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, after an ambush at Prossers Plains the

<sup>25</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 395, journal 16 June 1831. See also Bonwick, *Last of the Tasmanians*, p. 29.

<sup>26</sup> See, for instance, Nicholls, *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood*, pp. 128, 171, diaries 2 March 1807 & 27 March 1814; *Friendly Mission*, p. 405, journal 7 July 1831; Simpson to Arthur, 3 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 656-59; Roth, *The Aborigines of Tasmania*, pp. 67-68; 73-74. Stones were also used in hunting.

<sup>27</sup> Plomley, *The Tasmanian Aborigines*, pp. 47-48; N. J. B. Plomley, *The Baudin Expedition and The Tasmanian Aborigines, 1802*, Blubber Head Press, Hobart, 1983, pp. 185-88. Rhys Jones ('Hunting Forebears', pp. 27-28) found the main timber used in spear making was tea tree (*Leptospermum*). For a detailed description of the spear-making process see *Friendly Mission*, p. 255, journal 26 September 1830.

<sup>28</sup> Walker, *Life and Labours*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>29</sup> Plomley, *The Tasmanian Aborigines*, p. 48; *Friendly Mission*, pp. 59-60, journal 1 May 1829.

<sup>30</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 59-60, journal 1 May 1829.

<sup>31</sup> Plomley, *The Tasmanian Aborigines*, pp. 47-48. There are numerous references to weapons training, particularly in Robinson's journals. See, for example, *Friendly Mission*, p. 252, journal 23 September 1830.

<sup>32</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 13 December 1828, p. 2.

following year, the attackers found forty-nine spears and over a hundred waddies.<sup>33</sup> In the aftermath of such ambushes, the fleeing band needed to rearm as quickly as possible. Kickertopoller told Gilbert Robertson that ‘when they have used or lost their spears the two tribes nearest us resort (for a fresh supply) to a Hill called the “Blue Hill Bluff”’.<sup>34</sup> But good timber was not always nearby, nor was sufficient time always available, so bands overcame this by stockpiling spears in hidden caches. On the Freycinet Peninsula in 1831, for instance, a party of white men ‘found twelve spears concealed under a rock’, and Robinson observed the practice on several occasions as well.<sup>35</sup> Using these reserve arsenals, Vandemonians were able to rearm quickly after an ambush, and avoid long diversions to procure timber. Moreover, the practicality and efficiency of traditional weapons was such that Aborigines almost never used firearms, even though they had ready access to them, and were often competent in their use and maintenance.<sup>36</sup>

### Tactics

The Natives, during the last 12 months, have coined a spirit of enterprise and hardihood beyond that of any former year. The murders, in this District, have been less numerous, but the burnings of houses, corn stacks, fences have greatly increased. The Natives are become [*sic*] bolder and the Whites more timid.<sup>37</sup>

Thomas Anstey, Police Magistrate of Oatlands, March 1830

Over the course of the Black War numerous contemporaries observed a marked increase in the boldness, skill and system in the Vandemonians’ tactics. According to the *Tasmanian* of 18 April 1828, they exhibited ‘an extent of design and arrangement, that makes savages exceedingly dangerous.’<sup>38</sup> The same year, the *Hobart Town Courier* asserted that ‘the natives have formed a systematic organised plan for carrying on a war of extermination against the white inhabitants of the colony.’<sup>39</sup> In 1830, the *Colonial Times* also had to concede that:

<sup>33</sup> Lascelles to Arthur, 16 June 1829, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 275.

<sup>34</sup> Robertson to Colonial Secretary, 17 November 1828, TAHO, CSO1/331, pp. 168-70.

<sup>35</sup> Story to Arthur, 25 October 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 1015-19; *Friendly Mission*, pp. 295-96, 309-12, 454, 526-27, journals 1 & 15 November 1830, 8 September 1831 & 25 October 1831; Robinson to Colonial Secretary, 4 January 1832, in *Friendly Mission*, p. 604.

<sup>36</sup> There are two references to Aborigines carrying (but not firing) guns in conflicts with whites (testimony of Samuel James, 4 February 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 870 & Walyer case discussed in Chapter 6), and there are also several references to particular Aborigines being proficient at hunting with a gun (Robinson to Arthur, 20 November 1830, TAHO, CSO1/317, p. 228; Major Gray to Arthur, 23 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 691-95; *Friendly Mission*, pp. 302, 819, 889, journals 7 November 1830, 23 August 1833, 28 February 1834).

<sup>37</sup> Anstey to Aborigines Committee, 18 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, p. 343. See also, for instance, Godson to Curtin, 17 March 1828, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 121.

<sup>38</sup> *Tasmanian*, 18 April 1828, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 18 October 1828, pp. 2-3.

the attacks and depredations of the Aborigines on the white people of this Colony, and on the stock-huts, remote only a few miles from the townships and the military stations assume a regular and alarming consistency, and evince on the part of the blacks a cunning and superiority of tactic which would not disgrace even some of the greatest military characters.<sup>40</sup>

Such observations were more than justifications for the failure of whites to suppress the Aboriginal threat. Over the course of the War, many bands refined their modes of warfare to better exploit the invaders' weaknesses. 'The black assailant', wrote James Calder:

never fought till he knew he had his opponents at a disadvantage to themselves. He waited and watched for his opportunity for hours, and often for days, for he knew nothing of the value of time, and when the proper moment arrived he attacked the solitary hut of the stock-keeper with irresistible numbers.<sup>41</sup>

Reconnaissance was a crucial element of the Vandemonians' tactics. Even before settlement, French anthropologist François Péron observed of the Maria Island people that 'they surround themselves with sentries in advanced positions who, from the atops of hills and even high in very tall trees, keep a watch on all that takes place'.<sup>42</sup> Years later, at the height of the War, whites had a constant sense of being watched, and it seems they were often right in their suspicion. Aborigines learnt to recognise when the whites were most vulnerable. Usually this was when the hut was undefended, or when the firearms were out of reach. An army captain reported to the Governor in February 1830 that 'the knowledge the natives have of the defenseless state of the house is astonishing as they have invariably made their attacks on the departure of the means of defense.'<sup>43</sup> Following a fatal attack at Spring Hill the same year, 'a black woman' divulged 'the whole of their plans and schemes' to Robinson, explaining to him how 'a party of them had for three days kept watch unseen on one of the rocky hills close to the cottage, intending to wait there until Hooper went out to work without his gun'.<sup>44</sup> Such tactics were evident throughout the island, and were clearly pre-colonial in origin.<sup>45</sup>

Aborigines planned their attacks in almost every instance, even when thorough reconnaissance was impracticable.<sup>46</sup> This was most evident in the decoying strategies they employed. In the summer of 1827-1828, a band in the Bothwell district began 'to decoy them [their white victims] by lighting fires at a short distance, & to take the opportunity of them being absent to

<sup>40</sup> *Colonial Times*, 16 July 1830, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> Calder, *Some Accounts*, p. 51.

<sup>42</sup> Péron's Maria Island report, cited in Plomley, *The Baudin Expedition*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>43</sup> Vicary to Colonial Secretary, 12 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 404-5.

<sup>44</sup> L. Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania*, Bunce, New York, 1853, p. 86.

<sup>45</sup> See, for instance, *Colonial Times*, 30 April 1830, p. 2 & Smith to Colonial Secretary, 31 January 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 852.

<sup>46</sup> Aborigines no doubt made some spontaneous attacks, but the evidence suggests these were rare.

carry off all they could find.’<sup>47</sup> ‘No one can conjecture how crafty and subtle they act in the bush’, wrote a settler in 1830, ‘they even made the fire and smoke in the bush to entice people from the buildings in order that they might plunder.’<sup>48</sup> Another method of decoying whites was to send in a few men to make a dummy attack, and while they were being pursued, another party would assail upon the unguarded hut. In July 1830, for instance:

a tribe of the Natives came down upon the men in the Employ of Lieutenant Betts at the Big Lagoon ... they however were enabled to take to their heels, and made the best of their way towards the adjoining stock-hut ... all the arms and men were procured, and then listened back in order to fall in with the depredators, but on their coming to the place, not a sign of them was perceptible, they had decamped taking away every thing moveable along with them, the men then again returned to Mr. Stokell’s, and to their astonishment, found that in their absence, which had only been for a few minutes, the same depredations had been committed upon them, with the addition that the Natives had attempted to set fire to the hut.<sup>49</sup>

A similar diversion was used during an attack on a hut at Norfolk Plains property the same year, but on this occasion a third party was also ‘employed slaughtering [over 100] sheep which were speared and beaten to death with waddies.’<sup>50</sup> Such tactics were common, and after collating the testimonies of almost two-dozen settlers, the Aborigines Committee was convinced ‘by repeated instances, that the Natives have by artifice decoyed persons to quit their houses for the purposes of pursuit, who, on their return, have found their homes utterly destroyed by fire, and every thing of value carried off.’<sup>51</sup>

In the earlier phases of the War, before all trust had dissolved, Aborigines made some attacks under the guise of friendship:

by sending some of their people, sometimes women, sometimes unarmed men, who have approached huts with apparently the most friendly disposition, and have succeeded in engaging the attention of the inmates, or in alluring some of them to a distance, and thus enabling their armed confederates to fall suddenly upon their unsuspecting victims and destroy them.<sup>52</sup>

According to James Hobbs, it was ‘the women [who] visit the stock-huts as spies, and then the men attack them’.<sup>53</sup> Deprived as they were of sexual opportunities, white men often took great risks to fornicate with Aboriginal women. Some Vandemonians exploited this and sent women to huts for the purpose of decoying the occupants, or gathering intelligence. In December

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<sup>47</sup> Clark to Colonial Secretary, 29 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 710.

<sup>48</sup> Hooper to Anstey, 19 August 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 571-74.

<sup>49</sup> *Colonial Times*, 16 July 1830, p. 3. See also Clark to Colonial Secretary, 29 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 706-7.

<sup>50</sup> Smith to Parramore, 22 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 480-82.

<sup>51</sup> Aborigines Committee report, 4 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 43. See also, for instance, the inquest into the Gough and Geary killings, 11 October 1828, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 166 & Anstey to Colonial Secretary TAHO, 31 December 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 775.

<sup>52</sup> Minutes of the Executive Council, 27 July 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 63.

<sup>53</sup> Hobbs to Aborigines Committee, 9 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 50.

1827, for instance, ‘two black females came to Mr. Talbot’s, evidently sent as spies by a horde to which they belonged. They had scarcely left the house, when two of Mr. Talbot’s servants were attacked by about 150 [warriors].’<sup>54</sup> Indeed, they trialled various forms of artifice. When an Aboriginal girl was caught snooping around an east coast property in March 1828, it was observed that she ‘did not appear to make much exertion to effect her escape’. The girl then:

with seeming reluctance promised to shew where the natives were encamped; having to make some preparation the men were delayed until day-light when they proceeded under her guidance; they had not been long gone when one of the children perceived some of their warriors laying in ambush in the opposite direction to that where the black girl was conducting the party.<sup>55</sup>

Aside from their involvement as decoys, women almost never took part in frontier violence, generally remaining with the children and dogs in a secure location while the men attacked.<sup>56</sup> In June 1829, a northern correspondent claimed it was the Aborigines’ ‘custom to leave their women and children in a place of security, and for about twenty of the ablest and most dexterous of the men to go out on their excursions to rob and murder.’<sup>57</sup> In 1824, for instance, some Aboriginal women who had been captured by George Meredith’s men, confessed that during a recent killing they and their children ‘were stationed on the adjoining Hill, whilst the men attacked the Hut.’<sup>58</sup> This practice was widely attested to and appears to have been standard among Aboriginal bands.<sup>59</sup> This was no doubt a stressful time for the women, who were reported to have chanted to a ‘good spirit’ for the safe return of their men.<sup>60</sup>

War parties that attacked whites comprised anywhere from three to one hundred men, though the usual size was between ten and twenty.<sup>61</sup> When they encountered armed resistance the party often laid siege to the hut in an effort to intimidate, overpower or immolate the defenders. For example, Robinson recorded an incident in which a band of Aborigines:

burnt the soldiers’ hut to the ground and piled up the stones for a battery, from behind which they kept throwing fire at the hut and also stones, and calling in English, ‘Fire

<sup>54</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 8 December 1827, p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> Harte to Colonial Secretary, 20 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 126-28.

<sup>56</sup> There are a handful of examples of women taking part in attacks. See, for instance, deposition of Charles Chadwick, 31 August 1829, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 296-300. See also the case of Walyer discussed in Chapter 6. Even in these rare cases, however, women do not appear to have killed or wounded anyone.

<sup>57</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 6 June 1829, p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> Meredith to Arthur, 26 July 1824, cited in FitzSymonds, *A Looking Glass for Tasmania*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>59</sup> See also, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, pp. 249-50, journal 20 September 1830; *Hobart Town Courier*, 6 June 1829, p. 2. This practice was also noted by at least four of the settlers interviewed by the Aborigines Committee (see evidence of Brodribb, Robertson, White & O’Connor, 4, 11, 17 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, pp. 48, 52, 54-55).

<sup>60</sup> Leigh and Jeffreys (cited in Roth, *The Aborigines of Tasmania*, p. 136) independently reported this in 1820. Although they were probably referring to internecine conflicts, the same ritual no doubt took place when warring with white men. See also Darling to Arthur, 4 May 1832, SLNSW, ML, A1771, p. 108.

<sup>61</sup> There were reports of attacks being made by up to 300 men, but these were almost certainly exaggerations.

at me, you white". The women and the chief stood off in front and the chief kept giving directions how they ought to act. They were all round the hut behind stumps.<sup>62</sup>

Sometimes these sieges could last all day. At the Lagoon of Islands in 1828, a 'party of blacks attacked Mr. Allardyce's stock hut ... for more than six hours, until they at last thought fit to withdraw'.<sup>63</sup> Likewise, John Allen was besieged later that year by 'blacks numbering 13-18', keeping them at bay 'for over 8 hours'.<sup>64</sup>

Ideally though, sieges were unnecessary. Swift, hit and run ambushes were the most efficient mode of attacking, entailing the least risk to the assailants. Contemporary accounts suggest that Vandemonians were remarkably efficient at ambushing white men. Typically, they would approach their victims with stealth, secure their weapons if they were lying nearby, and spear them while their guard was down.<sup>65</sup> For instance, 'at Mr Scott's [in 1830] the attack was so sudden that the men were speared before they had any idea of a native even being near.'<sup>66</sup> The same year, near Pittwater, Thomas Pratt:

suddenly received a blow on the head from a waddy. The poor man immediately looked round, and perceived several blacks close behind him – he ran down the hill in front of the hut, when a native that was behind a log suddenly jumped up and threw a spear at him, which penetrated his back and reached his heart – he died instantly.<sup>67</sup>

Surprise was paramount, and it was the Vandemonians' forte. According to Calder, 'hundreds are the instances of their surrounding dwellings in perfect swarms without their exciting the smallest suspicion of their being at hand.'<sup>68</sup>

Crucial to the success of these guerrilla attacks was capable leadership. Warriors distinguished in bravery and skill would, as noted in Chapter 2, ascend to commanding roles in times of conflict. These 'chiefs' were often observed directing the actions of the war party. In March 1828, for instance, 'a sort of leader, with his hair thickly smeared with red ochre, was discovered crawling on his hands and knees, and directing about forty others to surround the hut.'<sup>69</sup> Similarly, when a hut on the South Esk River was attacked the same year, the war party

<sup>62</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 541, Journal 8 November 1831. See also, for example, *Hobart Town Gazette*, 29 October 1824, p. 2; *Hobart Town Courier*, 28 August 1830, p. 2.

<sup>63</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 8 March 1828, p. 2. See also, for instance, Simpson to Colonial Secretary, 4 September 1828, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 160; *Tasmanian*, 1 November 1827, p. 3; *Hobart Town Gazette*, 29 October 1824, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> John Allen file, GSBHS. Many other examples of sieges can be found in TAHO, CSO1/316.

<sup>65</sup> See, for instance, Simpson to Colonial Secretary, 23 August 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 581-82; Anstey to Colonial Secretary, 21 December 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 768; *Friendly Mission*, p. 568, journal 29 November 1831; Story to Bonwick, n.d., Utas ePrints no. 2228.

<sup>66</sup> Scott to Douglas, 30 September 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 652-55.

<sup>67</sup> *Colonial Times*, 22 October 1830, p. 3.

<sup>68</sup> Calder, *Some Accounts*, p. 100.

<sup>69</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 8 March 1828, p. 2.

was ‘under the control of a chief, who by words and gestures guided their movements.’<sup>70</sup> The best remembered of these chiefs included Tongerlongerter, Montpelliatta, Umarrah, Kickertopoller and Mannalargenna. Under such men, the Vandemonians adapted and honed their tactics to meet the changing exigencies of the War.

By the end of the 1820s, fewer than a dozen bands remained on the eastern front, and these were coming under increasing pressure from armed parties. Once a district was attacked, it was not unknown for ten pursuit parties to be raised, so a number of bands found it prudent to divide their forces, attack at different points simultaneously, regroup and then disperse before a large-scale pursuit could be coordinated. On 13 March 1829, for instance, a band launched no less than five attacks on properties just outside Launceston. Collecting accounts that day from two people directly involved, George Hobler recorded with exasperation that there were ‘4 murdered [a] child missing – and ten speared within about 3 hours’.<sup>71</sup> He also noticed that the war parties were not encumbered by the booty plundered from the other properties, which further suggests a divide and attack strategy. Likewise, Bothwell’s police magistrate observed in August 1830 that ‘the blacks divide themselves into small parties and attack different places at once widely apart, and then meet again, at some given place.’<sup>72</sup> The strategy of this particular band was explained by ‘Jack the Black native attached to Allison’s party’, who confirmed that they ‘now divided into ten or a dozen small mobs, the better to effect their purposes.’<sup>73</sup> In all known cases, these divide and attack missions were conducted from a central meeting point. According to an east coast settler, ‘the main body, women and children, are left some distance, from three to six miles, in the Hills, while the detachments, as it were, go out in various directions hunting and doing mischief.’<sup>74</sup>

Vandemonians preferred attacks on dwellings because these were both more controllable and more lucrative, but they also attacked many travellers. Carts, which were often laden with food, were essentially mobile huts, and plundered accordingly.<sup>75</sup> Around two-dozen carts were attacked during the War, and that number might have been higher had Vandemonians not preferred the safety of densely wooded river valleys where cart access was difficult.

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<sup>70</sup> Simpson to Colonial Secretary, 4 September 1828, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 160. See also, *Friendly Mission*, p. 541, 8 November 1831.

<sup>71</sup> Hobler, *The Diaries of Pioneer George Hobler*, pp.128-29, diary 13 March 1829.

<sup>72</sup> Vicary to Colonial Secretary, 9 August 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 550-58.

<sup>73</sup> Anstey to Colonial Secretary, 23 August 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 591-94. See also the attacks of 19 March 1831 (described in Chapter 13) and 6 June 1831 (Young to Wentworth, 6 June 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 922).

<sup>74</sup> Brown to Aborigines Committee, 5 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, p. 135. See also, for instance, deposition of James Olding, 19 May 1829, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 252-59 & Clark to Colonial Secretary, 15 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 414-15.

<sup>75</sup> See, for instance, Anstey to Colonial Secretary, 31 December 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 772-74; *Hobart Town Gazette*, 19 October 1816, p. 2; *Hobart Town Courier*, 25 October 1828, p. 2 & 11 September 1830, p. 3.

Attacks on mounted men, though infrequent, evidenced the growing boldness of the Vandemonians.<sup>76</sup> On 29 July 1828, Hobler noted in his diary that ‘their knowledge of firearms horses &c makes them now very formidable – a few years ago they fled from a horse, now they waylay horsemen and spear them’.<sup>77</sup> This was a sound observation. In the previous twelve months Aborigines had, for the first time, begun to attack mounted men. In July 1827, the *Colonial Times* reported that a man named Holmes ‘travelling on horseback’ through the Abyssinia Tier, ‘was beset by these black furies ... [and] narrowly escaped with his life’.<sup>78</sup> In March the next year, William Walker ‘was attacked (although on horseback) by the blacks at Quoin Mount, about four miles from Capt Wood’s, and together with the horse, most barbarously murdered.’<sup>79</sup> The testimony of the man’s master, John Franks, was recorded in the *Colonial Advocate*:

On this occasion they displayed a degree of discipline which was admirable, and according to Mr. Franks, “*manoeuvred in the most beautiful style,*” in order to surround him; but he providentially escaped by the speed of his horse, although the animal was dreadfully wounded.<sup>80</sup>

Nevertheless, in open country mounted men were extremely dangerous, and the Tasmanians soon developed a cautious respect for them.

Most Aboriginal attacks involved assaults on persons or attempts to plunder food and blankets, but as noted in Chapter 8, sabotage was also in their repertoire. They were responsible for forty-two attacks on domestic animals during the War (see fig. 12). Oxen and horses tended to be closely supervised, so they were only occasionally targeted.<sup>81</sup> Most attacks were on sheep and cattle, which roamed from pasture to pasture under the often inattentive care of convict stockmen.<sup>82</sup> In most cases they speared the animal, retrieved the spear and repeated the

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<sup>76</sup> See, for instance, *Hobart Town Courier*, 12 April 1828, p. 3; Clark to Colonial Secretary, 24 March 1828, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 134; Anstey to Colonial Secretary, 24 August & 31 December 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 593, 770, 774.

<sup>77</sup> Hobler, *The Diaries of Pioneer George Hobler*, pp. 94-95, diary 29 July 1828.

<sup>78</sup> *Colonial Times*, 27 July 1827, p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 1 April 1828, p. 94.

<sup>80</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 1 April 1828, p. 94. Original italics. See also Curtin to Colonial Secretary, 5 March 1828, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 113-16.

<sup>81</sup> For oxen, see *Friendly Mission*, pp.220, 586, journals 11 July 1830 & 14 December 1831; *Hobart Town Gazette*, 6 August 1824, p.2; Clark to Colonial Secretary, 29 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, p.710. For horses, see *Hobart Town Courier*, 13 December 1828, p.2 & 28 August 1830, p.2; *Tasmanian*, 12 December 1828, p.2; Lyttleton to Colonial Secretary, 31 January 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, p.856; *Hobart Town Courier*, 8 March 1828, p.2; Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania*, p.81.

<sup>82</sup> For sheep, see deposition of Robert Jones, 15 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp.191-96; *Hobart Town Gazette* of 29 April 1825, p.3; *Hobart Town Courier*, 21 June 1828, p.4 & 13 December 1828, p.2; Clark to Colonial Secretary, 29 October 1830, CSO1/316, p.707; *Colonial Times*, 29 September 1826, p.3 & 26 March 1830, p.3. See also e.g. Chapter 4. For cattle, see *Colonial Advocate*, 1 May 1828, p.134; *Friendly Mission*, pp.636-68, journal 5 May 1832; *Hobart Town Gazette*, 6 August 1824, p.2; Clark to Colonial Secretary, 29 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, p.710.



process.<sup>83</sup> Over the course of the War, Vandemonians speared several dozen horses and oxen, and thousands of sheep and cattle.<sup>84</sup> It was not uncommon for them to destroy over 100 sheep at a time.<sup>85</sup> Remarkably though, few Aborigines were ever observed in the act of spearing stock, and none were reported killed, which suggests some of them kept a close eye on the stockmen while their comrades undertook the slaughter.

The other form of sabotage Vandemonians used against the invaders was arson, of which there were forty-one cases recorded during the War (see fig. 11). They tended to employ this tactic in one of two ways. The first method was to place firebrands around the base of a dwelling or launch them onto its roof, generally in an attempt to disperse the inhabitants. William Clark of Bothwell described one such instance in which an Aborigine ‘leaped a four rail fence, set fire to the building, and was off again with incredible speed, one of his comrades standing on the opposite side of the house to direct his movements by signal.’<sup>86</sup> At other times, huts, barns or crops were simply set alight when the occupants were absent or after they had been killed.<sup>87</sup> Only around five per cent of Aboriginal attacks involved arson, which is probably reflective of how risky it was.<sup>88</sup> Repeated campfire ambushes had made Vandemonians extremely cautious about giving away their position with fire.

The Vandemonians’ resistance was remarkably protracted and effective, in the face of tremendous odds. In hindsight, however, they inflicted much less harm on the invaders than they might have. They never attacked at night,<sup>89</sup> and apparently never in the rain either;<sup>90</sup> but

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<sup>83</sup> In some cases stones and waddies were also used.

<sup>84</sup> Even dogs were occasionally speared or clubbed. See, for example, Fels, ‘Culture Contact’, pp. 55-58; Anstey to Colonial Secretary, 31 December 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 768 & Hudspeth journal, 9 December 1822, TAHO, NS187/12/1/4.

<sup>85</sup> The following is a sample of references to large sheep killings: Abbot to Colonial Secretary, 12 November 1827, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 64-5 (500 killed); *Tasmanian*, 16 November 1827, p. 3 (100+ killed); *Tasmanian*, 25 April 1828, p. 2 (150 killed) & Anstey to Arthur, 21 December 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 776 (100+ killed). Although cattle herds were smaller, losses were comparable. It should be noted, however, that although there was no financial reason to exaggerate the numbers of stock killed (there were no insurance policies), there were probably social reasons. That is, if a settler suffered large losses, it made future successes seem all the more commendable and mitigated the embarrassment of future failures.

<sup>86</sup> Clark to Aborigines Committee, 15 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, p. 321. See also, for instance, *Colonial Times*, 19 February 1830, p. 3; Jones to Anstey, 15 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 191-96; *Friendly Mission*, p. 562, journal 24 November 1831; NLA, MS3251/2/4, pp. 1-14; 25-26. For the throwing of flaming spears and waddies see, for instance, Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania*, p. 84; Bonwick, *The Lost Tasmanian Race*, p. 65 & McKay, *Journals of the Land Commissioners*, pp. 78, 94, journals 1 March 1828 & late 1828.

<sup>87</sup> For examples of crop burning, see Bonwick, *The Lost Tasmanian Race*, p. 65 & McKay, *Journals of the Land Commissioners*, p. 94, journal late 1828. All known cases of crop burning were of produce that had been reaped and stacked. Melville (*History of Van Diemen’s Land*, p. 84) claimed that ‘they also occasionally burnt standing ripe crops’, but there is no independent evidence of this. Presumably, the smoldering torches carried by Aboriginal bands were left with the women when embarking on an attack, so many instances of arson may have been avoided simply because fire was not to hand.

<sup>88</sup> This percentage has been calculated using the data in figs. 11 and 12, and the tally in Appendix 2.

<sup>89</sup> There are several plausible cases of Aborigines prowling around properties at night, all from 1829 and 1830 (Vicary to Colonial Secretary, 9 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 402-3; Harte to Colonial Secretary, 20 March 1828, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 126-28; Clark to Colonial Secretary, 12 October & 2

more importantly they never used sabotage systematically. John West's claim that they engaged in 'systematic destruction of premises by fire' is simply untenable.<sup>91</sup> As Chapter 11 argues, a genuinely systematic attempt to burn out settlers' homes and especially their crops would have been disastrous for the colony. So why did they not kill more stock and burn more property? They no doubt understood that the strangers valued their dwellings, their possessions, and the animals they constantly followed around, but the importance of these things to sustaining the invasion seems largely to have eluded the Aborigines. Had they fully appreciated and exploited the vulnerabilities of the colonial enterprise, things might have been different.

### **Internecine Violence and Cooperation**

The prevalence of internecine violence, both before and during colonisation, is difficult to gauge from the surviving evidence. Windschuttle has claimed that the death rate from internecine violence before colonisation was higher than the death rate at the hands of white men, implying that Vandemonians were already destroying themselves and colonial violence was relatively incidental.<sup>92</sup> But this is unsustainable. Whatever the scale of pre-contact violence it was obviously not large enough to fundamentally endanger Aboriginal society. The idea that the Vandemonians just happened to be on the verge of self-destruction in 1803, after surviving thirty-four millennia, two ice ages and humanity's longest isolation, strains all credulity.<sup>93</sup> For all its significance, pre-contact internecine violence was plainly small enough in scale that it did not jeopardise the island's population.<sup>94</sup>

It is possible that internecine violence in the colonial era was bloodier than usual.<sup>95</sup> Certainly these ancient feuds did not cease with the arrival of the white man, and in some cases they

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November 1829; 22 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 321-23, 346-48, 426-29). There were several other cases in which an Aboriginal presence was suspected during the night, but not confirmed. These might have been desperate individuals or groups hoping to pilfer food, but no violence was ever done by them.

<sup>90</sup> With one possible exception (see deposition of John Hurling, 26 June 1827, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 15-21), there is no record of Aborigines attacking in the rain. Walker (*Life and Labours*, pp. 105-6) noticed they were 'not fond of travelling in the wet, nor will they do so but in cases of necessity.' This may have been due to the difficulties of hearing and disguising tracks, or perhaps they could not achieve optimal distance or accuracy with their spears.

<sup>91</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 40.

<sup>92</sup> Windschuttle, *Fabrication*, p. 382.

<sup>93</sup> Windschuttle's broader argument about the demise of the Aborigines (*Fabrication*, ch. 10) claimed that, due to internecine violence and cultural regression, the Vandemonians were a doomed race. There is not the space to refute this here, though it is now widely acknowledged that his arguments on these points exhibit more ethnocentrism and contempt than logical and empirical merit.

<sup>94</sup> See also Chapter 2.

<sup>95</sup> In other contexts, colonisation caused internecine violence to intensify. Perhaps the most famous is the South African *Mfecane*, in which tens of thousands of indigenous people are believed to have died in wars connected to slavery and colonisation (see, for instance, J. Cobbing, 'The *Mfecane* as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo', *Journal of African History*, vol. 29, no. 3, 1988, pp. 487-519).

persisted right up to 1830. Gilbert Robertson, for instance, discovered from conversations with Kickertopoller, Umarrah and others, that the Mairremmener bands 'are hostile to the northern tribes' and that 'many [of these people] have been killed by the Port Dalrymple Natives'.<sup>96</sup> Just as this probably reflected a long-standing rivalry, so too did the conflict described by George Town's police magistrate, who was informed in 1830 that:

several tribes of eastern natives assemble together every year in summer, and move off west to collect red ochre to dress their hair; which they find at a waterfall in the western mountains; and in the fights which occur at these times with the western natives many on both sides are killed.<sup>97</sup>

The best documented internecine conflict from the War period occurred in 1830. On 19 October that year, ten men and two women from the greater northeast sought sanctuary at John Batman's property at the base of Ben Lomond.<sup>98</sup> The same day, Batman's neighbour wrote to the Governor, stating that the band's 'chief', Mannalargenna, 'seems very much incensed against the Oyster Bay tribe headed by Mimoune ... who he calls a bloody rogue'.<sup>99</sup> Another neighbour wrote on 23 October, reporting that Mannalargenna was 'very desirous that we should effect the capture of a tribe with which he has been at war ... [he] appears most anxious to assist in taking them says he and all his men will go with us and track them'.<sup>100</sup> At the same time, a letter appeared in the *Tasmanian* from someone present at Batman's. It appeared these twelve were the only survivors of their people, the rest apparently 'killed off by the Oyster Bay Tribe ... They have many spear wounds all over them, which they received in their battles with Numarrow, and two of them have lost an eye each'.<sup>101</sup> A similar letter was published in the *Hobart Town Courier*: 'They state, that their tribe has suffered much of late from the cruel and hostile attacks of the Oyster bay tribe led on by their sanguinary chief Neumarrah, who has succeeded in reducing them to their present small number'.<sup>102</sup> One of their adversaries, a Mairremmener man named Ronekeenarener, had been captured the same month, and confirmed that his band had 'fought the Stony Creek tribe [to the north] and killed a great number'.<sup>103</sup> From this testimony we can conclude there was at least one serious clash between northern and southern bands that year, in which the former appear to have lost a considerable number.

<sup>96</sup> Robertson to Aborigines Committee, 4 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 48.

<sup>97</sup> Clark to Colonial Secretary, 29 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 706-11.

<sup>98</sup> This band was seeking protection from the armed parties on the 'Black Line' (see Chapters 15 and 16).

<sup>99</sup> J. K. Gray to Arthur, 19 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 684-87.

<sup>100</sup> W. Gray to Arthur, 23 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 691-95.

<sup>101</sup> *Tasmanian*, 22 October 1830, p. 741.

<sup>102</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 23 October 1830, p. 2. See also 13 November 1830, pp. 2-3.

<sup>103</sup> Walpole to Arthur, 29 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/324. A 'civilized Black Boy' interpreted Ronekeenarener's testimony.

But this may not have been the only major internecine battle that took place in 1830. On 1 November, the five men and two women who surrendered to Robinson at Ansons River, told him ‘that they had recently returned from fighting with the natives of the lakes and that they had killed three of that people and the rest fled.’<sup>104</sup> The record of Aboriginal attacks places at least one band in the foothills of the Western Tiers (which skirt ‘the lakes’) in August.<sup>105</sup> No location is recorded for the clash described by Mannalargenna, but the incongruous details suggest that this was a separate conflict. These two battles may have been the last open hostilities between Vandemonians, but tribal animosities persisted even after surrendering to Robinson. There were clear tensions between members of the friendly mission.<sup>106</sup> Even when removed to Flinders Island, Vandemonians continued to exhibit hostility toward their traditional enemies, albeit without resorting to violence.

The reasons for the persistence of internecine conflicts are not entirely clear, but colonisation seems to have contributed in at least two ways. Firstly, the desire for women was involved in much of the recorded internecine hostility, which is unsurprising given that sealers and frontiersmen were commonly abducting and often killing women and girls.<sup>107</sup> Violent competition for women was a traditional feature of Vandemonian society, and wartime shortages exacerbated this pattern. The second possibility, as Melville put it, was that conflict erupted when Aborigines were ‘forced to trespass on each other’s hunting-grounds, being driven from their own by the white population.’<sup>108</sup> When traditional enemies were pushed together there is every reason to expect that existing disputes, cultural and linguistic differences, and wartime stresses militated against friendly accommodation.

The desire to combat the common white enemy nevertheless appears to have promoted cooperation between some bands.<sup>109</sup> In November 1828, five captive Aborigines told Gilbert Robertson that they had recently attended a gathering of four east coast bands at the Eastern Marshes. The assembly, they said, had two objectives:

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<sup>104</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 297, journal 1 November 1830. One of those killed was Umarrah’s wife (p. 344, journal 9 January 1831).

<sup>105</sup> It is assumed here that this is what Robinson meant by ‘the lakes’, but there is no way to be certain.

<sup>106</sup> Robinson’s journal for the latter part of 1831 contains many references to the wars and family killings that led to tensions between Umarrah, Mannalargenna and other envoys. See also Surridge to Aborigines Committee, February 1832, TAHO, CSO1/321, p. 398.

<sup>107</sup> See, for instance, West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 85 & *Friendly Mission*, pp. 292, 345, 411, 586, journals 25 October 1830, 11 January, 15 July, 15 December 1831. See also Chapter 6.

<sup>108</sup> Quoted in Roth, *The Aborigines of Tasmania*, p. 73. John West agreed (*History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 85).

<sup>109</sup> Plomley (*The Tasmanian Aborigines*, p. 87) disagreed. He believed that the Aborigines’ resistance would have succeeded but for ‘the fact that in the absence of any political association between the tribes, the war was conducted by them nearly independently.’ There is one statement from an Aboriginal that seems to support this. A boy taken by surveyor John Helder Wedge, reportedly did ‘not believe that the Natives act in concert’ (O’Connor to Aborigines Committee, 17 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, pp. 54-55). This boy, however, was taken on the west coast and was probably not familiar with the eastern bands.

First – to capture wives for the Oyster Bay and Stoney Creek tribes who had lost nearly all their women and – secondly – to repel an invasion by the Port Dalrymple ... [who trespassed on] the hunting ground of the swan port tribe ... [however] for some cause they have met without committing any act of Hostility and the four tribes I think have made some sort of treaty by which the Swan Port tribe have given all the others [permission] to hunt on their grounds – From whence each tribe sends small parties to rob and hinder the inhabitants of the remote huts – I am informed that they are now on their way to Fight the Big River tribe for the purpose of compelling them to give up their hunting ground for the common good and make common cause in carrying on their warfare against the white inhabitants.<sup>110</sup>

It was probably no coincidence that twelve months later Robertson learnt ‘from the natives who had been captured by Mr Bateman [*sic*] that a general meeting of the tribes was to be held near the Big Lake’.<sup>111</sup>

The proposition that some bands united to resist the white invasion is further buttressed by an entry in George Hobler’s diary for 6 October 1830, stating that ‘one fellow taken a short time ago who could speak a little English said that the different tribes had leagued together sinking their own disputes and determined to exterminate the whites if possible’.<sup>112</sup> Nevertheless, tribal differences were often deeply entrenched, and efforts to settle them were not always successful. After the War, a northern warrior named Wowaree told Robinson:

the Port Sorell natives frequently travelled to Circular Head, Cape Grim and Mount Cameron and fought with the wild natives. Said their object in going to their country was not for hostile purposes but to make friends with them and to induce them to visit their country and to aid them in robbing and committing aggressions upon the whites, but the wild or West Point natives would not make friends but fought with them. Several were killed on those occasions on both sides.<sup>113</sup>

Clearly some bands went to considerable lengths to negotiate truces and alliances in the final years of the War. By this stage, however, the boundary between contrived tactical alliances and the desperate coalescing of displaced remnants was vague. The Vandemonians were being destroyed so quickly they had little opportunity to overcome age-old enmities and coordinate their resistance strategies. By the time this had occurred to them, most bands were in severe decline. As Plomley noted, it was more a case of ‘the remaining Aborigines of several tribes combining to form units striving to survive.’<sup>114</sup> This was certainly true of the bands that surrendered to Robinson, which were always conglomerates.<sup>115</sup> The evidence suggests that, by

<sup>110</sup> Robertson to Lascelles, 17 November 1828, TAHO, CSO1/331, pp. 170-73. The account was translated by Kickertopoller, who was then Robertson’s guide. See also *Tasmanian*, 28 November 1828, p. 2.

<sup>111</sup> Gilbert Robertson’s journal, 2 November 1829, TAHO, CSO1/331, pp. 85-86. It is not clear which lake is being referred to here. If in the east, it could refer to Tooms Lake or the Jordan Lagoon (now Lake Tiberius). If on the Central Plateau, it could refer to Lake Echo, Lake Sorell/Crescent or Great Lake.

<sup>112</sup> Hobler, *The Diaries of Pioneer George Hobler*, pp. 186-87, diary 6 October 1830.

<sup>113</sup> *Weep in Silence*, p. 512, journal 15 December 1837. See also Robinson to Colonial Secretary, 30 April 1838, quoted in Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, p. 62.

<sup>114</sup> Plomley, *The Tasmanian Aborigines*, p. 26. See also Plomley, *Tasmanian Tribes and Cicatrices*, p. 5.

<sup>115</sup> See, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, pp. 432, 451, journals 14 August & 2 September 1831. See also discussion of the Thomas and Parker killings in Chapter 16.

the time bands disintegrated and reformed with other remnants, their primary objective had shifted from resistance to survival.

*White*  
11  
**Experience**

Black violence aroused a number of powerful emotions in colonists, among them grief, rage, frustration and fear. People living on the frontier juggled all these feelings, but none stamped their mark on the historical record in the way fear did. There are scores of archival references to the terror that the blacks engendered among settlers and convicts, yet this ubiquitous theme is conspicuously absent from most historians' accounts of the War. The one notable exception to this tradition has been Henry Reynolds' *Fate of a Free People*.<sup>1</sup> Reynolds devoted half a Chapter to the success of black resistance, breaking new ground in exploring the phenomenon of white fear.<sup>2</sup> His emphasis on fear buttressed his resistance argument by demonstrating its effectiveness. This Chapter differs from Reynolds' by examining the subject of white fear in much greater detail and by not approaching it, as he did, with a view to strengthening a broader argument. Rather, by asking how the atmosphere of terror and anxiety developed, what its significance was to colonists, and in what ways they responded to it, this Chapter reveals that no element of the frontier experience was more significant than fear. It begins, however, by examining several other key emotions that helped determine colonists' experiences of the War.

### **A New and Sinister Threat**

The Black War was not the first time colonists had faced a domestic enemy. From the earliest years of settlement, bushrangers – violent gangs of escaped convicts – had frequently plagued the interior, sacking properties, and committing occasional murders.<sup>3</sup> But by 1826, Arthur had sent the vast majority to the gallows, and most colonists believed the interior was now safe for settlement. They could not have been more wrong, as the *Colonial Times* observed in 1827, for 'no sooner had bushranging ... become extinct, than another no less terrible evil has broken out.'<sup>4</sup> With shocking speed, the natives appeared to transform from 'the most harmless race of people in the world' into the colonists' 'most bloodthirsty enemies'.<sup>5</sup> In 1827, William

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<sup>1</sup> Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, pp. 53-76.

<sup>2</sup> Reynolds presented copious powerful examples, but to highlight the richness and depth of the evidence, this Chapter draws on just one of them.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Maxwell-Stewart, 'I Could Not Blame the Rangers', pp. 109-26.

<sup>4</sup> *Colonial Times*, 5 January 1827, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 6 August 1824, p. 2; *Colonial Times*, 1 June 1831, p. 2.

Bryan penned a letter to his local police magistrate only hours after escaping his burning house, exclaiming:

I have been in houses attacked by white savages [bushrangers] and I put it most solemnly to you, that the system and fury of these Black Monsters, exceeded anything I have yet encountered, the house on fire and these furies dancing outside made me imagine I had been suddenly transported to the infernal regions.<sup>6</sup>

The same year, Roderic O'Connor wrote to the Governor:

It is deplorable and must be most distressing to His Excellency's mind after having completely given a death-blow to Bushranging that a set of wild Savages should immediately spring up, and commit such numerous massacres, as to alarm all castes of Persons, much more than all the Bushrangers that have ever appeared.<sup>7</sup>

The blacks, with their deadly guerrilla tactics and uncanny elusiveness, were not only more dangerous than the bushrangers, they were also much more frightening.

### **Grief, Anger and Frustration**

On the afternoon of 10 June 1830, Mr Daniels, Captain Wood's overseer at Regent Plains, returned from having lunch with his wife and newborn twins to begin ploughing a nearby field with a convict servant. Shortly after, however:

they observed the door of the hut was open, this circumstance excited suspicion as it was Mary Daniels' custom to keep the door of the hut bolted on the inside when the men were absent. They accordingly left their work and the husband first reached the hut. A few yards from the door he found his wife and two children lying covered with blood, he called the other man to his assistance and they removed the bodies into the hut, Mary Daniels and one of the infants died in about half an hour, the other infant in about six or seven hours after.<sup>8</sup>

This incident was followed eleven days after by the spearing of Mrs Langford at Green Ponds, in which the blacks also killed her fourteen-year-old daughter and wounded her young son, John.<sup>9</sup> To a colony now awash with reports of violence, these were just two more 'outrages', but to Mr Daniels, Mr Langford, and the hundreds like them who lost friends and family in the War, the effect was far more profound.

Frontier conflict triggered a host of strong emotions, one of which was grief. More than 250 colonists were speared, bludgeoned or burned to death by natives in Van Diemen's Land

<sup>6</sup> Bryan to Smith, 10 November 1827, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 58-59.

<sup>7</sup> O'Connor to Parramore, 11 December 1827, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 63-75.

<sup>8</sup> Vicary to Colonial Secretary, 15 June 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 525-28.

<sup>9</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 25 October 1828, p. 1 & 1 November 1828, p. 2. Natives killed Langford's son the following year.



between 1804 and 1842 (see fig. 8), most of whom left behind grieving friends or family. The sense of loss was often powerful and debilitating, but the prevalence of this emotion should not be overstated. At least three out of four victims were male convicts or emancipists, most of whom had no spouse or family in the colony.<sup>10</sup> These men certainly had friends, but their deaths generally seem to have evoked more anger than sadness.<sup>11</sup>

Native violence raised many colonists to the boiling point of frustration and anger. After presiding over yet another coronial inquest into the death of an assigned servant, a police magistrate ‘declared that if his family was attacked, he would kill as many as he could of the murdering incendiaries, and affix their bodies to trees, as he would those of any other ravenous animal.’<sup>12</sup> Similarly, John West noted that attacks on frontier labourers frequently ‘provoke[d] their fellow servants to rage’ and seeded a craving for revenge.<sup>13</sup> However, the objects of colonists’ rage were often beyond their grasp, which could leave them feeling intensely frustrated. It is palpably evident from their writings that they also felt frustrated at the government’s failure to protect them, and at their own inability to protect themselves.<sup>14</sup> The resulting bitterness is consistent with Michael Sturma finding that, ‘[i]n delineating the precursors of violence, social scientists most commonly point to frustration’.<sup>15</sup>

Insofar as the written record is our guide, however, fear dominated all other emotions. There were, of course, reasons why expressions of fear and the actions of fearful people predominated in official correspondence and newspaper commentary. The actions of frightened people are generally more identifiable than those of the grieving or embittered. Furthermore, people publicising the news of an attack in their neighbourhood sought to encourage a stronger military presence by emphasising locals’ fearfulness. On the other hand, there was generally no motivation for private correspondents and diarists to overemphasise fearfulness, yet it was the primary emotion expressed in these documents as well. What is more, emotions like grief and rage only affected some people, some of the time, whereas virtually everybody on the frontier was afraid, all of the time. Even if other emotions were underemphasised in the historical sources, there is no reason to suspect the ubiquity of fear and fearful behaviour those sources describe was anything but representative.

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<sup>10</sup> See figs. 8 and 9. These graphs do not specifically track convicts and emancipists (though these categories largely comprised the ‘labourer’ category), but the figure ‘three out of four’ has been checked against the tally in Appendix 2. See also *Launceston Advertiser*, 8 June 1829, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Some convicts no doubt developed strong (even romantic) bonds with their fellow servants, in which case they must have grieved considerably.

<sup>12</sup> *Tasmanian*, 26 February 1830, pp. 470-1.

<sup>13</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 34.

<sup>14</sup> Expressions of frustration are common in the contemporary sources, especially in settlers’ letters to the government and the newspapers, though it is evident more from tone than explicit statements.

<sup>15</sup> Sturma, ‘Myall Creek and the Psychology of Mass Murder’, p. 68.

## Economic Fear

Financial loss from theft and destruction of property was a constant threat to settlers, who could, and sometimes did, lose everything. In March 1828, for instance, after John Allen had his house and haystacks burned by the natives, he was forced to ask the government for assistance in rebuilding his house, and ‘slept on a sheet of bark for several months’.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, in February 1830, natives burned ‘Mr. HOWELL’S premises and property ... The family are now living under a break-wind, without a single article except what they then wore.’<sup>17</sup> There were no insurance companies in early Van Diemen’s Land.<sup>18</sup> Most settlers, whether emancipists or emigrants, invested all they had in their colonial ventures, and risked ruin if their crops and buildings were burned, or their stock destroyed. James Hobbs was completely burnt out by blacks in May 1830, after which he lamented, ‘it is nothing less than having to commence again as a new settler’.<sup>19</sup> Surviving meant establishing oneself rapidly with minimum setbacks, and from an economic perspective, the Black War produced a maelstrom of setbacks.<sup>20</sup>

Widespread stock killing by natives was a costly burden on many settlers. In a letter to the *Colonial Advocate* in 1828, one settler claimed that the frequency with which sheep and cattle were speared rendered it ‘useless to attempt to keep stock. It is better to drive the stock into town, and sell it for any price, than allow it to be made the prey of this accursed race!’<sup>21</sup> In the case of sheep, the acceleration of spearings coincided with a five-fold increase of the colony’s wool exports between 1827 and 1830.<sup>22</sup> Such attacks could be especially costly to settlers engaged in the painstaking development of bloodlines. In fact, Arthur later estimated the native threat had doubled the cost of raising sheep.<sup>23</sup> On at least a dozen occasions, horses and oxen were also speared, sometimes several at a time.<sup>24</sup> The high cost and utility of these animals meant their loss constituted an enormous setback to settlers. The heavy toll that natives took on settlers’ stock was dwarfed only by the toll settlers feared they might take. All were aware of their vulnerability to stock killing, and it weighed heavy on their minds.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>16</sup> John Allen file, GSBHS; Allen to Arthur, 15 March 1828, TAHO, CSO1/170, p. 38. Allen’s losses amounted to approximately £300.

<sup>17</sup> *Colonial Times*, 19 February 1830, p. 3. See also Vicary to Colonial Secretary, 16 August 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 564-65.

<sup>18</sup> Hartwell, *Economic Development*, pp. 179-82. The first insurance company opened in 1833. The timing may indicate that such companies were not viable during the War.

<sup>19</sup> Hobbs to Anstey, 20 May 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 509-10. See also, for instance, P. Harrison, ‘Memories of a Voyage to Van Diemen’s Land’, c.1824, TAHO, LMSS322/1/1, p. 23.

<sup>20</sup> See Chapter 9.

<sup>21</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 1 May 1828, pp. 133-34.

<sup>22</sup> See Hartwell, *Economic Development*, p. 118.

<sup>23</sup> Arthur to Buxton, 31 January 1835, TAHO, GO52/1/6, p. 250.

<sup>24</sup> See tally in Appendix 2.

<sup>25</sup> See, for instance, *Hobart Town Courier*, 18 April 1829, p. 2.

The greatest threat to settlers' economic security, though, was arson. Between 1824 and 1831, blacks incinerated no less than three-dozen huts and houses (see fig. 11). But, again, colonists were terrified of the devastation blacks *could have* inflicted, not just on buildings, but on crops. For many settlers, their livelihood was conditional on secure grain and fodder harvests to ensure cash flow, animal feed and subsistence. As Henry Reynolds has pointed out, cereal crops were the colony's primary source of food, but their flammability also made them its Achilles' heel, and colonists were acutely aware of this.<sup>26</sup> In February 1830, for instance, Bothwell's police magistrate informed the Governor that '[s]erious apprehensions are entertained by the settlers that the natives having resorted to destruction by fire will also burn up their crops.'<sup>27</sup> Despite causing considerable damage, no band ever fully exploited the potential of arson, but the fear that they would was widespread and entirely reasonable. Had the natives burnt crops and dwellings more systematically, the consequences would have been catastrophic, and the short-term viability of the colony might have been seriously compromised.<sup>28</sup>

Sabotage of this type was also troubling for its resemblance to traditional means of rural protest.<sup>29</sup> Stock killing and arson were reminiscent of 'hamstringing', rick burning and other types of vandalism used by the rural working-class in Britain and Ireland.<sup>30</sup> All inspired dread among landowners, not just because of the losses they incurred, but also because of the frustration and uneasiness that stemmed from being unable to prevent the attacks or identify and apprehend the assailants.<sup>31</sup> The natives' use of sabotage was no less political than its British and Irish equivalent, and the parallels were unmistakable. Thus, such tactics hit an already frayed nerve among the settlers of Van Diemen's Land.

### Concern for Others

Another type of fear felt by frontier colonists resulted from the thought of what the blacks might do to their loved ones. This was not mere paranoia. During the War, almost everyone on

<sup>26</sup> Reynolds, *A History of Tasmania*, p. 61.

<sup>27</sup> Vicary to Colonial Secretary, 16 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 416.

<sup>28</sup> There were a few settlers who spoke of having to abandon the colony, including chief civil auditor, George Boyes (letter to sister, 31 October 1830, in P. Chapman (ed.) *The Diaries and Letters of G. T. W. B. Boyes, Volume One, 1820-1832*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, p. 378) and newspaper editor, James Ross (*Hobart Town Courier*, 11 September, 13 & 20 November 1830), but their concerns were dismissed by more judicious commentators (see *Colonial Times*, 19 November 1830, p. 2). The natives' never came close to exploiting the full destructive potential of arson, though one can appreciate the concerns of someone like Boyes, who understood all too well the colony's reliance on locally grown crops, and thus its vulnerability.

<sup>29</sup> This paragraph is adapted from material supplied by Andrew Gregg whose expertise in this area has been exceptionally helpful.

<sup>30</sup> G. Rudé, *Protest and Punishment: The Story of the Social and Political Protesters transported to Australia 1788-1868*, Oxford University Press, London, 1978.

<sup>31</sup> See E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1991 [1981], pp. 16-96.

the frontier lost someone they knew or cared for, and graphic reports could all too frequently be read in the newspapers. On 9 October 1828, for instance, having unsuccessfully attempted to prevent an attack on a neighbour's hut, Patrick Gough was returning home when he:

was met by his eldest daughter Mary, covered with blood, calling upon her father to hasten home as the natives had killed her mother and sisters. Gough saw his wife about half a mile from the hut sitting on the ground, resting her back against the fence, with her infant child in her lap. The poor woman said – ‘My dear Gough, it is all over with me, I am killed by the natives.’ ... [He found] his infant daughter Alicia lying breathless in front of the door with her arms extended ... On entering the hut he found Anne Geary lying stretched on the floor, and on being removed to a sofa she vomited quantities of blood; she died about two hours after, and about midnight Alicia Gough, not more than four years of age, breathed her last. Gough's youngest child, an infant 13 months old, had received several contusions, but of a slighter character.<sup>32</sup>

Mrs Gough, who died in agony nineteen days later, told of how ‘she fell on her knees to the natives and said “Spare the lives of my picanninies”; and that one of the black natives replied in good English “No you white bitch we’ll kill you all”.’<sup>33</sup> This incident was widely reported in the press, and sent a wave of outrage and fear through the colony. Patrick Gough tried to move on with his two surviving daughters, but eleven months later, the blacks burned his house to the ground.<sup>34</sup> Not everyone suffered so greatly, but most experienced some kind of loss.

Stories like this understandably generated great apprehension on the frontier, particularly among those with families. With the knowledge of so many horrific attacks seared into their minds, men who regularly had to leave their families for work were constantly anxious about their safety.<sup>35</sup> As West observed: ‘Men know, when they pass their threshold, that the ties of life are uncertain, and that desolation may blast whatever they leave tranquil and beloved; [and] there was an intense realisation of this hazard’.<sup>36</sup> This fear was shared by women and children, who must have been similarly concerned for their fathers, husbands, brothers and sons, whenever they went out to work. Indeed, anyone separated from their loved ones during the Black War must have laboured under constant worry.

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<sup>32</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 18 October 1828, pp. 2-3.

<sup>33</sup> Coronial inquest, 11 October 1828, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 166.

<sup>34</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 26 September 1829, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> There were no recorded cases of white women being raped by natives in Van Diemen's Land, but this seems to have done little to calm fears.

<sup>36</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 35.

## Personal Fear

Fear for one's own life tended to trump all other concerns. Such fear could range from gentle uneasiness to paralysing terror, but everyone living in exposed locations undoubtedly felt some degree of fear. What sort of fear they felt, and how strongly they felt it, hinged on a number of factors. One such factor was the sun. It was well known that the blacks never attacked at night, so colonists could sleep soundly no matter how dangerous their situation. This dependable nocturnal respite – probably unique in the history of modern guerrilla warfare – was a welcome relief, but as soon as the sun rose again, colonists returned to looking over their shoulders. Other important factors included the topography and foliage a person was surrounded by, and the amount of protection they could rely on in the form of dogs, firearms, companions, police or soldiers. Furthermore, the type of work a person did could impact directly on their vulnerability and, thus, their level of fear. Those most at risk were labourers, who were required to perform strenuous, attention-demanding tasks in locations exposed to ambushes. Even factors such as the wind and rain,<sup>37</sup> and one's health,<sup>38</sup> could influence how secure colonists felt. Yet, probably the most important determinant of how afraid a person felt was their past experiences concerning black violence.

There is considerable circumstantial evidence that black violence was often targeted vengeance, especially during the earlier years of the conflict.<sup>39</sup> It is, therefore, not unreasonable to suspect that frontiersmen who had been involved in killing or raping blacks felt especially vulnerable to 'the fury of the savages'.<sup>40</sup> In fact, victims of native attacks were often accused of bringing it upon themselves.<sup>41</sup> However, the blacks later gained a reputation for indiscriminate violence, so although most colonists were probably never actively involved in harming them, a clean conscience offered little comfort. For these people, the history of attacks in their localities was a more potent determinant of fear. They realised that some districts attracted more violence than others.<sup>42</sup> They also noticed that the violence was more prevalent at certain times of the year (see fig. 6). There were, for instance, comparatively few attacks in early summer and early winter, but in the spring and early autumn, people in many districts had to be on high alert.

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<sup>37</sup> As noted in Chapter 10, natives were reluctant to attack in the rain, but if they attacked in windy conditions, this would have made hearing them more difficult, and potentially smelling (for dogs) as well.

<sup>38</sup> Mr Browning of the Macquarie district, for instance, was beaten to death in 1826, as he lay incapacitated from illness (*Colonial Times*, 5 May 1826, p. 3).

<sup>39</sup> See Chapter 8.

<sup>40</sup> *Colonial Times*, 6 July 1827, p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> Newspapers and government correspondence are replete with such accusations. See, for instance, *Colonial Times*, 29 September 1826, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> See tally in Appendix 2.

Some of the attacks that colonists lived through were truly terrifying. At Great Swanport, the body of James Stanton was found with:

the head beaten in with waddies: the nails of the fingers were separated from the quicks apparently with a knife, the fleshy part of the outside of the hands was cut off, they eyebrows were cut off and the bones of the eyebrows beaten down to the eyes. The whole of the teeth were beaten out of the head and the body otherwise much mangled.

This was awful enough for those who discovered his corpse, but Stanton's master, Lieutenant Hawkins, had to watch the horror unfold from his besieged hut before the blacks turned their attention to him, 'calling upon the dead man by name and laughing about it.'<sup>43</sup>

In 1830, at the farm now abandoned by Patrick Gough, Thomas Peters and his family experienced a different, but no less terrifying kind of attack.<sup>44</sup> While he was:

absent a short distance from his house, three black natives ... speared two of Mr. Peters' daughters, both young women about 14 and 16 years old – the youngest was speared [fatally] in the chest, the other through the palm of the hand. Mr. Peters hearing one of his daughters crying most bitterly, hastened with a loaded musket in his hand to the house, where he found the youngest lying at the sill of the door, bleeding.

During this time, Peters and his wounded daughters were shadowed by a warrior 'upwards of six feet high, much resembling a Chief, having his head, face, and hair ornamented with red ochre'. Peters kept his musket near, but was careful to preserve his one and only shot, 'fearing that he might miss fire'.<sup>45</sup> Eventually, the blacks left, unable to finish off their victims, but the ordeal frightened Peters and his surviving daughter off their farm.<sup>46</sup>

The following year, a soldier described an unexpected visit by a stockman who had just escaped an attack at Regents Plains:

it was a quarter of an hour before he could speak from fright, and the other men abused him and asked if he was mad. At length he spoke and stammered out that there was fifty natives and that he supposed they had killed the other man.<sup>47</sup>

West may have captured the horror of these experiences better than anyone, when he wrote:

Death, by the hands of a savage, is indeed invested with the darkest terrors: it was rarely instantaneous – it was often the effect of protracted torment, and of repeated blows: often, after a long pursuit, in which hope might occasionally gleam for a moment, to render death to the exhausted fugitive more distinct and terrible ... the

<sup>43</sup> Dalrymple to Colonial Secretary, 28 October 1828, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 189-90.

<sup>44</sup> This property was not the only one to suffer multiple attacks, which suggests such places might have been sites of significance to the natives. Alternatively, it may just have been in the path of their migrations and presented safe conditions for executing an ambush.

<sup>45</sup> *Colonial Times*, 26 November 1830, p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> Hayes to Arthur, 1 December 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 751.

<sup>47</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 594, journal 22 December 1831.

dying man would be roused by infernal shouts, and there would swim before him brandished clubs, and horrid visages distorted with demoniac rage. Such were the recollections of some who recovered; and such, we may be assured, were the emotions of many that died.<sup>48</sup>

Hundreds of people survived clashes with the natives, many of whom were scarred for life, both physically and psychologically. In 1830, for instance, after surviving a quadruple spearing at her Carlton River property, Judith Pearce ‘became from fright and terror, insane and sent to the Lunatic asylum at New Norfolk’.<sup>49</sup> It was as much a war of the mind as it was of spears and muskets.

In some regions the situation became so alarming that whole families were forced to temporarily or even permanently abandon their farms. Many settlers insisted they would be forced off their grants if protection was not immediately forthcoming. In 1830, Lieutenant Torlesse reported that ‘we all now feel too fearful of them [the natives] being near us, that we never move without a gun.’ The fear, he confessed, ‘is quite paralysing’, and he begged permission to ‘exchange my grant at the Hollow Tree for one near Hamilton, Mrs. Torlesse being in a very uneasy state of mind, our lives are daily in jeopardy.’<sup>50</sup> Likewise, Paul Minnitt beseeched the Governor for protection after his farm at the foot of the Western Tiers was attacked twice in 1831: ‘My late neighbour Bonnolly was driven with his family from his farm and I am much afraid that the same will be my case’.<sup>51</sup> Other colonists refused to remain in the path of the blacks a moment longer. Mr Kirby, for instance:

was obliged to abandon [his] hut in consequence of the attack of the natives ... [and] said he would not live at Mr Parker’s farm on any account, that the natives were always about there and that it was dangerous for the people living there to leave their hut unless accompanied by two or three other men.<sup>52</sup>

The Blue Hills east of Oatlands was a particularly dangerous region. In May 1830, ‘Pennington and his Wife and child fled [the district] to Hobarton’, barely escaping with their lives.<sup>53</sup> Sometimes whole communities were forced to flee. Robinson observed in 1831 that ‘many people’ who had once lived in the Blue Hills ‘were driven away by the natives.’<sup>54</sup> A similar exodus occurred following several attacks in the Green Ponds district in October 1828. According to the *Hobart Town Courier*:

<sup>48</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 35.

<sup>49</sup> A. Laing, ‘The Alexander Laing Story’, unpublished reminiscences of Pittwater’s District Constable, 1819-38, TAHO, NS116/1, p. 56.

<sup>50</sup> Torlesse to Vicary, 15 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 422-23.

<sup>51</sup> Minnitt to Arthur, 22 August 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 939.

<sup>52</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 580, journal 10 December 1831. The previous month, Robinson (p. 555, journal 17 November 1831) recorded that Mr Shone had abandoned his farm on account of the natives also.

<sup>53</sup> James to Colonial Secretary, 23 May 1830, TAHO, CSO1/320, section F.

<sup>54</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 561, journal 23 November 1831.

The wives and children of the settlers around are flocking in to the more populous part of this district, and an uninhabited house is taken as a sort of temporary place of security, there being none in the bush, till some check is put to this horrible havoc in human life.<sup>55</sup>

But few settlers had either the time or the money to start over again somewhere safer, so most had no choice but to endure the threat.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, those who suffered the greatest danger – the convicts and emancipist labourers – had no farms to leave.

### **Black Spectres**

The island's grapevine comprised a vibrant network of formal and informal communication channels. Even those who had not yet encountered hostile natives knew full well what was in store for them if they did. Tales of attacks were communicated via written correspondence and the press, but more commonly by word of mouth. The stories could be unnerving in the extreme. In December 1826, near Piper's Lagoon, a stock keeper 'was literally beat to a mummy! His throat cut and his lower extremities cut off!! Indeed he was cut to atoms.'<sup>57</sup> Similarly, at Quoin Hill, the body of an assigned servant was discovered 'most dreadfully lacerated, eight spears had entered the breast, the head was literally bashed to pieces, the flesh of the upper lip entirely knocked off, and in every respect presenting a most appalling spectacle.'<sup>58</sup> Printed in the newspapers for all to see, these accounts were typical of the stories people on the frontier were hearing every day, often with the violence and gore exaggerated by rumour.

The blacks also inspired great dread among travellers, even though relatively few were attacked. The island's rough and boggy roads were often no more than narrow tracks, rendering travel a slow and unnerving affair. John Young and Robert Graves were 'certain we were amongst the natives' when travelling through the Clyde district in 1829, 'as his [Graves'] horse would not proceed'. Their fears were confirmed that afternoon when they learnt that a woman had been speared to death nearby.<sup>59</sup> At the height of the War, most carts moved with an armed escort, but this could abate the traveller's apprehension only so much.<sup>60</sup> Robinson observed that some travellers, 'under the excitement of fear', were prone to hallucinations,

<sup>55</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 25 October 1828, p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> See, for instance, Macguinnis to Colonial Secretary, 8 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 446-48.

<sup>57</sup> *Colonial Times*, 29 December 1826, p. 3.

<sup>58</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 22 March 1828, p. 4.

<sup>59</sup> Young to Williams, 1 November 1829, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 335-36.

<sup>60</sup> This practice was widely documented. See, for instance, Hobler, *The Diaries of Pioneer George Hobler*, p. 40, diary 15 December 1827 & *Friendly Mission*, p. 865, journal 31 December 1833.



'taking black stumps for black men'.<sup>61</sup> Even the sounds of the bush could inspire dread, as it did for a member of Henry Hellyer's survey team in 1826: 'Byrne went to the Dismal [River] for water & heard the Native coo on the other side. He came back frightened to death', however, on investigation 'Byrne's Natives turned out to be a musical tree.'<sup>62</sup> Nonetheless, even Hellyer admitted he could not shake the feeling that 'they are watching us and are not far off.'<sup>63</sup>

The mere knowledge that blacks were out there could cause the traveller's hair to stand on end. In March 1830, while travelling through St Peter's Pass on their way to Launceston, Mrs Prinsep and her companions became apprehensive that the 'natives, who are easily concealed in these dark woods, [would] dart out upon the unconscious traveller.'<sup>64</sup> Riding through the heart of tribal country, she recalled:

the stories we had heard of the savage aborigines, came in full force upon our minds, and some of our party were fearful of meeting them in the dark hollows of the wild woods ... we amused ourselves and frightened each other by repeating the various cases of depredation lately committed by them on the settlers, sometimes even accompanied with murder and devastation by setting fire to farms and crops.<sup>65</sup>

Similarly, the sight of a bushfire, which usually signalled the presence of the natives, became an ominous portent. So common was native burning that, even in the latter years of the War, any unidentified fire could promote fear in the minds of colonists.

In contrast to the bushrangers before them, the blacks took on an aura of dread all their own. As the War gained momentum, and the reports grew more horrifying, colonists evolved a new way of conceptualising the once 'pitiable savage'. By the late 1820s, the natives' infamous brutality, spectacular bushcraft, and ability to 'vanish like spectres', combined to generate an image of them as magical, even demonic.<sup>66</sup> To colonists, the blacks were a mysterious race that seemed to lurk almost ghost-like in the wilderness.<sup>67</sup> Their intimidating 'war paint' and chilling 'war-whoop' only added to the effect. As the editor of the *Launceston Advertiser* described it:

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<sup>61</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 885, journal 27 February 1834. See also pp. 744-45, journal 3 January 1833.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas, *Henry Hellyer's Observations*, p. 42, diary 24 June 1826.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas, *Henry Hellyer's Observations*, p. 41, diary 23 June 1826. See also pp. 49-50, diary 28 June 1826.

<sup>64</sup> Prinsep, *Journal of a Voyage*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>65</sup> Prinsep, *Journal of a Voyage*, p. 78.

<sup>66</sup> Lascelles to Colonial Secretary, 10 June 1829, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 273. See also, for instance, Jorgenson to Arthur, 5 January 1828, SLNSW, ML, A2209, vol. 49, pp. 10-17; Gray to Arthur, 18 November 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 737 & P. L. Brown, *The Narrative of George Russell of Golf Hill: With Russellania and Selected Papers*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1935, p. 62.

<sup>67</sup> The natives of Van Diemen's Land were a poorly understood people. The importance of distinctions between bands, for instance, was lost on most colonists, who tended to see them for all practical purposes as one homogeneous 'horde of savages'. This apparent unity no doubt made them even more intimidating.

They daily exhibit such demoniac delight in the successful accomplishment of their diabolical purposes, and develop such a skill and watchfulness in following up their purposes, that must ... fill the breasts of all the out-settlers and stock-keepers with fear and dread.<sup>68</sup>

The *Colonial Times* referred to them as ‘Satan like’, while ‘the colonists’, according to one observer, ‘believe them sorcerers.’<sup>69</sup> Even Thomas Anstey felt that ‘[t]he disposition of the native appears to me to come closer to the cold malignity of a wicked spirit than to the frailty and passion of a man.’<sup>70</sup> Moreover, this mystique seemed to have become a common feature of colonists’ thinking about natives during the War. They were, as one east coast settler later called them, ‘the shadows of a hideous dream.’<sup>71</sup>

### Protection

Fear of black violence generated a number of responses among colonists. Some sought to deal with the problem proactively by hunting the enemy at night, but in the short-term this only incited more violence. There were also constant calls for increased military protection, which were progressively heeded. By 1830, almost half of the colony’s military force had been deployed throughout the interior in small detachments.<sup>72</sup> Still, none of this seemed to quell the violence, so the government fell back on its original policy of encouraging ‘vigilant self-defense’ by settlers.

The first thing many settlers did was secure their houses and stock huts. This could include laying turf on the roof to protect against fire, or building fortifications around the house.<sup>73</sup> In 1830, the *Launceston Advertiser* issued advice on how to build ‘a high fence made of logs placed upright two or more feet in the ground and 8 to 10 feet high’ to protect their premises from ‘the violence, the malice, and the watchful cunning of the Aboriginal tribes.’<sup>74</sup> A similar precaution was employed in the Bothwell district, where ‘buildings including a stone dwelling, cottages, barns, etc. ... were enclosed within a high brick and stone wall to keep out blacks and bushrangers.’<sup>75</sup> Although not all settlers could afford to fortify their dwellings, most ensured

<sup>68</sup> *Launceston Advertiser*, 7 February 1831, p. 45.

<sup>69</sup> *Colonial Times*, 1 June 1831, p. 2; Laplace, cited in Roth, *The Aborigines of Tasmania*, p. 40.

<sup>70</sup> Anstey to Colonial Secretary, 13 October 1828, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 177.

<sup>71</sup> Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania*, p. 84. This statement was made by Louisa Meredith, who did not arrive in the colony until 1840, though her husband Charles had been one of the earliest Oyster Bay settlers.

<sup>72</sup> See, for instance, Curtain to Colonial Secretary, 7 February 1828, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 94-97.

<sup>73</sup> For turfed roofs, see *Friendly Mission*, pp. 574, 865, journals 6 December 1831 & 1 January 1834.

<sup>74</sup> *Launceston Advertiser*, 20 December 1830, p. 3. The paper also suggested colonists clear a large area around their properties to deprive the natives of cover.

<sup>75</sup> W. H. Hudspeth to Sharland, no date, cited in M. Sharland, *Stones of a Century*, Oldham, Bedome & Meredith, Hobart, 1952, p. 56. For an example of fortifications in the Bothwell district, see fig. 21.

they at least had firing holes built into them.<sup>76</sup> And these were not the only architectural adaptations resulting from the native threat. The Daniels family, for instance, built their windows much higher than regular in order to hinder the attacks of ‘bloodthirsty tribes’,<sup>77</sup> and the huts on the River Wey ‘adjoin[ed] each other as a security from the natives’.<sup>78</sup> Fear then, not only pervaded the atmosphere, but also had a significant influence on the built landscape.

These protections must have been reassuring for women who were left at home during the day. Often, women (or solitary men) would stock up on supplies and lock themselves inside until they were again in protective company.<sup>79</sup> Some settlers took the further measure of arming their wives and children, and training them to defend themselves.<sup>80</sup> But when the enemy was known to be lurking, some women begged their menfolk not to leave.<sup>81</sup> Labourers, on the other hand, were forced to spend their days outdoors, but as the danger from blacks increased many insisted on having guard dogs present at all times. ‘My chaps refuse to go without dogs to warn them of the natives hovering round’, wrote one settler, ‘and my shepherds must have watch dogs chained by their huts.’<sup>82</sup> Another reported that, in the Shannon River valley, ‘[n]o person dare go any distance from his home without arms and his faithful companion the dog, the latter to give notice at the approach of those savages.’<sup>83</sup> When a tax was placed on dog ownership in an attempt to reduce numbers, the public outcry was intense. The primary objection was expressed in a petition by the ‘Inhabitants of the Clyde’, which stated that ‘in so many instances our dogs have been the means of saving so many valuable lives and property’ from the ‘daily atrocities’ of the natives.<sup>84</sup>

Another precaution was to work in pairs or groups. Putting extra men on a job was costly,<sup>85</sup> but it was widely believed that the blacks hesitated to attack multiple opponents. Bothwell’s police magistrate, Michael Vicary, observed that ‘in those parts most frequented by the aborigines the servants are fearful of going out simply and in some instances have positively refused to go out alone.’<sup>86</sup> In the north, Malcolm Smith’s overseer demanded he ‘send another

<sup>76</sup> See, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, pp. 319, 541, journal 30 November 1830 & 8 November 1831.

<sup>77</sup> Vicary to Colonial Secretary, 15 June 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 525-28.

<sup>78</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 232, journal 14 August 1830.

<sup>79</sup> See, for instance, *Colonial Times*, 25 May 1831, p. 4 & Vicary to Colonial Secretary, 15 June 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 525-28.

<sup>80</sup> See, for instance, *Hobart Town Courier*, 5 June 1830, p. 2 & Beams’ Ford account, Beams family papers, private collection.

<sup>81</sup> See, for instance, Wood to Arthur, 14 June 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 521-24.

<sup>82</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 20 March 1830, p. 2.

<sup>83</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 13 March 1830, p. 2.

<sup>84</sup> Inhabitants of the Clyde to Arthur, 27 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 438-43. See also, for instance, Wood to Aborigines Committee, 7 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, p. 98.

<sup>85</sup> See, for instance, Meredith Senior to Arthur, 26 July 1824, cited in FitzSymonds, *A Looking Glass for Tasmania*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>86</sup> Vicary to Colonial Secretary, 16 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 416.

man up as soon as you can as we dare not move out now alone'.<sup>87</sup> George Hobler ensured his sawyers worked in threes because 'it is a dangerous place for the native[s], and if surprised two can scarcely protect themselves.'<sup>88</sup> This strategy worked to an extent, but with the increasing boldness of the enemy, it could also result in more victims.

Firearms were the best security against hostile natives. Although early nineteenth century guns were cumbersome and unreliable, the enemy understood their potential and an unfired musket usually kept them at bay.<sup>89</sup> From 1828, most servants flatly refused to work in exposed places unless armed.<sup>90</sup> William Clark complained that 'our servants will not go about their ordinary occupation without arms'.<sup>91</sup> Robinson noted of such men that they 'are very much afraid of the natives and cannot venture the shortest distance without firearms.'<sup>92</sup> This demand presented a unique dilemma to a colony that had just put down a severe bushranging outbreak. At best, arming convicts threatened to undermine the carefully negotiated power dynamics of the master/servant relationship, and at worst, to facilitate another wave of escapee violence. 'It was certainly unprecedented', West exclaimed: 'Slaves had been armed by their masters'.<sup>93</sup> Nevertheless, the demands of convicts were so powerful and understandable, that settlers generally yielded.

Some servants flatly refused to work, despite the threat of severe penalties. In 1824, following the killing of a co-worker and their own narrow escape, a group of shepherds from York Plains deserted their flocks for the safety of Hobart. 'Such is the fear they entertain', reported the *Hobart Town Gazette*, 'that nothing can persuade them to return to their abandoned occupation.'<sup>94</sup> Similarly, in March 1828, a settler from Ross wrote: 'We have been attacked again by the natives. They have murdered two men ... So terrified are the shepherds that they have returned home with the sheep.'<sup>95</sup> Two weeks later, a settler on the Elizabeth River lamented: 'I cannot prevail on my shepherds to leave home, and if the present state of things continues, I must give up farming.'<sup>96</sup> The district's magistrate reported that 'the stock keepers in a great many instances refuse to attend their charge and express a determination to persist in

<sup>87</sup> Phillips to Smith, 21 April 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 489-92.

<sup>88</sup> Hobler, *The Diaries of Pioneer George Hobler*, p. 169, diary 15 February 1830.

<sup>89</sup> See Chapter 4. Nevertheless, guns were poor protection against surprise attacks, as men were generally forced to lay them aside when working.

<sup>90</sup> There are numerous references to servants refusing to work unarmed. See, in particular, TAHO, CSO1/316.

<sup>91</sup> Clark to Colonial Secretary, 2 November 1829, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 346-48.

<sup>92</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 174-75, journal 5 April 1830. See also p. 342, journal 7 January 1831.

<sup>93</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 55.

<sup>94</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 6 August 1824, p. 2. See also, for instance, Anstey to CS, 31 December 1830 TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 765.

<sup>95</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 22 March 1828, p. 3.

<sup>96</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 5 April 1828, p. 3.

the refusal while exposed to such sudden attacks.<sup>97</sup> Strikes of this type occurred throughout the interior and, at the height of the War, they threatened to cripple the colony's economy.<sup>98</sup>

The threat of black violence put masters in a difficult position, because the refusal of servants to work under such conditions was both reasonable and wholly unacceptable. It was never suggested that protesting servants were simply malingering, but some certainly exploited the situation in other ways. There is evidence that convicts occasionally tried to frame blacks for their own robberies, arson attacks, stock killings and even murders.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, the potential for scapegoating to over-inflate the record of native violence was, as Appendix 2 argues, probably cancelled out by the unrecorded or wrongly attributed attacks. The vast majority of black violence appears to have been just that – black violence – and the frauds and profiteers were as frightened of it as the next person.

### **A Fear Not Forgotten**

Nothing highlights the terror of the War years more than contrasting it with the sanity that returned once it was over. Following the surrender of the last hostile blacks in December 1831, the change in the interior was instant and dramatic. In 1833, Robinson noted in his journal:

When the hostile blacks were out and whilst I was perambulating the country in quest of them, there was not a man to be seen without a musket. No carts were to be seen with out the driver carrying a musket, sawyers and woodcutters of every description, shepherds and herdsmen, were all armed and never went abroad without those weapons. Every hut and every farmer's domicile had [more] the appearance of a fortress than the peaceful habitation of a rural settlement. Now it is vice versa. If you meet a solitary individual in the most secluded part of the forest he is without firearms. The herdsmen and stockmen follow their occupations without the least dread, the woodcutter and others retire to the forest without the least apprehension of danger. There is now no occasion for a hut keeper or companion to the shepherd: instead of three men one is sufficient. The shepherd locks the door and pursues his avocation with confidence.<sup>100</sup>

Despite his inflated sense of his own importance, there is no reason to doubt Robinson's observation here. It was testified to by many, including the settler Henry Stoney, who recollected that, after the surrender, 'a complete change took place in the island; the remote

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<sup>97</sup> Simpson to Colonial Secretary, 1 April 1828, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 137-38.

<sup>98</sup> This threat never eventuated. No scholar has yet tried to quantify the extent to which black violence retarded Van Diemen's Land's economy, or its emigration, but both continued to grow throughout the War.

<sup>99</sup> For robbery, see *Friendly Mission*, p. 745, journal 3 January 1833. For arson, see *Friendly Mission*, p. 253, journal 24 September 1830 & Brown, *Clyde Company Papers*, p. 99. For stock killing, see *Friendly Mission*, pp. 600, 881, journals 29 December 1831 & 22 February 1834. For killing, see deposition of John Western, 11 February 1826, NLA, MS3251/2/2, pp. 131-35 & Brown to Aborigines Committee, 5 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 120-21.

<sup>100</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 865, journal 31 December 1833.

stock stations were again resorted to, and guns were no longer carried between the handles of the plough.'<sup>101</sup> But it was the pseudonymous author of several letters to the *Colonial Times* who described the state of alarm most vividly. Writing in 1835, he recalled the gripping terror of life:

in the interior when the blacks with indiscriminate and savage ferociousness committed the most daring murders and depredations, sparing neither women nor infants – when no one ventured to plough his fields, gathering in his harvest, or walking a few yards from his own door, without firearms in his hands – when mothers turned pale, and the children screamed at the least rustling noise – these I say were the horrors we experienced in the interior.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> H. C. Stoney, *A Residence in Tasmania*, Smith, Elder & Co., London, 1856, p. 33.

<sup>102</sup> *Colonial Times*, 30 June 1835, p. 1. This author used the pseudonym 'A Settler'.

***Black***  
**12**  
**Experience**

It is very usual for a number of aborigines, when assembled by their fireside under the open canopy of heaven, to recount the sufferings of their ancestors, to dilate upon their present afflictions and to consult upon the best means of being released from their cruel and bloodthirsty foes.

George Augustus Robinson, journal 23 November 1829

By the time Robinson wrote these words, the remaining Vandemonians must have found it difficult to see from where their release would come. As the War drew on and their numbers plummeted, the hopelessness of their situation must have become increasingly apparent. What is more, mere existence had become a trial, in which hunger, cold and maddening skin infections ground away relentlessly at their will to resist. Yet they had no choice but to go on. They still had to eat and sleep. They still had to launch attacks, and defend against ambushes. They still had to deal with the dead and wounded, despite moving rapidly through the territories of both black and white enemies. And they still had to cope with the ever-present trauma of loss and fear.

This Chapter examines what life was like for Aboriginal bands during the Black War and why they responded in the ways they did. On both a practical and emotional level, it explores how they dealt with the constant threat of white violence, and the death and disorder it produced. Finally, to contextualise these experiential questions this Chapter will consider what is known about the Aborigines' social and emotional universe, and how it was affected by the exigencies of War. Until now, no historian has ever probed these questions in any depth, but it will be conclusively shown that the story of the Black War is critically impoverished without some reflection on the Aboriginal experience. Only by entering their world can we make sense of their actions, and empathise with their plight.

### **Experience of White Violence**

Aborigines possessed extraordinary 'keen-sightedness', and were rarely caught off guard in daylight hours, but when the sun went down, the tables of vulnerability turned against them. Hundreds were ultimately shot because of the need to light campfires. Smoke was the flag that repeatedly gave away their location, and yet, fires were indispensable for at least three reasons.

Firstly, there was the need to cook the meat and damper upon which Aborigines largely subsisted. The second reason was warmth. Traditionally, Vandemonians insulated their bodies with a mixture of animal fat and ochre, but as movement became increasingly dangerous, access to both ingredients was restricted.<sup>1</sup> Even when fat and ochre could be procured, it was generally insufficient to guard against night temperatures, which regularly plummeted below zero. Blankets offered some protection from the cold, but unlike fat, they were useless once wet, and keeping anything dry in the island's climate was difficult unless it could be dried over a fire. What is more, even a dry blanket had its limits. The winters of 1829, 1830 and 1831 were uncommonly harsh, though nighttime temperatures could turn hypothermic at any time of the year.<sup>2</sup> The necessity for a warm fire, as Bonwick pointed out, was even greater when 'harassed by Europeans, [because] they left off building huts and were satisfied with break-winds'.<sup>3</sup> When in enemy territory, Aborigines seem to have preferred easy-to-erect (and easy-to-vacate) break-winds to the more robust dome huts that, although better insulated, became a trap in an ambush. This pressure to compromise on huts and fires made access to dry blankets essential.

The third reason Aborigines needed campfires was their fear of the dark – or more specifically, the evil spirit they believed lurked in the dark.<sup>4</sup> The evidence on this point is by no means unambiguous. In March 1830, two months into his first mission, Robinson puzzled at why the 'opinion has been generally circulated that the natives will not stir at night, [because] whenever they have left me it has been at night.'<sup>5</sup> He also found that the Bruny Islanders often hunted wombat 'by torch light',<sup>6</sup> so obviously the fear was not always strong enough to prohibit nighttime movement, and may not have been common to all Vandemonians. Notwithstanding these observations, Robinson was well aware that most, if not all Aborigines were wary of an evil nocturnal spirit. Worrady once told him this fiend was 'like a black man only very big and ugly, and that he travels like the wind, that he comes and watches the natives all night and before daylight comes he goes away like swift wind.'<sup>7</sup> Indeed, a number of contemporaries reported that the Vandemonians' were afraid of the dark and reluctant to

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Walker, *Life and Labours*, p. 97. The pungent odour of this insulating compound also left them more vulnerable to detection by dogs, which is probably another reason why blankets were desirable.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, pp. 101, 611, journal 26 November 1829; Vicary to Colonial Secretary, 25 May 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 515-16; *Hobart Town Courier*, 15 November 1831, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Bonwick, *Daily Life and Origin*, p. 50.

<sup>4</sup> It may not have been the night so much as the dark that caused Aborigines to fear the spirit in question, which could explain why they were occasionally known to move by torch or moon light.

<sup>5</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 172, journal 30 March 1830. Robinson was referring here to the 'Port Davey people', whom he met several times, but on the first two occasion they departed secretly during the night.

<sup>6</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 193, journal 21 May 1830. See also p. 441, journal 21 August 1831.

<sup>7</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 406, journal 7 July 1831.



move at night;<sup>8</sup> a proposition strengthened by their unwillingness to launch night attacks, despite the tactical advantages this might have gained them.

Faced with this apparent contradiction, the *Launceston Advertiser* surmised that ‘it is not improbable, although the Blacks have an aversion to travel by night, that they would do so in cases of great emergency’.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, an Oyster Bay settler claimed to ‘have heard it asserted very confidently that the natives will not from motives of superstition move after night, but ... I have known several circumstances of their travelling ... in the dark if closely pursued.’<sup>10</sup> Jorgen Jorgenson, a particularly keen observer, concluded they ‘were always fearful of travelling in the night, they never did so, until they were pressed hard by the parties in pursuit of them.’<sup>11</sup> Under such circumstances, the fleeing band must have been doubly terrified.

If the Vandemonians’ fear of spirits in the night was mere superstition, their fear of muskets in the night was not. A campfire’s illumination made it difficult to see what was beyond, so for signs of danger they listened. However, it could be hard to differentiate between the scurrying of nocturnal life and the cracking of a twig under a white man’s foot. Robinson’s journals provide several eyewitness accounts of these ambushes from Aborigines themselves. Survivors of one ambush told Robinson that, after their band killed three people along the Shannon River in November 1830:

a party of white people followed them and came upon them at night and fired in among them and killed one woman and one man. The woman was shot dead, but the man walked a short distance to a thicket and dropped down dead. This woman [one of his companions] informed me [she] belonged to them and was with them at the fire when they were attacked. Said the white people had watched and waited till they made their fire and then came and fired in among them.<sup>12</sup>

An even more graphic account was given by the one-armed chief, Tongerlongerter, who told Robinson:

he was with his tribe in the neighbourhood of the Den Hill and that there was men cutting wood. The men were frightened and run [*sic*] away. At night they came back with plenty of white men (it was moonlight), and they looked and saw our fires. Then

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<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Hare, *Voyage of the Caroline*, p. 41; Hobbs to Aborigines Committee, 9 March 1830 & Robertson to Aborigines Committee, 4 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 48; Roth, *The Aborigines of Tasmania*, pp. 53-57 & Schayer’s account quoted in Chapter 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Launceston Advertiser*, 11 October 1830, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Brown to Aborigines Committee, 5 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 139-40. Brown had heard of them ‘even doing mischief by moonlight’, but as Chapter 10 points out, I have been unable to find any substantive evidence of this.

<sup>11</sup> Plomley, *Jorgenson and the Aborigines*, p. 67. See also *Colonial Times*, 19 February 1830, p. 3 & Walker, *Life and Labours*, pp. 105-6. The Vandemonians presumably had to explain how the white men avoided these evil spirits. Their explanation(s) probably invoked the assumption white men were themselves evil spirits (see Chapter 4).

<sup>12</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 555, journal 17 November 1831.

they shot at us, shot my arm, killed two men and three women. The women they beat on the head and killed them; they then burnt them in the fire.<sup>13</sup>

Tongerlongerter then recounted another instance, in which the white men:

came near to them at night; then stopped till morning and that when it was little day light came and fired at them. Took away his wife, also DROMETEHENNER. This was near the Lakes. On this occasion they shot DROMETEHENNER's husband through the head[.]<sup>14</sup>

Experience taught the Vandemonians never to expect quarter from an ambush party, so they invariably fled at the first sign of an attack. Choosing where to run must have been terrifying, when in any direction the darkness might conceal a musket.<sup>15</sup> A number of immediate challenges presented themselves to those who managed to escape. They first had to find one another and get to a safe location. In many cases they also had to care for wounded kinsfolk who had to remain silent in the face of horrific, often fatal gunshot wounds. What is more, their fires and blankets had been abandoned, so hypothermia became a serious problem, particularly if the ambush occurred early on a winter night. The following day, an urgent need for fire, blankets, food and spears pressed survivors into action, despite the fact that many had only hours before seen their loved ones killed or abducted.

For those who lived through these attacks the psychological impact could be immense. This was particularly true for those children who, in Robinson's words, 'witnessed the massacre of their parents and their relations carried away into captivity'.<sup>16</sup> In a letter to the editor of the *Tasmanian*, 'AN EYE WITNESS' stated that, when John Danvers' party, accompanied by their adolescent guide Mungo:

came to the spot where Mr Bateman [John Batman] had on a former occasion been compelled to kill some of the blacks ... Mungo well recollected the spot and the deed; he was instantly seized with a shivering, and from that moment refused all food: he was soon reduced to extremity and the party had to carry him from day to day, until ... he arrived on Thursday last bearing the near resemblance of a skeleton.<sup>17</sup>

There was probably no eastern Vandemonian who had not suffered a campfire ambush by 1830, so at one stage or another all had felt the emotions that overwhelmed Mungo. Thus,

<sup>13</sup> *Weep in Silence*, pp. 324-25, journal 19 December 1835. See also *Friendly Mission*, p. 659, journal 3 July 1832.

<sup>14</sup> *Weep in Silence*, pp. 324-25, journal 19 December 1835.

<sup>15</sup> Some Vandemonians considered abduction better than death. One colonist (paraphrased in Leavitt & Fenton, *Jubilee History*, pp. 53-54) claimed that, initially 'the women fled in terror of being captured; but, as time went on, they discovered too often that their flight was arrested by the deadly bullet; and, in order to save their lives, they sometimes yielded to the brutal grasp of the captor.' See also *Friendly Mission*, p. 218, journal 1 July 1830.

<sup>16</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 237, journal 20 August 1830.

<sup>17</sup> *Tasmanian*, 25 June 1830, p. 608. This ambush is described in Chapter 9.

these attacks were not only responsible for the physical destruction of Aborigines; they were also seared deep into the psyche of survivors.

### Defensive Tactics

Daring attacks are those posterity remembers, but no less important to any fighting force are their defensive tactics. As noted above, campfire smoke frequently gave away the Vandemonians' position to their enemies. One alternative was to have no fire at all, eat uncooked food, and use blankets and dogs to keep warm, but this was generally not practicable.<sup>18</sup> As a compromise, Robinson observed that Vandemonians managed 'with small fires, the smoke of which is scarcely perceptible. They will collect the small dry sticks for this purpose.'<sup>19</sup> Aborigines also learnt to make their camps in discreet places. One settler claimed that '[t]heir rendezvous are always very difficult to access, – and they generally choose a spot for their nocturnal resting place, which will command a view of the approaches.'<sup>20</sup> In choosing their campsites, Vandemonians were aiming to obstruct not just their assailants' visibility, but also their access. In 1830, the *Launceston Advertiser* reported on one pursuit in which the party located 'their fires at night but in such a scrubby place that they could not approach them undiscovered; in fact one of the men says they could not find the way to their fires through it'.<sup>21</sup>

The use of decoy fires was another effective strategy. In November 1828, a roving party that ambushed a band near the Eastern Marshes was 'quite dismayed' to find a decoy fire burning 100 yards from the main encampment.<sup>22</sup> A similar decoy was described in 1830, when an ambush party discovered a band that had secreted itself 'in a deep scrubby ravine' and kindled a fire well away from the main body.<sup>23</sup> In this case, the band also used sentinels, a common precaution when travelling through enemy territory. In fact, Gilbert Robertson may have been right in 1830 when he claimed that Vandemonians 'always keep regular sentries'.<sup>24</sup> One party was certain of success as they approached a sleeping band, until 'two blacks watching on the hills on both sides of the gulley [*sic*], gave the alarm, and the tribe fled.'<sup>25</sup> More ethereal

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, p. 599, journal 28 December 1831.

<sup>19</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 585, journal 14 December 1831.

<sup>20</sup> Brown to Aborigines Committee, 5 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 136-37. See also Scott to Douglas, c.3 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 652-55.

<sup>21</sup> *Launceston Advertiser*, 2 August 1830, p. 3. The band was discovered 'seated at no less than 7 fires, at the nearest of which there were 20 able men; no women, nor any children'.

<sup>22</sup> Robertson to Lascelles, 17 November 1828, TAHO, CSO1/331, pp. 170-71. Robertson, the party leader, was also baffled by 'the artful position that the natives had taken up having a very wet marsh in front and an almost impenetrable scrub on their left'.

<sup>23</sup> Walpole to Arthur, 29 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/324 & *Hobart Town Courier*, 6 November 1830, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Robertson to Aborigines Committee, 4 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 48.

<sup>25</sup> *Colonial Times*, 19 March 1830, p. 3. See also Beams account in Chapter 9.

means of protection were also available. Robinson's envoys told him 'that the devil comes and tells them when the white men are coming'.<sup>26</sup> Vandemonians no doubt found this belief consoling, but they also possessed a more practical warning system.

Bands throughout the interior were generally accompanied by dogs, sometimes dozens of them. Remarkably, these half-wild companions do not appear to have impeded their ability to remain covert. 'When I set out', Robinson observed:

I had hoped to have found the natives by their dogs, but the tact these people have in quieting their dogs is truly surprising: they had thirty dogs and we never heard the least noise of them until we approached them. As they hunt the dogs don't follow the game and seldom bark.<sup>27</sup>

Dogs were used for hunting during the day and for warmth and protection at night.<sup>28</sup> Rather than being a hindrance, dogs probably saved many Aboriginal lives by barking at the scent or sound of intruders, and allowing them the precious seconds necessary to escape.<sup>29</sup> The price for ignoring such warning signs could be fatal. Robinson was told that before one ambush the 'dogs barked but the natives paid no attention, when immediately after they were fired upon.'<sup>30</sup> But dogs could do more than just sound the alarm. Chapter 9 observes that dogs sometimes set themselves upon white assailants, which meant many of the bullets intended for Aborigines were expended on their canine protectors.<sup>31</sup>

Ambushes often succeeded despite a band's precautions. In most cases, the chaos of the escape and the firepower of the ambush party made counter-attacking impossible, but occasionally an opportunity presented itself. When a pursuit party 'came up' with their quarry in July 1827, for instance:

the men discharged their guns then became alarmed at the great numbers of the natives and retreated being pursued by the whole body for two miles and to within

<sup>26</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 587, journal 15 December 1831. See also pp. 525, 596, journals 24 October & 24 December 1831.

<sup>27</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 298, journal 2 November 1830. See also p. 530, journal 30 October 1831.

<sup>28</sup> See, for instance, Emmett, 'Reminiscences', pp. 1-2.

<sup>29</sup> See, for instance, Melville, *History of Van Diemen's Land*, pp. 71-72; *Friendly Mission*, p. 295, journal 1 November 1830; *Colonial Times*, 18 September 1829, p. 3 & 19 March 1830, p. 3. There are numerous cases of parties coming upon campsites that had been abandoned only minutes before, their occupants (perhaps warned by their dogs) leaving everything as they fled (see especially TAHO, CSO1/316).

<sup>30</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 555, journal 17 November 1831. See also *Hobart Town Courier*, 6 November 1830, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> There are many examples of parties destroying dogs after an ambush, which was no doubt an additional trauma to the Aborigines, who were known to be very fond of these animals. See, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, p. 824, journal 2 September 1833. In fact, in 1826, the Hobart press gave birth to a rumour that Aboriginal women frequently allowed their own infants to starve so they could suckle orphaned puppies. See, for instance, *Colonial Times*, 16 June 1826; *Hobart Town Gazette*, 4 February, 7 & 21 October 1826. Some probably did suckle puppies, but not at the expense of their children's lives.

three quarters of a mile of my house, one of Mr Herbert's men being unable to run fast fell into the hands of his pursuers by whom he has been murdered.<sup>32</sup>

Several such examples make it clear that, when able to regroup and ascertain their enemy's vulnerability, Aborigines could stand their ground and mount counter-attacks, but these occasions were rare.<sup>33</sup>

Vandemonians also had to be on the defensive during the day, but because of their superior bushcraft they were far less vulnerable. In fact, they appear to have been rather self-assured in daylight hours. One settler observed that 'the Natives think lightly of the whites',<sup>34</sup> and Robinson found they possessed 'a mean opinion of the white peoples' knowledge'.<sup>35</sup> It was their renowned ability to 'baffle all pursuit' that gave Aborigines this confidence.<sup>36</sup> Robinson found they 'ridiculed the idea of white men following them in the woods and many amusing stories have since been told connected therewith'.<sup>37</sup> East coast settler, Louisa Meredith, later insisted it was 'owing to their extreme cunning, activity, and stealthy cat-like nature, [that] retaliation was all but impossible'.<sup>38</sup> The Aborigines Committee also marvelled at 'their almost inconceivable adroitness in effecting their escape'.<sup>39</sup> Robinson dispelled some of the mystery in conversation with his envoys:

[They had] the greatest confidence in themselves and when pursued will, contrary to the general notion of the whites, secrete themselves and allow their pursuers to pass them, and then go in a contrary direction; and as a proof of their confidence they walk deliberately away with heavy loads of flour in the face of their crime.<sup>40</sup>

Another tactic was to throw pursuers off their track with fire. In January 1830, for instance, John Batman and his party were pursuing a band that 'set fire to the bush before us every 2, or 3 miles ... to lead me in the wrong direction.'<sup>41</sup> Indeed, Aborigines seem to have utilised a range of strategies in eluding pursuers, and their success-rate, even when hemmed in, astonished their enemy.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Bryan to Abbott, 2 July 1827, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 41-44.

<sup>33</sup> See, for instance, *Hobart Town Gazette*, 6 August 1824, p. 2; *Hobart Town Courier*, 21 March 1829, p. 1; Calder, *Some Accounts*, pp. 92-101.

<sup>34</sup> O'Connor to Aborigines Committee, 17 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>35</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 297, journal 1 November 1830.

<sup>36</sup> Quotation from O'Connor to Parramore, 11 December 1827, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 66.

<sup>37</sup> Robinson to Colonial Secretary, 11 May 1838, cited in Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, p. 37. See also Plomley, *Jorgenson and the Aborigines*, p. 23 & *Friendly Mission*, p. 524, journal 23 October 1831.

<sup>38</sup> Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania*, p. 81.

<sup>39</sup> Aborigines Committee report, 19 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 41.

<sup>40</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 568, journal 2 December 1831.

<sup>41</sup> Batman to Anstey, 1 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/320, section B.

<sup>42</sup> See, for instance, Gilbert Robertson's journal, 14 November 1829, TAHO, CSO1/331, pp. 88-89.

## Movement

By 1829 the interior was crawling with armed parties. In the vicinity of Bothwell, for instance, there were ‘no less than twelve parties scouring the country’.<sup>43</sup> Skilled as the Vandemonians were at evading these parties, it was taxing to be harried so incessantly. In search of respite, many bands began resorting, even in winter, to the remoter and less hospitable regions of the island.<sup>44</sup> In the Middlesex district, for instance, Hellyer discovered a band occupying the snowy Vale of Belvoir in winter.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, in October 1831, Robinson’s envoys told him the remaining ‘hostile natives’ had taken refuge ‘in the obscure recess of the forest or fastness of the hills between the rugged tiers.’<sup>46</sup> The Central Plateau, despite being exposed and resource-scarce, became an important sanctuary during the latter part of the War. Its extreme climate posed enormous challenges to anyone attempting to survive there in the winter months, but the threat of armed parties was great enough for some bands to justify the risk and torment. For example, Bothwell’s police magistrate observed in 1830 that, ‘notwithstanding the severe winter’, a small band remained in the highlands of the upper Shannon.<sup>47</sup> However, sustained refuge in such places was impossible. Dangerous as it was, Aborigines were forced to spend much of their time in and around the sprawling invaded districts.

The best country for hunting was also the best for farming, and over the course of the 1820s, the whites came to occupy almost all of it. Roaming flocks and herds meant that stockmen ventured far and wide, and with constantly prowling roving parties, places of safety in the low country all but disappeared. Traditionally, Vandemonian bands had followed regular migratory routes via rich hunting grounds, plentiful stretches of coastline and culturally significant sites.<sup>48</sup> In fact, one east coast settler asserted that the timing and direction of these migrations ‘is so well known as to enable anyone to describe it.’<sup>49</sup> Naturally, those who sought to harm Aborigines could exploit this knowledge.<sup>50</sup> Bands ‘moved with intervals so regular’, West wrote, that the ‘person employed in their pursuit, by the aid of his native allies, was able to predict at what period and place he should find a tribe’.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Gilbert Robertson’s journal, 27 September 1829, TAHO, CSO1/331, p. 84.

<sup>44</sup> Remote is of course a relative term, but even before contact some areas were much less populated and hospitable than others, thus the Vandemonians would have had a sense of remoteness. By the late 1820s, their sense of remote was probably similar to the whites’. On the Central Plateau, for instance, it was much safer during the winter months as the cattle and stockmen had descended to lower pastures (see, for instance, Jorgenson to Anstey, 14 July 1829, TAHO, CSO1/320, section D).

<sup>45</sup> Hellyer to Robinson, c.25 August 1830, in *Friendly Mission*, p. 272.

<sup>46</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 529, journal 30 October 1831. See also pp. 525-26, journal 25 October 1831.

<sup>47</sup> Vicary to Colonial Secretary, 25 May 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 515-16.

<sup>48</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>49</sup> Brown to Aborigines Committee, 5 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, p. 137.

<sup>50</sup> See, for instance, Young to Dumaresq, 8 June 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 928-29; Hobler, *The Diaries of Pioneer George Hobler*, pp. 103-4, 20 September 1828; Hamilton to Colonial Secretary, 5 January 1829, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 214.

<sup>51</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 20.

To the extent that Aborigines were predictable, they were vulnerable, but they soon realised this and adapted. During the winter, for instance, they had traditionally moved less and encamped longer, but the white man had since learnt this was ‘the best season for pursuing them’.<sup>52</sup> Consequently, many bands began to stay mobile year round, often forging new and inconspicuous tracks parallel to their traditional routes.<sup>53</sup> One settler noted that ‘the Blacks avoid, as much as they possibly can, taking the Hills, – always keeping about the gullies, and rivers, where there is much scrub and stunted undergrowth.’<sup>54</sup> Robinson’s envoys added that they ‘never stopped on the plains where the white people stayed’.<sup>55</sup> This meant the most congenial camping spots had to be abandoned for less conspicuous ones that tended to be deficient in the usual sources of food, water and comfort. It seems, however, that some bands found ways around this. For example, when a pursuit party surprised a band near Cockatoo Valley in 1828, they ‘found several glass bottles full of water with strings tied round their necks.’<sup>56</sup> Other bands learnt to store their plundered flour in discreet underground caches.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, Vandemonians readily altered or abandoned their age-old customs in response to white invasion, sometimes in quite creative ways.

In addition to changing their migratory patterns, the Vandemonians were also forced to ‘move with greater rapidity than formerly’.<sup>58</sup> One settler recalled that ‘the rapid movements of the blacks was [*sic*] remarkable, forty or fifty miles a day must have been travelled by them at the height of the war’.<sup>59</sup> Moving at such speeds gave the Aborigines an extraordinary advantage, but this came at a cost. John West claimed that ‘individuals of the tribes were often left behind. It was the custom to fix small pieces of stick at short distances, to assist the stragglers in rejoining their main body.’<sup>60</sup> Other bands notched trees for the same purpose,<sup>61</sup> but often the sick, elderly and wounded could not keep up.

Although whites did not record it, people with serious wounds were almost certainly abandoned by bands being pursued; there was no alternative. Men and women with gunshot wounds or amputations endured unimaginable suffering in order to keep pace. The bodies of

<sup>52</sup> Brodribb to Aborigines Committee, 11 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 52.

<sup>53</sup> There is diverse evidence for this. For examples, see *Colonial Times*, 22 May 1829, p. 3; Curr to Colonial Secretary, 5 September 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 950-53; Jorgenson to Anstey, 14 July 1829, TAHO, CSO1/320, section D.

<sup>54</sup> Brown to Aborigines Committee, 5 February 1830 TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 136-37.

<sup>55</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 577, journal 7 December 1831.

<sup>56</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 1 November 1828, p. 2.

<sup>57</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 924, journal 28 June 1834.

<sup>58</sup> O’Connor to Aborigines Committee, 17 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>59</sup> Emmett, ‘Reminiscences’, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 30. See also Pearson to Aborigines Committee, 13 June 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 381-82 & Jorgenson to Anstey, 30 November 1830, TAHO, CSO1/320, section D.

<sup>61</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 549, journal 12 November 1831.

those few who survived the War were covered in scars. Robinson observed among the Mairremmener people who surrendered to him in 1831, that ‘there was scarcely one among them – man, woman, or child, but had been wounded by the whites.’<sup>62</sup> Years later, on Flinders Island, he again remarked in his journal on the prevalence of gunshot wounds, going so far as to say:

there is not an aborigine on the settlement nor an aborigine that has been at the settlement but what [*sic*] bears marks of violence perpetrated upon them by the depraved whites. Some have musket balls now lodged in them such as Adolphus ... Some of the natives have slugs in their bodies and others contusions, all inflicted by the whites.<sup>63</sup>

Although some of these wounds were no doubt received in internecine combat, the scar left by a ¾ inch slug is difficult to mistake.<sup>64</sup> These projectiles inflicted terrible wounds, shattering bones, rupturing vital organs and causing massive internal haemorrhaging. For most victims, walking anywhere would have been grueling, thus they had to be left behind; any other course would place the whole band in jeopardy.<sup>65</sup> The same difficulty presented itself to the sick and elderly. They too often struggled to maintain the pace of wartime movement, and were sometimes abandoned out of necessity.<sup>66</sup> From the absence of old, ill or recently wounded people in the bands encountered late in the War, it would appear that this expedient was not uncommon.<sup>67</sup>

Sources also suggest that infanticide played a role in the decreasing number of Aboriginal children reported during the 1820s.<sup>68</sup> There is some evidence of bands engaging in this practice for reasons of expediency before the War. Hellyer observed in 1826 that, in the yet-to-be-settled northwest, ‘when their mobs are too strong to get food for all they have their

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<sup>62</sup> Robinson’s speech to the Australian Aborigines Protection Society, 19 October 1838. See also *Colonial Times*, 20 November 1838, p. 373.

<sup>63</sup> *Weep in Silence*, p. 464, journal 22 July 1837.

<sup>64</sup> At the point of impact, molten slugs flattened out causing enormous damage. Robinson appears to have recognised the difference (See *Friendly Mission*, pp. 457, 908, journals 11 September 1831 & journal 8 April 1834).

<sup>65</sup> Making this problem even more acute was the shortage of women, who, as Chapter 2 notes, carried all the bands’ children and possessions so the men could hunt.

<sup>66</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 23 October 1830, p. 2; William Grant’s journal, 13 February 1829, TAHO, CSO1/331, pp. 126-27; *Friendly Mission*, pp. 59, 776, journals 27 April 1829, 17 June 1833. Although the latter example took place on the west coast, the band in question was in a time of great stress. In good times, it seems Vandemonians did their best to assist the weak and disabled. This point is often made by reference to a partially crippled hunchback, observed by the Bligh and d’Entrecasteaux expeditions in 1789 and 1793, who was not only accepted, but appeared to be a man of standing (see *Hobart Town Courier*, 4 April 1829, pp. 2-3 & Melville, *History of Van Diemen’s Land*, pp. 78-79). See also Gregg, ‘A Young Englishman’s Observations’, p. 21 for examples of man with curved spine and a severely burned child.

<sup>67</sup> Weaker individuals were also those less likely to escape an ambush, so we must be careful not to overestimate the prevalence of such expedients.

<sup>68</sup> See, for instance, Roth, *The Aborigines of Tasmania*, pp. 22, 162-63 & Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania*, p. 143.



killing days.<sup>69</sup> A similar remark was made by Reverend Dove, who spent several years with Vandemonians on Flinders Island:

The force of the parental instinct was usually strong enough to render the maintenance of their offspring a care and a delight. Instances, however, have occurred in which the child has been wantonly sacrificed to the dread of famine.<sup>70</sup>

The most convincing evidence, however, comes from the surgeon and keen observer, John Barnes, who discovered that '[i]n the event of the mother dying after parturition the infant is invariably sacrificed.'<sup>71</sup> Such evidence is insufficient to gauge the frequency of infanticide before colonisation, but during the War it probably became relatively common.<sup>72</sup> Treasury clerk Henry Emmett later wrote:

the settlers noticed the marked decrease of children: this arose from the policy of the tribes, who finding themselves hard pressed, and who feared the betrayal of their haunts from the cry of their little ones, resolved upon themselves the destruction of their children. Mothers were known to murder their own babes, rather than have them fall into the hands of their implacable enemies.<sup>73</sup>

Likewise, West asserted that '[i]nfanticide was not common; although, in the latter days, when harassed by daily conflict, the practice, was not unknown.'<sup>74</sup> Infanticide may have been seen as a form of euthanasia; still, no matter how they conceptualised it, taking the life of a loved one must have been a wrenching ordeal.

### **Wartime Relationships and Emotions**

The Vandemonians were highly emotional people, though the blinkers of the white man's prejudice often blinded him to this. 'It has generally been supposed that the Aborigines of this Island are a cold and phlegmatic people, and void of sensibility', wrote 'AN EYE WITNESS' in a letter to the *Tasmanian* in June 1830. Yet, the correspondent continued:

[those] who have the opportunities to observe them clearly, well know to the contrary, and that the keenest sensibility is woven into their nature. Many of the Aborigines ...

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<sup>69</sup> Thomas, *Henry Hellyer's Observations*, pp. 23-24, diary 6 June 1826. How Hellyer obtained this information is unclear.

<sup>70</sup> Cited in Roth, *The Aborigines of Tasmania*, p. 163.

<sup>71</sup> Cited in Gregg, 'A Young Englishman's Observations', p. 21. Barnes was in the colony from 1822 to 1828, and spent considerable time observing fringe-dwelling Aborigines around Hobart.

<sup>72</sup> As noted in Chapter 6, children born to white fathers were occasionally killed out of resentment, but this is a very different phenomenon to the expediency killings under discussion. See also West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, pp. 80-81.

<sup>73</sup> Emmett, 'Reminiscences', p. 1. See also Calder, *Some Accounts*, p. 64.

<sup>74</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 79. If James Hobbs (evidence to Aborigines Committee, 9 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 50) is to be believed, Vandemonians went to greater lengths to preserve male rather than female children, possibly because they needed warriors.

have evinced the strongest feelings and the most overpowering emotions when meeting with their friends, or relations.<sup>75</sup>

Only those who had never witnessed their familial affections could have dehumanised the Vandemonians as heartless brutes.

‘Never shall I forget the unsophisticated, the sincere and warm affection of those interesting people’, wrote Robinson, after seven years of constant association with Vandemonians.<sup>76</sup>

Numerous contemporaries made similar comments regarding their emotional and affectionate nature. Rarely was this more evident than when friends and family, torn apart by war, were reunited. In September 1829, for instance, eleven captives were escorted to the Richmond gaol where three of their relatives had for some time been imprisoned. A local correspondent observed that:

immediately on their coming in sight of the newly arrived party, the cry of welcome was evinced, and on coming near each other the feeling portrayed on either side would have done honour to the most civilized – the two women long confined clasped to their arms children and grandchildren each shedding floods of tears of joy. The mutual happiness displayed in the countenances of these poor savage people beggars all description, the mothers overwhelmed in transport in having found their children, and the children in having recovered a parent.<sup>77</sup>

On another occasion, describing a reunion at Macquarie Harbour, Robinson wrote that:

a truly affecting scene took place between TARTOYENRUC and his wife, and between the mother WYREE and her son. She run [*sic*] towards him and on embracing him the involuntary lachryma [tears] burst forth. Indeed the meeting was truly affecting between the two tribes; a reciprocity of feeling was apparent between them.<sup>78</sup>

The angst of being separated from loved ones weighed heavily on the minds of Aborigines. Robinson noted in 1831 that:

when the LAIR.MAIR.REN.NER woman saw the tracks of her brother she wept much. I asked what she did that for, when WOORRADY said because she MOUNER.CADDY.NOTE.TE, loved him. They have strong natural affections, especially for those who are related to them by ties of consanguinity.<sup>79</sup>

The feelings of loss and powerlessness were even more profound when loved ones fell into the hands of the enemy. A Mairremmener woman stated that when she was captured and gaoled with four others at Launceston, their kinfolk made smoke signals in the surrounding hills to

<sup>75</sup> *Tasmanian*, 25 June 1830, p. 608.

<sup>76</sup> *Weep in Silence*, p. 300, journal 14 October 1835.

<sup>77</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 3 October 1829, p. 2.

<sup>78</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 805, journal 24 July 1833. For more examples of emotional reunions, see *Friendly Mission*, pp. 815, 816, journals 10 & 11 August 1833 & Chapter 6.

<sup>79</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 550, journal 13 November 1831.

reassure them.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, the desire to be reunited with those who had been imprisoned or exiled probably influenced the decision of some bands to surrender.<sup>81</sup>

A particularly warm bond existed between parents and their children. This bond could go violently awry if daughters rejected their parents' wishes in marital matters,<sup>82</sup> but for the most part, Aborigines were firm, guiding and loving parents. There are numerous references to filial affection, particularly in Robinson's journals and the writings of the French explorers.<sup>83</sup> While women were remarkably tender and attentive parents, men too were 'fond of their offspring', Robinson observed, 'and here the ties of nature must be acknowledged to weigh in a superior degree'.<sup>84</sup> In January 1830, he appealed to the Governor on behalf of a woman who:

has been, and still is, in considerable grief respecting her offspring a lad about 14 years of age, who is at the present time attached to Jorgen Jorgenson's Party. ... The generality of parents entertain a strong natural feeling towards their offspring, and are wont to deplore the loss of a child, with the same degree of anguish that is experienced in civilized life.<sup>85</sup>

Later that year, a South Esk River settler relayed the equally anxious request of a 'Chief' who had surrendered himself two days before:

The native boy now with Mr Batman is son to the chief [Mannalargenna], his name is Trelabuenea, his father is most anxious to see him as also the other lad whom Mr Batman took and who I believe is with Mr Robinson, his mother and father are both here and most anxious for the return of the parties to see them.<sup>86</sup>

When he finally got to see his son, who had been taken from him in an ambush fourteen months earlier, Mannalargenna 'took him in his arms kissed him and carried him about all day'.<sup>87</sup> The strength of these bonds is suggestive of the pain that must have been endured by parents who saw their children killed or captured, or were forced in desperation to sacrifice them so that others might survive.

Children were spared none of the War's horrors. They quickly developed a healthy fear of the white man. According to Robinson:

the natives when they wanted to quiet their children, told them that the NUM LAGGER, i.e. the white man come, which always was sufficient to quiet the children.

<sup>80</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 546, journal 10 November 1831.

<sup>81</sup> See Chapter 16 and Appendix 1.

<sup>82</sup> See *Friendly Mission*, pp. 592-93, journal 20 December 1831.

<sup>83</sup> See, for instance, C. Dyer, *The French Explorers and the Aboriginal Australians 1772-1839*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, Queensland, 2005, pp. 151-52; *Friendly Mission*, pp. 777, 809, 868, 869, journals 17 June & 1 August 1833, 5 & 14 January 1834.

<sup>84</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 88, journal 30 September 1829.

<sup>85</sup> Robinson to Arthur, 15 January 1830, TAHO, CSO1/317, pp. 128-29. See also, *Friendly Mission*, pp. 109-10, journal 1 January 1830.

<sup>86</sup> J. K. Gray to Arthur, 19 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 684-87.

<sup>87</sup> J. K. Gray to Arthur, 19 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 684-87.

Hence the name of white man infuses into the minds of these poor creatures the same terror.<sup>88</sup>

There are no surviving accounts from children's perspectives, but given their immaturity and vulnerability, it is reasonable to assume their experiences were even more terrifying and confusing than their parents'. Many of them had never known a stable existence, having been hunted by the invaders for as long as they could remember. The long marches and cold nights pushed them to their physical limits, but it was above all the constant loss of friends and relatives that suffused their young lives with sadness and instability.

Relationships between men and women were central to Aborigines' experience of the War. As Keith Windschuttle has pointed out,<sup>89</sup> the poor treatment of women has too often been glossed over by historians.<sup>90</sup> As Chapter 2 explains, women bore a disproportionately heavy labour burden, were sometimes sexually exploited, and experienced varying levels of domestic violence. However, it does not follow from this that Aboriginal women lived in perennial terror and misery, or that their relationships were loveless. Windschuttle failed to balance his evidence for domestic 'dysfunction' with any of the more numerous examples of love, devotion and tenderness that have survived. There is no denying a Vandemonian woman could suffer rough treatment from her husband, but this was an accepted part of life, and it was perfectly consistent with a loving relationship.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, almost all recorded spousal violence resulted from jealousy, suggesting passion rather than disregard. 'As husbands they seem regardful of their wives', wrote Robinson, but this 'often amounts to jealousy; and the slightest suspicion of a rival affection is attended by the utmost efforts to crush the aggressor by the weight of his adversary's indignation.'<sup>92</sup>

There is no evidence that women resented the burdens placed on them, or that violence evaporated spousal affections. Women were unwavering in their care and affection towards their husbands. When Penenebope became delirious with fever at Macquarie Harbour in 1833, Robinson noted that his wife, Temgorerer, 'accompanied him and watched him with the greatest tenderness'.<sup>93</sup> And this comportment went both ways. During the same outbreak of

<sup>88</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 665, journal 16 July 1832.

<sup>89</sup> Windschuttle (*Fabrication*, pp. 379-86) went on to argue that it was above all the 'abuse and neglect of its women' that led to the collapse of Vandemonian society. The fact that they comprised one of the oldest societies on Earth did not escape Windschuttle, yet he believed their endurance 'owed more to good fortune than good management.' However, unless we accept that 'luck' indulged the Vandemonians continuously for 34,000 years, this conclusion need not be taken seriously.

<sup>90</sup> Windschuttle, *Fabrication*, pp. 379-86. See, for instance, S. Breen, 'Re-inventing Social Evolution', in R. Manne (ed.) *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, Black Inc., Melbourne, 2003, pp. 148-50; Windschuttle, *Fabrication*, pp. 379-86 & Calder, *Levée, Line and Martial Law*, pp. 76-80.

<sup>91</sup> This is not to excuse domestic violence, which is *always* detestable, and should check any inclination to romanticise Aboriginal culture. However, the aim of this Chapter is to facilitate understanding, not judgment.

<sup>92</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 88, journal 30 September 1829.

<sup>93</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 809, journal 1 August 1833.

disease, Robinson observed that ‘wives were most assiduous in their attention upon the husbands, so likewise the husbands upon their wives.’<sup>94</sup> He observed similar behaviour when visiting the seriously ill woman, Morley, on Bruny Island. Her husband Joe ‘was much affected [and] frequently shed tears. Indeed this man’s affection, both to his wife and children, was very striking: in civilised society he would be termed a good husband and kind parent.’<sup>95</sup> Other Europeans observed similar spectacles. George Washington Walker wrote of his experience on Flinders Island in 1832:

Pellonnymyna was suddenly seized with an attack of illness and became unable to support herself. The faithful lover was at her side. Seizing her in his arms he bore her to a place of safety, and during her indisposition, which was tedious, he nursed her with the greatest attention, and most affectionate assiduity. She at length recovered, when, overcome with gratitude she declared, that none but Pannehrooneh should be her husband; and from that time they have become united by the most inviolable attachment.<sup>96</sup>

It can be difficult for westerners today to comprehend how inequality and violence might be compatible with a loving relationship, but other cultures have (and do) achieve such a balance. Had Windschuttle’s emotionally barren picture of Aboriginal gender relations been accurate, all the deaths, injuries, abductions and rapes suffered at the hands of white men might have been easier to bear. But he could scarcely have been more wrong. Many Vandemonians witnessed their loved ones suffer such fates, and the psychological trauma that this caused probably dominated their experience of the War. For obvious reasons, there is little record of how Aborigines responded to seeing their family killed, maimed and abducted in the immediate aftermath of the white man’s predatory raids; nor are there any illuminating accounts of how women and girls felt as they were being abducted or gang-raped. The closest we have are the reminiscences of Trugernanna:

We were camped close to Partridge Island when I was a little girl, when a vessel came to anchor without our knowledge of it, a boat came on shore, and some of the men attacked our camp. We all ran away, but one of them caught my mother, and stabbed her with a knife, and killed her. My father grieved much about her death, and used to make a fire at night by himself, when my mother would come to him. I had a sister named Moorina; she was taken away by a sealing boat. I used to go to Birch’s Bay; there was a party of men cutting timber for the Government there, the overseer was Mr. Munro; while I was there two young men of my tribe came for me ... two of the sawyers said they would take us in a boat to Bruny Island, which we agreed to. When we got about half-way across the Channel, they murdered the two natives, and threw them overboard, but one of them held me.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>94</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p.816, journal 11 August 1833.

<sup>95</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 61, journal 18 May 1829. See also, for instance, pp. 256, 569, journals 30 September 1830 & 2 December 1831.

<sup>96</sup> Walker, *Life and Labours*, pp. 103-4, journal 12 October 1832.

<sup>97</sup> Reminiscence dictated to Alexander McKay, cited in Calder, *Some Accounts*, pp. 104-5.

This account reveals little emotion; however, given the abundance of evidence attesting to the emotionality of the Vandemonians, the psychological agony suffered by Trugernanna and hundreds like her can be confidently inferred.

Descriptions of Aborigines grieving, whilst rarely associated with violence, are common. When death struck, the relatives of the victim were generally inconsolable, and witnesses never failed to be moved by their compassion for the dying. For example, when disease tore through the Bruny Island population in 1829, Robinson observed that '[t]he gentle feelings of our natives are almost borne down with agonising sympathy'.<sup>98</sup> Likewise, the doctor on Flinders Island, Arthur Walsh, exclaimed: 'The poignancy of sorrow expressed by them on the death of their friends (which has been often truly painful to me to witness) cannot be surpassed among any class of people'.<sup>99</sup> The expressions of grief when a child died were equally dramatic. When John Batman buried an Aboriginal baby at his farm in 1830, for instance, he found the mother 'crying over the Grave' the following morning.<sup>100</sup> But whilst grief was inevitable, its severity could be mitigated if traditional funerary practices were observed.

Some of the significance of funerary and mourning practices was captured by the missionary James Backhouse when he witnessed the following ritual:

The ashes of the dead were collected in a piece of Kangaroo-skin, and every morning, before sunrise, till they were consumed, a portion of them was smeared over the faces of the survivors, and a death song sung, with great emotion, tears clearing away lines among the ashes.<sup>101</sup>

As Chapter 2 observes, these rituals were immensely important to Vandemonians, so they did all they could to retrieve the bodies of their fallen comrades.<sup>102</sup> However, this was often too dangerous. The wartime death of a loved one was wrenching enough, but when families and friends could not conduct the proper funerary rites to ensure the soul's transmigration, they often had to fear the dead man's disturbed spirit, as well as the white men who killed him.

<sup>98</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 83, journal 21 September 1829. See also, for instance, pp. 69, 807, 809, journals 8 July 1829, 29 July 1833 & 2 August 1833.

<sup>99</sup> Walsh to Robinson, 28 July 1838, in *Weep in Silence*, p. 569.

<sup>100</sup> Batman to Anstey, 22 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/320, section B. See also Batman diary, 6 April 1830, unpublished, NLA, N994.6 & *Friendly Mission*, pp. 868, 869, journals 5 & 14 January 1834.

<sup>101</sup> Backhouse, *A Narrative*, p. 105. Backhouse recorded the emotion and affection of Aborigines at many points throughout his *Narrative*.

<sup>102</sup> See, for instance, Brown to Aborigines Committee, 5 February 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, p. 139; Thomas, *Hellyer's Observations*, p. 12, diary 6 June 1826; *Colonial Advocate*, 1 May 1828, p. 134; *Colonial Times*, 10 November 1826, pp. 2-3 & Roth, *The Aborigines of Tasmania*, pp. 119-20; *Friendly Mission*, pp. 282, 335, journals 12 October & 26 December 1830.

## Desperation

The preceding discussion of familial relationships debunks the cold and animalistic image of Vandemonians promoted by Windschuttle, but it also presents a sample of the ways they responded emotionally to the death and estrangement wrought by white invasion. In a similar vein, the remainder of this Chapter will be devoted to examining the causes and effects of the fear, torment and desperation they suffered during the conflict. In doing so, it needs to be appreciated that the plummeting population and soaring violence meant surviving Aborigines' involvement in the conflict increased exponentially with every year (see fig. 5).

At the same time, the number of white men was increasing by several thousand every year (see fig. 1). By 1830, there were almost 100 white men in eastern Van Diemen's Land to every one Aborigine. The Vandemonians were being overwhelmed on all sides, and hunted unrelentingly by armed parties, even in the remote areas that had once provided them sanctuary. The result of this 'harassing life', West explained, was that:

parents and children had been divided, and families had been broken up in melancholy confusion: indeed, they had ceased to be tribes, and became what they were called – mobs of natives, composed often of hereditary enemies. Infanticide and distress, rapid flight, and all the casualties of a protracted conflict, threatened them with weedy destruction.<sup>103</sup>

They lived more or less constantly on the run. By day they moved fast, keeping to the thick bush, hunting and raiding where they could, and watching and listening constantly for armed parties. This frequently entailed travelling on rough tracks, suffering aching and lacerated feet, exhaustion and long periods of hunger. At night, they had to fear not just the fiends of their imaginations, but also the white men who sought any opportunity to ambush them. Robinson observed 'they were much afraid' when having to camp in the vicinity of armed parties.<sup>104</sup> Under such circumstances, it is easy to see how their nerves would become frayed.

Harried as they were, Vandemonians found sleep hard to come by, and the resulting weariness must have been detrimental to their mood and functioning.<sup>105</sup> Cold, hunger and anxiety were all obtrusive to their slumber, but for staving off sleep there was probably nothing that rivaled the unremitting torment of the 'native pox'.<sup>106</sup> This unidentified skin infection discussed in Appendix 3 produced scabby pustules that could cover the entire body. In 1826, the *Colonial*

<sup>103</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 66.

<sup>104</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 536, journal 4 November 1831. See also, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, pp. 327, 521, 652, journals 17 December 1830, 20 October 1831, 20 June 1832.

<sup>105</sup> There is no evidence of sleep deprivation in the written record. Under the circumstances, however, it was almost certainly common.

<sup>106</sup> The painful symptoms gonorrhoea and other venereal diseases, which were so prevalent among the Vandemonians (see Appendix 3), must have added to their discomfort and distress.

*Times* reported that ‘during the last few years many of the native tribes are suffering severely from some most loathsome coetaneous disease, which almost covers the body; it spreads itself to that extent, that the sight is quite disgusting’.<sup>107</sup> Whatever this condition was, it seems eventually to have afflicted almost every band on the island. After contracting it himself, Robinson declared that he ‘would sooner face a thousand hostile natives than have this horrid infection.’ It caused him to lament the plight of the Aborigines who had ‘no means of relief except by bursting the skin. I have seen these poor creatures in the greatest torment and scratching themselves as if they would tear the flesh, the blood trickling down their naked bodies.’<sup>108</sup> We can only imagine how this grotesque infection magnified the misery of the Vandemonians’ wartime ordeal.

The War all but destroyed the Vandemonians’ political and cultural networks, making it difficult for survivors to maintain their traditions and ceremonies. In 1829, for instance, Jorgenson noted that the ‘grand corroboree’ held each November on the plains northwest of the Ouse River, was cancelled ‘for fear of being surprised’.<sup>109</sup> Many smaller ceremonies and dances were probably also cancelled on account of the noise and distraction they created, or because there was no one left to perform them. Another reason may have been that they were simply not in the mood. Either way, this cultural disruption must have caused the Vandemonians great distress.

Notwithstanding the onslaught of tragedies suffered by Aborigines during the Black War, there is a danger of construing their conduct as merely a series of survival responses.<sup>110</sup> In addition to their myriad defensive concerns, most Vandemonians also appear to have been committed to pressing their offensive campaigns against the white invaders, which consumed vast swaths of their time and energy.<sup>111</sup> Thus, although they endeavoured to stay safe, warm and fed, they were also driven by feelings of hatred and injustice. They were both victims *and* agents, inflicting and enduring suffering in like measures. In the end though, the cost of fighting a guerrilla war against insurmountable odds was more than they could bear.

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<sup>107</sup> *Colonial Times*, 16 June 1826, p. 3.

<sup>108</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 172-73, journal 30 March 1830. Robinson’s envoys shared with him their interpretation of the affliction: ‘The natives have a tradition that this distemper is caused by a RAEGEOWRAPPER or evil spirit, and that when one of the tribe dies of this infection he walks by night, having a quantity of the distemper in a kangaroo skin, and imparts it to the rest of the tribe.’

<sup>109</sup> Plomley, *Jorgenson and the Aborigines*, p. 68. Jorgenson did not say how he came to know this.

<sup>110</sup> Despite their awful situation, it seems the Vandemonians did not lose their sense of humour entirely. Robinson’s journals are full of examples of them making jokes and playing tricks, and occasionally they even displayed humour during their attacks on whites (see, for instance, Plomley, *Jorgenson and the Aborigines*, p. 72 & *Friendly Mission*, pp. 239-40, journal 23 August 1830).

<sup>111</sup> This is abundantly clear from the material presented in Chapters 8 and 10.



*White*

## 13

**The Black Line**

[N]otwithstanding the clamour and urgent appeals which are now made to me for the adoption of harsh measures, I cannot divest myself of the consideration that all aggression originated with the white inhabitants, and that therefore *much ought to be endured* in return before the blacks are treated as an open and accredited enemy by the government.

Arthur to Goderich, 10 January 1828<sup>1</sup>

But how much was too much? Before the spring of 1830, the blacks had killed or wounded at least 417 colonists, and plundered or destroyed thousands of pounds worth of property.<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, demands for ‘decisive action’ were growing louder. Governor Arthur, who had long resisted the use of force, both because of his genuine sympathy for the natives and because he feared rebuke from London, finally capitulated to public pressure. On 9 September 1830, he enjoined the whole community to ‘come forward and zealously unite their best energies with those of the Government in making such a general and simultaneous effort as the occasion demands.’<sup>3</sup> It was to be a mass mobilisation of all able-bodied men to defend the colony – a *levée en masse*.<sup>4</sup> This was a truly immense and desperate operation, but as Arthur put it, the blacks had ‘become so formidable, that the strongest possible united effort of the Community is necessary to subdue them.’<sup>5</sup>

The operation became known as the Black Line, and questions surrounding its origins, legality and historical significance have been debated from the moment it was conceived.<sup>6</sup> These are all interesting lines of inquiry, and historians have discussed them at length. On the other hand, practically nothing has been written about the motivations and experiences of the men who participated, nor of those on the home front. The following discussion fills this void by drawing on an array of new and old sources, and for the first time examining the Line from an

<sup>1</sup> Cited in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, pp. 4-5. My italics.

<sup>2</sup> See tally in Appendix 2.

<sup>3</sup> Government Order no. 9, in *Hobart Town Courier*, 11 September 1830, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> As military historian John Connor (‘British Frontier Warfare Logistics’, p. 149) pointed out, ‘[c]alling for volunteers from the civilian population (a *levée en masse*) is not unusual, but Arthur’s use of a human line to clear an enemy from an area of land was.’ Connor presented two examples of military operations that employed similar tactics, but in its finer details, the Black Line appears to have been unique.

<sup>5</sup> Government Order no. 9, in *Hobart Town Courier*, 11 September 1830, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> The term ‘Black Line’ was first used in 1835 by Henry Melville (*History of Van Diemen’s Land*, p. 90).

eye-level perspective – an approach I develop further in an upcoming article in the *Journal of Australian Studies*.<sup>7</sup> But first, an overview of how this intriguing event unfolded.

### Overview of the Operation

According to Arthur, the Black Line comprised 2,200 men, 550 of whom were soldiers.<sup>8</sup> These figures agree closely with those tallied by officers and magistrates in the field,<sup>9</sup> but historians have invariably mistaken the proportions of assigned convicts, ticket-of-leave convicts and free men. In 2010, Graeme Calder asserted that 738 convicts and 912 settlers participated, and in 2012, Lyndall Ryan suggested very similar numbers.<sup>10</sup> Such figures, however, come from misinformed nineteenth century commentators. The actual civilian constituency, as derived from official registers, commissariat records and elsewhere, was around 440 free men, 800 assigned convicts and 400 ticket-of-leave convicts.<sup>11</sup>

Settlers were encouraged, not only to join in person, but also to contribute assigned servants. Selected assignees, along with all ticket-of-leave men, were compelled to participate, though the latter had the option of providing a substitute. Police magistrates arranged their local forces into parties of ten, each led by a settler and a guide.<sup>12</sup> Whilst Arthur maintained overall control, Major Sholto Douglas of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Regiment was entrusted with the immediate command of the forces, which were divided into three divisions. Captain Donaldson led his division of just over 300 men from Launceston and Norfolk Plains up over the Central Plateau. Captain Wentworth, with parties stretching from Lake Echo to New Norfolk, led his division eastward. The third division, commanded by Douglas himself, pushed south from positions along the St. Pauls River. Before advancing on 7 October, the three divisions formed a staggered front over two hundred miles long (fig. 20, line AAA).

<sup>7</sup> N. Clements, “‘Army of Sufferers’: The Experience of Tasmania’s Black Line”, *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2013, pp. 19-33.

<sup>8</sup> Arthur to Colonial Secretary, 20 November 1830, SLNSW, ML, A1771, vol. 28, p. 47.

<sup>9</sup> The number of soldiers is precisely tallied in TAHO, CSO1/324 (563 including commanders). The accuracy of this figure lends credence to Arthur’s total figure of 2,200, which is also consistent with the Commissariat Department’s records (TAHO, CD11/1-2, pp. 394-95). Every participant was to be issued a pair of shoes, and as noted below, 2,340 pairs were supplied.

<sup>10</sup> Calder, *Levéé, Line and Martial Law*, p 183; Ryan, *Tasmanian Aborigines*, p. 134. Ryan (p. 138) also claimed these 1,650 ‘settlers and their servants returned home on the 31 October’, but this is incorrect. The whole force was disbanded together on 26 November.

<sup>11</sup> The most revealing data set for the constituency of the Line is in TAHO, CSO1/328, pp. 15-56. If we accept the total of 2,200, then CSO1/328 accounts for 60 per cent of non-military participants, listing 262 free men, 234 ticket-of-leave men, and 469 assigned convicts.

<sup>12</sup> In addition to these settler leaders, there were at least eight ticket-of-leave men who led parties (see TAHO, CSO1/328, pp. 15-56), though none had free men under their command.

Initially, the parties were too widely spaced to form a linked cordon, so they embarked on a series of scouring missions through the natives' 'most likely haunts'. By 12 October, Douglas and Wentworth's forces linked up, creating what was intended to be an unbroken line from Waterloo Point, east to Table Mountain, and south to the Derwent (fig. 20, line CCC). While Donaldson maintained a safety net between Lake Echo and Lake Sorell,<sup>13</sup> Douglas and Wentworth continued advancing southeast in an ever-tightening cordon, gradually converging on East Bay Neck until the operation was called off on 26 November.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the Line's scale and complexity, the survey and commissariat departments were given only a month to plan and organise it. This allowed insufficient time to make all the arrangements, let alone to reconnoitre the terrain. Furthermore, the best maps of the day were incomplete and inaccurate, and the infrastructure necessary to ensure efficient provisioning and communication was all but non-existent. None of this, however, seemed to dampen the ardour of the community. With every native 'outrage', support for conciliation waned, and it was now widely believed that force was the only alternative. In Oatlands, Thomas Anstey remarked: 'The whole country is now convinced of the wisdom of Coll. [sic] Arthur's plan'.<sup>15</sup> Even the anti-government newspapers enjoined their readers to rally to the cause.<sup>16</sup> Enthusiasm was not always accompanied by optimism, but virtually everyone agreed that something had to be done.<sup>17</sup> According to the *Hobart Town Courier*, the native problem had become 'the important crisis on which the future rise or fall of this beautiful colony is to be determined.'<sup>18</sup>

## Sources

Three separate accounts of the Black Line, written by participants, have come to light since 2010. Before this, with the exception of a brief extract in an obscure 1961 publication, none of

<sup>13</sup> This was intended to net any natives that slipped through the main line. On 25 October, Arthur sent for Donaldson's division to reinforce the main Line in the southeast.

<sup>14</sup> East Bay Neck is the neck of land 600 yards wide connecting the Forrester and Tasman Peninsulas to mainland Tasmania. Today it is the site of the township of Dunalley.

<sup>15</sup> Anstey to Colonial Secretary, 14 October 1830. TAHO, CSO1/324.

<sup>16</sup> The *Launceston Advertiser*, the *Colonial Times* and, to a lesser extent, the *Tasmanian*. They did, however, express some doubts about the efficacy of the plan. On 8 October, for instance, the *Colonial Times* (p. 3) predicted that, 'although the snake may be slightly scratched, we foretell that it will not be killed.'

<sup>17</sup> The only conscientious objector outside of Hobart was Thomas Gregson, who 'totally disapproved and probated the whole system carrying on against the Blacks considering it altogether illegal, cruel and bloody'. His objection, however, was highly unpopular. When forwarding Gregson's response to the Governor, Thomas Anstey wrote: 'This man is decidedly mad ... His refusal to send men is noticed for consideration by all his neighbours – and the reasons objected for ridiculous' (Salmon to Anstey, 28 September 1830, TAHO, CSO1/324. Anstey's note is dated 4 October).

<sup>18</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 11 September 1830, pp. 2-3.

them appeared in the literature.<sup>19</sup> The only other accounts that probed the day-to-day experience were a dozen pages in George Lloyd's *Thirty-Three Years in Tasmania and Victoria* (1862),<sup>20</sup> several correspondents' letters to the newspapers, and a handful of official letters. However, these sources are insufficient for a study of any depth, which has only been made possible by the revelation of these three, previously overlooked accounts.

The first of these is the diary of Edward Dumaresq, the police magistrate of New Norfolk.<sup>21</sup> I found this document miscataloged in the Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office in 2011, and discovered that no scholar of the Black War had yet referred to it. Dumaresq was in charge of distributing forces raised from New Norfolk and Hobart, and took direct command of at least twelve parties during the first month of the campaign. His diary entries are generally brief and impersonal; still they offer an invaluable insight into daily life in one sector of the Line.

The second source is a private reminiscence written in 1873 by Henry James Emmett who led a party from Hobart during the Line. I found this document also in the Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office, and it too was cited nowhere in the Black War literature. This is a detailed account, written chronologically, though not always dated. Unlike Lloyd's book, there is no suggestion that Emmett was writing for publication.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, it harmonises with the other sources, and in particular, with the journal of Robert William Lawrence, which was rediscovered by Eleanor Cave and myself in 2010.<sup>23</sup>

Lawrence, who was the son of the colony's wealthiest landowner, was twenty-three at the time of the Line, and his journal is by far the richest personal account of the event known to exist. Lawrence's 'Journal during the expedition against the Blacks' is a highly personal document, offering historians a raw, spontaneous account of day-to-day life on the Line as he led his party over the Central Plateau from Launceston. Together, these three accounts force us to reconsider the Black Line. Not only do they facilitate an entirely new perspective, allowing us to see the campaign through the eyes of participants, but they also challenge a number of long-standing assumptions. Supplemented by these sources the historian can now ask: What were

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<sup>19</sup> T. E. Burns, J. R. Skemp & F. Ellis, *Van Diemen's Land Correspondents 1827-1849*, Queen Victoria Museum, Launceston, 1961, p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> Lloyd was a party leader during the Line.

<sup>21</sup> Edward Dumaresq's diary, 1829-30, TAHO, NS953/1/376.

<sup>22</sup> Emmett, 'Reminiscences', TAHO, NG1216. Emmett never produced a final version of his reminiscences. It was edited into its current format by his grandson, who in turn bequeathed it in typescript form to his close friend and respected historian, Sir William Crowther. The original has not been located.

<sup>23</sup> Launceston's Community History Centre holds a photocopy of Lawrence's journal (QVMAG, CHS53-33/2). The original has not been located. The copy was bequeathed to the Centre by N. J. B. Plomley, who never cited the journal in any of his publications. I am indebted to Eleanor Cave for her transcription of this document. See also E. Cave, "'Journal during the expedition against the blacks': Robert Lawrence's Experience on the Black Line", *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2013 pp. 34-47.

the motivations and experiences of the men? Was the operation well organised and executed? Did the forces really advance in a cordon? What were participants' objectives? Such questions can now be answered with some conviction, and what follows is an attempt to do just that.

### **Motivations**

A week before the parties began moving out, blacks killed three of Major Gray's servants on the South Esk River, and grievously wounded a fourth.<sup>24</sup> The *Colonial Times* reported that:

the men in question were at work at a little distance from their hut, when the Natives rushed on them, and beat them to death with their waddies. They afterwards disfigured them in a most shocking manner, cutting the heads off of three of them, and placing them between their legs.<sup>25</sup>

The last detail may or may not have been true, but it made the desired impression. Rancour against 'these barbarous savages' was raised to a fever pitch, but this was not the only reason men volunteered.

Twenty-one year old Emmett, a clerk in the Colonial Treasury Office in Hobart, evinced great excitement at the prospect of 'seeing the whole county'.<sup>26</sup> On 1 October 1830, he and his party, consisting of his brother, two other free men, five ticket-of-leave men and three of his own servants, assembled at 6 am in the courtyard of the Hobart post office, along with 110 other men:

a large number of persons assembled including the merchants, Public Officers and others, to witness our departure for the scene of the intended operations, all appearing most anxious in the work before them. At 7 o'clock the Governor and his staff appeared, entered the centre of the square, and addressed us in a most feeling speech of upwards of an hours duration, giving us an outline of our intended duties, everything being done in Military style. At the conclusion of his speech His Excellency spoke to me in the most friendly manner, thanking me for what I had undertaken. He also requested me to take charge of thirty more men as far as New Norfolk.<sup>27</sup>

This was clearly a proud moment for Emmett. Although he came from a respectable family, the young man had achieved nothing of note himself, and had no military experience; yet now he was commanding forty men at the personal behest of the Governor, marching off to defend the colony. It was well known that several parties had recently been rewarded and extolled for

<sup>24</sup> John Batman's diary, 25 September 1830, NLA, N994.6 & TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 646-59.

<sup>25</sup> *Colonial Times*, 1 October 1830, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Emmett to Colonial Secretary, 17 September 1830, TAHO, CSO1/328, p. 182; Emmett, 'Reminiscences', p. 2. In preparation for the Line, Emmett spent a small fortune, purchasing a double-barrelled shotgun, a suit of moleskins, a knapsack, a compass, and a spare pair of boots.

<sup>27</sup> Emmett, 'Reminiscences', p. 2. Emmett claimed there were 300 men assembled, but Arthur recorded only 120 (memorandum, 1 October 1830, TAHO, NS953/1/476).

capturing or killing blacks, so Emmett and the other leaders no doubt recognised the Line as an opportunity for personal advancement. This sentiment was shared by Robert Lawrence, a twenty-three year old who was also seeking to escape his father's shadow.<sup>28</sup> Throughout the campaign Lawrence went to extraordinary pains to appear zealous and competent in the eyes of officialdom. However, it was twenty-one year old George Lloyd who best described this emotion: 'our hearts [were] fluttering with hope and excitement, at the prospect of distinguishing ourselves by the capture of even one of the dreaded savages.'<sup>29</sup>

Volunteers certainly found the social recognition alluring, but they were a small minority of the total force. Most of the men who comprised the Black Line were not there by choice, and this all but precluded their chances of gaining prestige. Although some convicts were initially seduced by the novelty of the campaign and the chance to kill blacks, anyone familiar with the ruggedness of the interior would have felt less enthusiasm. The possibility of pardons or reduced sentences might have offered some encouragement, but Arthur made it clear that, even if a party was successful, 'no individual is to expect any specific reward'.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, more than half the participants had no incentive to exert themselves.<sup>31</sup>

The reluctance of ticket-of-leave men to participate is far better evidenced, because many took the option of hiring a substitute. Little is known about how substitutes were paid, but given that the campaign was expected to last at least a month, it was probably substantial. Their willingness to make these costly trade-offs suggests many ticket-of-leave men had strong reasons to avoid serving.<sup>32</sup> Most subsisted on a financial knife-edge, and would have been loath to leave their employment for any length of time.<sup>33</sup> They were probably also unenthused about making additional sacrifices for a colony founded for and by their oppression. And there was no shortage of free men ready to exploit this reluctance. Given the option of volunteering without remuneration or taking part as a paid substitute, many chose the latter; around half of all free participants served as substitutes.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Lawrence had already established himself as a gifted botanical collector who sent specimens to the famous English botanist, Sir William Hooker. Indeed, he spent a significant portion of his journal of the Line describing plants (see E. Cave, 'Flora Tasmaniae: Tasmanian Naturalists and Imperial Botany, 1829-1860', PhD thesis, University of Tasmania, History & Classics, 2012).

<sup>29</sup> Lloyd, *Thirty-Three Years*, p. 227.

<sup>30</sup> Government Order no. 9, 9 September 1830, in *Hobart Town Courier*, 11 September 1830, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> See, for instance, the letters of Jorgen Jorgenson in TAHO, CSO1/320, section D & TAHO, CSO1/324.

<sup>32</sup> It was not always the ticket-of-leave men themselves who footed the bill. Some settlers paid for a substitute if they deemed their ticket-of-leave man too valuable to lose for the duration for the campaign (see, for instance, *Hobart Town Courier*, 6 October 1830, p. 2).

<sup>33</sup> The government provided rations to the families of those ticket-of-leave men who could demonstrate they would be otherwise left destitute (Mulgrave to Colonial Secretary, 9, 12, 14 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/329, pp. 12, 79, 99).

<sup>34</sup> Out of a sample of 112 free participants, who formed parties tasked with scouring inside the Line, sixty-eight were substitutes (TAHO, CSO1/324).

The military's participation was also involuntary. Whilst it is reasonable to assume not all were thrilled to forfeit the relative ease and freedom of their regular posts, references to their conduct were rarely disparaging. The Line punctuated the boredom of military life, but, more importantly, it gave soldiers a chance to display their authority and expertise to settlers who outranked them in society, and to convicts who could effectively outrank them in the roving parties. As Chapter 7 observes, soldiers and convicts tended to despise each other, which may help explain the undisciplined behaviour of convicts during the campaign, while soldiers were reported to have been unusually 'well-conducted'.<sup>35</sup>

### Setting Out

The Black Line, before it became a harrowing ordeal, was quite the party. Enormous excitement surrounded the event, particularly in the major towns. 'Large posting bills was [*sic*] stuck up calling upon all settlers and their servants to volunteer',<sup>36</sup> and in the days leading up to the campaign, Launceston and Hobart became hives of activity.<sup>37</sup> Writing to his wife on the eve of the Line's departure, Robinson remarked: 'We are all bustle in this [northern] part of the island. Nothing is heard or thought of but the blacks.'<sup>38</sup> In Launceston, the local newspaper described the scene:

all day this flourishing little town was full of bustle ... The parting from friends and acquaintances sometimes led to an extra glass, but excepting here and there, a married man forced from his home his wife and family, we saw none but joyous faces, and as far as we could judge, and willing hearts.<sup>39</sup>

The men made the most of the festivities, much to the ire of their leaders, who had to control them. On the morning they marched out of Launceston, four of Robert Lawrence's eight ticket-of-leave men 'gave me the slip' – probably still inebriated – and by the end of the day he had lost another.<sup>40</sup> When his depleted party arrived at Norfolk Plains he found his two commanding officers embroiled in a bitter squabble over where to assemble, and most of the day was squandered in the organisational bedlam that ensued. The next day, with the sheepish return of his missing ticket-of-leave men, Lawrence proceeded south with the rest of Donaldson's force to scale the imposing Great Western Tiers. He and his men spent the night of 7 October bracing gale-force winds and snow as they huddled together half way up the

<sup>35</sup> See, for instance, Lawrence journal, QVMAG, CHS53-33/2 & TAHO, CSO1/320 & 324.

<sup>36</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 258, journal 1 October 1830. Robinson observed these displayed in George Town.

<sup>37</sup> The majority of participants were from outside the major population centres of Launceston and Hobart.

<sup>38</sup> Robinson to wife, 6 October 1830, in *Friendly Mission*, p. 467.

<sup>39</sup> *Launceston Advertiser*, 11 October 1830, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> Lawrence journal, 5 October 1830, QVMAG, CHS53-33/2.

escarpment. The following evening, Lawrence recorded, 'we made a very bad ascent, having to crawl on our hands and knees, in some places, and to assist one another over the craggy rocks'.<sup>41</sup> Once atop the plateau, the blacks would have to wait. As the snow again began falling, shelters were frantically erected by 300 shivering men, who must have been wondering what they had let themselves in for.<sup>42</sup>

In the south the situation was similarly disordered. Henry Emmett's newfound sense of responsibility was heightened even further by the intriguing scene he and his men encountered as they marched out of town:

It was quite pitiful to observe the sad state of the poor women and children who followed a considerable way sobbing with their aprons to their eyes, and others with plates of foods and mugs of tea, as if it was to be the last meal we should ever partake of, or that we should never need them again.<sup>43</sup>

Once he had left the women behind:

a fresh trouble commenced this being to get the men past the public houses. The day had been extremely warm and we were all very tired. I stopped for a short time on the road side and allowed some beer to be brought down, but I would not suffer the men to enter the inn, fearing I might lose some of them, though they tried and begged to be permitted to do so. I was determined however, not to grant such permission.<sup>44</sup>

Despite this vigilance, a ticket-of-leave man named Paddy managed to sneak away to the Black Snake Inn, though he turned up two days later, begging forgiveness. Unfortunately for Emmett, the pandemonium of this first day compared mildly to what lay ahead.

### **Life on the Line**

Once atop the Central Plateau, Lawrence's division had four days to reach their rendezvous point at Lake Sorell. Although they were supposed to be advancing in unison, the parties had scarcely any idea of their own location, let alone where others were. Lawrence, for instance, led his party to the outskirts of Bothwell before realising his mistake and beginning the twenty-mile hike back. Eventually he made it to Lake Sorell, but he was too late. Captain Donaldson had already left to establish a line of posts between Lake Sorell and Lake Echo.<sup>45</sup> On 15 October, Lawrence was directed to take up a position not far from Lake Sorell, only to find the next day that 'the Sergeant had been playing a trick upon me, having directed me to a

<sup>41</sup> Lawrence journal, 6-8 October 1830, QVMAG, CHS53-33/2.

<sup>42</sup> Lawrence journal, 8 October 1830, QVMAG, CHS53-33/2.

<sup>43</sup> Emmett, 'Reminiscences', p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> Emmett, 'Reminiscences', p. 2. 'It was the additional 30 men that gave me the trouble', Emmett complained.

<sup>45</sup> Lawrence journal, 8-13 October 1830, QVMAG, CHS53-33/2.



station on a high hill, out of the line'.<sup>46</sup> To make matters worse, his men were beginning to protest against the operation, and fight among themselves. The men 'quarrel with one another at a great rate', Lawrence wrote on 17 October: 'The novelty of this campaign is past, and consequently, no longer gives to it that attraction which it at first had.' If that was not bad enough: 'Poor Ford has a severe scrophulous attack in the leg; he is scarcely able to walk; and Mr Thornberry has a severe attack of laziness.'<sup>47</sup> Even Lawrence, when ordered on a 'scouring' mission to search the country about the Ouse River on 22 October, lamented: 'I was so dreadfully fatigued that I was quite unable to accomplish such a journey, being like some of the men scarcely able to stand.'<sup>48</sup>

The exhaustion felt by men on the Line was not because the government had been frugal in rationing them. They were entitled to '3 oz. of sugar, ½ oz. tea, 2 lbs. flour, and 1½ lb. of meat' per day, and after much complaining, ¼ lb. tobacco, ½ oz. soap and ½ oz. salt was added.<sup>49</sup> At almost 4,000 calories this should have been, if not ideal, at least sufficient to sustain them.<sup>50</sup> The problem was accessing these rations, and Lawrence soon realised that 'many will suffer materially from want of food during this campaign'.<sup>51</sup> There were thirty depots scattered throughout the zone of operations, but they were rarely close and convenient.<sup>52</sup> George Lloyd's provisioning party got lost attempting to find one of these depots and he and his men went 'not tasting food for [a] full sixty hours.'<sup>53</sup> Another party got so lost they 'were four days without provisions ... [such that the leader] was obliged to eat the sheep skin straps of his knapsack.'<sup>54</sup>

Even when the ration depots could be found, there was no guarantee they would contain rations. Unprecedented rains flooded rivers, and turned the already dismal roads into impassable bogs, which made transporting supplies extremely difficult.<sup>55</sup> Major Douglas informed the Governor on 25 October that most parties were not receiving their rations, and what they did receive was so rotten it made them sick.<sup>56</sup> The same was true in Wentworth's

<sup>46</sup> Lawrence journal, 15 & 16 October 1830, QVMAG, CHS53-33/2.

<sup>47</sup> Lawrence journal, 15 October 1830, QVMAG, CHS53-33/2.

<sup>48</sup> Lawrence journal, 22 October 1830, QVMAG, CHS53-33/2.

<sup>49</sup> Government Order no. 10, 22 September 1830, in *Hobart Town Courier*, 25 September 1830, p. 2; Commissariat memorandum, 9 September 1830, TAHO, CSO1/329, p. 229.

<sup>50</sup> The World Health Organization (*Technical Report Series*, no. 724, 1985) recommended 2,900 calories per day for men 19-50 years old. Given the exertion men on the Line were subject to this intake was probably adequate.

<sup>51</sup> Lawrence journal, 13 November 1830, QVMAG, CHS53-33/2.

<sup>52</sup> Lawrence, Emmett and Lloyd all complained of this.

<sup>53</sup> Lloyd, *Thirty-Three Years*, p. 223. For a brief account of the problem of getting lost by a participating soldier, see Clark [Christian name unrecorded], 'A Young Soldier in the Antipodes', in T. H. McGuffie (ed.), *Rank and File: The Common Soldier at Peace and War* Hutchinson, London, 1964, p. 174.

<sup>54</sup> Gray to Colonial Secretary, 1 November 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 714-17.

<sup>55</sup> Douglas to Arthur, 30 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/324; *Hobart Town Courier*, 30 October 1830, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> Douglas to Arthur, 25 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/324. See also Plomley, *Jorgenson and the Aborigines*, p. 107.

division, where Emmett claimed the rations ‘made us all very unwell’.<sup>57</sup> On the Plateau, Donaldson’s division was equally disgusted by the food. Having received only rancid meat, Lawrence was forced against orders to send his men to hunt kangaroo. The situation was so bad by 3 November that an entire section of Douglas’ division refused to move until supplied with adequate provisions.<sup>58</sup> By this stage, it seems, the blacks were fading as a priority.

Weather conditions compounded the men’s misery. A correspondent to the *Colonial Times* reported that, from the outset, ‘the weather in many parts of the country was more severe than had been experienced at any time during the past winter. It was exceedingly cold, accompanied with squalls of wind, rain, and hail.’<sup>59</sup> According to Lloyd:

The rain fell in torrents during many hours of each day and night for the first fortnight; and rendered travelling through dripping scrubs, flooded creeks, and deep marshes, almost impracticable. When the time for the general halt came round, wet blankets, and soaked gray cotton horse-rugs, afforded but a sorry prospect for a refreshing night’s repose.<sup>60</sup>

The historian James Bonwick interviewed ‘a veteran shepherd, who had been a guide [on the Line]’, and reported of some of the hardships encountered by this man and his party: ‘Torn by the scrub, hungry and wet, their camp was most miserable. Without tents, the men had to pass an inclement night on that bleak hill, around the fire, or stowed away in the hollows of trees.’<sup>61</sup> Their only relief from the elements came when they stopped long enough to erect makeshift huts. ‘The plan of these huts varied according to the taste of the proprietor’, Robinson observed when he came the way of the Line in January 1831: ‘some had verandahs in front with seats, others large porches; some had bark tables; some was [*sic*] thatched with grass; some was [*sic*] in the form of a semicircle.’<sup>62</sup> Lawrence was especially proud of his hut: ‘a very comfortable one it is; indeed it is quite a mansion, built of stone, and roofed with stringy-bark.’<sup>63</sup> These huts were sanctuaries against the wild weather and scrub, but outside them the men suffered dreadfully from exposure. Most participants wore cotton garments, but these offered little protection against the weather, and were no match against the scrub, which left them ‘almost destitute of clothing’.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Emmett, ‘Reminiscences’, p. 5.

<sup>58</sup> Douglas to Arthur, 3 November 1830, TAHO, CSO1/324.

<sup>59</sup> *Colonial Times*, 22 October 1830, p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> Lloyd, *Thirty-Three Years*, p. 219. Lawrence and Emmett also remarked on the inclement weather.

<sup>61</sup> Bonwick, *Last of the Tasmanians*, p. 156.

<sup>62</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 348-49, journal 14 January 1831.

<sup>63</sup> Lawrence journal, 15 October 1830, QVMAG, CHS53-33/2.

<sup>64</sup> Arthur to Colonial Secretary, 20 November 1830, TAHO, CSO1/329, p. 168. According to Lloyd (*Thirty-Three Years*, p. 219), ‘the impervious kangaroo-rug of the man well versed in such matters was held at a considerable premium, and caused many a shivering spectator to break the Tenth Commandment [coveting that which is thy neighbour’s].’

The men's loudest complaints, however, were about shoes. Although they were heavily laden with equipment and provisions, many participants wore poor quality shoes that failed within the first fortnight.<sup>65</sup> In the third week of the campaign, Captain Donaldson complained that 'a great proportion' of his men were barefooted, and by November protests were erupting.<sup>66</sup> On 12 November, Captain Mahon warned Major Douglas that his men were shoeless and threatening to desert unless appropriate footwear was immediately issued. Mahon lamented that 'I have myself worn out two new pairs of strong Boots since I left Oatlands. And in a few more days I shall I fear be as naked as the men.'<sup>67</sup> Commissariat officers supplied 2,340 pairs of shoes, but most did not reach the men until near the end of the campaign.<sup>68</sup>

By mid October, Douglas and Wentworth's divisions had linked up (see fig. 20, node of lines CCC and DDD), from whence a tight cordon was to be maintained as the parties advanced towards the Tasman Peninsula. During the day, the men were ordered to advance parallel to each other at even distances, and to scour the country as they went. At night, sentries were to patrol back and forth between their party's campfires.<sup>69</sup> This was all in vain though. Vast swamps, impenetrable scrub and rugged mountains all militated against an effective cordon. 'The line was very soon broken', Emmett recalled:

indeed it could not have been otherwise, even with double the number of men we could not have done so in consequence of many obstacles in the way of a given progress, gullies, and rocky hills were continually met with, rendering the task an utter impossibility[.]<sup>70</sup>

Historian James Calder recorded a similar account told to him by Captain Vicary, a corps commander who informed him that, as his men were 'crossing a very rugged eminence ... their advance was wholly broken in ten minutes, and to use his own expression, "The devil a Man of them did he see the whole of the rest of the day"'.<sup>71</sup> This not only rendered farcical any notion of a 'line', it also meant that countless men got lost, exposing them to terrible hardships and dangers.

The gaps in the Line were large and numerous, and reports began filtering back of groups of natives slipping through in several places. Then, after receiving a report on 25 October of a

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<sup>65</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 349, journal 14 January 1831. The equipment men were required to carry included firearms and ammunition, handcuffs (of which 300 pairs were dispensed), and up to ten days provisions (see Emmett, 'Reminiscences', p. 4 & TAHO, CSO1/324). Robinson came across scores of disintegrated moccasins when he passed over the country in January 1831.

<sup>66</sup> McDowell to Moodie, 25 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/329, p. 126.

<sup>67</sup> Mahon to Douglas, 12 November 1830, TAHO, CSO1/324.

<sup>68</sup> Commissariat distribution log, October & November 1830, TAHO, CD11/1-2, pp. 394-95.

<sup>69</sup> Arthur to Douglas & Wentworth, 24 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/324.

<sup>70</sup> Emmett, 'Reminiscences', p. 4. Often parties were forced to proceed in single file (see, for instance, Jorgenson to Anstey, 30 November 1830, TAHO, CSO1/320, section D; Lloyd, *Thirty-Three Years*, p. 222).

<sup>71</sup> Calder, *Some Accounts*, appendix, p. i. Vicary commanded one of Captain Wentworth's corps from the west. See also Emmett, 'Reminiscences', pp. 3-4.

band trapped within the cordon,<sup>72</sup> Arthur halted the forces in a thirty-mile arc from Sorell to Prosser's Bay (see fig. 20, line HHH). For more than three weeks the force stayed in this position. A participant writing to the *Colonial Times* described their strategy for maintaining the cordon:

every leader has nine men placed under him, and he has three different huts for these nine men and himself, each but at about every 150 yards apart, containing three of the men. When under marching orders, or expecting any rush, then one man stations himself at 50 yards, and another at 100 yards from the hut – thus the lines are at present concentrated, so that each man is only 50 yards from his next companion. The watches are very tedious, each individual having to perform eight hours duty as sentry in the course of the day and night. The rapid manner in which the watch-word passes along the line is really astonishing; indeed, the passing of the word 'all's well,' and a message, and sometimes a letter to the next sentry, to be forwarded to the next, *ad infinitum*, is our only amusement when on duty[.]<sup>73</sup>

At night the scene was impressive. According to Emmett:

Six fires were kept up by each party all night, one in front of each tent, and three others fifty yards in front ... It was an exceedingly pretty sight to see the fires for miles, especially on the tops of hills, and many of the sentries watchcrys coming down the line at intervals helped the effect.<sup>74</sup>

In order to maintain so many fires, the parties were occupied almost full-time in gathering firewood, and the longer the Line remained stagnate the scarcer dry timber became. Emmett recalled that, for those not on sentry duty, 'there was plenty of work all day collecting firewood for the night fires'. Robinson's description of the site a year later is insightful:

The road through which we travelled this day was where the Line had been formed ... Hundreds of thousands of trees had been stripped of their bark and cut down to make fires. The trees were stuck with bullets. On one hill a brush fence had been erected as *chevaux de frise* [spiked wooden barricade] against the aborigines. The ground was torn up by the trafficking of carts, horses, bullocks &c in conveying supplies. Shoes of a light description, worn out, was [*sic*] strewed about. It had all the appearance of a great assemblage of persons having met, and vast destruction was effected among the trees of the forest. Stripped of their covering they were left to droop and die, a monument of a well intended but ill-devised plan. Nature had been completely dismantled.<sup>75</sup>

By November the men were sick from the food, frozen from the wind and rain, and bored senseless from the endless patrolling and wood gathering. Worst of all, no one knew what the plan was. The men were given no forecast of operations, because none existed. The Governor

<sup>72</sup> This was the Walpole incident (discussed below), in which two natives were captured and two killed.

<sup>73</sup> *Colonial Times*, 19 November 1830, p. 2.

<sup>74</sup> Emmett, 'Reminiscences', p. 5. Jorgenson (*Jorgenson and the Aborigines*, p. 107) and Lloyd (*Thirty-Three Years*, p. 219) described similar scenes.

<sup>75</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 349, journal 14 January 1831.

developed his strategy according to incoming intelligence, and although there was no shortage of reports, sifting fact from fiction proved difficult. The very structure of the operation made it an engine of rumour. All manner of reports wound their way along the Line, some genuine, some invented, but each distorted as they were shouted along in a cacophony of accents. On 7 November, Lawrence recorded a typical incident of confusion. When a soldier saw what he thought to be blacks in the darkness around him:

he fired, & yelled Look out the Blacks ... [and ordered] the men to 'keep up the fires in front of the Line', for the purpose of obtaining a greater light. This order was misunderstood and was converted by one of the sentries in to 'keep up the firing down the line'.<sup>76</sup>

On another occasion Lawrence wrote of 'a report flying about the line, that we are to move to the North-eastern extremities of the Island shortly.'<sup>77</sup> Initially, he believed it, but like most of the reports 'flying about', it proved to be false.<sup>78</sup>

The most bizarre report was of white men leading the natives, which first appeared on 13 October 1830. The *Hobart Town Courier* urged caution: 'Misguided as they doubtless are by white miscreants ... they are no more to be trusted than ought to be a wild beast, a lion or tiger'.<sup>79</sup> Men on the Line supposedly found shoe prints at native campsites, or heard from others who had, but it was the colourful tale of a convict named Thomas Savage that really propelled the myth. On 16 October, Savage reported having been kidnapped the night before by natives led by a bushranger named Brown. Somehow Governor Arthur believed the story, for which a special edition of the *Hobart Town Courier* was printed.<sup>80</sup> That same day, on the Plateau, Lawrence heard that the Governor had himself 'fallen in with a large party of Natives ... headed by two White men.'<sup>81</sup> There is no good evidence that colonists ever fought alongside blacks, but the idea persisted because, as argued in Chapter 7, many found it difficult to believe the island's 'ignorant blacks' were capable of managing such effective resistance themselves.

The most common reports were of attempts by blacks to penetrate the Line.<sup>82</sup> These had an unnerving effect on the men, and meant that they had to fear not just the blacks, but also their trigger-happy comrades. There were dozens of reported sightings; most were probably

<sup>76</sup> Lawrence journal, 7 November 1830, QVMAG, CHS53-33/2.

<sup>77</sup> Lawrence journal, 18 October 1830, QVMAG, CHS53-33/2.

<sup>78</sup> Arthur had initially intended sending forces into the northeast, but this never eventuated (see, for instance, Wedge's memorandum, 10 October 1830 & Arthur to Donaldson, 13 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/324).

<sup>79</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 13 November 1830, p. 3.

<sup>80</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 13 November 1830.

<sup>81</sup> Lawrence journal, 18 October 1830, QVMAG, CHS53-33/2.

<sup>82</sup> This effect was magnified on the home front where in circulation 'a thousand vague and absurd reports of Battles fought and captives taken' (Burnett to Arthur, 15 October 1830, cited in Reynolds, *An Indelible Stain?*, p. 69).

inventions or mistakes, but they all had to be treated seriously, especially as no one knew how many blacks they were facing.<sup>83</sup> Although some were known to have escaped, it was generally believed, at least until mid November, that a number of blacks remained within the cordon. To promote vigilance, Arthur actively recirculated the reports he received of sightings and encounters, but by now, nothing could salvage the men's enthusiasm.

### **The Home Front**

Serving in the town guard was, for some, a less strenuous and more visible way of aiding the cause. In Hobart and Launceston, civilians took over guarding the jails, ports and public buildings, thereby freeing up the military.<sup>84</sup> In Hobart, the presence of a civilian guard proved quite the novelty until they were dismissed (with great indignation) when fresh troops arrived in late October.<sup>85</sup> In Launceston, the volunteers served until 1 December, by which time they had gained a reputation for 'inefficiency', 'dissent' and overzealously guarding the public houses.<sup>86</sup> But whilst they were the subjects of much conversation, the intrigue of the town guards failed to distract the community from the gravity of the events unfolding in the interior.

The inhabitants of Launceston and Hobart read the newspapers with intense interest, and were, according to Colonial Secretary John Burnett, 'on the tip-toe for intelligence from the 'seat of war''.<sup>87</sup> Melville recalled that, 'during the months of September, October, and November ... the black war, and nothing but the black war, was the subject of general attention.'<sup>88</sup> Great intrigue surrounded the Line, but so too did sincere concern. Burnett observed that every citizen of Hobart 'seems to take the greatest interest in, and to feel the most intense anxiety respecting the present operation'.<sup>89</sup> The minister at St David's church caused outrage when he introduced a new prayer into the liturgy, asking for the success of the campaign and the men's safe return. Conservative parishioners insisted that, although everyone was concerned for the men in the field, the liturgy could only be altered by royal proclamation.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Surveyor, John Helder Wedge ('Autobiographical Sketch', unpublished manuscript, 1837, SLNSW, ML, A576, pp. 18-19) believed that profiteering contractors actively fabricated rumours so as to keep the forces in the field longer. Another possibility is that bored, attention-seeking sentries simply made up sightings. The *Colonial Times* (19 November 1830, p. 2) asserted the figure of 700, but Chapter 14 argues there were probably only 20-30 natives inside the Line when it halted.

<sup>84</sup> Eighty-four volunteers served in Hobart, and fifty-six in Launceston. George Town (and possibly other smaller towns) also raised a civilian guard.

<sup>85</sup> *Colonial Times, Hobart Town Courier & Tasmanian*, September-December. A military officer oversaw the civilian guard.

<sup>86</sup> *Launceston Advertiser*, 11 October 1830, p. 2. There were 'various dismissals' during this time.

<sup>87</sup> Burnett to Arthur, 15 October 1830, cited in Reynolds, *An Indelible Stain?*, p. 69.

<sup>88</sup> Melville, *The History of Van Diemen's Land*, p. 99.

<sup>89</sup> Burnett to Arthur, 23 October 1830, cited in Reynolds, *An Indelible Stain?*, p. 69.

<sup>90</sup> See *Tasmanian*, 22 October 1830, p. 741 & Bonwick, *Last of the Tasmanians*, pp. 154-55.

In the interior, colonists were concerned more with their own safety than ecclesiastical protocol. With so many men and guns sequestered in the Line, those left at home rightly feared that the natives would exploit this weakness. In November, for instance, a party of natives attacked the hut of Mrs Field, whose husband was away on the Line. The blacks ‘broke the legs of one of his [Mr Field’s] dogs with a waddy’, yet she succeeded in ‘repulsing’ her assailants by taking up arms and disguising herself in ‘men’s clothing’.<sup>91</sup> This was one of at least fifty attacks reported during the campaign, which together created an atmosphere of intense trepidation.

### **The End of the Line**

As the operation entered its fifth week the languishing forces became restless. ‘During the delay’, Emmett recalled, ‘we could not make out what was the intention of the Governor, and were, of course, quite ignorant of his movements.’<sup>92</sup> The monotony was broken when the call went out for volunteers to scour the area inside the Line. Emmett, Lawrence and Lloyd volunteered to lead three of the forty scouring parties. These seven-man parties were to reconnoitre the country between the cordon and the Tasman Peninsula, but what some thought would be a welcome break, turned out to be the most gruelling duty of the campaign.

Even the fittest and most energetic volunteers had their breaking points and, in mid November, as he wandered lost somewhere in the rugged southeast, Lawrence reached his:

I am now quite tired of this business; there is very little chance apparently of success, and a report has just arrived up the line, which if correct will make it quite useless to proceed further, viz. That the Natives have been traced through the line in two different places. Hard work, without hope is distressing. The men are all disgusted, and grumbling; they have become so ill tempered that it is almost impossible to manage them except by compulsion. I do not wish to punish, for allowances must be made for the long succession of hard privations which they have endured.<sup>93</sup>

The experience of Lawrence and his party were not unique. When the campaign began, most men assumed they would be home by the end of the month.<sup>94</sup> On 31 October, Arthur assured them ‘the final & decisive movement ... [would] commence tomorrow’, but a fortnight later they had barely moved.<sup>95</sup> By 16 November, when the Line finally lurched forward, party

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<sup>91</sup> Anstey to Colonial Secretary, 21 December 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 768. Anstey’s report claimed this was not the first time Mrs Field had made use of this novel defence when attacked by natives.

<sup>92</sup> Emmett, ‘Reminiscences’, p. 6.

<sup>93</sup> Lawrence journal, 15 November 1830, QVMAG, CHS53-33/2.

<sup>94</sup> The *Launceston Advertiser* (25 October 1830, p. 3), for instance, presumed the campaign would be over by late October.

<sup>95</sup> Circular, 31 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/324.

leaders were expressing ‘a great deal of impatience’,<sup>96</sup> and the men, Emmett recalled, ‘were tired of the monotony of the line’.<sup>97</sup> In addition to the horrendous conditions, there was hay to cut, crops to harvest and lambing sheep to tend.<sup>98</sup> ‘Many of the men are now loosing two or three guineas per week’, Lawrence wrote regretfully; but of greater concern to some was the safety of their families and property.<sup>99</sup> From the moment the campaign got underway, reports of attacks on the home front raced up and down the Line, and whether or not they were true, they had a devastating effect on morale.

A significant number of men chose to desert. Lloyd remembered how ‘the discomfort experienced in travelling amidst heavy rains by day, and lying upon the damp earth, unsheltered from the chilly dews of night, soon sufficed to rid the ranks of scores of these thin-skinned heroes.’<sup>100</sup> Thomas Faro and his party, who trudged back to Launceston in early November, were among those Lloyd was referring to, but Faro defended his actions in the *Launceston Advertiser*:

Great complaints are made by his party of wearing their clothes to pieces, and worse yet, the skin of their feet, the flesh from their backs, together with a frequent want of provisions, and that for three days at one time.<sup>101</sup>

Faro and his men were not alone. On 30 October, Robert Foster’s party deserted and Douglas feared that within a week the rest of his division would follow.<sup>102</sup> By 3 November, Donaldson’s parties had begun to desert as well,<sup>103</sup> and the following week the *Hobart Town Courier* lamented that ‘daily desertions are taking place.’<sup>104</sup>

As the prospect of success faded, the Governor’s correspondence developed undertones of embarrassment and guilt at having detained the volunteers so long. Realising he could not keep them much longer, Arthur ordered a series of movements towards East Bay Neck on 17 November. This ‘final push’ advanced over some of the most difficult country the men had yet encountered, intending to rendezvous with the scouring parties who had set out two days earlier. The cordon rapidly disintegrated, as gaps opened up so large the scouring parties and linesmen missed each other entirely. Lawrence conceded: ‘If a hundred and fifty men have

<sup>96</sup> Douglas to Arthur, 11 November 1830, TAHO, CSO1/324. Various despatches referred to the impatience of the forces.

<sup>97</sup> Emmett, ‘Reminiscences’, p. 6.

<sup>98</sup> See *Colonial Times*, 3 December 1830, p. 3 & *Hobart Town Courier*, 27 November 1830, p. 2.

<sup>99</sup> Lawrence journal, 15 November 1830, QVMAG, CHS53-33/2; Plomley, *Jorgenson and the Aborigines*, p. 108.

<sup>100</sup> Lloyd, *Thirty-Three Years*, p. 219.

<sup>101</sup> *Launceston Advertiser*, 15 November 1830, p. 2. See also *Launceston Advertiser*, 8 November 1830, p. 3. Notwithstanding this case, the newspapers generally wrote of deserters in harsh terms (see, for instance, *Hobart Town Courier*, 13 November 1830, p. 3).

<sup>102</sup> Douglas to Arthur, 30 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/324.

<sup>103</sup> TAHO, CSO1/324 (see summary of events at beginning of file).

<sup>104</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 13 November 1830, p. 3.



passed through [unseen, the Line] can no longer be of any use.’<sup>105</sup> Dismayed, he and his party marched for Sorell, where they were permitted to return home early.

Back on the Line, things only got worse.<sup>106</sup> The final week saw the campaign fall apart with apathy and disorganisation, but no official rebuke was forthcoming. The men had endured great hardships, and Arthur clearly saw no point compounding their disappointment. Only a small number of parties even bothered to push through to the Peninsula. In the last days, most either gave up and turned back, or veered straight for Sorell where they were rationed and sent home. There were no celebrations.

### Objectives and Results

Government Order no. 10 stated emphatically that ‘the object in view is not to injure or destroy the unhappy savages, ... but to capture’. As argued in Chapter 7, frontier colonists generally ignored the government’s injunctions, because in practice they were unenforceable, but during the Line operation, they knew interior would be full of military and civil authority figures, including the Governor himself. Initially, it seems no one knew just how literally to take the Government Order on this occasion. The *Colonial Times* confessed:

we ourselves really do not understand, nor have we been able to meet with any who could explain to us, whether the sword or the Bible is meant to be the means of instructing the Aborigines in their relative duty to ourselves. In other words ... are the numerous parties which are soon to scour the interior, to destroy or save these misguided creatures? Whatever may be the intentions of the Government, we are fully convinced, that most of those who are now preparing for the interior are not aware of the manner in which the Government expects them to act.<sup>107</sup>

The *Launceston Advertiser* was resolute about which it had to be. Even if 20,000 soldiers were employed, the editor mused, ‘they would not capture all the blacks in seven years – that is to say, if they were bound to catch them alive.’<sup>108</sup>

How indeed were the parties to merely ‘capture’ the blacks? Again, the *Launceston Advertiser*’s satire is insightful:

drive all the Blacks in that division up in one corner; and mind, men, do not shoot or hurt one, but catch them all alive, oh and be very careful you don’t hurt them, and if they should attempt to run away from you, tell them to stop or you will certainly shoot,

<sup>105</sup> Lawrence journal, 17 November 1830, QVMAG, CHS53-33/2.

<sup>106</sup> See, for instance, Jorgenson to Anstey, 30 November 1830, TAHO, CSO1/320, section D.

<sup>107</sup> *Colonial Times*, 24 September 1830, p. 2.

<sup>108</sup> *Launceston Advertiser*, 27 September 1830, p. 2.

and the bare words will arrest them, only you must first learn them the language in which it is spoken.<sup>109</sup>

The following week the editor laid bare his true opinion: ‘To capture them will be very difficult, but to visit them with condign punishment, will not only be easier of performance, but will far better satisfy the friends and relatives of the fallen’.<sup>110</sup> This seems to have reflected the general attitude in Launceston, where according to one witness, ‘nothing was heard or thought of [other] than shooting the natives’.<sup>111</sup> In Hobart, the atmosphere was little different. The *Colonial Times* reported that ‘more than a few are now burning with impatience to signalize themselves, and to immortalize their names by the trophies they mean to bring home’.<sup>112</sup> The meaning of ‘trophies’ had been revealed three weeks earlier:

one of the humane ticket-of-leave men who are about being sent into the bush, in search of the Aborigines, congratulates himself that ... he can at any time obtain five guineas for each scull [*sic*] of the blacks, with which he expects to return loaded.<sup>113</sup>

Exterminationist sentiment was certainly common among frontier convicts, but it was not exclusive to them. On 22 September 1830, four hundred of Hobart’s respectable inhabitants assembled in the courthouse to discuss the establishment of a town guard, but it quickly evolved into a debate about the object of the operation. One-time Attorney-General, Joseph Gellibrand, felt certain that colonists were ‘about to enter upon a war of extermination, for such I apprehend is the intended object of the present operations’.<sup>114</sup> Gellibrand decried such an outcome, but most believed it now necessary. Dr. Adam Turnbull, for instance, insisted: ‘The war must be a war of extermination ... the present warfare of the stock-keepers is infinitely more one of extermination than the present one will be.’ Even Solicitor-General Alfred Stephen declared: ‘if you cannot [capture them], destroy them ... I say boldly and broadly, exterminate!’<sup>115</sup> Notwithstanding the bombast of the town meeting, it remained to be seen whether the forces were really willing to kill blacks against official orders.

Lawrence’s experience appears to have been typical. On 8 October, he and his party ‘saw a fire’ and ‘arranged to sneak upon them before morning.’ What followed began as a textbook campfire ambush:

<sup>109</sup> *Launceston Advertiser*, 27 September 1830, p. 2.

<sup>110</sup> *Launceston Advertiser*, 4 October 1830, p. 2.

<sup>111</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 258. The witness was Robinson’s assistant, James Parish.

<sup>112</sup> *Colonial Times*, 8 October 1830, p. 3.

<sup>113</sup> *Colonial Times*, 17 September 1830, p. 3. Substantial sums of money could be made selling native remains to scientists and collectors, both in Van Diemen’s Land and in Europe, and this incentive may have motivated colonists to kill blacks on more than just this occasion.

<sup>114</sup> *Tasmanian*, 24 September 1830, pp. 709-10.

<sup>115</sup> *Tasmanian*, 24 September 1830, pp. 709-10. Mr. Thomson seconded Stephen, contending that: ‘If there is an imperative necessity to destroy the Blacks, then, I say, we are bound to’.

we started cautiously towards the fire. I thought it prudent to wait till daylight, when I stationed my party in such a way, as to cover the sides of the fires, and commenced to close upon them; the fourth side was covered by the Lake. Upon closing upon them however, we found to our great disappointment, that our labour had been thrown away upon a party of the line<sup>116</sup>

It is not clear what Lawrence's intent was, but had he executed a bloodless capture it would have been one of the first in the colony's history.

Capture, it seems, was never seriously considered a priority. On 3 November, Lawrence recorded hearing several shots down the Line: 'It proved to be a Mr Glover and a constable, who had fallen in with a single native, at whom they fired several times without effect.' At 11 pm on 5 November, 'the cry of look out came down the line and two shots were heard. In the course of the day it was asserted that the natives were supposed to be in a scrubby bush; into which one of the sentries fired.' Then, on 7 November:

About 10 O'Clock last night we were aroused by a strong fire of musketry and the cry of look out. I suppose not less than two hundred rounds were fired ... one of the soldiers not being accustomed to the nocturnal ramblings of the Opossums, imagined when he saw one of them terrible vermin moving about, that it must certainly be one of the enemy.<sup>117</sup>

Lawrence was not the only participant to note this pattern. In total, hundreds of shots were fired at targets thought to be natives. Most of the time it was just lively marsupials or unlucky sentries, though there appears to have been several genuine sightings.<sup>118</sup> The only success, Edward Walpole's dawn ambush on 25 October, resulted in two natives captured (one of whom was wounded), and two killed.<sup>119</sup> Overall, the evidence demonstrates that most participants were not interested in capturing blacks, except perhaps if they were wounded.

The degree to which the campaign succeeded or failed can be gauged by reference to its objectives. 'The following movements', stated Government Order no. 10, are:

directed first to surround the hostile Native Tribes, – secondly, to capture them in the county of Buckingham, progressively driving them upon Tasman's Peninsula, – and, thirdly, to prevent their escape into the remote unsettled Districts to the Westward and Eastward.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>116</sup> Lawrence journal, 8-9 October 1830, QVMAG, CHS53-33/2.

<sup>117</sup> Lawrence journal, 7 October 1830, QVMAG, CHS53-33/2.

<sup>118</sup> For a typical example, see Douglas to Arthur, 25 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/324.

<sup>119</sup> Arthur later criticised Walpole, but not for using lethal violence. Rather, he believed Walpole should have sought reinforcements to enhance the effectiveness of his ambush (Government Order no. 13, 26 November 1830, in *Hobart Town Courier*, 27 November 1830, p. 2). He nevertheless granted Walpole 3,000 acres of land, which suggests that his public condemnation may have been an exercise in scapegoating.

<sup>120</sup> Government Order no. 10, 22 September 1830, in *Hobart Town Courier*, 25 September 1830, supplement. It was directed that only those natives manifesting a 'hostile disposition' who were to be targeted.

Aside from the capture of the two men, the operation failed in all these respects, and at the time, nobody denied this.<sup>121</sup> This has not stopped revisionist historians trying to squeeze a victory from the outcome. Ryan, for instance, claimed the Line succeeded in its stated aims, because it ejected the natives from the settled districts.<sup>122</sup> This claim cannot be sustained. Not only was the official objective ‘to *prevent* their escape into the remote unsettled Districts’, the record for 1831 reveals several dozen attacks perpetrated within the area scoured by the Line.<sup>123</sup> Historians have also argued that the Line was an indirect success. Some emphasise, as John McMahon did, ‘the meticulous planning and execution of all its phases’.<sup>124</sup> Ryan too believed the government ‘had succeeded brilliantly in keeping the men on the Line clothed shod and fed, which in turn reinforced the colonists’ high morale.’<sup>125</sup> However, the newly recovered accounts by Lawrence, Emmett and Dumaresq reveal that this too is false.<sup>126</sup>

Well before the Line operation was officially called off on 26 November 1830, participants knew it had failed. Jorgenson put it down ‘to the want of vigilance, to slugginess [*sic*], and to total inattention.’<sup>127</sup> The men, he complained, would not patrol their posts, ‘but keep close to their hut fires.’<sup>128</sup> This was certainly true, yet, even if the men had been more invested in the scheme, vigilance and enthusiasm were difficult to maintain in the absence of adequate food, clothing or shelter. Most focused simply on making the ordeal as painless as possible, but nothing frustrated this project more than the landscape itself. The more lost the men became, and the more country they bypassed, the stronger their sense of futility. By 15 November, Lawrence lamented that ‘[a]lmost every one appears to have given up hope of success’.<sup>129</sup>

When the gusto had subsided, and the realities stood in stark view, no one was surprised at the result. The campaign had, after all, asked men to search hundreds of square miles of mostly uncharted wilderness for a ghost-like enemy. No one denied the natives’ effectiveness, both at making their incursions and eluding capture, but few imagined these ‘pitiable savages’ could

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<sup>121</sup> The confirmed casualties on the British side were one dead from the explosion of a musket (*Colonial Times*, 19 November 1830, p. 3), plus ‘a sentry at Mr Weiss’s hut no. 5 Richmond party’ was ‘severely wounded in two places’ (Douglas to Arthur 27 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 703-4).

<sup>122</sup> Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*, p. 112 & L. Ryan, ‘The Black Line in Van Diemen’s Land: Success or Failure?’, *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2013, pp. 3-18. See also Calder, *Levée, Line and Martial Law*, p. 188.

<sup>123</sup> Government Order no. 10, 22 September 1830, in *Hobart Town Courier*, 25 September 1830, supplement. My italics. See tally in Appendix 2 for attacks during the Line.

<sup>124</sup> McMahon, ‘The British Army’, p. 94.

<sup>125</sup> Ryan, *Tasmanian Aborigines*, p. 136.

<sup>126</sup> It has also been argued, retrospectively, that the Line frightened the natives into surrendering the following year. This proposition is discussed in Chapters 14 and 16.

<sup>127</sup> Jorgenson to Charles Arthur, 30 November 1830, TAHO, CSO1/320, section D.

<sup>128</sup> Jorgenson to Arthur, 9 November 1830, TAHO, CSO1/324.

<sup>129</sup> Lawrence journal, 15 November 1830, QVMAG, CHS53-33/2.

outfox such an imposing British force. Outfoxed they were though, and the effect on the community was crushing. It had been, as Robinson put it, 'a battle with a shadow.'<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 585, journal, 14 December 1831.



*Black*

## 14

**The Black Line**

Nowhere was the difference between the black and white experiences more stark than when it came to the Black Line. On one side, the Line was the all-consuming project of a united white community; on the other, it is doubtful that any of the remaining Vandemonian bands ever fully grasped the scale or meaning of the event. Robinson's journals, together with scattered archival references, provide some record of the Aborigines' experience. Most significantly, Robinson recorded a small but telling selection of testimonies, both during and after the Line, from which it is possible to paint a reasonable picture of the event from their perspective. In light of all the evidence, it will be shown that most bands realised something abnormal was in progress, though their perception and understanding of the Line was much more limited than historians had previously assumed.

The literature includes a plethora of synopses of the Black Line, but it is rare to see even a token sentence on the Aborigines' experience.<sup>1</sup> The present Chapter is intended to rectify this imbalance. It attempts to identify each band, and what their activities and priorities were at the time. It also looks at how they avoided the Line, and what significance it had for them.

Knowing as we do the importance of this immense operation to white society, and to history, it can be easy to forget that the Vandemonians did not have a bird's-eye-view. They were ignorant of anything they did not see with their own eyes, or hear from friends. They gained some understanding of the Line in the days and months following, but one of the themes of this Chapter will be to consider what they knew at the time.

**Lead-up to the Line**

Most bands migrated away from the settlements between April and July 1830, as they had done in years past.<sup>2</sup> The number of attacks over this period averaged around one every three days, but as in previous years, the bands became increasingly hostile towards the end of winter and into spring.<sup>3</sup> During this period, at least seven bands remained active in attacking the

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Ryan, *Tasmanian Aborigines*, pp. 131-41 & Calder, *Levée, Line and Martial Law*, pp. 181-89.

<sup>2</sup> See fig. 6.

<sup>3</sup> As suggested in Chapter 10, this was probably due to several factors. The most important of these included day length, weather, resource availability and the Aborigines' changing proximity to settlements as they migrated.

eastern settlements.<sup>4</sup> In the north, there was a band on each side of the Tamar River, and one in the region of Ben Lomond. Most belligerent of all though, were the Mairremmener bands, two of which appear to have been in the river valleys northwest of Hobart, another west of Campbell Town in the foothills of the Western Tiers, and still another in the Oyster Bay area. All these bands were on the brink of collapse, and all were primed with grief and anger.

Collectively, Vandemonians orchestrated no less than forty-seven attacks in August 1830.<sup>5</sup> They made fewer incursions the following month, but those they did make were particularly bloody. On 10 September, for instance, a party of Mairremmener attacked the property of Thomas Buxton at Bream Creek. They may not have known that a man named Buxton assumed ownership of the area, but they knew the country, once theirs, was now infested with malevolent beings. Those beings also stored food in their huts, and this appears to have been the motive for the attack. An advance party speared the two stockmen who were present, while the others stormed the hut. This was a common tactic, but one of the wounded men put up a determined resistance, and the band was eventually forced to retreat.<sup>6</sup> The same day, ninety miles to the northwest, on the banks of the Tamar River, three sawyers were grievously speared and clubbed, one fatally.<sup>7</sup> The band responsible was probably the remnant of several bands that had once ranged the area west of the Tamar and north of the Great Western Tiers.

These attacks, which occurred on the same day that newspapers announced the Black Line, intensified the furore that was animating the whites to take such a drastic measure. But all this excitement went largely unnoticed by the people responsible for it. The war parties that made the attacks on 10 September knew nothing of each other's activities, or the effect they were having on the white community. Certainly, any thoughts of terrorising the whites into submission had long since been abandoned. Their actions were now primarily orientated towards staying alive.

### **The Line Begins**

Unbeknown to the Vandemonians, a storm was brewing around them early in the spring of 1830. Bands in the north and northeast may have noticed the pressure on them reduced as the white men busied themselves with preparations for the Line. It was only the bands in the

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<sup>4</sup> This figure has been deduced by plotting on a map all confirmed reports from the tally in Appendix 2.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 2.

<sup>6</sup> Aubin to Colonial Secretary, 18 September 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 629-30; *Colonial Times*, 1 October 1830, pp. 2-3.

<sup>7</sup> *Colonial Times*, 17 September 1830, p. 3; Lyttleton to Colonial Secretary, 13, September 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 621.



central and southeastern parts of the island – probably less than 100 individuals – that laid in the path of the intended movement. On 5 October, a band was surprised in a densely wooded labyrinth of valleys and hills between the Clyde and Jordan Rivers. Although one man was shot in the leg, all ‘escaped in the scrub’, evidentially slipping into the rear of the parties.<sup>8</sup> Three other escapes were reported within the first ten days of the campaign.<sup>9</sup> On 13 October, it was revealed by ‘several reports’ that ‘some of the native bands have been left in the rear of Lieut. Murray’s Division on the Dee & the West bank of the Derwent’.<sup>10</sup> On the same day, an advance party stumbled upon a band of ‘forty-two’ natives near Penstock Lagoon on the Central Plateau, but lost their trail to the westward after tracking them to the northern end of Great Lake.<sup>11</sup> Several days later a third band broke through the Line at the Lower Marshes on the Jordan River.<sup>12</sup> On each occasion, the Vandemonians eluded their pursuers.

Around the same time, another band comprising some forty remnant Mairremmener people descended on Pittwater, a now largely unprotected area well inside the Line.<sup>13</sup> Fresh from a successful fight with an enemy band to the north, they ransacked eight houses, killing one man and seriously wounding three others.<sup>14</sup> Gauging from witnesses’ reports, and the fact that the attacks took place over just two days, it is highly probable that this band divided itself into several war parties, operating from a central location where the women and children watched over the accumulating booty. Their plunder was substantial, but so were their losses. One man was mortally wounded with a pitchfork in a brawl with a white man, and according to the testimony of one of the Aborigines involved, four others were shot during or soon after these attacks.<sup>15</sup> Afterwards they retreated into the unsettled recesses of the southeast where they mistakenly thought themselves safe. These people, ignorant as they were of the operation bearing down upon them, appear to have been the only band not to make an early escape from the Line.

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<sup>8</sup> Dumaresq diary, 5 October 1830, TAHO, NS953/1/376. This was a preliminary scouring party from New Norfolk led by Charles Tully, by whom the shot was fired.

<sup>9</sup> On 21 October, Parish told Robinson of a fourth escape (*Friendly Mission*, pp. 289-90), but the credibility of the account is questionable.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur to Captain Donaldson, 13 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/324. This was probably the same band that was shot at on 5 October (see above).

<sup>11</sup> Letter from participant, in *Hobart Town Courier*, 30 October 1830, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Arthur to Captain Donaldson, 17 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/324. See also, *Friendly Mission*, pp. 537-38, journal 5 November 1831.

<sup>13</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 522-23, journal 22 October 1831; Walpole to Arthur, 29 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/324.

<sup>14</sup> See tally in Appendix 2.

<sup>15</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 20 November 1830, p. 2; Walpole to Arthur 29, October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/324.

## The Northern Bands

In the closing months of 1830, at least one band continued to operate in the island's north, during which time they made around a dozen attacks, but generally steered clear of the settlements. Meanwhile, another very small band was operating in the lightly settled hinterland east of the Tamar River. They had occasionally visited George Town and, in early September, they approached that settlement one last time.<sup>16</sup> In the past, they probably recognised the relative safety of the township, with its opportunities for procuring introduced foods, but on this occasion the Black Line was announced soon after their arrival. They may not have known why, but the simmering animosities of many local whites were now unleashed, making it unsafe for them to remain in the area. The band quickly fled the town, and with the exception of two spearings along the East Tamar, they steered clear of the settlements until their surrender to Robinson on 1 November.<sup>17</sup>

Their neighbours in the Ben Lomond region had, by now, coalesced into a single remnant band. They too had suffered heavy losses at the hands of sealers and frontiersmen, but also in internecine conflicts.<sup>18</sup> By October 1830, this band had been reduced to just ten individuals, all men. John Batman had been hunting this band for two years. As a last resort, on 8 August, he secured the release from jail of two women, Karnebutcher and Luggenemenener, on the condition they acted as envoys to this band, and convinced them to turn themselves in.<sup>19</sup> The women soon made contact, but they apparently had no intention of returning. That was, Robinson reported, until they 'had seen the soldiers, and had been inside the Line and had run away'.<sup>20</sup> Luggenemenener later described to Robinson how 'the soldiers [extended] for a long way and that they kept firing off muskets. Said plenty of PAR.KUTE.TEN.NER horsemen, plenty of soldiers, plenty of big fires on the hills.'<sup>21</sup> Being 'afraid they [the soldiers] would shoot them', Luggenemenener convinced the others to accompany her to Batman's farm, where they arrived on 19 October. Clearly, they recognised that something big was afoot.<sup>22</sup>

This band was headed by the revered chief Mannalargenna, who charmed Batman and his neighbours, employing the diplomacy skills he had acquired as a slave trader on the sea

<sup>16</sup> Lyttleton to Colonial Secretary, 13 September 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 621.

<sup>17</sup> See tally in Appendix 2. Although they were not identified, it seems probable that this band was responsible for the spearings because there appears to have been no other Aborigines in the area.

<sup>18</sup> See Chapter 10.

<sup>19</sup> Robinson to Arthur, 20 November 1830, TAHO, CSO1/317, pp. 216-33; John Batman's diary, August-September 1830, NLA, N994.6.

<sup>20</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 309-12, journal 15 November 1830.

<sup>21</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 309-12, journal 15 November 1830.

<sup>22</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 309-12, journal 15 November 1830.

frontier.<sup>23</sup> This geniality, however, may have been a charade. After receiving food and protection for ten days, Mannalargenna and his band deserted Batman's in the middle of the night, helping themselves to his dogs and provisions.<sup>24</sup> The following day, they attacked two huts on the South Esk River, but a party of whites was in close pursuit. After a skirmish at Grants Mill, the band was surprised while plundering a hut at Fingal, and two warriors were killed.<sup>25</sup> Thirteen days later they arrived at Cape Portland and began making smoke signals to Robinson, who had only days before established a temporary mission on Swan Island. On 15 November, a party of envoys collected the one woman and five men, who were all that remained of this band, and removed them to the mission.<sup>26</sup> The band's resumption of violence, despite their partial awareness of the Line, indicates that the operation was not their primary reason for surrendering. It no doubt buttressed their sense that continued resistance was futile, but then, they already knew that.

### **Escaping the Cordon**

Early on the morning of 25 October, at the Sandspit River not far from the coast, the Mairremmener band that had recently been at Pittwater was awoken by white men storming their camp.<sup>27</sup> Always on their guard against such attacks, they had left only one of their huts exposed. According to the lead assailant, the hut was occupied by five men, who 'appeared to have been a look out.' 'There were', he reported, 'five other huts across the creek in the centre of a very thick scrub – I had fully intended to attack the main body but I found it impossible to get near enough without being heard.'<sup>28</sup> The attack was a clumsy one. Two sentinels, Ronekeenarener and Weltepellemener, were wrestled into submission and captured, and two others were shot dead as they attempted to flee, but the kinsfolk they sought to protect all managed to escape.

The survivors were now propelled into an all too familiar and distressing situation. They responded by dividing into smaller parties and heading north. One group penetrated the Line

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<sup>23</sup> See W. Gray to Arthur, 23 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 691-95 & J. K. Gray to Arthur, 19 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 684-87. The person was identified as 'Limogana', but I am confident, for the reasons outlined in Chapter 6, that this was in fact Mannalargenna [KEEP & CHANGE].

<sup>24</sup> Mannalargenna left his young son at Batman's (Gray to Arthur, 24 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 696-98), presumably because he believed he would be safe there and because rapid, stealthy movement was impossible when encumbered by a small child.

<sup>25</sup> W. Gray to Colonial Secretary, 1 & 11 November 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 714-17; *Hobart Town Courier*, 13 November 1830, pp. 2-3. This is the attack on Talbot's hut described in Chapter 15.

<sup>26</sup> It was not actually Robinson, but his assistant Alexander McKay and a small contingent of envoys who collected this band (see McKay to Calder, n.d. SLNSW, ML, A597; Rae-Ellis, *Black Robinson*, p. 65; *Friendly Mission*, pp. 551-53, journal 15 November 1830; I. McFarlane, pers.comm. April 2012).

<sup>27</sup> For the approximate location of this ambush, see fig. 20, eastern end of line LLL.

<sup>28</sup> Walpole to Arthur, 29 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/324.

several miles west of Prossers Bay in the early hours of 26 October, one linesman noting: ‘The cunning of the Blacks in selecting the tempestuous night ... to escape was remarkable’.<sup>29</sup> The Mairremmener were loath to move at night, but Woolaytoopinneyer later told Robinson ‘they saw the soldiers and the fires’, and thus knew they had a gauntlet to run.<sup>30</sup> They even tethered and abandoned their dogs, despite their great value as hunters and companions, which suggests they appreciated the seriousness of the situation.<sup>31</sup>

In the days that followed this first clandestine escape, the rest of the band seem to have slipped through at various points along the Prossers Plains section of the Line.<sup>32</sup> They were in places glimpsed and heard, and on one occasion a warrior speared a sentry in two places as he rekindled his fire, yet all made it through unscathed.<sup>33</sup> This came as no surprise to the editor of the *Launceston Advertiser*, who had been pessimistic about containing people of such ‘quicksightedness and skill’ within the cordon. ‘Escapes have been known to be made by the Natives’, he remarked, ‘which have almost the appearance of being miraculous’.<sup>34</sup> Nor was it a surprise to Robinson:

The military operations and armed parties sent out in quest of the hostile natives has frequently been the occasion of much reflection to my mind and the futility of such endeavour has been apparent ... The natives have the advantage in every respect, in their sight, hearing, nay, in all their senses; their sense of smelling also. They can smell a smoke at a long distance, especially if the wind sets towards them. I have known instances of their scenting a kangaroo roasting by the hostile natives. They are at home in the woods; the whole country with few exceptions affords them concealment.<sup>35</sup>

When Robinson asked Woolaytoopinneyer, a Mairremmener woman, how she and her people managed to escape the Line, she assured him ‘they had no trouble in getting away.’<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 30 November 1830, p. 2. This circumstance of penetrating the Line at night was later confirmed by one of the Mairremmener men involved (*Weep in Silence*, pp. 324-25, journal 19 December, 1835).

<sup>30</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 209, journal 22 October 1830.

<sup>31</sup> C. Darwin, *The Voyage of the Beagle*, Bantam, New York, 1972 [1839], p. 38, journal 30 February 1836; Jorgenson to Arthur, 9 November 1830, TAHO, CSO1/324; *Hobart Town Courier*, 13 November 1830, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> There were vague rumours of Aborigines trapped within the cordon during the final weeks of the campaign, but there appears to have been no truth to them.

<sup>33</sup> Douglas to Arthur 27 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 703-4; *Hobart Town Courier*, 6 & 30 November 1830; *Colonial Times*, 5 November 1830, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> *Launceston Advertiser*, 11 October 1830, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 584-86, journal 14 December 1831.

<sup>36</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 209, journal 22 October 1830.

## Aboriginal Guides

The Black Line was not entirely white. A number of Vandemonians participated as guides, though the details of their involvement are in most cases unknown.<sup>37</sup> An exception was Ronekeenarener, one of the two Mairremmener men captured on 25 October. He divulged substantial information to his captors with the aid of ‘a civilized Black Boy ... [who] acted as interpreter’, and was then shackled and commanded to lead the white men ‘to the haunts of his tribe’.<sup>38</sup> Ronekeenarener was praised as a shrewd guide, but since he did not lead them to his countrymen, he may have been shrewder than they realised.<sup>39</sup>

The only other guide we know something about is Kanneherlargenner, or as he was known to the whites, Umarrah. Apparently the leader of a band from the Tamar River area, Umarrah had been captured by Gilbert Robertson in November 1828, and became acquainted with the Governor when he was interviewed by the Executive Council later that year.<sup>40</sup> In early 1830, he joined Robinson’s expedition around the west coast, but abandoned him once they reached Macquarie Harbour. When Umarrah reappeared in Launceston in October, the Governor requested that he ‘readily and cheerfully’ join the Line as his personal guide and advisor.<sup>41</sup> To this he was said to have ‘very readily’ assented, and by 22 October he had joined the white chief’s entourage at Orielton.<sup>42</sup>

Umarrah acted as counsel to the Governor for three weeks, until one day, while ‘out with two men, kangaroo hunting, all of a sudden he disappeared’.<sup>43</sup> It is not clear why he joined the campaign, much less why he left it, but it may have been connected to his discovery that one of his two wives was hemmed in by the forces.<sup>44</sup> He later pointed out to Robinson ‘the way he went when he left the Line, i.e. by a circuitous route NNE through the thick forest south of the Eastern Marshes’, along a traditional ‘native road’.<sup>45</sup> Umarrah’s brief career as the Governor’s *aide de camp* was an undistinguished one, and there is no indication that he was in anyway helpful to the operation. As Robinson soon discovered, Vandemonian guides were only as helpful as they wanted to be.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> This number may have been significantly higher, but there is no way to know.

<sup>38</sup> Walpole to Arthur, 29 October 1830, TAHO, CSO1/324; Arthur to Murray, 20 November 1830, SLNSW, ML, A1771, p. 53.

<sup>39</sup> Lawrence journal, 11 November 1830, QVMAG, CHS53-33/2.

<sup>40</sup> It is possible Umarrah came from the east coast, as the record is confused. Kickertopoller (Black Tom) acted as interpreter during his interview with the Executive Council.

<sup>41</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 124.

<sup>42</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 23 October 1830, p. 2; Arthur to Gordon, 19 October 1830, CSO1/324.

<sup>43</sup> *Colonial Times*, 19 November 1830, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 522-23, journal 22 October 1831.

<sup>45</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 525, journal 24 October 1831.

<sup>46</sup> See Chapter 16.

## Behind the Line

Some of the Vandemonians who avoided the Black Line carried on plundering and killing in its rear. This was particularly true of two Mairremmener bands: the one ambushed on 25 October, and another that evaded the operation in its early stages. The former regrouped north of the Line and immediately launched attacks on four huts in the Eastern Marshes.<sup>47</sup> They then headed southwest, attacking a hut at Jerusalem on 7 November, where they harassed three men, speared a woman ‘in several places, and then robbed the hut of every article they could carry away.’<sup>48</sup> Afterwards, on 9 November, they again broke up into smaller war parties that plundered five huts in Dysart Parish.<sup>49</sup> A warrior was shot in one of these raids, prompting the others to retire into the hills until, for reasons unknown, three of them emerged a week later, fatally spearing the young daughter of a Bagdad settler.<sup>50</sup> But with the exception of one more robbery, this was their last attack for the year. Where they ‘disappeared’ to in the coming months is not clear.

Thirty miles to the west, another band was taking a heavy toll on the settlements in the rear of the Line. In the course of one week, they made up to a dozen attacks on properties between the Ouse and Clyde Rivers.<sup>51</sup> They plundered seven huts in just two days.<sup>52</sup> Obviously, this band was employing the same divide and attack strategy that had come to distinguish Mairremmener tactics in the later stages of the War. By 13 November, they had targeted nearly every settler in the district. Then, having accumulated a healthy store of food and blankets, they too disappeared for the remainder of the year, probably heading north onto the sparsely inhabited Central Plateau where the warmer weather would allow them to hunt in relative safety.

## Knowledge of the Line

The question of what the Vandemonians knew about the Black Line can be divided in two: What did they know at the time, and what did they discover later. Both questions are difficult to answer, but the first is less so. No eastern band appears to have had foreknowledge of the campaign; they only became aware of it upon encountered the parties. We have accounts from

<sup>47</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 13 November 1830, p. 3. These attacks all occurred on one property.

<sup>48</sup> *Colonial Times*, 12 November 1830, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> The claim that the band split up is evidenced by reports of multiple attacks on the same day, and from witness accounts noting small parties of three or four men (see *Colonial Times*, 12 November 1830, p. 3 & *Hobart Town Courier*, 13 November 1830, pp. 2-3 & 20 November 1830, p. 2). See also tally in Appendix 2.

<sup>50</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 20 November 1830, p. 2; *Launceston Advertiser*, 6 December 1830, p. 3. The assailants were forced to retreat when the girl’s sister, although speared herself, managed to raise the alarm.

<sup>51</sup> See tally in Appendix 2.

<sup>52</sup> The two days were 6 and 12 November.

three of the bands that escaped. One of these was Mannalargenna's people, who reported seeing soldiers firing off their guns. Another was the band that slipped through near Penstock Lagoon on 13 October. The following year, some of Robinson's envoys told him they had seen soldiers make 'huts and large fires' in this area.<sup>53</sup> He assumed they were referring to Donaldson's Black Line parties, and he was probably correct.

Both these bands seem to have realised there were more parties in the field than usual, but how many did they actually see? Their escapes were in early October, well before the order was given for the impressive rows of fires that have since come to be associated with the Line. In fact, the parties were so widely spaced at this early stage of the campaign, that the escaping bands probably saw two or three of them at most. The sight of multiple parties was no doubt intimidating, but armed parties were by now familiar hazards, and they were quickly evaded.

The third group that we know became partially aware of the Line was the Mairremmener band that was ambushed on 25 October. From their perspective, the ambush itself would have indicated nothing out of the ordinary, but the presence of fires to the north soon alerted them to something more ominous.<sup>54</sup> Depending on weather, vegetation, light and their vantage point, the band presumably saw evidence of multiple parties as they made their way through the Line, thus they must have realised a larger-than-usual force had been assembled against them. Nevertheless, neither this band, nor the bands that escaped in the early stages of the Line, could not have known how big the Line actually was, and presumably they had no idea what the white men were up to.<sup>55</sup>

What then did the Vandemonians learn of the operation in the weeks and months following their escapes? The evidence is thin, but we can venture some tentative propositions. Mannalargenna's band probably learnt the most. At Batman's, they were joined by Mungo, a disillusioned guide who no doubt shared with them what he knew of the campaign.<sup>56</sup> Later, on Swan Island, Robinson attempted to reinforce the loyalty of Mannalargenna and the other exiles by emphasising the power of the Black Line, and thus the danger of returning to the bush:

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<sup>53</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 575, journal 6 December 1831.

<sup>54</sup> This band clearly had no foreknowledge of the Line. The imposing hills that surround this location would have blocked any view of the approaching parties. Furthermore, the ambush party first spotted them hunting in open country, which would be surprising if they knew what was approaching.

<sup>55</sup> Given the limited perspective this band had, the much smaller 'Freycinet Line' in September 1831 (see Chapter 15), which consisted of no more than 100 men, probably seemed just as big.

<sup>56</sup> Batman to Frankland, 18 November 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 742-44. It is not clear which band Mungo came from, but since 1828, he had been working as a guide in various roving parties. Just before the Line, Mungo suffered something akin to a mental breakdown (see Chapter 12), and after fleeing Batman's with Mannalargenna, he does not appear in the record again. Mannalargenna's band may also have learned about the Line from the white men at Batman's.

I made known to them the military plans that were in operation against them and ... I then described to them the nature and formation of the Line by tracing it on the ground with a stick, and further informed them that the mighty enemy who were at that time engaged in capturing their countrymen to the southward would shortly appear in formidable array in front of their own territory.<sup>57</sup>

The Governor had sent a huge force against them, and how many would he send next time? Although the whites were incapable of repeating such a costly operation, the Aborigines on Swan Island were led to believe otherwise. Robinson's explanation had the desired effect. He noted that 'the whole of them was in tears throughout the whole of the day.'<sup>58</sup> Then, in an almost certainly related act, 'all the aborigines tattooed themselves, the shoulder of some and back and belly of others was completely scarified.'<sup>59</sup>

The other bands that escaped the Line no doubt discovered further evidence of the campaign, in the form of tracks and abandoned campsites. Even though they were seeing only a fraction of the Line's environmental impact, these clues probably suggested the operation was larger than they first suspected. Just how large they thought the Line was, we will never know; but from their limited exposure, they could not have appreciated its full scale, let alone of its full implications. Furthermore, there was nothing in their collective memories that even bordered on a precedent for such an event. The Vandemonians would have struggled to fathom anything on that scale, and with that type of organisation. Consequently, the Black Line they experienced probably bore little resemblance to the actual Black Line.

### **Significance of the Line**

In 1831, Vandemonians made less than one third of the attacks they had the previous year (see fig. 5), but this owed surprisingly little to the Black Line. Their hostility declined, not because the Line rendered them meek and mild, but because years of warfare had drastically reduced their strength. Across the island, bands reached the apex of their resistance at different times. Those in the Norfolk Plains region, for instance, reached theirs around 1827, while the most belligerent bands peaked in 1830. They had taken a serious toll on the white men, but their numbers were declining, and under wartime conditions, could not be replenished. The enemy, on the other hand, somehow continued to multiply, and the balance of power swung ever more against the Aborigines, whose capacity to make war was rapidly waning. Although these shifts occurred at around the same time as the Line, they bore no strong relationship to it.

<sup>57</sup> Robinson's report, February 1831, in *Friendly Mission*, pp. 470-71.

<sup>58</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 317, journal 26 November 1830.

<sup>59</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 317, journal 26 November 1830.



It is easy to overemphasise the significance of the Vandemonians' experience of the Black Line. For one, the parties comprising the line were louder and more visible than the creeping vigilantes they were used to, which made them easier to avoid, and once the bands had evaded the Line, the danger it posed was over. In fact, they may not have realised it, but in the rear of the forces they were safer than usual.

This has not prevented historians echoing Jorgen Jorgenson's claim that '[t]he marvelous facility with which the colony got eventually rid of the Blacks was entirely owing to Sir George Arthur's *levy en masse*.'<sup>60</sup> He insisted that '[t]he success afterwards of Mr. G. A. Robinson was *solely* attributable to the formation of the Line; it showed the Aborigines our strength and energy.'<sup>61</sup> Jorgenson was referring to the historic surrender of the last Mairremmener people, many of whom had escaped the Line at Prossers Plains. This band almost certainly realised the whites had executed some kind of large offensive. As disquieting as this was, however, by the time the Mairremmener surrendered, they had fought hundreds of skirmishes and dodged dozens of armed parties over the preceding decade, so the idea that the Line covered them into submission is not as self-evident as historians have assumed. As I argue in Chapter 16, the Mairremmener's decision to surrender was driven by far more pressing concerns.

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<sup>60</sup> Plomley, *Jorgenson and the Aborigines*, p. 99. Such scholars include Calder, *Levée, Line and Martial Law*, pp. 187-89; Connor, 'British Frontier Warfare Logistics', p. 143; McMahon, 'The British Army and the Counter-Insurgency Campaign', pp. 90-94; Ryan, *Tasmanian Aborigines*, p. 112; Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, p. 51.

<sup>61</sup> Plomley, *Jorgenson and the Aborigines*, p. 99. Original italics. This opinion could be expected from Jorgenson, who had failed as a roving party leader before the Line. Nevertheless, he was not the only contemporary who, with the benefit of hindsight, explained away Robinson's success in this manner. See, for instance, Horace Rowcroft (*Launceston Examiner*, 2 October, 1847, pp. 4-5) and Henry Emmett ('Reminiscences', p. 7).



*White*

## 15

**The War's End**

The Black War has ended here after 2 months' campaign of 3,000 men ... but I fear we shall not so soon be quit of the blacks.<sup>1</sup>

Alexander Reid, Bothwell

The failure of the Black Line cast a dark cloud over the frontier community. It had been the biggest effort the colony was capable of mustering, and it had failed. The question now weighing on everyone's minds was expressed succinctly by William Lawrence in the Line's closing days: 'If, as is most likely, the present attempt fails, I know not what more can be done, I have not as yet heard of one feasible scheme.'<sup>2</sup> Nowhere was this anxiety felt more acutely than 'in the breasts of lonely settlers', wrote Lawrence's fellow linesman, George Lloyd: 'the untoward result [of the operation] produced a feeling of deep despondence, and shed over their future prospects a gloom from which there seemed to be no possible relief.'<sup>3</sup> In light of such evidence, Lyndall Ryan's claim that the Line resulted in 'a much needed increase in morale among the settlers' cannot be sustained.<sup>4</sup>

Just as despair was setting in, a glimmer of hope appeared. Colonists knew the number of native attacks decreased every summer, but it seemed quieter than usual.<sup>5</sup> By late January, few serious incidents had been reported, and some colonists began to suspect the Line had been effective after all. 'Since the breaking up of the lines, we have scarcely heard of any depredations being committed by them', wrote the *Colonial Times* on 28 January 1831:

What has become of all the Aboriginal tribes? were they all killed or taken prisoners during the late expedition? [These] are now the generally repeated questions. We are exceedingly happy to say that, to all appearances, if they were not taken or destroyed, they appear at all events to have been so much frightened as to prevent, for the present, their repeating their visits to the civilized inhabitants.<sup>6</sup>

But the newspaper's optimism was short lived. Even as it was going to print, couriers were bringing the news south of the spearing of a man and a child on the West Tamar.<sup>7</sup> Then, on 29

<sup>1</sup> Reid to Williams, December 1830, cited in Brown, *Clyde Company Papers*, p. 110.

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence journal, 15 November 1830, QVMAG, CHS53-33/2.

<sup>3</sup> Lloyd, *Thirty-Three Years*, p. 234.

<sup>4</sup> Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*, p. 112; Ryan, 'The Black Line in Van Diemen's Land', p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> See tally in Appendix 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Colonial Times*, 28 January 1831, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Lyttleton to Colonial Secretary, 31 January 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 854.

January 1831, only three months after her husband had been killed by blacks, Mary McCasker ‘was most barbarously murdered’ at Dairy Plains, and all hopes for peace seemed dashed.<sup>8</sup>

Experienced frontiersmen were struck by a remarkable fact: the more blacks they killed, the more there seemed to be. Europeans found it extremely hard to identify the individuals or bands responsible for attacking them, so they were never sure how many they were facing. In hindsight, we know there could scarcely have been 100 natives operating in the settled districts in 1831, but to terrified colonists, this number would have sounded absurdly low. The frequency and geographic distribution of attacks, combined with exaggerated rumours of bands comprising hundreds of warriors, led colonists to massively overestimate the force arrayed against them. Most assumed there remained at least 500 eastern natives, but some thought the number was in the thousands.<sup>9</sup> It seemed only logical that a sizeable population was necessary to generate so much disturbance; thus the ‘vast savage hordes’ that haunted the colonists’ imaginations bore little resemblance to the desperate remnant they were actually facing. It was to be the final year of the War, but no one knew that then, nor did anyone seem to suspect it.

This chapter examines the last year of fighting, the various ways colonists tried to defeat the blacks, and the fear and powerlessness they felt as the body count continued to rise in spite of their efforts. It also interrogates the public’s responses to the War’s most notorious attack, and to the surrender of the natives that occurred soon after. Finally, this chapter looks at the ways colonists remembered both the War, and the enemy that had for so long filled them with terror and malice.

### **One Week in March**

For reasons they did not understand, the year 1831 was particularly severe on northern colonists. In March alone, they suffered a series of brutal attacks that unleashed panic throughout the district. On the East Tamar, Mrs Cunningham:

was at work in the garden when the natives came down. She was first speared in the back. Immediately she caught up her infant and ran towards the house, the blacks following her. As she ran she received another spear from behind; and before she

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<sup>8</sup> Smith to Colonial Secretary, 7 February 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 65-76.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Bent attempted to play down the native threat by suggesting no more than 600 (*Tasmanian*, 18 June 1831, p. 191); Robinson (Aborigines Committee minutes, 23 February 1831, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 80) believed there was ‘not more than 700’; Roderic O’Connor (evidence to Aborigines Committee, 16 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, pp. 54-55) estimated ‘600 or 700’; and James Kelly suggested 5,000 (evidence to Aborigines Committee, 10 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 51).

could reach the house, having several times fallen, a native met her and knocked her down with a waddie. As she fell, she received another spear, which entered her body, passing nearly through her. She then drew herself over the child, when the savages came up, and stabbed her with spears about the body till she fainted. ... she lingered in extreme agony till the following morning, when she expired. The infant was much bruised, but is not mortally wounded.<sup>10</sup>

Five days later, two soldiers were wounded by another band at Norfolk Plains, reporting that their assailants 'exceed 100 or 150 large stout men'.<sup>11</sup> Everyone was put on guard and defences redoubled, but the natives made a mockery of these efforts. At 9 am on 19 March, the same band attacked the Lawrence property at the base of the Western Tiers. This was the first of five Lake River properties attacked by this war party in just five hours, in which at least one man was killed and three seriously wounded.<sup>12</sup> One of the assigned servants on the scene hastily scribbled the following note to his master:

Dear Mr O'Connor, You have often been warning us against the natives. We always said they would never would come here but alas they have made their appearance ... poor Crowhurst and York [are] dreadfully speared. We don't expect Crowhurst to live but one of the men that came galloped off as fast as ever he could to Dr Paton. Now what is to be done? *I am frightened out of my life.*<sup>13</sup>

The palpable terror exuded in this letter was representative of the feeling throughout the district. 'All is terror and dismay in this part of the Colony', wrote one local settler in the days following the attacks, and 'not a man appears willing to go out to do his work'.<sup>14</sup> Although the level of black violence fluctuated throughout 1831, the fear, frustration and anger it produced never went away. Indeed, these emotions welled more intensely with every passing month.

### **Finding a Solution**

When he returned to Hobart after the disbanding of the Black Line, Arthur immediately convened the Executive Council to discuss the 'distressing and difficult question' of what to try next. He had finally given up on the possibility of peaceful coexistence, realising only two options remained: either the natives should be removed (by capture or conciliation) or they must be shot. Whilst he undoubtedly desired the former, Arthur feared the 'latter alternative ...

<sup>10</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 26 March 1831, p. 3. See also Clark to Colonial Secretary, 12 March 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 898-900; W. H. Browne, 'Journal of Reverend Dr. William Henry Browne', 16 March 1831, SLT, LMSS12/1/10 (I am indebted to Gill Morris for this transcription).

<sup>11</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 26 March 1831, p. 3. This figure is highly exaggerated.

<sup>12</sup> Smith to Colonial Secretary, 21 March 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 905; *Hobart Town Courier*, 26 March 1831, p. 3; *Independent*, 11 April 1831, p. 3; *Tasmanian*, 8 April 1831, p. 112.

<sup>13</sup> Unsigned letter among Roderic O'Connor's papers, Connorville, item 7, miscellaneous letters folder. My italics. I am indebted to Andrew Gregg for this letter, and for our many conversations on the question of white fear.

<sup>14</sup> *Tasmanian*, 8 April 1831, p. 112. The author, who used the pseudonym 'An Emigrant', was likely Roderic O'Connor.

could alone be looked to for preserving the lives of the settlers'.<sup>15</sup> It would appear that, having finally seen the situation for himself, Arthur came to appreciate the frustration and angst that those in the interior had been subjected to for years. At the very least, he was now convinced of the futility of trying to hunt down people who appeared to simply vanish into thin air, and so, with the support of the Aborigines Committee, he disbanded the civilian roving parties.

Alternatively, the idea of concealing men in stock huts, for the purpose of ambushing approaching natives, gained popularity at the same time as the roving parties were making it clear that 'travelling about at random, and scouring the country at large, can only by accident succeed'.<sup>16</sup> 'It would be better', wrote the *Hobart Town Courier* in February 1830, 'to remain in ambush at good commanding outposts, and wait patiently for an opportunity to arrest the blacks as they pass.'<sup>17</sup> In fact, even some roving parties realised this and had begun setting such traps the previous year.<sup>18</sup> The first vindication of the tactic occurred near Fingal on 30 October 1830, when a detachment of constables split into three parties, each of which concealed themselves in nearby huts. Major Gray reported the result to Hobart:

the natives have been very troublesome of the past week, they have committed robberies at almost all the huts on the road from this place to Mr. Talbot's, when they were met by four of a party of constables from Campbell Town under Mr. Sampson, on Saturday evening about four o'clock after nearly an hours watching they made a rush at a man of Mr. Talbot's who was sent out as a decoy by the constables.<sup>19</sup>

In the affray that followed, Talbot's man was speared in the leg, and two natives were shot dead. As it happened, this success was never to be repeated, but at the time it garnered considerable support for the tactic, and helps explain why 'ambush huts' featured strongly in post-Black Line deliberations.

The Aborigines Committee made it clear in its report of 4 February 1831 that it supported conciliatory aims, but 'in the meantime, for the protection of the distant settlers and stock-keepers, parties of armed men (four in number) should be stationed in the most remote stock-huts'.<sup>20</sup> Ostensibly, the purpose of setting these ambushes was to capture the unsuspecting assailants, but the men involved understood their remit differently. In October 1831, for instance, Robinson passed a farm at the foot of the Blue Hills in which there were 'nine men in the hut, armed with ten guns and a blunderbuss ... and these men affirm that if they had seen

<sup>15</sup> Executive Council minutes, 30 November 1830, cited in Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, pp. 118-19. When the Executive Council met in February 1831, Chief Justice John Pedder disagreed with his fellow councilors, arguing that peaceful coexistence was possible if British representatives could be found to live and liaise with the bands. Such a proposition was wholly untenable by this stage of the War.

<sup>16</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 13 February 1830, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 13 February 1830, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, John Batman's diary, July & August 1830, NLA, N994.6 B333.

<sup>19</sup> Major Gray to Colonial Secretary, 1 & 11 November 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 714-17.

<sup>20</sup> Aborigines Committee report, 4 February 1831, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, pp. 76-78.

them [the blacks] they should certainly have shot them.’<sup>21</sup> To facilitate these new measures, as many as 150 stock huts were turned into ambush huts, the number of soldiers in the interior was increased, and five strong military posts were established to intersect native migratory routes in a line from the Derwent River in the west to Chimney Hill in the east. In addition, temporary barracks were constructed at Spring Bay, Richmond and Break O’Day Plains, while the barracks at Sorell and New Norfolk were rebuilt and extended.<sup>22</sup>

The government’s redoubled commitment to military protection for the exposed settlements was soon evident. In the northeast, Robinson found troops ‘stationed at all the out-stations ... and several farms have military stationed at them’, while in Hobart and Launceston, large standing forces were ready to be deployed at a moment’s notice.<sup>23</sup> In January, for instance, no less than fifty soldiers were sent in pursuit after natives made incursions east of Launceston.<sup>24</sup> Not long thereafter, Lieutenant-Colonel Logan marched ninety-three troops from Hobart to engage a band that had begun ‘committing depredations’ in the Derwent Valley. In emulation of the recent campaign, Logan deployed his men in an extended line across the Black Snake Gully and marched in this formation for three days until reaching Sorell Rivulet, but to no avail.<sup>25</sup>

A non-military campaign of similar proportions was initiated at Norfolk Plains following the attacks of late January. The police magistrate, Malcolm Smith, ordered all the district’s ticket-of-leave men, along with all the assigned convicts that local settlers could spare, to assemble at the police station on 7 February. From here the men were directed to ‘such places as the natives are known to frequent’ where they were to build ‘sham huts’ and lie in ambush.<sup>26</sup> Costly as this operation must have been to settlers and the government, it was undoubtedly more disagreeable to the men forced yet again from their homes into the most dangerous parts of the frontier, and for an indefinite time. It is unclear how many convicts were involved, or how long they stayed in the field, but there is no evidence that they had any success.

Despite this up-scaled military presence, the government continued to insist that ‘the chief object [was] to conciliate and not to destroy these people.’<sup>27</sup> The major shift in its approach after the Black Line was the abandonment of ‘coexistence’ for a policy of exiling all captured blacks to Bass Strait. With growing fervour, the press had been calling for removal since 1826,

<sup>21</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 530, journal 30 October 1831.

<sup>22</sup> Minutes of the Executive Council, 30 November 1830, cited in Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, p. 119; Sharland to Parramore, 25 June 1831, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 279-81.

<sup>23</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 375, journal 14 April 1831; *Colonial Times*, 8 October 1830, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> *Launceston Advertiser*, 31 January 1831, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Logan to Arthur, 14 March 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 901-4.

<sup>26</sup> Smith to Colonial Secretary, 31 January 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 857-58.

<sup>27</sup> Lascelles to Colonial Secretary, 29 June 1831, TAHO, CSO1/317, pp. 449-50.

but those on the frontier realised that the problem was not what to do with the blacks once they were in custody, but how to capture them in the first place.

Although the Governor was not sanguine about ending the War by bloodless means, he had no choice but to try.<sup>28</sup> Realising the natives' aversion to armed parties, and the latter's tendency to shoot all potential captives, Arthur sought alternative means of encouraging colonists to 'take them alive'. On 25 February 1830, Government Order no. 2 appeared in the *Hobart Town Courier*, stating that 'a reward of £5 shall be given for every adult aboriginal Native, and £2 for every child, who shall be captured, and delivered alive at any one of the police stations.'<sup>29</sup> In the two years that followed this order private settlers made several captures, but their rewards greatly exceeded the promised amounts. George Anstey, for example, received 500 acres for taking one man, two women and a child.<sup>30</sup> In this case, no blood was spilled, but recognising the difficulty of the task, Arthur set no requirement for delivering captives unhurt, and no limit on the number that could be killed in the fray. This omission allowed Humphrey Howells, who led an ambush on the Shannon River in August 1831, to receive 1,000 acres of land for capturing one native, despite killing at least two others in the process.<sup>31</sup> The bounties, therefore, provided no safeguard against bloodshed, just as they made no significant contribution to ending the War.

### **The Friendly Mission**

The only real hope for a non-violent solution was the 'friendly mission'. In March 1829, George Augustus Robinson was appointed storekeeper at a recently established ration depot for natives on Bruny Island. Robinson never intended to be just a storekeeper though, and he immediately turned his attention to the natives' material and spiritual 'improvement'. The problem was, his charges died quicker than he could convert them. Within six months, around two thirds of the Bruny Islanders had died from respiratory disease.<sup>32</sup> Realising the enterprise was unsustainable, Robinson sought permission to draft the survivors into a 'conciliatory

<sup>28</sup> As explained in Chapter 7, Arthur's conscience and the humanitarian expectations of London forced him to exhaust all peaceful means before resorting to violence.

<sup>29</sup> Six months later, Government Notice no. 161 was published (*Hobart Town Gazette*, 21 August 1830, p. 1) to clarify that bounties would only be paid for 'hostile' blacks. This was a response to the unwarranted restraint of two natives who surrendered near George Town earlier in the month (Welsh to Colonial Secretary, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 559-60).

<sup>30</sup> Arthur to Colonial Secretary, 30 July 1830, TAHO, CSO1/317, pp. 169-70. Anstey was the son of Oatlands' police magistrate, Thomas Anstey. His captives escaped en route to Hobart.

<sup>31</sup> Howells to Vicary, 5 August 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 545-47; Vicary to CS, 16 August 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 564-66.

<sup>32</sup> Robinson gave the figure of twenty-two dead, but this included casualties among a visiting party from the southwest (see his report of 23 September 1829, TAHO, CSO1/317, pp. 83-91). No precise census was conducted for the natives at the depot, but there appears to have been between thirty and forty present at the beginning.



mission' that would journey around the island's southern, western and northwestern coastlines delivering a 'message of peace' to the bands in these regions.<sup>33</sup> Accompanied by a troop of natives and convicts, the mission embarked on its harrowing journey on 27 January 1830.<sup>34</sup> In the eight months that followed, the party made contact with several bands, laying what Robinson believed were the foundations of peaceful dialogue. But, by the time the party re-emerged in early October, the situation with the blacks had worsened dramatically.

When Robinson arrived on the outskirts of Launceston, preparations for the Black Line were in full swing. Coexistence, he now realised, was no longer a possibility. He resolved to continue the friendly mission, but its objective now shifted to effecting the voluntary removal of the remaining bands. As the Line marched south, Robinson's party proceeded in the opposite direction, hoping to confer with the remnant northeast people, and success quickly followed. In November alone, Robinson and his envoys secured the surrender of thirteen natives, prompting him to write to the Governor claiming that, by means of diplomacy alone, he could remove 'the entire black population'.<sup>35</sup> Arthur may not have been entirely convinced it would succeed, but he understood the value of the friendly mission for his reputation in London, and gave Robinson his full support.<sup>36</sup>

Opposition to the enterprise was widespread from the start. The public had lost all patience with the government's conciliatory rhetoric. On the frontier, Robinson regularly encountered the sneers and non-cooperation of colonists who felt the time had long since passed for diplomacy.<sup>37</sup> In Launceston and Hobart, the press mocked the mission and its prospects for success.<sup>38</sup> The prevailing mood was epitomised by the *Launceston Advertiser*, which demanded to know:

Can it be that we are to thus suffer these people to destroy our Fellow Colonists, and is the Government to sit down supinely and view this destruction calmly and preach conciliation? No! rather let the sentence be extermination.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> The idea for the mission was hatched in May 1829. Robinson claimed to have raised the idea with the people at Bruny Island, who 'cheerfully acquiesced' (*Friendly Mission*, p. 65). After the success of the mission gained renown, there was a tussle between Gilbert Robertson, George Augustus Robinson, and the latter's patron Reverend William Bedford over whose idea it had originally been. The issue was never resolved, though Robinson remains the most obvious candidate.

<sup>34</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 276.

<sup>35</sup> Robinson to Arthur, 20 November 1830, TAHO, CSO1/317, pp. 216-33.

<sup>36</sup> In the latter half of 1831, Arthur fitted out several smaller parties modelled on Robinson's, though these tended to resemble the old roving parties, more ready to use force than diplomacy (see, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, pp. 480, 505, 720-22).

<sup>37</sup> Robinson's journals are replete with examples of this.

<sup>38</sup> See, for instance, *Colonial Times*, 22 February 1831, p. 2, 1 March 1831, p. 2 & *Launceston Advertiser*, 14 March 1831, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> *Launceston Advertiser*, 7 February 1831, p. 45.

### Thomas and Parker

In the opening days of spring 1831, the few colonists who remained unconvinced of the necessity of exterminating the blacks, received a resounding ‘I told you so’ from their more pessimistic acquaintances. The brutal killing of Captain Bartholomew Thomas and his overseer James Parker at Port Sorell on 31 August shook the colony to its foundations, and triggered an unprecedented surge of fear and anger.<sup>40</sup> Thomas was a highly respected war veteran, whose brother Jocelyn Thomas was Colonial Treasurer and a member of the Executive Council. Not only was Thomas sympathetic towards the natives, but him and Parker had also been attempting to conciliate the band when they were slain. Outraged, the public mourned the men as martyrs of the lost cause of conciliation. Incidentally, Thomas and Parker were the last colonists to die in the War, but nobody knew that at the time. Indeed, in previous years native hostility had always increased in the spring (see fig. 6), so the killings were seen by many as ushering in yet another season of violence.

The response to the killings was especially vitriolic in the north, where it seemed exterminationist sentiment now permeated even the township of Launceston. Not long after the bodies were found, the *Launceston Advertiser* denounced the killings as the ‘barbarity of a race which no kindness can soften, and which nothing short of utter annihilation can subdue.’ Thomas and Parker, the editor lamented, were ‘victims of a mistaken faith in the sincerity of these blood-thirsty savages.’<sup>41</sup> For its part, Launceston’s other newspaper, the recently established *Independent*, believed this latest outrage:

call[ed] aloud for retribution, deep and lasting, not only upon the perpetrators of the deeds, should they come within our power, but upon the whole race ... The whole colony cries out upon the occasion. It is useless they say, and we adopt and re-echo the opinion, to no longer attempt to hold terms with these worse than untamed beasts of prey ... What, then, is to be done? For, with the return of the season that produced the mighty armament of last year, something must be done! Otherwise what settler is there who can consider himself and his family in security from the dreadful visitations of the Aborigines!<sup>42</sup>

But it was not just newspaper editors who felt this way. One settler wrote to the editor of the *Independent* in early October, asserting that colonists now faced a simple question: ‘Are we to kill them or are they to kill us?’<sup>43</sup> The record suggests that most colonists agreed conciliatory measures had reached an impasse, and since capture was seemingly impossible, the only course left was extermination.

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<sup>40</sup> The newspapers in both Launceston and Hobart for September and October contain many heated references to the incident and its supposed implications.

<sup>41</sup> *Launceston Advertiser*, 19 September 1831, p. 292.

<sup>42</sup> *Independent*, 24 September 1831, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> *Independent*, 15 October 1831, p. 2.

## The 'Freycinet Line'

In the tumultuous wake of the Thomas and Parker killings, a choking anxiety hung thick over the interior. The *Independent* expressed the concern on everyone's mind: 'Who can tell to what lengths they (the aborigines) may run this season, beyond all precedence'?<sup>44</sup> Receiving reports of 'great numbers' of native fires near Oatlands, the *Colonial Times* predicted that the bands were 'undoubtedly approaching' the east coast and that 'the depredations of these misguided creatures, will shortly be recommenced, with more desperation than even last season.'<sup>45</sup> Sure enough, several weeks later they descended on the settlement at Great Swanport, robbing huts and causing panic. Then, on 19 October, the men at George Meredith's whaling station, located across the bay from Waterloo Point, reported seeing between twelve and thirty natives pass onto the Shouten (Freycinet) Peninsula. Once the sighting was confirmed on 21 October, Meredith and the district's other settlers rallied their servants and, together with ten soldiers, formed a stationary cordon across the narrow part of the Peninsula from The Fisheries.<sup>46</sup> Word was sent out and by 23 October around 100 armed men were in position.<sup>47</sup>

Many of the men who took up arms on the 'Freycinet Line' would also have served on the Black Line the previous year, and just as before, the majority of participants were convicts and soldiers who had no choice in serving. Likewise, both operations consisted of equally spaced posts between which men, under military supervision, took shifts patrolling.<sup>48</sup> Compared to the Black Line though, there were some major differences in the way the Freycinet campaign was experienced. Firstly, the men had not endured weeks of hellish marching before establishing their static cordon, and secondly, they were guarding a narrow isthmus only around a mile wide, so hopes were high that, this time, the natives would not escape. After just four days, however, the enemy was again in the rear, and fleeing.<sup>49</sup> The settler John Lyne recalled the escape:

the moon didn't rise until 10 pm and the fires were becoming low. It was my turn to patrol, I was at the time [urging] the men to keep good watch as the native dogs were seen amongst the fires in front, and after passing one of the soldiers on duty about 50 yards I heard him call "Halt". He comes there firing off his gun to give the alarm and on my running quick I heard a rustle as though a mob of wild cattle were passing but could see nothing.

<sup>44</sup> *Independent*, 17 September 1831, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> *Colonial Times*, 17 August 1831, p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> Story to Arthur, 25 October 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 1015-22. See also E. Stoddart, *The Freycinet Line, 1831: Tasmanian History and the Freycinet Peninsula*, Freycinet Experience, Coles Bay, 2003.

<sup>47</sup> Story to Arthur, 25 October 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 1015-22; Aubin to Colonial Secretary, 31 October 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 1041-44; *Hobart Town Courier*, 26 November 1831, p. 2.

<sup>48</sup> Rations were rowed over daily from Waterloo Point to The Fisheries.

<sup>49</sup> See, for instance, Story to Arthur, 25 October 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 1015-22 & Meredith to Arthur, 27 October 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 1030-32.

The news was confirmed the next morning, when Lyne and his demoralised comrades 'tracked their foot marks very plain'.<sup>50</sup> This result was a huge blow to a community already exhausted from years of failed efforts to contain the native threat. George Meredith, the man who had initiated the campaign, wrote to the Governor with evident frustration:

I must beg with deference to submit that the local government has too long delayed those energetic and efficient measures which can alone be relied upon under existing circumstances, and although the happy alternative is no longer an option, that of securing the Aborigines and removing them without the effusion of blood, their atrocities may be checked by a generally organised plan and one encouragement held out to those who from habit and experience are competent to the particular service required.<sup>51</sup>

One does not have to read too far between the lines here: Meredith was imploring the Governor to offer rewards to the frontiersmen with expertise in killing blacks, in the hope they would finish the job.

### **Surrender and the Memory of War**

Two months later, the job was finished, but not in the way Meredith or his fellow colonists expected. On New Year's Eve 1831, Robinson and his envoys negotiated the voluntary surrender of the once powerful Mairremmener people, of whom just sixteen men, nine women and one child remained. Seven days later, Robinson and his party walked into Hobart amidst a remarkable scene. The *Colonial Times* pointed out that it had been 'some years since the inhabitants of Hobart Town have witnessed a tribe of Aborigines in their native state', so in the interest of taste, the party were issued trousers before entering the town.<sup>52</sup> But this did not diminish the novelty of the spectacle. Citizens abandoned their employments and proceeded en masse to Elizabeth Street where they lined up to witness the arrival of this most infamous of 'the savage tribes'. Onlookers puzzled at how such a small, unassuming band could have struck so much terror into the hearts of frontier colonists. The *Hobart Town Courier* remarked at how the 'very small number, which is now found to compose these tribes must strike many of our readers [as surprising], especially those who supposed them to amount to thousands'.<sup>53</sup>

With the exception of the sporadic violence that continued in the northwest for another decade, the surrender of this last band signalled the end of the fighting. It took some time for

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<sup>50</sup> Recollections of John Lyne, cited in Stoddart, *The Freycinet Line*, p. 13.

<sup>51</sup> Meredith to Arthur, 27 October 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 1030-32.

<sup>52</sup> *Colonial Times*, 11 January 1832, p. 2. Descriptions of this event have been drawn from the *Hobart Town Courier*, 14 January 1832, p. 2 & Emmett, 'Reminiscences', p. 8.

<sup>53</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 14 January 1832, p. 2.

incredulous colonists to accept that the removal of just sixteen warriors had actually ended the violence, but it was soon apparent that ‘tranquility’ had indeed been restored.<sup>54</sup> Everyone felt a great sense of relief, but the War had taken its toll on frontier colonists, and it would not easily be forgotten. For more than half a decade the men, women and children of the interior had been under siege, many not daring to move without arms, and looking constantly over their shoulders. As Louisa Meredith remarked, it was a time ‘when every bush within spear throw of the house was a source of danger’; no one who had lived through the War could forget ‘the horrors, and terrors, and hair-breadth escapes’.<sup>55</sup>

Virtually overnight, newspapers and private correspondents all but ceased discussing the blacks. Colonists would occasionally mention them, but generally only when complaining about the cost of the Flinders Island mission. Only when it was suggested the surviving forty-seven be allowed to return, did it become apparent that memories of the War were still vivid and painful. On 20 August 1847, some 200 men assembled at the Cornwall Hotel in Launceston to draft a petition against the motion. Above all, those attending insisted that the new Governor, Sir William Denison, was under a dangerous misapprehension; that neither he, nor anyone who had arrived in the colony after 1831 could appreciate the consequences ‘when uncivilised creatures with all their savage and blood-thirsty propensities are admitted [*sic*] to escape into the bush to perpetrate all sorts of depredations and atrocities.’<sup>56</sup> Those present saw it as their duty to thus remind these newcomers of ‘those days of terror ... the dreadful state of affairs, too vivid in the memory of old colonists ever to be forgotten.’<sup>57</sup> If the thought of repatriating forty-seven aging and sickly natives could evoke such powerful feelings among the gentlemen of Launceston, it is fair to assume that the topic was no less emotive on the frontier. ‘It is a pity’, grumbled one veteran frontiersman:

that even one of the black wretches was allowed to escape without being roasted alive which was too good for them. And now there they are the biggest villains of every tribe who were clever enough to escape summary vengeance – there they are pampered up at Flinders Island with food and clothing, and Robinson and Parson Dove to pray for them, while everything that money can do is lavished on the innocent fiends that were leaders in the warfare against the settlers. ... If Robinson had left us alone we soon would have demolished them, and left nothing but their bones to tell the tale.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Throughout the War, colonists spoke longingly of a time when the Blacks would be removed and ‘tranquility’ would be restored. After the War, this became a selling point to potential emigrants, as the island had become the only British colony without a native population (see, for instance Anon [Christian name unrecorded], *A Visit to Tasmania by an Anglo-Indian 1875*, NWF Press, Muree, India, 1877, p. 45).

<sup>55</sup> Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania*, p. 78. As noted earlier, Louisa Meredith arrived after the War. Her husband (and presumably her source) had lived on the east coast since 1823.

<sup>56</sup> *Examiner*, 2 October 1847, pp. 4-5. Quotation by the speaker W. T. Weston.

<sup>57</sup> *Examiner*, 2 October 1847, pp. 4-5. Quotation by the speaker Theodore Bartley.

<sup>58</sup> Cited in Fenton, *James Fenton of Forth*, pp. 201-2.

Hundreds of colonists had been killed, and many more were left physically or psychologically scarred. Not surprisingly, the horrors of the War were seared deep into their memories, and the bitterness smoldered long after the enemy had been banished.

*Black*

## 16

**The War's End**

The Vandemonians must have known their struggle was lost well before 1831. In the east, there remained no more than five bands, comprising maybe eighty or ninety individuals. Isolated in small groups, they may not have been aware of just how depleted their numbers were; yet the unsustainability of their situation could not have escaped them. Most had by now seen the majority of their families die, which had to have had a profound affect on their attitudes and experiences. Whilst they could no longer have entertained any hope of victory, hatred and desperation drove them to press the War. Aboriginal attacks took on an especially brutal character in 1831, even though fewer were made overall. They could no longer have entertained victory, yet hatred and desperation drove them to press the War. Although Aborigines made fewer attacks in 1831, they were of an especially brutal character. White observers also noticed that their hostilities evinced boldness hitherto unseen hitherto unseen, though by now, the line between confident and desperate was blurred. The character and patterns of these attacks will be briefly surveyed in this Chapter, as will the experiences of those who chose instead to surrender and collaborate with the white man. Finally, it will examine the collapse of Vandemonian resistance, and the reasons why the survivors chose to surrender.

**Collaborators**

Some Aborigines were on friendly terms with certain white men until the mid 1820s. Settlers sometimes gave them food as a gesture of goodwill, and many labourers did the same, though usually in exchange for sex. Even during the early years of the War, occasional non-violent encounters took place.<sup>1</sup> But once the conflict began in earnest, neither black nor white would risk approaching each other. It had become 'a war of extermination', as some settlers put it.<sup>2</sup> But, while most Aborigines were being swept up in the burgeoning conflict, a few chose instead to collaborate with the invaders, and become trackers and guides for the roving parties.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, the town meeting of 22 September 1830 discussed in Chapter 13.

<sup>3</sup> In addition to his Aboriginal guides, John Batman contracted seven New South Wales Aborigines for the purpose, though they were of limited use.

Notable guides included 'Black Bill', who served under Batman; 'Mungo', who served under both Batman and Jorgenson; Cowerterminna ('Jack'), Lackerla ('Jemmy') and Kanneherlargenner ('Umarrah'), who were at various times members of Gilbert Robertson's parties; the women Karnebutcher and Numberloetinnare who guided Alexander McKay; and 'Boomer Jack', who was attached to a military roving party. The best known of all the roving party guides was Kickertopoller ('Black Tom'), who alternated throughout the 1820s between guiding the white men and killing them. Kickertopoller had been raised from boyhood by a Hobart settler, and was first employed as a guide by exploration parties in the early 1820s, but like many Aboriginal 'orphans', he eventually rejected white society, and returned to his kinsfolk.<sup>4</sup> However, most Aboriginal guides were prisoners who had agreed to assist the white men in exchange for their release. Some later absconded (Umarrah and Kickertopoller both escaped on several occasions), but others remained with the roving parties. Why they assisted the invaders is not fully understood, but we can gain some insight by examining the motivations of the envoys on Robinson's 'friendly mission'.

Robinson and his mission have acquired an aura both legendary and infamous. What began as a noble and courageous undertaking, in the post-War years devolved into a tragic saga of sickness and deceit. But again, this is posterity's view, and it does little to illuminate the attitudes and experiences of the Vandemonians who were responsible for its success. Henry Reynolds has contended that these people constituted a 'peace party', who conceived the friendly mission in an attempt to save other bands.<sup>5</sup> The Bruny Island people, he pointed out, witnessed the frequency with which shiploads of white men sailed up the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, and were thus singularly aware of the futility of resisting. He suggested that these people, believing Robinson offered the only chance for their race's survival, contrived to spread the word around the island. On its face, this hypothesis is by no means untenable. In its favour is the fact that the mission went first to the 'Port Davey people' in the island's southwest. The people in this area had taken practically no part in the violence, but they did have kinship ties with the Bruny Islanders,<sup>6</sup> who managed to deceive Robinson and the Governor into thinking they were primarily responsible for the War.<sup>7</sup> This explains the government's otherwise bizarre decision to invest considerable resources, at the height of the

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<sup>4</sup> It is not clear when and how Kickertopoller came to be living with the Birch Family. For more on this interesting character, see Robert Cox's forthcoming book *Broken Spear: The Sundered Life of Black Tom Birch*.

<sup>5</sup> Reynolds, *History of Tasmania*, pp. 71-76.

<sup>6</sup> Reynolds, *History of Tasmania*, p. 72.

<sup>7</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 70-72, 82, journals 11 July & 19 September 1829. The record shows that the so-called Port Davey people were responsible for none – or at least very little – of the violence. Robinson tacitly acknowledged this by never mentioning it again. Windschuttle (*Fabrication*, pp. 113-14) accepted the truth of Robinson's initial belief that the 'Port Davey tribe' were attacking colonists in the settled districts, and used this as evidence that expulsion from country was obviously not one of the reasons Aborigines fought. All other historians who have examined the evidence recognised Robinson's initial statement for the mistake it was.



War, in a mission to relatively peaceful Aborigines. The problem with Reynolds' theory, however, is not that it rests on circumstantial evidence – this is often all historians have to work with – but that the greater weight of that evidence suggests otherwise.

The decision to go west into an uncolonised wilderness rather than north into the warzone might have been a contrivance on the part of the Bruny Islanders, but a more likely explanation is that Robinson was not initially interested in negotiating with hostile warriors. Instead, he preferred to recruit more placid subjects for the grand 'Christian establishment' he envisioned. Furthermore, there is no convincing evidence that the envoys on the first mission wanted to 'save' the Port Davey people. Of the nine adult envoys who accompanied the first mission, only one was from Port Davey and no more than three were Bruny Islanders; the others hailed from various locations throughout eastern Van Diemen's Land.<sup>8</sup> Whilst there were certainly some warm relations between the two peoples,<sup>9</sup> internecine relationships were complicated, and this was no exception. When the bands met in the southwest, Robinson observed that a 'rooted enmity subsists in the mind of [the Bruny Island man] WOORADY against these people; again he urges me to capture them.'<sup>10</sup>

There were no white men in the southwest to be saved from, but even if we concede that some of the initial envoys had the wellbeing of the southwest people in mind, there is no reason to suppose their concern extended to all bands. By the time they reached the northwest, for instance, the envoys had no relationship with the bands they met and thus no investment in protecting them. To the contrary, they were afraid of foreign bands, and inclined to either avoid or attack them. When the mission returned to the northwest in 1832, Robinson complained that his 'aboriginal friends are bad politicians: they have no idea of persuasion; their ideas extend only to force.'<sup>11</sup> After the first mission, the composition of the envoys became even more diverse, and there were never more than two or three who had kinsfolk among the bands they were pursuing. In most cases, the people they sought were avowed enemies. Divided by ancient rivalries, there was never a pan-Aboriginal sentiment among Vandemonians, so the envoys must have had other reasons for supporting the friendly mission.

A number of possibilities present themselves. The envoys appear to have held Robinson in high regard – at least in the beginning – and as an influential and sympathetic white man they stood to gain much from his patronage. One obvious benefit was a fairly constant supply of

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<sup>8</sup> These included Robert and Kickertopoller, who had been raised by settlers; Umarrah, who had been captured in the interior; and Dray, who was from Port Davey. For a full list of who comprised the first mission, see *Friendly Mission*, p. 276.

<sup>9</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 70, journal 9 July 1829.

<sup>10</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 171, journal 28 March 1830. See also pp. 165, 172-73, journals 21 & 30 March 1830.

<sup>11</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 653-57, journal 23 June 1832.

flour, sugar, tea and tobacco. No less important was the physical security Robinson and his entourage of white servants provided the envoys. This allowed them to hunt in relative safety, but above all, to sleep easy at night in the knowledge that they would not be ambushed.<sup>12</sup> They also realised that Robinson was their only hope for a peaceful solution to the War, and for gaining some concessions in the process. He was, after all, a man who bore the authority of the Governor – the chief of all white men.

The envoys were the last remnants of their bands. Woorrady, for instance, was the last adult male of the Bruny Island people, so most of the relationships, ceremonies and traditions that had once dominated his world were no more. Remarkably, this most trusted of Robinson's envoys continued to lead songs, stories and dances during his years with the mission, despite the loss of almost all his friends and family, and of the world in which he grew up. For Woorrady and the other envoys, there were just two alternatives to joining Robinson's mission: continuing to fight an unwinnable War or languishing helplessly on a windswept island in Bass Strait – neither of which was enticing.

Until recently, most historians have seen the envoys as naïve dupes. James Calder, for instance, claimed that Robinson 'had acquired an ascendancy so complete over those of these simple minded savages whom he had subdued to his service, as to have left them almost literally without the faculty of volition.'<sup>13</sup> Calder did not have access to Robinson's journals, but similar conclusions were drawn by those who did.<sup>14</sup> However, as Reynolds pointed out, Robinson was totally dependent on these men and women, not just for finding and negotiating with the hostile bands, but for staying alive.<sup>15</sup> The envoys understood this, and were thus able to exercise considerable agency in their roles as guides, providers and negotiators. Indeed, to Robinson's frustration, they often did as they pleased.<sup>16</sup>

Nothing exemplifies the agency displayed by the envoys better than their subtle sabotaging of Robinson's mission. From October-December 1831, Robinson and fourteen envoys zigzagged across the center of the island in quest of the much-feared Mairremmener people. The surrender of this last band is remembered as Robinson's finest hour, but closer inspection reveals how powerless he was without the envoys' cooperation. Despite their façade of loyalty, most were far keener to hunt and enjoy the constant supply of the white man's food than to

<sup>12</sup> There was one instance at Circular Head on 13 May 1832, in which a party of Van Diemen's Land Company servants ambushed the mission's camp, but this was merely an act of thuggish intimidation, not a serious attempt to kill or abduct Aborigines.

<sup>13</sup> Calder, *Some Accounts*, pp. 107-8.

<sup>14</sup> Reynolds (*History of Tasmania*, pp. 74-75) highlighted several examples.

<sup>15</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 148-49, 520, 661-63, 800-2, journals 12 February 1830, 19 October 1831, 14 July 1832 & 22 July 1833; Robinson to Colonial Secretary, 5 January 1832, in *Friendly Mission*, p. 604. Robinson was fretfully aware of his reliance on the envoys.

<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, pp. 452-53, journals 4, 6 & 7 September 1831.

locate the people they were sure would kill them.<sup>17</sup> For three months Robinson was frustrated by their manoeuvres to stall and misdirect the mission with deception and theatrics, until on 28 December something happened that convinced them to cooperate.

This morning the natives broke all their spears and threw away their waddies, except MANNALARGENNA, a proof of their desire to conform; and MANNALARGENNA sent away his big dog that barked. ... the people evinced eagerness to go after the natives, which shewed (if such a circumstance was necessary) their sincerity to do their duty. I urged them on and told them the Governor only wanted me to get to the Big River tribe and then our troubles would be over, we should not have to go after any more and they could then hunt.<sup>18</sup>

That afternoon, the envoys located the first signs of the Mairremmener who had conveniently eluded their search for so long. Over the course of the mission, Robinson had tried various strategies of imploring, threatening and bribing the envoys into finding this band, but they had no interest in confronting an enemy people. Whatever changed their minds must have been profound, yet nothing appeared to distinguish 28 December from any other day, except ‘the natives said that yesterday when they was hunting they saw an eagle kill a young kangaroo.’<sup>19</sup> There is, of course, no way to know whether this event was significant, though these animals were believed to be animated by powerful spirits, so it is possible they perceived something oracular in it.<sup>20</sup>

Spiritual revelation or not, three days later, in an atmosphere of extreme fear and anxiety, a select embassy of eight envoys managed to negotiate an interview with the Mairremmener. This was Robinson’s version of events as the party returned:

I heard their war whoop by which I knew they were advancing towards me. I also heard them rattle their spears as they drew nearer. At this moment MANNALARGENNA the principal chief leaped on his feet in great alarm saying that the natives were coming to spear us. He urged me to run away. Finding I would not do so he immediately took up his spears and kangaroo rug and went away. Some of the other natives were about to follow his example but I prevailed upon them to stop. From their advancing with the war whoop the aborigines as well as ourselves considered that they were coming to us with hostile intentions and that they had either killed the natives who had been sent from us, or that those natives had joined the hostile tribes.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 517-98, journals 3 October–28 December 1831. Robinson summed up these shrewd diversionary ploys in his official report of 25 January 1832 (in *Friendly Mission*, pp. 601-2).

<sup>18</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 599, journal 28 December 1831.

<sup>19</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 599, journal 28 December 1831. Although he had attempted many times before to persuade his envoys to find the Mairremmener, Robinson did not record doing so this day.

<sup>20</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>21</sup> Robinson to Colonial Secretary, 25 January 1832, in *Friendly Mission*, p. 602. This version of events was years later challenged by one of Robinson’s servants, Alexander McGeary (cited in *Tasmanian*, 21 April 1837, p. 129), who claimed ‘[t]here never was anything like danger’. Certainly, Robinson was not beyond vain embellishments, yet it must be remembered that McGeary was not fond of Robinson, and appears not to have been present at the time.

As they came closer, however, the Mairremmener lowered their spears and a surrender was negotiated. How this motley assortment of collaborators managed to navigate such a strange and dangerous set of circumstances is a mystery, but clearly they were not the credulous simpletons they have so often been portrayed as. Nor were they the traitors they are sometimes imagined to be. Indeed, in the final years of the conflict, the *opportunity* to surrender was usually all that distinguished the envoys from the war parties.

### **Final Resistance**

Over the course of the Black War, a combination of growing desperation and resentment propelled the Vandemonians to gradually abandon their traditional modes of subsistence, and devote more and more time to killing and plundering white men. This meant that, despite their relentlessly declining population, Aboriginal belligerence intensified up until 1830. Whilst the capacity of the bands to make war had been decreasing more or less since the invasion began, the extent to which they used that capacity had risen exponentially from the mid 1820s.<sup>22</sup> Hypothetically, it is plausible to imagine that the remaining 1,000 or so eastern Vandemonians utilised two per cent of their collective war-making capacity in 1824, whereas the 200 or so left in 1830 used close to one hundred per cent. Obviously, even if such capacity could be quantified in theory, there are insufficient sources to do so in practice. But the point is this: by the time they began investing all their resources in attacking the whites, they was scarcely any of them left. Eastern Vandemonians made more attacks than ever in 1830, but this was in fact just the death throes of their society, and in the year that followed it collapsed entirely (see fig. 5).

The pressure from armed parties increased in 1831, forcing survivors into more marginal and less familiar areas. This was especially evident in presence of Mairremmener people in the northern foothills of the Great Western Tiers.<sup>23</sup> Since 1827, this area had seen almost no violence, presumably because the local bands had been killed off. But now, for the first time, it was assailed upon by a band, comprising mostly Mairremmener people, that had travelled north over the Central Plateau. These people retreated south in March, killing and plundering as they went, but remarkably, they undertook the journey again that August. Their decision to brave the frigid Plateau in winter is indicative of the danger they were facing in the south.<sup>24</sup> When they reached the northern plains in late August, hungry and exhausted from their trek,

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<sup>22</sup> By 'capacity to make war', I mean the number of warriors a band could sustain in the field against an enemy.

<sup>23</sup> Every Aboriginal attack made between January and April 1831 was in the north (see tally in Appendix 2).

<sup>24</sup> For reasons unknown, the other remaining Mairremmener band proceeded eastward to Oyster Bay about the same time.

they immediately began robbing stock-huts. Between 17 and 23 August, they attacked four huts, spearing a stock-keeper and a little girl, before stealthily crossing the plains, and following the Rubicon River to Port Sorell.<sup>25</sup> Here they slew their last two victims.

The circumstances surrounding the killing of Thomas and Parker speak volumes about the desperate state of the surviving Vandemonians in 1831. The records pertaining to this event are numerous.<sup>26</sup> We have the Aboriginal testimonies given to Robinson and his one-time assistant, Alexander McKay, as well as the formal deposition of the woman Nongoneepitta to the coroner in Launceston.<sup>27</sup> Robinson heard ‘there was three tribes – Big River, Oyster Bay and Port Sorell – present’, but the group probably comprised the remnants of at least four different bands.<sup>28</sup> And this was not the only sign of distress. There appears to have been a complete absence of children and elderly among this band,<sup>29</sup> neither of whom were adapted to rapid, stealthy movements, let alone to crossing the Plateau in winter. Among this young and motley group were several locals who had received mixed treatment from Thomas’ men in the past.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, hunger seems to have prompted two men, Mackamee and Wowaree, to approach one of Thomas’ huts. The Captain, whom Wowaree called ‘Kandownee’ (chief), gave the emissaries some bread and requested they lead him and Parker to their camp.<sup>31</sup> Thomas hoped to conciliate the band, but soon after arriving at the camp, and without warning, one of the men snatched Parker’s shotgun, while another clubbed him to death with a waddie.<sup>32</sup> Thomas ran for his life, but did not get far before succumbing to almost a dozen spear wounds.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>25</sup> They probably chose Port Sorell because it was comparatively dryer, warmer (Australian Government, Bureau of Meteorology, <http://www.bom.gov.au>), and more isolated than anywhere else in the area (at this time Thomas’ property was accessible only by sea).

<sup>26</sup> The more germane sources drawn upon for this section include: Calder, *Some Accounts*, pp. 77-88 (mostly based on McKay’s evidence); *Weep in Silence*, pp. 399-400, journal 9 December 1836; *Friendly Mission*, pp. 510, 528, 584, 611, 637, 724-25, journals 27 October, 14 December 1831, 5 May 1832; *Tasmanian*, 10 & 24 September, 1 October 1831; *Hobart Town Courier*, 17 & 24 September 1831; *Launceston Advertiser*, 19 & 26 September 1831; *Colonial Times*, 14 & 21 September 1831; Robinson to Colonial Secretary, 17 September 1831, TAHO, CSO1/318, pp. 57-62; depositions and correspondence respecting Thomas/Parker killings, 5-24 September 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 954-86; NLA, MS3251/2/4, pp. 75-99. The sources do not agree on all details, but I have presented what I believe to be the most probable series of events.

<sup>27</sup> Nongoneepitta’s interpreter was McKay. Whilst it is doubtful he understood much of her language, she probably spoke some English. The transcript is written in very simple language (Deposition of Nongoneepitta, 24 September 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 984-85).

<sup>28</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 584, journal 14 December 1831. According to the various sources, as many as eight (named) Aborigines were involved in this incident. Their band locations, according to Plomley (*Friendly Mission*, pp. 1014-27), included Spring Bay, Great Lakes, Big River, and Port Sorell.

<sup>29</sup> There were no recognised chiefs among the band either, which suggests it might have been a breakaway band of young confederates.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas’ men were probably responsible for some violence against the local Aborigines (see *Friendly Mission*, pp. 248, 251, journals 17 & 21 September 1830), yet there also appears to have been some non-violent contact as well (Calder, *Some Accounts*, p. 86).

<sup>31</sup> Calder, *Some Accounts*, p. 86.

<sup>32</sup> Details of the killing come largely from Nongoneepitta’s and Mackamee’s testimonies (Deposition of Nongoneepitta, 24 September 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 984-85 & *Weep in Silence*, pp. 399-400, journal 9 December 1836). There is only one major discrepancy between their accounts. Mackamee claimed that Parker died by a gunshot blast to the back of the head from his own gun. This is the version accepted by

Perhaps because of their diverse composition, those present had disagreed over whether to kill the two white men, and some of the women tried ardently to stop the slaughter.<sup>34</sup> Three of these women stormed off, but along with Calama-Rowenge, Mackamee and Wowaree, who were attempting to entice them back, they were captured by Thomas' men after being lured with food to the homestead. The six captives were taken to the George Town gaol, where they were denied blankets, fire and food until one of the women, Nongoneepitta, agreed to direct authorities to the bodies.

Thomas and Parker's killers were, it seems, possessed by an emphatic hatred of all white men. Mackamee told Robinson the men were slain 'in retaliation for injuries they [his people] had received from the whites.'<sup>35</sup> Some Vandemonians had long felt this way, but the callous ferocity of this killing was especially characteristic of the attacks made in 1831, which suggests a peculiar bitterness was driving certain survivors to take greater risks in pursuit of indiscriminate vengeance. The proportion of Aboriginal attacks that resulted in death or wounding had decreased steadily every year since 1826, but it spiked again in 1831 (see fig. 7), as did the percentage of such attacks on women and children.<sup>36</sup> This resurgence of brutality was not a last-ditch attempt to win the War, which was obviously lost. More probably, it reflected the pain and acrimony that had taken hold of the last free Vandemonians.

Seventy attacks were recorded in the east in 1831, compared to 250 the previous year (see fig. 5). This is indicative of how swiftly the fighting capacity of the remaining bands declined. None of this was lost on the Vandemonians. According to the testimony of survivors in later years, they had by this stage accepted that they were 'irrevocably destined to destruction'.<sup>37</sup> 'They were the worn out relics of their nation', wrote John West; '[s]ome, who later gave themselves up, stated that they had been very unhappy: they had gone over the country, searching for their lost friends, of whom they could gain no tidings.'<sup>38</sup> It is not clear how West came to know this, but Robinson also wrote of the Vandemonians' growing sense of isolation:

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Plomley. However, Nongoneepitta told the coroner that one of the men snatched the gun from Parker while another, Dowungee, struck on him on the head with a waddie. This also corresponds with the examination by Doctor Smith, who observed 'an extensive fracture on the right side of the head, apparently from the blow of a stick.'

<sup>33</sup> Colonial report of Dr John Smith, 24 September 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 976-79.

<sup>34</sup> Deposition of Nongoneepitta, 24 September 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 984-85. Nongoneepitta also claimed that some of the men sat down in protest.

<sup>35</sup> *Weep in Silence*, pp. 399-400, journal 9 December 1836.

<sup>36</sup> See Chapter 8 for why Aborigines killed less and plundered more as the War progressed. Only seven per cent of attacks involved the killing or wounding of women or children in 1831, but this was the highest annual proportion of the War.

<sup>37</sup> This was conveyed to Flinders Island Superintendent, Henry Jeanneret, in discussions with survivors (cited in Reynolds, 'Terra Nullius Reborn', pp. 125-26).

<sup>38</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, pp. 57, 73. See also Brown, *The Narrative of George Russell*, p. 61.

'My sable companions frequently asked me what had become of the natives, as they had not discovered any traces of them. They supposed that they had been shot by the soldiers.'<sup>39</sup>

Those who continued the fight were tired and despondent, and might well have considered surrendering long before encountering the friendly mission had they had reason to think a viable solution existed. Arthur was probably right when he observed in 1830:

These miserable beings, I make no doubt, are wearied with the harassing [*sic*] life they have endured for a considerable time past, and would gladly be reconciled if they knew our real intentions towards them were those of kindness; but, unfortunately, the most conciliatory measures of the Government have been already frequently rendered nugatory by the barbarity of runaway convicts, or of detached stockkeepers.<sup>40</sup>

It must have been difficult for the Vandemonians to imagine what such a solution would look like. There is no reason to think the idea of removing to an island had even occurred to them until Robinson and his envoys proposed it. At the same time, the thought of living amicably alongside the white men was clearly absurd. Why would all those thousands of apparently independently acting white men suddenly cease trying to kill them? To the last of the free Vandemonians, hiding was the only alternative to fighting. It is telling that Robinson's offer of a bloodless escape from their nightmarish ordeal was swiftly accepted in just about every instance. For those who wanted to live, surrender was their only real option.<sup>41</sup>

## Surrender

Robinson and his assistants secured a trickle of surrenders between November 1830 and August 1831, which was followed on 31 December 1831 by the surrender of the Mairremmener people described above.<sup>42</sup> Wearied, but resolute, this last band agreed to accompany the mission to Hobart. 'I have promised them a conference with the Lieut Govr', Robinson wrote ahead:

and that the Governor will be sure to redress all their grievances. I earnestly hope that every possible kindness and attention may be shewn to these people for they cannot

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<sup>39</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 412, journal 17 July 1831. See also *Friendly Mission*, pp. 776-79, 895-97, journals 17 June 1833 & 14 March 1834; *Farmers Cabinet*, 18 September 1835, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Arthur to Murray, 15 April 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 17. See also Barnes to Aborigines Committee, 10 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, p. 301.

<sup>41</sup> Despite this receptiveness, Robinson was not above using scare tactics and deception to enhance the appeal of his offer. See, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, pp. 295-300, 451, 668, journals 1 & 2 November 1830, 3 September 1831 & 22 July 1832.

<sup>42</sup> Sporadic conflict continued in the northwest until 1842 (see Appendix 1). There was also an isolated report of a stockman being harassed near the Liffey River in July 1832, and of two huts being plundered near Hamilton in August 1834.

and ought not to be looked upon as captives. They have placed themselves under my protection and are desirous for peace.<sup>43</sup>

On 7 January, this war-torn remnant arrived in the capital, and as they strode towards Government House, parting crowds of curious onlookers, they saw for the first time the true scale of what they had been fighting. The imposing buildings, the alien sounds and smells, and the sheer number of whites bombarded their senses in ways now difficult to imagine. It must have been an overwhelming experience, and one that confirmed the invaders' insurmountable power. According to the *Colonial Times*:

if report says true, the view with which they were induced to accompany Mr. Robinson, was, that they should seek redress from the Governor, whom, next to Mr. Robinson, they had been [led] to consider the greatest man in the Island. These men, it is said, were bent upon spearing His Excellency, provided he did not grant them the redress they were seeking. The whole mob immediately proceeded to Government House, when His Excellency came out to meet them, and after consulting some time with those of the tame mob that could speak English, he gave to each of these savage looking warriors a loaf of bread, after which they retired to the green sward, at another part of the premises, when the band was sent for; On the first sound of the musical instruments the astonishment with which they listened was truly wonderful; there was a degree of fear portrayed on their countenances, but as the music continued they became more calm<sup>44</sup>

Unfortunately, the condescending nature of the press coverage tells us little about how the Vandemonians experienced this extraordinary event. Adding to the mystery, no record exists of their interview with the Governor. We know only that they were soon aboard the *Tamar*, bound for Bass Strait. According to the captain, 'during the whole passage they sat on the vessel's bulwark, shaking little bags of human bones, apparently as a charm against the danger to which they felt exposed.'<sup>45</sup>

In 1995, Reynolds triggered an intense and ongoing debate over the conditions under which Vandemonians surrendered to Robinson, arguing they accepted a verbal treaty that was never honoured by the British.<sup>46</sup> This debate has tended to focus on the contemporary legal and political implications of such an agreement, but the present Chapter is solely concerned with how Robinson's assurances influenced the surrender process.<sup>47</sup> Reynolds argued convincingly that the Aborigines chose to surrender and relocate to Bass Strait on three conditions. Firstly, 'their customs were to be respected, and not broken into by any rash or misguided

<sup>43</sup> Robinson to Colonial Secretary, 5 January 1832, CSO1/318, p. 127.

<sup>44</sup> *Colonial Times*, 11 January 1832, p. 2. See also, *Hobart Town Courier*, 14 January 1832, p. 2 & Emmett, 'Reminiscences', p. 8.

<sup>45</sup> Stokes, *Discoveries in Australia*, vol. 2, p. 466.

<sup>46</sup> Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, pp. 151-56.

<sup>47</sup> Adding to the controversy is uncertainty about Robinson's authority and the government's knowledge of his promises.



interference.<sup>48</sup> There is no evidence regarding the origin or influence of this promise, but it probably carried some weight. Secondly, Robinson ‘told them that they should have everything they wanted ... plenty of tea, Sugar and flour, and have fine houses, Blankets, Rugs and Bedding when they came to Flinders Island.’<sup>49</sup> Given their fondness for such goods, and the difficulties they now had subsisting, this would have been a highly appealing offer.

The third and most contentious condition was Robinson’s assurance that all Vandemonians who agreed to ‘cease their depredations’ could return to their country once the violence had subsided. In his journal for 27 August 1831, Robinson wrote:

I omit no opportunity of impressing upon the mind of the chief and the other natives that they are to remain in their own country; and that I am anxious to get to them for the purpose of going to others, and that I will leave a man to take care of them and that some of the [Tyereelore] women shall stay with them. At this arrangement they are much pleased and say it is very good indeed.<sup>50</sup>

There is considerable evidence that Robinson made the same promises in all his negotiations, though it is not clear whether these conditions were demanded or merely accepted by the surviving bands.<sup>51</sup> They may have been willing to fight to the last if unsatisfied with Robinson’s terms, but given their dire situation, they were probably drawn to any resolution that ended the torment, and preserved their lives. They could not have imagined that, within just a few years, most of them would sicken and suffer an agonising death in a strange land. The Russian Lieutenant Vilgelm Linden, who visited Hobart in 1870, reasoned that:

It wasn’t persuasion that made the indigenous Tasmanians leave their native forests – it was their hopeless situation. If they had known what awaited them, they would doubtless have chosen to die of hunger like hunted beasts in their dens.<sup>52</sup>

As it happens, we know nothing of the regrets the exiled Vandemonians took to their graves, though there were surely moments when they paused to envy their fallen comrades, who were spared the horror of witnessing their society gasp its last breath.

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<sup>48</sup> Robinson to Montague, 31 July 1835, cited in Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, pp. 151-52.

<sup>49</sup> Statement by Thomas Bruny, the young Aborigine from Wybalenna, cited in Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, p. 151. Robinson and the government regularly repeated this promise, and to a large extent kept it.

<sup>50</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 446, journal 27 August 1831.

<sup>51</sup> See, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, pp. 427, 454, 457, 599, journals 6 August, 8, 11 September & 28 December 1831; Colonial Secretary to Robinson, 25 June 1831, in *Friendly Mission*, p. 500; Robinson to Colonial Secretary, TAHO, CSO1/318, pp. 45-51; *Weep in Silence*, pp. 747-48. In July 1838, in a letter to Colonial Secretary (cited in Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, p. 152), Robinson watered down these promises, claiming he had merely guaranteed ‘that as far as practicable they were in the summer months under proper protection to occasionally visit their native districts.’

<sup>52</sup> Cited in E. Gover, ‘Tasmania through Russian Eyes (Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries)’, *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers & Proceedings*, vol. 37, no. 4, 1990, p. 157.



## Conclusion

Given the importance of the Black War to Australian and world history, the preceding exploration into how it was experienced is long overdue.<sup>1</sup> Posterity remembers it for its tragic outcome; what many consider an indelible stain on a callous empire. But for the thousands of Aborigines and colonists who endured it, the War looked radically different. For them, it was a cycle of violence, misery and fear, compounded on both sides by the incomprehensibility of the enemy. Indeed, there has never been a war fought between such fundamentally different people. The ethical and legal questions that animate today's historical conferences were far from the minds of those involved. Thus, in exploring and juxtaposing these peoples' attitudes and experiences, this thesis has sought to illuminate the War from important and neglected angles. Above all, this unique approach has contributed a fresh layer to our understanding, and what follows is a synthesis of its more salient insights.

### The White Perspectives

The Black War has almost invariably been approached from the point of view of the colonial administration, and the near annihilation of the Aborigines has been frequently blamed on the government's failure to punish those who harmed them. However, despite his neglect in failing to follow up several egregious cases, Governor Arthur's actual control over the frontier was minimal. He admonished the settlers to keep their servants in check, but maintaining constant surveillance was impossible. In isolated regions, the threat of Aboriginal revenge was often all that checked the behaviour of brutalised and sex-deprived convicts; while on the sea frontier, hardened sealers and escapees had even less to restrain their carnal desires.

The colony's pernicious gender imbalance led inevitably to frontiersmen abducting and raping Aboriginal women. As the violence spiraled further out of control in the late 1820s, sex became less important than defeating the enemy, whom many considered sub-human. But, just as frontiersmen encountered few legal or moral obstacles to killing Aborigines, they had very little protection against being killed themselves. For this reason, many colonists killed Aborigines as much from a sense of self-preservation as from feelings of hatred and lust. The blacks made everyone on the frontier feel intensely vulnerable, to the point where killing them came to be considered a public service.

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<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the ways in which its conclusions bear on questions of national and imperial history, though these are potentially fruitful lines of enquiry.

Aboriginal attacks generated immense hatred, grief and frustration, but the emotion colonists expressed above all others was fear. Everyone on the frontier felt afraid to some extent, but for those in exposed areas, the fear could be paralysing. Most pressing among settlers was the fear of economic loss, and fear for the safety of family and friends. Convicts, however, were understandably more concerned for their own safety. The blacks were so effective and so elusive that they took on a dark mystique in the minds of frontiersmen. The result was a claustrophobic atmosphere of terror that forced numerous architectural and behavioural changes. Many remote colonists turned their dwellings into makeshift fortresses, and refused to venture beyond them without guns, dogs or companions. In extreme cases, fear drove people from their farms. Indeed, whether it was their intention or not, Aborigines succeeded in producing a measure of hysteria among the invaders of their country.

The Black Line was the zenith of the War, and the ultimate expression of this hysteria. For a brief period, this intriguing, and in many ways unique operation offered colonists hope, but it also gave them a way to channel years of pent-up frustration and fear. The Line was Australia's largest domestic military operation before World War II, yet it remains one of the most poorly understood. By drawing on previously unused primary sources, I have, for the first time, shed light on the attitudes and experiences of participants. I have also shown that the composition of the Line was vastly different to what scholars had previously thought. But, perhaps most significantly, I have demonstrated that it was a tactical disaster and outright failure, which demoralised the frontier community, while having no serious impact on the Aborigines.

The Black War cost colonists in a number of significant ways. The extent to which violence retarded the colony's economic and population growth is difficult to measure, though its cost to settlers in labour and property was a constant source of complaint. Even greater was the cost in human life. Depending on how one measures the population of frontier colonists, between three and six per cent were killed or wounded by Aborigines, and many more survived pursuits and sieges.<sup>2</sup> But the most costly toll of all was psychological.

By illuminating these experiential dimensions, I have challenged the picture of a monolithic European dispossessor that permeates much of the literature. To accommodate the evident multiplicity of frontier experiences such a picture needs refiguring. Little can be said about 'the Europeans', but as this thesis has shown, much can be said of the diverse experiences of the fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, prisoners and soldiers, housemaids and stockmen who colonised Van Diemen's Land.

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<sup>2</sup> For the variables involved in such an estimation, see Finnane, 'a nun's picnic', pp. 300-304.

## **The Black Perspectives**

If examining the Black War through the colonists' eyes has its difficulties, glimpsing it from the perspectives of the Vandemonians – a mysterious, preliterate people – poses immense challenges. Nevertheless, this thesis has managed to distil something of their attitudes and experiences from the observations of Europeans, and to interpret these within their historical, environmental and cultural contexts. From this analysis, a number of conclusions can be drawn. Most Vandemonians understood little about the white men, and at least some believed they were malevolent ancestor spirits returned from the isle of the dead. However, none of this prevented them from recognising the strangers' destructive power, or from treating them as invaders of their country.

Attacks by Vandemonians were sometimes overtly political, especially those involving arson and stock killing, but they were also motivated by more proximate causes. These provocations, and their responses to them, changed over the course of the War. When seeking revenge, for instance, Aborigines initially targeted specific perpetrators, but as the insults mounted, they began to treat all whites as enemies. Another major change was that, as the soaring white population overwhelmed the game-rich plains and valleys, European foods and blankets became necessities rather than luxuries. Thus, Vandemonians experienced a priority shift from killing on principle to plundering for survival.

The invasion of their homelands cost most Vandemonians their life, but it cost all of them their way of life. Over the course of the 1820s, their population plummeted, their social and ceremonial networks broke down, and they found moving and hunting more dangerous with every passing year. When near the settlements, bands were forced to sleep around tiny campfires in inconspicuous places, with sentinels constantly on guard. From sundown to sunrise they wrestled against cold and fear, questioning every sound, and watching for the slightest stirring among their dogs. Vandemonians had always dreaded the malevolent spirits that lurked in the night, but during the War their slumbers were haunted by more tangible spectres.

Increasingly, the surviving bands sought refuge in the remote and inhospitable recesses of the island, but often the dangers of cold and starvation outweighed those of the bayonets and bullets. Incessantly harried by dozens of armed parties, the wounded had no time to recuperate, and the strong were sometimes obliged to abandon them, along with their infants and elderly. These crushing expedients, together with the constant loss of kinsfolk in campfire ambushes, caused a great cloud of sadness, anger and despair to descend on the survivors. From the

perspectives of the Vandemonians, the Black War was largely a story of desperation; of trying to run, fight and survive as their society collapsed around them. Not surprisingly, the Conciliator's offer to relieve them of this hellish existence was readily accepted.

### **General Themes and Comparisons**

The parallel chapter format of this thesis is not only convenient for presenting both perspectives, it also reflects the fact that the two vantage points were deeply alien to one another. Yet, at the same time, the lives and often the fates of Aborigines and colonists were tightly enmeshed. Thus, to underscore some of its more significant findings, this thesis will close with a summary of some common themes and illustrative comparisons regarding the nature of warfare in Van Diemen's Land.

The Black War was fought almost exclusively by independently acting parties using guerrilla tactics. As a conflict, it exhibited many features common to guerrilla wars throughout history – small, stealthy raiding parties, hit and run ambushes, sabotage and a high casualty rate among non-combatants – but the most distinctive feature of the Black War was its solar rhythm. Every attack on colonists or their property was conducted during daylight hours, and with few exceptions, colonists attacked Aborigines at night. This day/night pendulum of violence has hitherto gone unnoticed by historians, yet it could well distinguish the conflict as unique in the history of warfare.<sup>3</sup>

A related pattern, which has gone all but unnoticed, concerned the regularity of the guerrilla tactics employed on the frontier. With characteristic perceptiveness, Robinson observed that 'the practice of this class of individuals [convicts] is to come upon them [the blacks] and to fire at them – a similar practice to the blacks in their attacks upon the whites'.<sup>4</sup> Colonists found that the only reliable way to kill or capture Aborigines was to desecrate their campfires, then ambush them as they slept. On the other hand, most colonists were killed or wounded when Aboriginal war parties ambushed them in or about their huts. Although the colonists were ultimately victorious, the tactics used by both sides were comparably effective.

Between 1824 and 1831, Aborigines made at least 833 attacks on colonists in the east, killing or wounding 437 of them (see figs. 5 and 9). Although in hindsight they did not fully exploit tactics such as arson, the Vandemonians nonetheless proved themselves to be skillful and dangerous foes, mounting a resistance that dwarfs anything encountered elsewhere in the

<sup>3</sup> To my knowledge, no other conflict has exhibited such a strict day/night oscillation.

<sup>4</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 524, journal 23 October 1831.

Australian colonies. For their part, colonists killed something like 600 eastern Aborigines during the War years, mostly in clandestine ambushes. The majority of these attacks were conducted not by troops or roving parties, but by vigilante groups comprised largely of convicts and emancipists. These men had, like their victims, honed their tactics to a formidable degree. Nowhere were these tactics more effectively employed than on the sea frontier, where sealers managed to all but wipe out the female population of the northeast. Indeed, in most respects the colonists can also be said to have engaged in guerrilla tactics, a feature of the War that other studies have failed to recognise.

The criteria for comparing the efficacy of white and black tactics are numerous and difficult to measure, but in general, both sides demonstrated skill and resolve, each inflicting a horrific toll on the other. Given its profoundly unequal result, the claim that the Black War was a fight between equally competent adversaries can at first glance seem inconsistent. Keith Windschuttle has asserted that '[e]ither the Aborigines were not the great guerrilla warriors they have been portrayed or their death toll was much lower than has been claimed. The orthodox thesis cannot have it both ways.'<sup>5</sup> This non sequitur reasoning, however, ignores the historical fact that martial prowess never guarantees victory. In the American Civil War, for instance, the confederates were generally more effective fighters and strategists than their union antagonists, but out-numbered and out-resourced, they ultimately lost the struggle. Likewise, the Vandemonians' guerrilla tactics were highly effective; but for every colonist they killed, another fifty poured into their country, and all the while, their own population plummeted. Demographically overwhelmed, the effectiveness of their tactics could do little to alter the result of the War.

This thesis represents a unique and serious attempt to examine the Black War from the viewpoints of those who lived and died in its clutches. It follows on the heels of several generations of impressive scholarship to which I hope it has made its own modest contribution. It delivers new insights into the nature of the violence, what caused it and how it made people feel. But perhaps most importantly, it reveals the essentially human character of the conflict, dispelling the myth that modern Tasmania was forged in a battle between good and evil. Moreover, it has shown that the traditional literary dichotomies of strong and weak, cowardly and courageous, victim and victimiser do not stand up to criticism. Practically everyone saw themselves as the victims. White and black alike, most were just trying to survive the nightmare in which they found themselves. There were of course many cruel individuals, but they too were victims of their circumstances, assumptions, hatreds, frustrations, fears and sadnesses. This is not justification, nor is it condemnation. Understanding the Black War

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<sup>5</sup> Windschuttle, *Fabrication*, p. 356.

requires evidence and empathy, not judgment, and weaving these into a new narrative of this tragic event has been the *raison d'être* of this thesis.



## *Appendix*

### I

#### **The Northwest Frontier**

The northwest theatre of the Black War was in many ways remarkably similar to the eastern theatre, and might have been absorbed into the wider narrative of this thesis were it not for some significant peculiarities. The first thing to note is the timing. The violence in the east began at Risdon in 1804, and was over by December 1831. In the northwest, however, the first violence did not erupt until 1827, yet it continued until 1842. The people involved in the northwest conflict were also distinctive. The colonists were exclusively servants of the Van Diemen's Land Company, a chartered enterprise that had been granted a monopoly on the region. Vandemonians in the northwest were culturally, technologically and linguistically distinct from those to the south and east, and their level of contact with eastern bands appears to have been minimal and mostly hostile.<sup>1</sup> Thus, there are a number of geographical and temporal, but also cultural and circumstantial features of the northwest conflict that recommend it for independent analysis.

Only two publications have dealt in any depth with the Black War in the northwest. Geoff Lennox, in his lengthy 1990 article 'The Van Diemen's Land Company and the Aboriginal Aborigines: A Reappraisal', published in the *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings*, was the first to undertake serious archival research on the conflict, and his work has formed the basis of all subsequent scholarship.<sup>2</sup> The most important publication, however, is Ian McFarlane's 2008 book *Beyond Awakening: The Aboriginal Tribes of North West Tasmania: A History*, which is to-date the most comprehensive treatment of the northwest conflict.<sup>3</sup> The work of both Lennox and McFarlane has proved extremely useful, but neither explored the conflict from the perspectives of the convicts or Aborigines. This Appendix departs from all previous scholarship by focussing on the attitudes and experiences of those engaged in the violence on the northwest frontier.

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<sup>1</sup> See Jones, 'Tasmanian Tribes', pp. 331-52. The level and nature of their contact with bands along the western and southern coasts is unknown.

<sup>2</sup> See vol. 37, no. 4 of the *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers & Proceedings*.

<sup>3</sup> James Boyce's 2008 book *Van Diemen's Land* does delve into the northwest conflict, but adds little to McFarlane's 2002 PhD thesis 'Aboriginal Society in North West Tasmania'.

## The Whites

The Van Diemen's Land Company was overseen by a board of directors in England, and managed in the northwest by its chief agent, Edward Curr. In late 1826, the Company's headquarters were established at Circular Head, while a contingent of surveyors and convicts began searching the unexplored northwest region for suitable sheep grazing pastures.<sup>4</sup> Little was found beyond the Hampshire and Surrey Hills, and the areas around Circular Head and Cape Grim (see fig. 18), so it was these tracts, manned by twenty-four convicts and several free overseers, that became the focus of the Company's grazing operations.<sup>5</sup>

As chief agent and magistrate, Curr held total authority in the northwest; he was, in his own words, 'both master and magistrate, party and judge'.<sup>6</sup> Branded the 'Potentate of the North' by the *Hobart Town Courier*, Curr has been described by McFarlane as a malicious despot, cruel in his treatment of both servants and blacks.<sup>7</sup> Under Curr, violence towards blacks was not only tolerated, but also at times actively encouraged. McFarlane concluded that, '[w]ithin twelve months of the Company establishing a presence in the north west, the employees under Curr's direct control had gained a reputation for brutal treatment of the local Aboriginal population.'<sup>8</sup>

Sex was again the primary catalyst for conflict. There were very few white women in the colony generally, but there seems to have been only two in the northwest, Curr's wife and Superintendent Adey's wife. Jorgen Jorgenson, who worked for the Company in 1827, warned the Governor that Curr's shepherds 'had designs of violating the [native] women.'<sup>9</sup> He would be repeatedly vindicated. For example, while Robinson was at Circular Head in 1830, Mr Reeves told him that 'a female aborigine was kept by a stockkeeper for about a month, after which she was taken out and shot.'<sup>10</sup> An even more graphic account was given to John Stokes, who spoke with a convict at Stony Head in 1836: 'He had spent the early part of his servitude at Circular Head, where he was for some time in charge of the native woman caught stealing flour at a shepherd's hut, belonging to the Van Diemen's Land Agricultural Company'. In the course of conversation, the man confessed 'he kept the poor creature chained up like a wild

<sup>4</sup> The Company was initially granted 250,000 acres, but a further 100,000 acres were granted in 1829. For more detail on land settlement in the northwest, see Robson, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 1, pp. 190-92.

<sup>5</sup> McFarlane, *Beyond Awakening*, p. 78.

<sup>6</sup> Curr to Court, 22 March 1833, cited in McFarlane, *Beyond Awakening*, p. 80.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in McFarlane, *Beyond Awakening*, p. 81.

<sup>8</sup> McFarlane, *Beyond Awakening*, p. 89.

<sup>9</sup> Memorial by Jorgenson, 8 January 1828, cited in G. Lennox, 'The Van Diemen's Land Company and the Tasmanian Aborigines: A Re-Appraisal', unpublished draft, STL, TL.Q 994.60049915 LEN, 1991, appendix.

<sup>10</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 244, journal 13 September 1830.

beast; and whenever he wanted her to do anything, applied a burning stick, a fire-brand snatched from the hearth, to her skin!’<sup>11</sup>

In November 1827, it was over women that the conflict began in earnest. Robinson’s envoys told him that at Cape Grim ‘the Company’s shepherds had got the native women into their hut and wanted to take liberties with them, that the men resented it and speared one man in the thigh; that they [the stockmen] then shot one man dead.’<sup>12</sup> In response to this killing, the band destroyed 118 of the Company’s ewes, spearing and clubbing some, and herding the rest over a cliff.<sup>13</sup> An escalating cycle of retribution had begun, and the Company’s men were determined to strike a decisive blow.

Curr informed the Company’s directors on 14 January 1828 that the cutter, *Fanny*, had been sent to Cape Grim a few days after the spearing of the ewes. There, Captain Richard Frederick:

took the opportunity of going in quest of them, with three other men. They came about nightfall on a tribe of about seventy men, but it was judged better to take day light for the intended attack, and the party drew off until morning. It rained heavily during the night and when they approached in the morning close to the Natives with the intent of attacking them, not a musket would go off and they were obliged to retreat without firing a shot.<sup>14</sup>

This version of events might have gone unquestioned had it not been for an account given by Rosalie Hare, who was then lodging with her husband at the Curr homestead. Hare recorded that:

While we remained at Circular Head there were several accounts of considerable amounts of Natives having been shot by them (the Company’s men), they wishing to extirpate them entirely, if possible. The master of the Company’s Cutter, *Fanny*, assisted by four shepherds and his crew, surprised a party and killed twelve.<sup>15</sup>

It had apparently been a close shave, as the surviving natives ‘escaped but afterwards followed them. They reached the vessel just in time to save their lives’.<sup>16</sup> Windschuttle has made the point that Curr, ‘having acknowledged the attempted ambush, had no reason to lie about its lack of success.’<sup>17</sup> Another possibility – in keeping with Curr’s brash but shrewd personality – is that he believed knowledge of the ambush had already been leaked and thus fabricated the

<sup>11</sup> Stokes, *Discoveries in Australia*, p. 459.

<sup>12</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 215, journal 21 June 1830.

<sup>13</sup> McFarlane, *Beyond Awakening*, p. 90.

<sup>14</sup> Cited in McFarlane, *Beyond Awakening*, p. 91.

<sup>15</sup> Hare, *Voyage of the Caroline*, p. 41.

<sup>16</sup> Hare, *Voyage of the Caroline*, p. 41.

<sup>17</sup> Windschuttle’s opinion summarised by John Dawson in ‘Van Demonisation: The Revival of the Aboriginal Genocide Thesis’, *Quadrant*, vol. 52, no. 11, pp. 50-51.

story as a credible alternative. Furthermore, Hare had no reason to invent such an account and was unlikely to have been mistaken given the level of detail she provided.<sup>18</sup>

Whatever the truth, the local shepherds were determined not to rest until the entire band was exterminated. The end result of this resolution was the so-called ‘Cape Grim Massacre’, which has since become a by-word for the cruelty of colonialism in Van Diemen’s Land. This attack was not a campfire ambush; rather than attacking at night, the men used the Cape’s topography to gain the element of surprise. Having some idea of the band’s movements, Company servants Weavis, Gunshannon, Nicholson and Chamberlain came upon them while they were collecting shellfish at the foot of a cliff accessible only by a steep and narrow track. From their position atop the cliff the men – one, an ex-soldier – picked off the helpless victims below.<sup>19</sup> Trapped on the beach, the natives suffered a high mortality, though Chamberlain was probably exaggerating when he claimed ‘about thirty’ were killed.<sup>20</sup>

The men’s motives are somewhat obscure. They may have sought to remove a lingering threat, or to avenge their friend Thomas John, who had been speared two months earlier, but in Gunshannon’s confession one detects something more sinister: ‘He seemed to glory in the act’, Robinson observed, ‘and said he would shoot them whenever he met them.’<sup>21</sup> For his part, Curr ignored his magisterial duty and failed to investigate the matter despite being fully aware of it. Later that year, he announced that ‘a war of extermination’ was underway: ‘The recent proclamation of Martial Law ... does not speak this out in very clear terms, but it is to be the practical effect of it.’<sup>22</sup> The chief agent was nonchalant at the prospect of annihilating the northwest bands. He once even confessed to offering his men spirits if they bought him back three native heads. In a letter to the Company’s directors, Curr admitted:

My whole and sole object was to kill them, and this because my full conviction was and is that the laws of nature and of God and of this country all conspired to render this my duty. ... As to my expression of a wish to have three of their heads to put on the ridge of the hut, I shall only say that I think it certainly would have the effect of deterring some of their comrades, of making the death of their companions live in their recollections.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Windschuttle pointed out that Ida Marriott, the editor of Hare’s journals, suspected Hare might have confused the incident with a later one, but this is unconvincing. Such a discrepancy between sources of similar reliability ought to preclude the level of certainty with which both Windschuttle and his opponents have displayed in this case.

<sup>19</sup> McFarlane’s account of events is the most plausible, but discrepancies in the evidence have understandably generated debate on some points (see especially Windschuttle, *Fabrication*, pp. 249-94 & I. McFarlane, ‘Cape Grim’, in R. Manne (ed.) *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle’s Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, Black Inc., Melbourne, 2003, pp. 277-98).

<sup>20</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 230, journal 10 August 1830.

<sup>21</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 230, journal 10 August 1830. See also Chapter 7 for mention of Chamberlain’s remorseless account.

<sup>22</sup> Curr to Directors, 17 January 1829, cited in McFarlane, *Beyond Awakening*, p. 105.

<sup>23</sup> Curr to Directors, 7 October 1830, cited in McFarlane, *Beyond Awakening*, pp. 112-23. McFarlane also found that Joseph Milligan, the Company’s surgeon in 1831, possessed the skull of ‘man aged about 24 who

This grisly bounty, together with a previous hunt endorsed by Curr,<sup>24</sup> reassured his men that killing blacks was acceptable, yet he also gave them reason to be reticent. On 21 August 1829, just west of Emu Bay, four Company servants under the supervision of Alexander Goldie spotted two women and a girl about six-years-old. They shot one of the women in the back and captured the other two. One of the men approached the wounded woman and struck her with an axe on the 'jugular vein, when she instantly died.'<sup>25</sup> Several weeks later, Goldie mentioned the killing in a letter to Curr. He had no reason to expect rebuke given Curr's well known attitude towards blacks, but the calculating manager reported the matter to the Governor hoping to present himself as humane, while maliciously punishing Goldie, with whom he had recently fallen out.<sup>26</sup> The case, which was brought to the attention of Attorney General Alfred Stephen, should have been unambiguous, since the martial law proclamation stated clearly 'that defenceless women and children be invariably spared.'<sup>27</sup> However, the government chose not to lay charges for fear of inciting a public outcry. Because the natives were 'open enemies to the King, in a state of actual warfare against him', Stephen concluded, 'the Pursuit of the Natives by Mr. Goldie and his party, was lawful.'<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, following Curr's unexpected reaction, Goldie went on a tour of the Company's stock huts warning the other employees that the manager was not to be trusted and to keep quiet about any killings.<sup>29</sup>

None of this tempered relations with the local blacks. At the Hampshire and Surrey Hills, where the headhunting incident had followed a series of violent encounters, Robinson

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had been killed in 1831, during an attack on a shepherd's hut in Tasmania's Surrey Hills' (I. McFarlane, 'Aboriginal Contact History in the Burnie District', unpublished paper presented to the Burnie Pioneer Museum, Burnie, 27 February 2013).

<sup>24</sup> McFarlane, *Beyond Awakening*, p. 108.

<sup>25</sup> Goldie to Arthur, 5 October 1829, cited in Lennox, 'The Van Diemen's Land Company and the Tasmanian Aborigines', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers & Proceedings*, p. 185. This was not the first time Goldie had led men against natives. A year earlier he had 'led an attack on them in which several were killed' (*Friendly Mission*, pp. 270).

<sup>26</sup> McFarlane, *Beyond Awakening*, pp. 109-12.

<sup>27</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 8 November 1828, p. 1. Also notified was Secretary of State Murray in London, who demanded the killers be brought to justice (Murray to Arthur, 23 April 1830, cited in Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, pp. 115-16). These instructions were ignored, and Reynolds has noted that all mention of the Goldie affair was omitted from the 1831 British parliamentary report. This was not the only time sensitive War-related documents were censored in these reports.

<sup>28</sup> Stephen to Arthur, n.d., cited in Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, p. 112. It is clear from his other statements that Stephen's conscience was troubled by this judgment, though he was fully aware of the dilemma he would create by bringing the case to trial. If a guilty verdict was returned the credibility of martial law would 'be forever after destroyed', while 'the consequences to humanity will be still more deplorable' if the perpetrators were found not guilty (Stephen to Arthur, n.d., cited in Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, p. 112). Yet, to Stephen's relief, news of the incident was not leaked to the wider public (it did not appear in the newspapers or surviving correspondence from the interior). Instead, it merely proved to later generations that the government was unwilling to enforce its rhetoric about limiting martial law to 'hostile' natives.

<sup>29</sup> McFarlane, *Beyond Awakening*, p. 112. For more on the Goldie affair and its legal implications, see Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, pp. 111-19; Lennox, 'The Van Diemen's Land Company and the Tasmanian Aborigines', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers & Proceedings*, pp. 180-94 & McFarlane, *Beyond Awakening*, pp. 108-12.

discovered in 1830 that the men ‘evinced a hostile feeling towards the aborigines and declare they will shoot them whenever they may find them.’<sup>30</sup> However, shooting blacks may not have exhausted the men’s tactical repertoire. According to Robinson:

Mr Robson said that he had proposed to the shepherds at the Surrey Hills to give them some poison to use for the destruction of the hyaena [Thylacine]. The men said that they did not require it then but if Mr R would let them have some in the summer they would find a use for it. He asked them why they should find a use for it in the summer more than now. They said, “Oh, Sir, we will poison the natives’ dogs”. Mr R took it away with him, their object, he said, being to poison the natives by putting it in the flour &c. No doubt hundreds have been destroyed in this way.<sup>31</sup>

Eleven years later, in 1841, Curr wrote to his overseer Adolphus Schayer seeking confirmation:

A report, resting on very good foundation I believe, that it was intended to get rid of the natives by leaving poisoned damper in the huts, having reached the Government, is the cause in my opinion, of the present investigation ... I beg you to communicate to me (and in a separate letter) anything you may have heard connected to this topic.<sup>32</sup>

Neither of these references proves that poison was used, though these men certainly had the motives and the means to employ such tactics had they chosen to.

In response to the resurgence of violence in 1841, Curr had his servants experiment with novel ways of killing blacks. In August of that year, the Chief Agent confided in a friend that he had:

tried the effect of spring guns in the huts, which they have once discharged, and must have escaped from almost by miracle. I am now trying a man-trap, also in one of the huts. I have for a week concealed an armed man inside one of the huts, with directions to fire upon intruders.<sup>33</sup>

The Company’s men did their utmost to assist Curr in putting down this wave of attacks, and they may well have been successful. In December 1842, the Lanne family – an adult couple with three boys under the age of eight; purportedly the last of the free blacks – was captured by sealers near the Arthur River, but McFarlane makes a plausible case that these were not the people responsible for the recent attacks in the northwest.<sup>34</sup> Witnesses to the attacks described up to nine assailants (presumably adult male), yet William Lanne – well known for his placid nature – was the only adult male in the family. The implication is that there was probably another group responsible, and the fact that they were not heard of after February 1842 suggests Curr’s efforts were not fruitless after all.

<sup>30</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 230, journal 10 August 1830.

<sup>31</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 229, journal 8 August 1830.

<sup>32</sup> Curr to Schayer, 6 December 1841, cited in McFarlane, ‘Cape Grim’, p. 293.

<sup>33</sup> Curr to Archer, 10 August 1841, cited in McFarlane, *Beyond Awakening*, p. 117. Spring guns were designed to fire on persons opening a door or otherwise triggering a hidden firing mechanism. Mantraps were essentially enormous rabbit traps with spring loaded steel jaws. This latter device was also used on the eastern frontier (see *Hobart Town Courier*, 12 June 1830, p. 3).

<sup>34</sup> McFarlane, *Beyond Awakening*, pp. 169-80. They were taken not by force, but by subterfuge.

Thus, northwest Van Diemen's Land appears to have been the breeding ground for an especially sordid strain of white violence; a place where, according to Hare, men 'consider[ed] the massacre of these people [blacks] an honour.'<sup>35</sup> This is not to suggest that native resistance in the region was impotent, or that colonists in the northwest did not live in fear. Following an attack at Emu Bay, for instance, the stockmen were discovered 'in a dreadful state of alarm'; two of them 'so reduced and altered by the constant state of dread in which they existed' that they were 'no longer the same men'.<sup>36</sup> Blacks in the northwest made sixty-four recorded attacks on colonists and property between 1827 and 1842 (see fig.16), taking a substantial physical and psychological toll on the men they targeted. Nevertheless, the company's men, with their unbridled violence, clearly dominated the conflict. Northwest Van Diemen's Land was one of the most remote frontiers in the Empire, and the only force of law within 100 miles was a callous magistrate who cared nothing for the welfare of the natives, and everything for the profits of the Company. The surviving evidence provides us with a mere snippet from which we must infer the rest, and as with elsewhere in the colony, the tip of the northwest's empirical iceberg bodes ominously for that which went unrecorded.

### **The Blacks**

The greater northwest of Van Diemen's Land was home to at least a dozen bands.<sup>37</sup> To gain insight into their experience of the Black War we rely on a slim, but surprisingly rich catalogue of evidence, comprised largely of Van Diemen's Land Company records, on the one hand, and Robinson's journals on the other. The picture that emerges from these sources is tantalisingly incomplete, though there were obviously some important differences between the experiences and responses of northwest Vandemonians and those of their eastern neighbours, just as there were also many parallels. Events in this region have been overshadowed in the literature by the conflict in the east, about which local Aborigines are likely to have known and cared little. Their world was the northwest and their story is essentially a unique one.

By the time white men first set foot in the northwest in late 1826, the bands in the region had no doubt heard of them, but what preconceptions they held is impossible to know. There had been isolated contacts with the strangers before 1826, the first being in 1803 when a sealing vessel under Captain Chase had an uneasy, but apparently non-violent encounter with a band

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<sup>35</sup> Hare, *Voyage of the Caroline*, p. 41.

<sup>36</sup> Curr to Arthur, 6 January 1830, cited in Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, p. 56. See also, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, p. 231, journal 13 August 1830.

<sup>37</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 1006. Some bands probably went unrecorded.

on Robbins Island.<sup>38</sup> The next recorded contact between northwest people and sealers occurred around 1820, when the latter killed two men and abducted at least seven women at Cape Grim.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, sealers had operated in western Bass Strait consistently from the turn of the century, so there were almost certainly other encounters.<sup>40</sup>

Between 1815 and 1824, five exploratory voyages also visited the northwest and Macquarie Harbour. Brief encounters were recorded on four of these expeditions, but only the meeting with James Kelly's whaleboat crew in January 1816 ended in violence.<sup>41</sup> Local men initially welcomed the five strangers as they hauled their boat onto the beach at Robbins Island, but following a misunderstanding over some swans, they began showering them with stones. Kelly claimed he and his men shot several in self-defence.<sup>42</sup> The only other hostile contact with whites occurred on the west coast, in the vicinity of Macquarie Harbour, where a penal station had been established in 1822. In its eleven years of operation, a trickle of convicts escaped from this hellish prison into the surrounding wilderness, many of whom were never seen again. Two women, who were familiar with the region, told Robinson the local Aborigines 'killed plenty of prisoner white men from Macquarie Harbour.'<sup>43</sup>

Notwithstanding these infrequent encounters, most northwest Vandemonians did not see their first white man, sheep, oxen, horse or stock hut until the Van Diemen's Land Company began its operations in the late 1820s, by which time the War in the east was already reaching its apex. The arrival of these strangers was initially cause for great curiosity, and many bands gained a voyeuristic familiarity with them.<sup>44</sup> During the first twelve months of the Company's presence, there is circumstantial evidence suggesting that at least one band engaged in prostitution, probably in exchange for dogs and other novelties.<sup>45</sup> One man, Nicermenic, even appears to have spent some time working for the Company.<sup>46</sup> But this state of affairs came to an abrupt end with the November 1827 dispute over the violation of women by shepherds at Cape Grim (see above). In another incident, 'Thomas, a man in the Company's employ, enticed some aborigines by holding up a large damper to them, and when one drew near he

<sup>38</sup> An expedition by Bass and Flinders in 1798 recorded no significant contact.

<sup>39</sup> See Chapter 5.

<sup>40</sup> Judging by the behaviour of sealers elsewhere (see Chapters 5 and 6), any contact was likely to have turned violent if the bands were not willing to part with their women. According to Curr (letter to Aborigines Committee, 28 April 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 370-71), the sealers had 'occasionally landed on the main and made havoc amongst them.'

<sup>41</sup> These expeditions were conducted by James Kelly (1815-16, 1819); Cunningham and King (1819); Charles Hardwicke (1823); James Hobbs (1824).

<sup>42</sup> Bowden, *Captain James Kelly*, p. 31.

<sup>43</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 696, journal 2 October 1832.

<sup>44</sup> In 1826 and 1827, for instance, Company surveyor, Henry Hellyer, noted the frequent presence of Aborigines, but found they would not approach his party (see Thomas, *Henry Hellyer's Observations*).

<sup>45</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 215, journal 21 June 1830.

<sup>46</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 269. The circumstances surrounding this purported employment are unknown. Robinson recorded in his journal for 11 July 1830 (*Friendly Mission*, p. 220) that Nicermenic had 'no toes', but he did not say how they were lost.



offered him a piece of bread on the end of a large knife and while the man was in the act of taking it off, he rushed forward and ripped him up'.<sup>47</sup> The violence then quickly spread, and from 1828, most bands found themselves at war with the strangers.

A total of sixteen separate acts of violence against Aborigines were recorded in the northwest (see fig. 16), but this cannot account for the destruction of the bands in this region. With the exception of the two devastating ambushes at Cape Grim in February 1828 (see above), most of the recorded incidents seem to have involved only one or two victims.<sup>48</sup> Yet, by the time Robinson collected what he believed was the final remnant in 1834, the known bands had been all but wiped out.<sup>49</sup> The only known outbreak of disease occurred at Macquarie Harbour in 1833,<sup>50</sup> so we must assume that violence (not all of it perpetrated by white men) played a significant role in the decline of the northwest bands.<sup>51</sup>

After the killings at Cape Grim, Robinson observed that 'the [northwest] natives call the white people NOW.HUM.MOE, devil, and when they hear the report of a gun they say the NOW.HUM.MOE have shot another tribe of natives.'<sup>52</sup> But, though they were afraid of their new nemeses, Robinson also noted that the northwest Aborigines were a vengeful people who 'never forget an injury'.<sup>53</sup> For instance, one of the Cape Grim killers 'was severely speared afterwards at the Surrey Hills, as was [*sic*] several others, when the natives came down and robbed the hut and made an attack upon the shepherds and speared them'.<sup>54</sup> Likewise, following the Goldie incident described above, the killer was soon after speared.<sup>55</sup> According to Robinson, 'the husband of this woman took it so much to heart that he vowed to revenge her death on every white man he had the chance to meet, and which it appears he has done in numerous instances.'<sup>56</sup> At the Arthur River, an Aborigine named Edick swore a similar oath to one of Robinson's envoys that he and his people 'would murder every white man they met with'.<sup>57</sup> In this, they were occasionally successful, such as when three Company men were killed at the Surrey and Hampshire Hills in three separate spearings in July and October 1831.

<sup>47</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 244, journal 13 September 1830. Robinson was told this by the Superintendent at Cape Grim, Mr Reeves. See also *Weep in Silence*, p. 464, journal 22 July 1837.

<sup>48</sup> This estimation is based on the sources supplied in the tally in Appendix 3.

<sup>49</sup> In total, Robinson removed around one hundred west coast Aborigines to Flinders Island, though a precise count is difficult to arrive at from his records.

<sup>50</sup> See *Friendly Mission*, pp. 806-16, journals 24 July-11 August 1833. There is, however, circumstantial evidence that some west coast bands were afflicted by disease at an earlier time. According to Plomley (*Friendly Mission*, p. 732), Robinson 'reported that the natives he had met [in September 1832] at the Arthur River – who later attacked him – comprised people from Port Davey, Macquarie Harbour, Pieman River and Sandy Cape'. It was probably not violence alone that caused this reduction and coalescence.

<sup>51</sup> In *Beyond Awakening*, McFarlane argued strongly for this, claiming that Curr and his men were responsible for 'genocide'.

<sup>52</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 215, journal 21 June 1830.

<sup>53</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 645, journal 4 June 1832.

<sup>54</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 230, journal 10 August 1830.

<sup>55</sup> McFarlane, *Beyond Awakening*, pp. 111-12

<sup>56</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 225, journal 4 August 1830.

<sup>57</sup> Cottrell to Robinson, 7 December 1832, in *Friendly Mission*, pp. 837-38.

They also inflicted heavy losses on the Company's sheep and oxen,<sup>58</sup> but compared to bands in the southeast, the toll that northwest Aborigines took on the invaders was less severe. Part of the reason for this may have been their preoccupation with internecine conflict.

There is more evidence for internecine conflict in the northwest than there is for the central and eastern half of the island. This may indicate that bands in the northwest were more hostile toward each other than elsewhere, but it probably just reflects the fact that the main source, Robinson, spent more time in that quarter. From the time of his first mission in 1830, to his final visit in 1834, Robinson recorded a number of these conflicts. One distinguishing feature of internecine warfare in the northwest was that some bands appear to have used firearms against their tribal enemies, though to what extent (and why they never used them against the whites) remains a mystery.<sup>59</sup> Where the information was available, Windschuttle tallied the causes of these disputes and found that most were over women.<sup>60</sup> There is no way to know whether the white invasion exacerbated internecine conflict in the northwest, but, as argued in Chapter 10, it is reasonable to assume it had some effect. Most of the fights Robinson mentioned were small-scale, involving the deaths of only one or two people, though on one occasion an envoy told him that, at Rocky Cape, 'the PEE.WRAP.PER natives [had recently] killed all the LOW.REEN.NER nation.'<sup>61</sup> In fact, judging solely from the recorded deaths, internecine conflict in the northwest killed almost as many Vandemonians as did conflict with the stockmen, though the significance of this observation is greatly diminished by the paucity of the record.

In 1834, all the violence ceased. Robinson declared: 'The work is done, the great evil is removed', and most assumed that every last Vandemonian had been killed or removed.<sup>62</sup> Five years later, however, they resurfaced, and between September 1839 and February 1842 they made at least eighteen attacks on Company men and property. Presumably, this was just one band that had attempted to live remote from white settlement, but for some reason resumed their hostilities.<sup>63</sup> These attacks 'were much more serious than a few raids for provisions upon isolated huts', argued McFarlane; they 'were clearly organised as resistance to European invasion'.<sup>64</sup> Resistance may have been part of their motivation, but sheer desperation was

<sup>58</sup> See, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, pp. 220, 637, 881, journals 11 July 1830, 5 May 1832, 22 February 1834; Colonial Secretary to Robinson, 28 January 1834, in *Friendly Mission*, p. 945.

<sup>59</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 872, 887-89, journals 24 January & 28 February 1834.

<sup>60</sup> Windschuttle, *Fabrication*, pp. 108-9. Several of Windschuttle's references are incorrect, but I do not dispute his general findings.

<sup>61</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 223, journal 26 July 1830. See also Bonwick, *Daily Life and Origin*, p. 85.

<sup>62</sup> Robinson to Whitcomb, 4 March 1834, in *Friendly Mission*, p. 951. Many of west coast Aborigines were removed at gunpoint by Robinson and his party, making a mockery of the term *friendly* mission (see, for instance, *Friendly Mission*, pp. 762-63, 772-74, 780, 804-6, journals 21 May, 14 & 18 June, 24 July 1833).

<sup>63</sup> One possibility is that the stress of the 1839 winter drove this band to once again plunder the white men's huts. Another is that their vitriol was reignited by an insult of some kind.

<sup>64</sup> McFarlane, *Beyond Awakening*, pp. 171, 173.

probably more important. Whatever their motivations, this band made their final attack at Table Cape on 27 February 1842, and then disappeared forever. Their fate, as suggested above, was probably not natural death. Moreover, the circumstances and motivations that triggered this aftershock of the Black War are unclear. We are equally ignorant of what this remnant – the last of the free Vandemonians – went through during their final campaign. The attitudes and experiences of these people can only be surmised; all we can be sure of is that despair was among the emotions they felt, and hope was not.

### Legend for Tallies in Appendices 2 and 3

#### Types of Victim:

• Soldier	SOL
• Settler	SET
• Servant	ST
• Stock-keeper	STK
• Shepherd	SHP
• Sawyer/Splitter	SW
• Sealer	SL
• Unassigned Convict	UC
• Man	M
• Woman	W
• Child	CH

#### Types of Assault:

• Killed	KL
• Wounded	WN
• Died of Wounds	DW
• Spear	SP
• Waddy	WD
• Stoned	SN
• Harassed	HR
• Missing (Killed)	MS
• Plunder	PL
• Set on Fire	BP
• Burned Down	BN
• Attack (vague)	AK

#### Type of Property:

• Firearms	FR
• Ammunition	AM
• Bedding	BD
• Blankets	BL
• Clothing	CL
• Bread	BR
• Flour	F
• Sugar	S
• Tea	T
• Tobacco	TB
• Food	FD
• Knives	KN
• Utensils	UT
• Bottles	BT
• Potatoes	PT
• Potatoes dug up	PD
• Tools	TL
• Various	V
• Cattle	CT
• Horse	H
• Sheep	SH
• Bullock/Oxen	OX
• Dog	DG

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CA	<i>Colonial Advocate</i>
CT	<i>Colonial Times</i>
DS	<i>Derwent Star</i>
HTC	<i>Hobart Town Courier</i>
HTG	<i>Hobart Town Gazette</i>
ID	<i>Independent</i>
LA	<i>Launceston Advertiser</i>
LE	<i>Launceston Examiner</i>
NWP	<i>North West Post</i>
SG	<i>Sydney Gazette</i>
TAS	<i>Tasmanian</i>
TPDA	<i>Tasmanian &amp; Port Dalrymple Advertiser</i>
TC	<i>The Colonist</i>



## Protocols for Tallies in Appendices 2 and 3

### Points to Note

- Although I have not re-checked all Plomley work, I have found a number of errors. For this reason, the incidents in my tallies do not always line up with Plomley's. This effect is accentuated by the fact that Plomley mentioned a number of incidents in his 'comments' column only, while my tallies list all incidents the same way. Nevertheless, where Plomley made some mention of an incident, I have cited him (this appears in the tally simply as 'Plomley'). Where further sources have been found to support an incident listed by Plomley, those sources are cited in addition.
- Most of the women living with the sealers were taken forcibly from their bands, but only specifically recorded cases are tallied.
- All archival call numbers are for the Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office, unless otherwise stated.
- Where specific details are uncertain, an '?' is marked beside them.

### Tally Protocols and Assumptions

- Plausibility:
  - PE = Probable exaggeration (casualty rates have been halved and rounded down).
  - DU = Significant details are uncertain or confused.
- Dates:
  - Where a date is uncertain over a duration of more than 2 years, no date is tallied.
  - Where a date is uncertain within a 2 year period, *ceteris paribus* it is tallied in the latter year (until 1830), because violence increased until 1830, making the latter date more probable.
  - Where a date is specified to within 1 year, but not to within 3 months, it is tallied in the annual but not the monthly total.
  - Where a date is known to within 3 months, the month of the mean date (rounded up) is tallied.
- Definitions:
  - Only men on active duty are tallied as 'soldiers'.
  - Where a victim is unidentified, they are assumed to be a male labourer.<sup>2</sup>
  - Where a dwelling was attacked, but repulsed,<sup>3</sup> Plomley listed no victim or assault. Obviously though, someone was there to repulse the attackers, so these instances have been tallied as one male labourer harassed.
  - Animals tallied are only those killed or wounded, not those 'driven off'.
  - 'Dwelling' is used to denote houses, huts, barns, mills and tents.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The vast majority of people on the frontier were men, and the few women were almost invariably domestic servants or settlers' wives who were less likely to come into contact with Aborigines. Furthermore, labourers were most likely to remain unnamed in the source as observers considered it far more significant when a settler (or a woman) fell victim, and almost always gave their names. This assumption will almost certainly be mistaken in a small number of cases.

<sup>3</sup> In most cases, the repulsion is stated, but it is assumed here even when unstated. Contemporaries were generally consistent in their distinction between the terms attacked and robbed. The former usually involved one or more defenders who repulsed the attackers. The latter usually meant that the hut was unoccupied and plundered, or that it was plundered after the occupants were killed or driven off.

<sup>4</sup> The vast majority of cases refer to huts and houses.

- 'Raped' or 'abused' is tallied only as a capture.<sup>5</sup>
- 'Capture' is used here in a strictly non-voluntary sense.
- 'Died of wounds' (DW) cases are treated as deaths in the tally, as are missing victims (MS) where the source suggests that they had been killed.
- 'Shot' is treated as killed (KL), unless the source states otherwise.<sup>6</sup>
- Numbers:
  - Of the killings of Aborigines that can be dated as either 'pre-War' or 'wartime', 88% fell into the latter category. It has therefore been assumed that 88% of the undated or very vaguely dated killings were also wartime killings.
  - Where the number of events, people, dwellings, etc. is pluralised in the source (i.e. attacks, shepherds, huts), *ceteris paribus* it is tallied as 2.
  - 'Visited' or 'appeared at' is interpreted as Aborigines seen around the location in question, but not as an instance of violence. Plomley tallied these cases as violent incidents, but they are not tallied here.
  - 'Several', 'Family', 'Plenty', 'Party', 'Numerous' and 'Numbers' = 4
  - 'Some', 'People' and 'a Few' = 3
  - 'Band' or 'Tribe' is assumed to be 20 in number.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> There is a good case for tallying rapes and euphemisms for rapes as woundings, but in the interest of conservatism this has not been done.

<sup>6</sup> It was the custom to use 'shot' to mean 'killed', but there were probably exceptions to this.

<sup>7</sup> This is much smaller than the band sizes suggested in Chapter 2 and Appendix 3, but twenty has been tallied in the interest of conservatism, and to account for depopulation.

## *Appendix*

### 2

#### **White Casualties**

In 1992, N. J. B. Plomley compiled his *Aboriginal/Settler Clash*, a tally of attacks made by Aborigines in Van Diemen's Land between 1804 and 1842. He drew almost exclusively on two key sources: the colonial newspapers and CSO1/316. The latter is a 1,100 page file of incident reports archived among the Colonial Secretary's records. It was a vast and admirable undertaking that made a major contribution to the field, changing the way the conflict was discussed, but Plomley's tally was far from complete. Left out were the settler's journals, nineteenth century publications, and the various correspondence files, both official and private, from archives around the country. In 2003, Howard Willis updated Plomley's tally, drawing on fourteen additional sources, but his tally was also far from complete. The tally provided in this thesis cites sixty-six additional sources, making it by far the most extensively researched to-date.

For obvious reasons, the tally at the end of this Appendix is much better evidenced than the tally of Aboriginal casualties in Appendix 3; still, it is not without its limitations. For one, some reports were undoubtedly exaggerated, false or confused. The chain of communication was often unreliable, and rumours sometimes masqueraded as facts, particularly in the newspapers. There was a tendency by some writers to play down the violence, but more often to exaggerate it. Furthermore, as Chapter 11 points out, convicts sometimes framed Aborigines for their own crimes. Whilst every effort is made here to identify and negotiate these problems, there is no way to eliminate them entirely.

Notwithstanding these issues, the scale of the violence as represented in this tally is likely to be too small rather than too large. Various lines of evidence buttress this assumption. For one, my research found that many, if not most of the incidents noted in sources other than those used by Plomley, are not found in his tally. This means the newspapers and CSO1/316 did not come close to recording every incident, especially non-fatal ones.<sup>1</sup> One reason for this was that the official record keeping system was highly imperfect, and in some magisterial districts (such as Campbell Town and Norfolk Plains), few records were kept at all. This is especially true of the period before 1827.

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<sup>1</sup> Both these sources deal predominately with the War period. Chapter 4 also includes a brief discussion on why the level of pre-War violence is likely to have been higher than the records indicate.

Official record keeping before the arrival of George Arthur in 1824 was extremely ad hoc and, the private sources likely to record attacks were very limited. The vast majority of the bureaucrats, editors, correspondents and diarists who would later document the War did not arrive until the mid to late 1820s. Nevertheless, there is reason to suspect that some of the hunters and bushrangers who first broached the interior fell victim to the Aborigines. For instance, the fates of at least eleven bushrangers remain unknown for the period 1807-1823,<sup>2</sup> and Aborigines no doubt killed some of these men. Therefore, whilst the first two decades of settlement were certainly less violent than the third, the early record probably understates the true extent.

Arthur was a relatively meticulous record keeper, but even he did not demand that all Aboriginal attacks be recorded until the War was almost over. Knowing he would have to justify the Black Line to London, Arthur issued a Government Order on 7 October 1830 requesting all magistrates to collect accounts of Aboriginal attacks in their respective districts.<sup>3</sup> Most of the incidents they collated had not been reported previously,<sup>4</sup> which shows there had been no regularity in reporting incidents to the government. Many were probably never brought to the attention of the magistrates in the first place. It is also abundantly clear that these hastily compiled lists were not nearly exhaustive. The only one of any depth was compiled by Jorgen Jorgenson for the Oatlands district. Some of the others were terse indeed. The list returned from New Norfolk was particularly short, the Governor commenting in the margin that ‘many cases are omitted.’<sup>5</sup> Laziness was partly to blame in these cases, though in fairness to the magistrates, the untimely order – issued on the day the Black Line began – was extremely difficult to comply with. When the police magistrate of Campbell Town returned his catalogue, he added:

The report is not so full as could be wished for, but the length of time elapsing renders the particular circumstances difficult to collect. ... The numerous acts of robbery and murder committed in this district will not admit of recital, within a moderate report, and an account of all their attacks on stock keepers will be exceedingly difficult if not impossible to collect.<sup>6</sup>

The press too noticed that many incidents were going unreported. In 1827, the *Colonial Times* felt it ‘very probable, from the recent occurrences, that many more murders have been

<sup>2</sup> H. Maxwell-Stewart, ‘I Could Not Blame the Rangers’: Tasmanian Bushranging, Convicts and Convict Management’, *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers & Proceedings*, vol. 42, no. 3, 1995, p. 117.

<sup>3</sup> Government Order no. 12, 7 October 1830, in *Hobart Town Courier*, 9 October 1830, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Arthur did not require incidents to be reported or all reports to be kept until 1829. This no doubt skewed the data towards the period around 1830.

<sup>5</sup> Dumaresq to Colonial Secretary, 13 January 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 828-28. There was no follow up to this report, despite Arthur’s doubts.

<sup>6</sup> Simpson to Colonial Secretary, 11 February 1831, TAHO, CSO1/316, p. 811.

committed by these savage people, than has ever been made publicly known'.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, in March 1828, a correspondent to the *Hobart Town Gazette* claimed that '[m]any and desperate have been their attacks during the summer, which have never been recorded in your columns.'<sup>8</sup> The editors were themselves complicit. Andrew Bent, proprietor of the *Colonial Times* (1825-30), asserted that '[t]he Colonial Press, so far from having exaggerated statements, has actually not mentioned one-half of the murders perpetrated, nor one-tenth part of the outrages committed.'<sup>9</sup> The editor of the *Tasmanian* admitted as much in 1831, stating that he frequently excluded stories about Aboriginal attacks for fear they would be exaggerated in the British press, 'thereby very materially injuring the Colony, and stopping the course of emigration'.<sup>10</sup> This was not mere paranoia. The British press was paying a disquieting amount of attention to the horror stories printed in colonial newspapers, which surely have left an impression on the minds of potential emigrants.<sup>11</sup> Thus, since the newspapers are one of the two main sources of incident reports, these omissions indicate that the known record is not nearly exhaustive.

It is the very nature of 'unrecorded' events that, apart from indirect allusions, we cannot know about them, so any argument attesting to their prevalence will necessarily be unsatisfying. Nevertheless, the foregoing discussion has demonstrated the plausibility, if not the likelihood that some percentage of attacks never made it into the archives. The *Launceston Advertiser* claimed in 1829:

If a regular list was collected of all those who have perished by this cause, it would be a most formidable number, if we mistake not, a most appalling number; but they are generally crown prisoners, and have no friends to bemoan them, (at least none near) and they perish almost without notice.<sup>12</sup>

In light of the evidence assessed here, this sentiment is surely accurate. At the very least, John West was correct in observing that '[s]uch crimes were of daily occurrence; perhaps sometimes multiplied by rumour, but often unheard of and unrecorded.'<sup>13</sup> Likewise, it is my contention that any false or exaggerated reports of attacks on colonists and their property were probably balanced, if not outweighed by those that went unreported.

<sup>7</sup> *Colonial Times*, 11 May 1827, pp. 2-3.

<sup>8</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 22 March 1828, p. 4. See also, for instance, *Colonial Advocate*, 1 May 1828, p. 134.

<sup>9</sup> *Tasmanian*, 18 June 1831, p. 191.

<sup>10</sup> *Tasmanian*, 28 May 1831, p. 167.

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, *Independent*, 17 December 1831, p. 2; *Tasmanian*, 6 June 1828, p. 2; *Tasmanian*, 26 September 1828, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Launceston Advertiser*, 8 June 1829, p. 3. See also, for instance, Scott to Aborigines Committee, 11 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 315-17.

<sup>13</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, vol. 2, p. 34.

## Appendix 2: Tally White Casualties

P = Plausibility

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
n.d.	Huon Rv.		2 SW	2 WN-SN	FR, Boat taken	FM, p405	
n.d.	Northwest	VDLCo.	M	WN-SP		FM, pp585-6	
n.d.	Mills Plains		Brady (SW)	HR-SP	CT-KL (frequently)	NLA, MS3251, b1, v4, p5	
n.d.	Campbell Town		Escapes	KL		Emmett, p8	
n.d.	Macquarie Harbour		Mrs Erps	WN-SP		FM, p696	
n.d.	nr. Deloraine		M	WN-SP		Elmer	DU
Early settlement	nr. Hobart		George Munday	KL		FM, p408	
Early settlement	nr. Hobart		Reconnaissance party	HR	PL-V	Shaw, p53	
4 January 1804	Port Dalrymple	A. W. H. Humphrey	Convict party	2 WN-SN, WD		Robson, p45	
7 May 1804	nr. Risdon		Soldier	HR		HRA, s3, v1, p238	
12-25 November 1804	Port Dalrymple		Convict	WN-SP		HRA, s3, v1, p607	
n.d. 1805	South		8 Sealers	WN-SP	Hut PL-BN, 2,000 seal skins BN	West, p7	
March 1805	Oyster Bay		Alexander Riley (STK)	WN-SP		Plomley	
1 December 1805	Port Dalrymple		Private Bent	WN-SP		HRA, s3, v1, pp649-50	
	Pitt Water	Johnson	Brown (ST)	WN-SP	2 DG-KL, 2 kangaroos taken	Plomley	
c.27 November 1806	Frederick Henry Bay				PL Boat & 9 kangaroo	Plomley	
c.14 February 1807	New Norfolk?	Fosbrook	Robert Waring	KL-SP		Knopwood, p126	
c.28 February 1807	New Norfolk?	Fosbrook & Shipman	2 ST	2 HR	Kangaroo taken	Knopwood, p128	
c.28 February 1807	Frederick Henry Bay?	Bowden	George Brewer	KL-SP		Knopwood, p128	
28 February 1807	South	Knopwood	Richardson, Earl, Kemp	3 HR-SN, SP		Plomley	
Mid April 1807	Hobart, Eastern Shore?	Collins (Governor)	2 ST	2 HR	DG-KL	Plomley	
1 August 1807	South	Knopwood			DG-WN	Knopwood, p140	



DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
2 February 1808	Lime Kilns, Eastern Shore		2 ST	2 HR	2 DG-KL	Plomley	
n.d. 1810	Herdsmans Cove		Marine	HR		West, p8	
January 1810	Interior		Getley (bushranger)	MS		DS29/1/10	
January 1810	Interior		Russell (bushranger)	MS		DS29/1/10	
January 1810	Collinsvale				2 CT-KL	Plomley	
January 1810	Blackmans Bay	George Guest			3 CT-KL	Plomley	
c.7 April 1813	Port Dalrymple	Joseph Mountgarret	ST	WN-SP		SG20/4/13, p2	
May-June 1813	Coal Rv.		ST	HR	CT-AK	Plomley	
3 March 1814	New Rv.	Massey	ST	HR		Plomley	
8 November 1815	Scantlands Plains	Morgan			930 SH-KL-BN	Plomley	PE
13 December 1815	Recherche Bay	James Kelly	Kelly, Griffiths, Briggs, Jones, Tooms	4 HR-SN, SP		Bowden, p24; Shaw, p51	
4 January 1816	Robbins Is.	James Kelly	Crewman (ST)	WN-SP			DU
27 July 1816	Tea-tree Brush	J. Beaumont		HR-SN		Bowden, p31	
31 August 1816	New Norfolk		3 STK	HR	CT-AK	Plomley	
August-September 1816	up-country				CT-KL	Plomley	
7 September 1816	Jericho	S. McNeelance			2 CT-KL	Plomley	
14 October 1816	Saltpan Plains		2 M, 2 W	4 HR	Cart AK	Plomley	
n.d. 1817	Clarence Plains	Edward Kimberly			500 SH-KL	HRA, s3, v3, p361; SG18/7/18, p3	PE
13 March 1817	Green Water Holes	Beaumont	M	HR	Cart AK	Plomley	
24 May 1817	Sweet Water Hills	Jeffrey	ST	HR-SN		Plomley	
November 1818	Grindstone Bay		John Kemp	KL	DG-KL	HTG28/11/18, p1	
n.d. 1819	Macquarie Rv.			KL		West, p10	
n.d. 1819	Jericho District		Huxley	KL		Plomley	
17 March 1819	Tea Tree Brush	Morris			SH-KL-SP	Jorgenson, p93	
18 March 1819	Tea Tree Brush	Morris	Robert Jones (ST)	WN-SPx5	Hut BN	Plomley; Jorgenson, pp93-95; West, p85	
			McCauldless (ST)	WN-SPx2			
Mid March 1819	Oyster Bay		M	WN-SP		Plomley	
10 April 1819	George Town		Escapee	KL		Plomley	
			Escapee	WN			

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
Early April 1819	Macquarie/Isis Rv. junction	Gordon and Miller			SH-KL-SP	Plomley	
Early April 1819	Macquarie Rv.	Stocker	STK	WN-SP		HTG17&24/4/19	
			STK	WN-SP			
Late 1819	Interior		M	WN-SP		HRA, s3, v4, p651	
14 December 1819	Stony Hut Plains	James Triffitt Snr.			300 SH-KL	HTG18/12/19, p2	
c.1820	Cape Grim?		3 sealers	KL-WD		FM, p871	
n.d. 1820	Salt Pan Plains	Stocker	STK	KL		Bonwick, p61	
			STK	KL			
April 1820	Port Davey		Crewman	WN-SP		Plomley	
c.14 September 1821	Bream Creek	Thomas Buxton	Thomas Buxton	HR		NLA, MS902, f3, pp2-4	
n.d. 1822-28	South Esk, Beams Hollow	Thomas Beams			Hut PL, F, S, T	Beams	
n.d. 1822-28	South Esk, Beams Hollow	Thomas Beams	ST	KL-SP, WD		Beams	
			ST	KL-SP, WD			
Early July 1822	Port Dalrymple	John Reibey	SHP	KL-SP		Plomley	
c.25 November 1822	George Town, north shore		Simmonds (ST)	KL-SP		Plomley; CSO1/323, p170	
			M	WN-SP			
9 December 1822		J. M. Hudspeth	ST	HR	DG-KL-SP	Hudspeth	
3 May 1823	Swan Rv. (Cranbrook)	Adam Amos		HR	House AK	Amos 3/5/23	
15 November 1823	Grindstone Bay	Gatehouse	William Hollyoak (ST)	KL-SP		Plomley; HTG3/12/24, p3	
			Mamoa (ST)	KL-SP			
			John Radford (ST)	WN-SP			
14 December 1823	Swan Rv. (Cranbrook)	Adam Amos			Field BN	Amos 14/12/23	
<b>1824</b>							
n.d. c.1824	Oyster Bay		Thomas Colly (ST)	KL		FM, p347	
n.d. 1824	Sorell Plains		P. Macarthy (STK)	KL		Plomley; Melville, p39; West, p14	
Early 1824	Shannon Rv. (nr. Hermitage)	Lord	Monkshaw (ST)	HR		CSO1/323, p320	
January 1824	Abyssinia (Bagdad district)	G.W. Evans	ST	KL	Hut BN	Plomley; HTG23/1/24, p2	
9 March 1824	Rv. Isis	Cox	ST	HR		Sutherland 9/3/24	
2 April 1824	Old Beach (Brighton)	John Cassidy	James Taylor (ST)	WN-SP		Plomley; HTG2/4/24, p2	
c.21 April 1824		Mrs Kermode	Dickenson (ST)	HR	Hut AK	Parramore, p40	
10 June 1824	Jericho	Matthew Osborne	Mr Osborne	KL-SP, WD	Hut PL	Plomley; CSO1/323, p327; HTG16/7/24, p2	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
16 June 1824	Abyssinia (Murderers Plains)	Oaks	Mrs Osborne	WN-SP, WD			
16 June 1824	Big Rv.	Triffett	2 ST	2 KL		Plomley	
16 June 1824	Clyde Rv.	Hood	ST	KL		Plomley	
16 June 1824	Lake Sorell (or north Clyde)	Hood or Wood?	2 ST	HR		Plomley	
29 June 1824	Rv. Isis	Sutherland	ST	HR	Hut BN	Plomley	
Pre-July 1824	Swanport	George Meredith	Brown	HR		Sutherland 29/6/24	
6 July 1824	Swanport		ST	WN		FitzSymonds, Looking Glass, pp35-6	
c.18 July 1824	Swanport	George Meredith	Robert Gay (ST shoemaker)	KL		FitzSymonds, pp35-6; Amos 7/7/24; Meredith, pp82-83	
			ST	KL		Plomley; FitzSymonds, pp35-6	
			Man	KL			
25 July 1824	Pitwater		Joseph Jerome	WN-SP		HTG6/8/24, p2	
c.31 July 1824	York Plains (Eastern Marshes)	James Hobbs	James Doyle (ST)	KL-WD		Plomley; HTG6/8/24, p2; HTG29/10/24, p2	
August-October 1824	York Plains (Eastern Marshes)	James Hobbs			PD	Plomley	
21 October 1824	York Plains (Eastern Marshes)	James Hobbs	2 ST	HR-SP, SN	Hut PL-FD, CL, BD, UT	HTG29/10/24, p2	
Late November 1824	Cape Portland or Eddystone Pt.		Duncan McMillan	KL		Plomley; Begg, pp60, 108; J. Calder, pp93-99; FM, pp226, 288	
			William Saunders	KL			
			John Cliff	KL			
			Samuel Stewart	KL			
			Thomas Tucker	HR			
December 1824	Ouse Rv.	Edward Lord	STK	WN-SP		Ross, p90; HTG24/12/24, p2	
1825							
n.d. 1825	Nile Rv.	Capt. Barclay	2 ST	2x KL-SP	Hut PL-BN	FM, p867; Richards, pp5-10	
n.d. 1825	Michael Howes Marsh Franks		Bamber (ST)	HR		Plomley	
n.d. 1825	New Norfolk district	William Roadknight	ST	HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
n.d. 1825-29	Jordan (Big) Lagoon	Noah Mortimer			Hut PL	CSO1/323, p336	
n.d. 1825-30	Bashan Plains	Espie			SH-KL (many)	HTC13/3/30, p2	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
11 January 1825	Lake Rv.		2 SW	2 WN-SP, WD	Hut PL-BP, AM, FR	Plomley	
13 March 1825	Upper Macquarie Rv.	Jonathan Kinsey	John Johnson (ST)	KL	Hut PL-CL, BL, FR, AM	Plomley	
13 March 1825	Upper Macquarie Rv.	D. Lord	James Taylor	KL	Hut PL	Plomley	
13 March 1825	Upper Macquarie Rv.	Stocker	1 ST	HR		Plomley	
c.15 March 1825	Clarendon, South Esk Rv.	Barclay	William Arnold	KL	Hut PL-BN	NLA MS3251, b1, v4, pp1-14; 25-26; FM, p867; TPDA30/3/25, p3	
c.10 April 1825	Elizabeth Rv., Campbell Town	James Cox	Thomas Booth	KL-SN, WD			
22 April 1825	Upper-Macquarie Rv.	Dr Pearson	Pearson	HR-SP	Hut PL, SH-KL (many)	Plomley	
c.23 April 1825	Elizabeth Rv., Campbell Town	Dr Pearson			CT-KL	Plomley	
June 1825	Sideling Hill (Winterton Parish)	John Jones			Hut PL-V, SH-KL (many), OX-WN	TPDA27/4/25, p2	
5 August 1825	Bruny Is.	James. Kelly			Hut PL-BL, CL, F, T, S, KN	Plomley	
c.September 1825	Greenwater Ponds		Kingston (SW)	KL-SP	House PL-V, CT-SP	Plomley	
c.September 1825	Interior		SW	KL-SP		Plomley	
31 December 1825	Western Creek	Stocker	2 M	2 KL		Plomley	
<b>1826</b>			James Cupid (ST)	WN-SP	Hut AK	Plomley	
c.1826	Bothwell	William Clark			Hut PL	Arthur, pp15-16	
c.1826	Bothwell	William Clark			Hut PL	Arthur, pp15-16	
c.1826	Oatlands		Road gang		Hut PL	CSOI/323, pp197-201	
Post-1826	Circular Head	VDLCo.			Hut PL-F	Stokes, pp458-59	
n.d. 1826-28	Huntingdon Parish, Oatlands	Field	Field	HR	Hut AK	CSOI/316, pp776-77	
n.d. 1826-28	Huntingdon Parish, Oatlands	Field	Mrs Field	HR	Hut PL-KN, 5 FR, PT, S, BD, CL	CSOI/316, pp776-77	
n.d. 1826-28	Huntingdon Parish, Oatlands	Field	Field	HR	Peas	CSOI/316, pp776-77	
n.d. 1826-31	Nile Rv.	Hill	ST	KL		FM, pp866-67	
Pre-1826	Circular Head	VDLCo.			PD	Stokes, pp458-59	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
January 1826	Ouse Rv.	Burn & Pitcairn	George Scott (ST)	KL		Plomley	
January 1826	Clyde Rv.	Patrick MsCarthy	Patrick MsCarthy	KL		Plomley	
January 1826			Wife & family	HR			
January 1826		James Triffitt Shr.			Hut PL	Plomley	
14 March 1826	Great Swanport	Buxton	M	KL	House PL-FR, AM, F, S, BL, TL	Plomley; Bonwick, p117	
April 1826	Oyster Bay	Paddy Harte	M	WN			
29 April 1826	Bluff, Dromedary	J. Browning	Thomas Colby	KL		Plomley	
May 1826	Sussex (Carlton district)	J. Browning	J. Browning	KL	Hut PL-FR	Plomley	
May 1826	Sussex (Carlton district)	Richard Smith	Richard Smith	WN		Plomley	
May 1826	Bagdad	John Jells	James Rowe (ST)	WD	FR	Plomley	
May 1826	Jerusalem	David Mackie	David Mackie	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
c.1 June 1826		M	M	HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
16 June 1826	Tea Tree Brush	Clitherow	Johnson (Overseer)	WN	Hut PL-3 FR	Plomley	
Early September 1826	Pittwater	Gibson	3 ST	3 HR			
September 1826	North		ST	HR		Hellyer, p23	
12 September 1826	nr. Pipers Lagoon		ST	WD	PD	Plomley	
10 October 1826	Clyde Rv.?	Mrs Mary Smith	Samuel Perry (ST)	KL-SP, WD	House PL-V	Plomley	
10 October 1826	Clyde Rv.	Nicholson	Patrick Hallan (ST)	KL-SP, WD	CT-AK	HTG23/9/26, p2	
November 1826	Pooles Marsh (Jordan Rv.)	Allardyce	2 ST	2 KL		Plomley	
2 November 1826	Shannon Rv.	Robert Jones	ST	KL		Plomley	
3 November 1826	Shannon Rv.	Thomson	Family	2 HR			
3 November 1826	Shannon Rv.	Ross	ST	HR	House AK	Plomley	
7 November 1826	Pennyroyal Creek	Pitcairn	James Scott (Overseer)	HR-SN	House AK	Plomley; Arthur, pp15-16	
c.7 November 1826	Elizabeth Rv.	George Simpson	James Rush (Overseer)	HR	House PL	Plomley; Arthur, pp15-16	
		L. Gilles	Reynolds (SHP)	KL		Plomley	
			2 ST	2 KL			DU
			John Guinea (ST)	KL-SP	Hut PL-CL, BD, V	Plomley	
			James Rush (Overseer)	HR		Plomley	
				KL-WD	Hut PL, BN	Plomley	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
11 November 1826	Millers Bluff	George Taylor	G. Taylor Jnr.	KL-SP, WD		Plomley	
21 November 1826	Cockatoo Valley (nr. Allenvale)	John Riseley	John Monks (SW)	KL		Plomley	
			William Priest (SW)	WN		Plomley	
21 November 1826	Cockatoo Valley (nr. Allenvale)		M	KL		Plomley	
			M	WN			
22 November 1826	3m. From Allenvale	Downie	ST	HR		Plomley	
27 November 1826	Cross Marsh	A. F. Kemp	SW	HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
Late November 1826	Clyde	Capt. Wood	2 SHP	2 HR		HTG2/12/26, p4	
Late November 1826	4m. from Bothwell		STK	HR	Hut BD	HTG2/12/26, p4	
3 December 1826	Partridge Is.	Laughton	William Cox	WN-SP, SN	Hut PL-F, S, PT, FD, FR, AM, KN, V	Plomley	
			Andrew Swanson	HR			
15 December 1826	Brown Mountain	Laing	Robert Grimes	HR		Plomley	
19 December 1826	nr. Pipers Lagoon	Thomas Faro	ST	KL-WD		Plomley	
<b>1827</b>							
n.d. 1827	Breem Creek	Buxton	Traveller	WN-SP	Hut BP	Meredith, pp84-85	
			ST	KL-SP			
n.d. 1827	Richmond		Police party	HR-SN		Shaw, p49	
n.d. 1827	George Town				3 House PL	Plomley	
n.d. 1827	Four Square Gallows	Robert Jones			PD	Plomley	
n.d. 1827	Lake Sorell	A. F. Kemp	ST	HR		Plomley	
n.d. 1827	Spring Hill parish	James Hooper	ST	HR		Plomley	
n.d. 1827	Kittys Rvt. (nr. Kittys Corner)		Wattie (SW)	HR		Plomley	
			SW	WN			
n.d. 1827	Kittys Rvt. (nr. Kittys Corner)	George Green	SHP	WN		Plomley	
19 January 1827	Coal Rv.	Sponsford	Sponsford	HR	CT-SP (several)	Plomley	
21 January 1827	Shannon Point	Thompson	George Roberts (SHP)	MS		Plomley	
			ST	DW-SP			
1 February 1827	St Pauls Plains	Talbot	STK	DW-SP	Hut PL-F, FD	Plomley	
			STK	WN-SP			

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
6 February 1827	Dunorlan (Norfolk Plains)	James Hill Junior	Abraham Spence (STK)	KL		Plomley	
		Timothy Daly	John Fairley (STK)	KL			
c.21 February 1827	Macquarie Plains	Michael Steel's neighbour	2 M	KL		Dow, p45	
			2 M	WN			
23 February 1827	Launceston district	Griffiths	ST	MS		Plomley	
		Grant	ST	KL			
March 1827	Mayfield Bay	Buxton			House PL, BD, wheat BD	Plomley; Story	
12 April 1827	Elizabeth Rv.	Walter Davidson	Thomas Rawling (SHP)	KL-SP	Hut BN	Plomley	
			Edward Green (SHP)	KL-SP			
c.19 April 1827	Elizabeth Rv.		2 SW	HR		Plomley	
20 April 1827	Jericho	Romney	James Johnson (ST)	WD	Hut PL-FR, AM, V	Plomley; HTG5/5/27, p3	
			2 ST	HR			
c.20 April 1827	Jericho				Hut PL	HTG5/5/27, p3	
May 1827		Abraham Walker	John Smith (ST)	KL		Plomley	
May 1827	Great Swanport	Gatehouse	Richard Addey (STK)	MS		Plomley	
24 May 1827	9m. from Lake Rv.	W. Brumby	Patrick Lapham (SW)	KL		Plomley	
			James Ruebottom (SW)	KL-SP			
June 1827	Dairy Plains	Stocker	James Cupit (Cubit)	WN-SP	Hut AK	Jorgenson, p125; FM, p254	
c.12 June 1827	Lake Rv.		M	DW		CT3/8/27, p3	
19 June 1827	Western Marshes	D. Gibson	Thomas Baker	HR	Hut PL, BD, C, TL, KN, UT, V	Plomley	
22 June 1827	Michael Howes Marsh	J.A. Eddie	John Flood (SW)	WN-SP	Hut PL-BD, FD, TL	Plomley	
			SW	HR			
23 June 1827	Blackmans Rv., Tunbridge	Lackey	SW	WN-SP		Plomley	
			SW	WN-WD			
23 June 1827	Quamby Bluff (Laycock Falls)	T. C. Simpson	William Knight (STK)	KL-SP, WD	Hut PL-F, T, S, BL, BD, TL,	Plomley	
			Hurling (ST)	HR	FR, AM		
29 June 1827	Glenore (Long Swamp)	Chapman (Herbert)	ST	KL	Hut PL-F	Plomley	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
30 June 1827	Great Western Lagoon	Capt. Thomas	Quin (ST)	KL	Hut PL	Plomley; CSO1/316, p1067	
			ST	KL			
			ST	WN			
Late June	nr. Quamby Bluff	Field	ST	KL		Plomley	
1 July 1827	Quamby Bluff	Widowson	SHP	MS	Hut PL	Plomley	
1 July 1827	Quamby Bluff	Walker	SHP	MS		Plomley	
20 July 1827	Clyde (Grassy Hut)	Capt. Wood			Hut PL	Plomley	
21 July 1827	Hunting Ground, Abyssinia Tier		Holmes	HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
c.25 July 1827	Broad Marsh		Field	WD	PL-FR	Plomley	
c.26 July 1827	Salt Pans Plain	Capt. Wilson	SW	DW-SP		Plomley	
			SW	WN-MS			
			SHP	WN			
27 July 1827		Wilkerson			Hut PL	Plomley	
n.d. c. August 1827	Michael Howes Marsh	Anstey	2 SW	2 HR	Hut PL-BD, FD, TL	Plomley	
September 1827	Ouse Rv.	Nicholas	William Lewis (ST)	WN-SP	Hut PL	Plomley	
c.12 September 1827	Blackmans Rv., Tunbridge	Eddie	2 ST	2 HR		Plomley	
c.12 September 1827	Blackmans Rv., Tunbridge	G. C Clark	SW	HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
Mid September 1827	2m. from Launceston		M	KL		Plomley	
23 September 1827	Mount Royal	Signal station	3 M	3 HR	Hut PL-FD, BD, FR, V	Plomley	
3 October 1827	New Norfolk district	Macpherson	2 SW	2 HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
14 October 1827	Currijong Bottom	Preswell (Bennett)	William Bennett	DW-SP		Plomley; CSO1/323, p336	DU
			Clark	WN			
			Maclanachan	HR			
14 October 1827	Macquarie Springs	Weeding	M	WD-SP		Plomley	
c.20 October 1827	Pleasant Hills		M	KL		Hobler, p31	
			M	WN-SP			
c.27 October 1827	Tamar Rv. (10m. Launceston)	Andrew Birrell	Birrell	KL		Plomley	
November 1827	Bluff Tier		Peter Raine (SW)	HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
			SW	HR			



DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
November 1827	Btw. C. Grim & Circular Head	VDLCo.			2 SH-KL	Lennox	
November 1827	nr. Circular Head	VDLCo.			Hut BN	Lennox	
November 1827	nr. Circular Head	VDLCo.			Hut BN	Lennox	
Early November 1827	Northwest	VDLCo.	Fossey (Surveyor)		Camp PL	Lennox	
8 November 1827	Brown Mt.		Rogers (Field Police)	WN-SN		Plomley; HTC24/11/27, p2	
c.10 November 1827	Hobart-Launceston Rd. (Macquarie Rv.?)	L. Gilles			Cart PL	Plomley	
10 November 1827	Glenore, Western Rv.	William Lyttleton	Joseph Hilton (SHP)	KL		Plomley	
10 November 1827	Glenore, Western Rv.	William Bryan	Lawrence Cunningham (SHP)	DW	Hut PL, BP-F, BL	Plomley	
10 November 1827	Lake Rv.	Lawrence	SHP	KL?	100 SH-KL	Plomley	
10 November 1827	Seven Lagoons, Norfolk Plains	Paton	ST	WN-SP	Hut PL-FR, AM	Plomley	
12 November 1827	Russell Falls	Abbott	SHP	HR		Plomley	
12 November 1827	Russell Falls	Stokell	SHP	MS		Plomley	
c.17 November 1827	Oyster Bay	Amos	David Thomas (ST)	KL		Plomley	
18-24 November 1827	Norfolk Plains	Archer	M	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
18-24 November 1827	Norfolk Plains	Archer	M	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
18-24 November 1827	West Tamar (Green Point)	Jonathan Griffiths	M	HR	House AK	Plomley	
18-24 November 1827	Supply Rv., West Tamar	Jonathan Griffiths	M	HR	Mill AK	Plomley	
22 November 1827	Western Rv.	Richard Dry	John Dry	KL-SP, WD		Plomley	
			John Wrigley (SHP)	KL-SP, WD			
c.24 November 1827	Blackwall, West Tamar	Gilders	Gildas	KL-SP		Plomley	
			2 ST	2 KL-SP			
24 November 1827	West Tamar (5m. Launceston)	A. Thompson	William Welladvice	KL-SP		Plomley	
			2 ST	2 HR			
24 November 1827	Pleasant Hills	Bickfod	W. M. Simmonds (ST)	WN		Plomley	
24 November 1827	Macquarie district (Richmond?)	Barker	2 SW	2 HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
28 November 1827	Antill Ponds	R. Harrison	ST	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
Late November 1827	Antill Ponds	R. Harrison	M	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
Late November 1827	Antill Ponds	R. Harrison	M	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
December 1827	Bashan Plains	John Espie			Hut PL-T, S, BL	Plomley	
December 1827	Shannon Rv.	Mrs Ransom			Hut PL-T, S, KN	Plomley	
December 1827	Bagdad	Thomas Starkey	Starkey	HR		Plomley	
			Wife	HR			
Early December 1827	Cape Grim	VDLCo.	Thomas John (STK)	WN-SP		Lennox; FM, pp395, 397	
2-7 December 1827	Break-O-Day Plains	Talbot	2 ST	2 HR		Plomley	
2-7 December 1827	Norfolk Plains (Launceston Rd)		4 M	4 HR		Plomley; HTC8/12/27, p1	
9 December 1827	Paterson Plains	Hobler			Hut PL-BL, U	Hobler, p 38	
11 December 1827	Hobart road (5m. Launceston)		Traveller	WN-SP		Plomley	
11 December 1827	Western Marshes (nr. Ritchie's)	VDLCo.	STK	HR		Lennox	
15 December 1827	North Esk Rv.	Hobler	Britton (SW)	WN-SP		Plomley; Hobler 15/12/27	
16 December 1827	South Esk Rv. (4m. Launceston)		Richard Rutten (ST)	KL-SP		Plomley	
18 December 1827	Macquarie district (Richmond?)	Barker			Hut & Timber stack BN	Plomley	
31 December 1827	Cape Grim	VDLCo.			118 SH-KL	Lennox	
n.d. 1828	Bashan Plains	Espie	William Claypole (ST)	HR	Hut AK-BP	CSO1/316, pp307-9	
n.d. 1828	West Tamar, Middle Arm		20 lime burners (ST)	20 HR	Hut PL-BL, BR	Plomley	PE
n.d. 1828	Greystone Point		2 Sealers	2 KL	Hut PL-FR, V	CSO1/316, pp706-11; J. Calder, pp97-99	
			2 Sealers	2 HR			
			Sealer	WN			
n.d. 1828	Hollow Tree Bottom	Hodgson	ST	HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
n.d. 1828	Michael Howe Marsh	Mackersay	Peter Allen (ST)	WN-SP		Plomley	
n.d. 1828	Bothwell district	James Triffett	William Smith (ST)	KL	Hut PL	Plomley	
n.d. 1828	Lake Sorell	A. F. Kemp	ST	KL	Hut PL	Plomley	
n.d. 1828	Ouse Rv.	Thomas Triffett			Hut PL	Plomley	
n.d. 1828		Mrs Humphries			Hut PL	Plomley	
Summer 1827/28	East Tamar (opp. Blackwall)	Kneale			Hut PL-FD, KN; 2CT-KL, 2 OX-WN	Plomley	
Summer 1827/28	Clyde district	Capt. Wood			Turnips dug up	Plomley	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
Summer 1827/28	Clyde district	Howell			PD	Plomley	
1828							
Early 1828	Emu Bay	VDLCo.			Hut PL-V	Hare, pp40-41	
n.d. 1828-29	nr. Quambys Plains	Smith	STK	KL		CSO1/323, p289	
			STK	KL			
n.d. 1828-30	Cape Grim?	VDLCo.	Gunnshannon (STIK)	WN-SP		FM, p225	
January 1828	Macquires Marsh		William Lewis	HR		Plomley	
January 1828	Shepherds Beats	Synnott	ST	WN-SP	Hut PL	Plomley	
c.5 January 1828	Patrick Plains, Upper Clyde	Capt. Clarke	Clark	HR		Plomley	
			ST	HR-WD			
14-19 January 1828	Interior		M	HR-WD		Plomley	
Late January 1828	Lower Clyde	Sharland			Hut PL	Plomley	
Late January 1828	Cataract Gorge, Launceston		2 W	2 HR	PL-CL	Plomley; CA1/3/28, p43	
			2 M	2 HR			
Late January 1828	North Esk Rv. (2m. Launceston)		M	HR	Hut PL	Plomley; CA1/3/28, p43	
February 1828	Cape Grim				300 SH-KL-SP	Lennox	PE
February 1828	Bluff Tier	Michael Best	George Cable (SW)	HR	Hut BN	Plomley	
February 1828	Bagdad		M	KL-SP		Plomley	
			M	WN-SP			
			M	HR			
February 1828	Great Swanport	Lyne	Daughter	WN-WD	House AK	Plomley; HTC8/3/28, p2; FM, p344	
			Daughter	HR			
February 1828	Great Swanport	Buxton	M	HR	Hut PL-V	Plomley	
c.1 February 1828	Macquires Marsh	G. Nicholas	SHP	HR		Plomley	
4 February 1828	Macquires Marsh	G. Nicholas	SHP	WN-SP	Hut PL-FR, AM	Plomley	
16 February 1828	Bagdad district, Constitution Hill		Thomas Brisco (Blacksmith)	KL-SP, WD		Plomley; CA1/3/28, p43	
			Shepherd	WN-SP			
			M	WN			
18 February 1828	Bagdad		Road worker	KL-SP		CA1/3/28, p43	
			2 Road workers	2 HR			
c.24 February 1828	Great Swanport	Meredith	ST	HR	Hut PL	Plomley; HTC8/3/28, p2	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
c.24 February 1828	Great Swanport	Meredith	ST	HR	Hut PL	Plomley; HTC8/3/28, p2	
c.24 February 1828	Great Swanport	Allen			House PL-BN, Stacks BN, FR	Plomley; Allen	
24-29 February 1828	Bruny Is.	James Kelly			Hut PL-UT	Plomley	
25 February 1828	nr. Patrick Plains	Allardyce	2 ST	H-KL-SP	2 HR-SP, SN	Plomley	
26 February 1828	Western Mts.	Stocker	James Cupit (Cubit) (ST)	WN-SP		Plomley	
28 February 1828	Shannon Rv.	Espie	2 STK	2 HR		Plomley	
2-6 March 1828	Great Swanport	Amos	2 CH	2 HR	House AK	HTC8/3/28, p2	
2 March 1828	Clyde district	William Clark			PD	Plomley	
4 March 1828	Quoin Hill (4m. Capt. Woods)	John Franks	Franks	HR	H-WN-SP	Plomley	
			William Walker (SHP)	KL			
7 March 1828	Regents Plains, Upper Clyde	Russell			Hut PL-2 FR, V	Plomley	
c.11 March 1828	The Den, Clyde	Capt. Wood			Hut PL-3 FR, V	Plomley	
c.12 March 1828	The Den, Clyde	Capt. Wood	ST	HR	Hut PL	CSO1/316, p134	
13 March 1828	Elizabeth Rv.	Stynes & Troy	John Campbell (SHP)	HR		Plomley	
13 March 1828	Elizabeth Rv.	Stynes & Troy	John Campbell (SHP)	KL-SP	Hut PL	Plomley	
c.14 March 1828	Ross		Road party	HR		CAJ1/4/28, p94	
c.14 March 1828	Michael Howes Sugarloaf		people'	HR		Plomley	
15 March 1828	Eastern Tier, 12m. Ross	Horne	William Roberts (SHP)	KL-SP	Hut PL	Plomley	
			SHP	HR			
16 March 1828	Shannon	Edward Lord	S. Godson	HR	Hut BN-BL, V	Plomley	
			2 STK	2 HR			
16-20 March 1828	Swanport	J. D. Harte	SHP	HR		Plomley	
16-20 March 1828	Swanport	Amos			House PL	Plomley	
c.17 March 1828	Patricks Plains	Jones	M	HR	Hut PL-BD, CL, FD	Plomley	
19 March 1828	Clyde Rv. region	Mrs Ransome	2 ST	2 HR	House AK	Plomley	
c.20 March 1828	Ross (nr. Bridge)	Hill	2 ST	2 KL		Plomley; TAS28/3/28, p2	
24-28 March 1828	Antill Ponds	Presnell			House PL	Plomley	
24-28 March 1828	Black Brush		2 ST	2 KL		Plomley; TAS11/4/28, p3	
30 March 1828	Elizabeth Rv.	Robertson	Henry Beames (SHP)	KL-SP, WD	Hut PL	Plomley	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
April 1828	Western Rv. district		ST	WN-SP			
April 1828	Western Rv. district		M	KL		CSOI/323, p316	
April 1828	Western Rv. district		M	KL		CSOI/323, p316	
Early April 1828	Avoca district	Kearney	STK	HR-SP	Hut AK	CSOI/323, p316	
Early April 1828	Western Mountains		STK	HR	Hut AK, CT & SH-KL-SP	TAS 11/4/28, p3	
1 April 1828	South Esk Rv.	Bonney	STK	WN-SP		Plomley	
1-5 April 1828	Lagoon of Is.	Allardyce	4 STK	4 HR			
8 April 1828	Lagoon of Is.	Eddington	SHP	HR	Hut PL, BN	Plomley; HTC8/3/28, p2	
9 April 1828	Ben Lomond Rvt.	Batman	SHP	HR	Hut PL, BN	Plomley	
11 April 1828	Macquarie Rv.	Gilles	2 ST	2 HR		Plomley	
11 April 1828	Macquarie Rv.	Cottrell	ST	KL	Hut PL	Plomley	
Mid April 1828	Cape Grim	VDLCo.			150 SH-SP	Plomley	
Late April	Quamby Bluff	Eddington			Hut BN	CA1/5/28, p134	
Late April	Interior		STK	HR		Plomley	
May 1828	Macquarie Rv.	David Gibson		WN-BN	Hut PL-BN, F, V	Plomley	
May 1828	Elizabeth Rv.	Robertson	Robertson & 2 ST	HR	Hut AK	Shaw, p49	
3 May 1828	York Town	Henry Barrett	2 ST	2 HR			
			Barrett	WN-SP	36 SH-KL, PD	Plomley; CSOI/316, p707	
			ST	HR			
c.10 June 1828	St Pauls Plains (nr. Evandale)	Talbot			SH-KL-SP (great number)	Plomley	
1-5 June 1828	Western Rv.	Thomas Ritchie	ST	WN-SP	Hut PL, BN	Plomley	
c.9 June 1828	Norfolk Plains (4m. Gibson's)	Stocker	ST	WN-SP	Hut PL-F, T, S, oats	Plomley	
28 July 1828	Dilston, East Tamar	Coulson	ST	KL-SP, WD		Plomley	
Winter 1828	Antill Ponds	John Russell	Jones	HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
c.7 August 1828	Schouten Whale Fishery	Meredith	Benjamin Varden	DW-SP, WD		Plomley	
			Thomas Myres	HR			
			ST	MS			
22 August 1828	Break-O-Day Plains	D. Reynolds	ST	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
22 August 1828	Western Mts.	Dingle 40th Regt.	Mrs Dingle	WN-SP		Plomley	
24 August 1828			Morgan Lewis	WN-SP		Sutherland 24/8/28	
27 August 1828	The Lakes (Lake Sorell?)	George Kemp	Samuel Clarke (Coke)	KL-SP, WD		Plomley	
28 August 1828	Elizabeth Rv.	Styne	SHP	HR		Plomley	
28 August 1828	The Lakes (Crescent Lake?)	Pitt	Elisha Kingston (ST)	HR		Plomley	
28 August 1828	The Lakes (Crescent Lake?)	Franks	William Scott (ST)	HR		Plomley	
c.30 August 1828	St Pauls	Archer			Hut PL	Plomley	
c.30 August 1828	Western Mountains	P. Minnett	P. Minnett	WN		CA1/10/28, p392	
31 August 1828	Sorell Springs	Presnell	ST	HR		Plomley	
September 1828	Burleigh hut, Hampshire Hills	VDLCo.	William Murray	WN		Lennox; FM, p872	
			Nathaniel Russell	WN			
			2 STK	2 WN			
September 1828	Macgills Marsh	T. Lovell			Hut PL-FD, BL	Plomley	
September 1828	Lake Rv.	Urquhart	SHP	WN-SP		Plomley	
September 1828	Sussex	J. O'Reardon			Hut PL-F, PT, V	Plomley	
September 1828	Ivorys Bight		Buckley	KL-SP		CA1/10/28, p392	
September 1828	Pittwater	David Mackie			Hut PL-F, S, 2 FR	Plomley	
1 September 1828	Eastern Marshes	Mitchell	ST	WN-SP, WD	Hut PL	Plomley; CA1/10/28, p392; FM, pp866-67	
2 September 1828	South Esk Rv.	William Robertson	William Robertson	HR		Plomley	
			ST	HR			
4 September 1828	Kittys Corner		ST	KL		Plomley	
			ST	WN			
6 September 1828	Great Swanport	Lt. Hawkins	James Stanton (ST)	KL-WD		Plomley	
6 September 1828	Great Swanport	Wilkinson	ST	KL		Plomley	
			ST	WN			
9 September 1828	Grindstone Bay	Gatehouse	ST	HR	Hut PL?	Plomley	
19 September 1828	Prossers Plains	Buchanan	ST	HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
21 September 1828	Birchalls Bottom (Sorell district)	John Stacey	John Priest (SHP)	KL		Plomley	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
23 September 1828	Birchalls Bottom (Sorell district)	Laug	John (or Bob) Sumser (SW)	WN-SP	Hut PL	Plomley	
			Elinor Philips (Rockford?)	WN-SP			
23 September 1828	Birchalls Bottom (Sorell district)		Joseph Jerome	WN-SP		Plomley	
c.October 1828	Bothwell district	James Triffitt	William Smith (ST)		Hut PL	Plomley	
c.October 1828	Ouse Rv.	Thomas Triffitt			Hut PL	Plomley	
c.October 1828	Ouse Rv.	Mrs Humphries			Hut PL	Plomley	
October 1828	Little Swanport	William Cullian	James Cullian	HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
			Richard Barnes	HR			
c.1 October 1828	Ben Lomond	Darke	SHP	WN-SP		Plomley	
c.8 October 1828	Ben Lomond	Bonney			Hut PL-F, S, BL, V	Plomley	
9 October 1828	Big Lagoon, Oatlands	Patrick Gough	Mrs Esther Gough	DW	Hut PL-BD, KN, FD, V	Plomley	
			Esther Gough (13 months)	WN		Plomley	
			Alicia Gough (4 yrs)	KL			
			Mary Gough (7 yrs)	WN			
9 October 1828	Blue Hills	Noah Mortimer	Anne Geary	KL	Hut PL-BL, FR	Plomley	
10 October 1828	Blue Hills	Bryant	ST	HR-SP	Hut PL-BL, CL, KN, UT, F, T, S, V	Plomley	
c.11 October 1828	Ben Lomond	Massey	SHP	HR		Plomley	
c.11 October 1828	Ben Lomond	Sinclair	SHP	HR			
14 October 1828	Green Ponds	Cobb	James Blunders	WN-SP	Hut PL-T, S, BL, V	Plomley	
20 October 1828	Green Ponds (nr. Ransome's)	Thomas Langford	Mrs Langford	WN-SP	Hut PL-PT, FD, F, BL	Plomley; CSO1/331, p173; CT26/11/30, p3	
			Daughter (14)	KL-SP			
			John (young son)	WN-SP			
23 October 1828	Lovely Banks		M	WN-SP	Cart AK	Plomley	
24 October 1828	Abyssinia Marsh	McNeilly (Espie?)	William Parrs	WN-SP		Plomley	
			ST	HR			
25 October 1828	Ouse Rv.	Synnott	ST	WN-SP		Plomley	
25 October 1828	Second Sandspit (nr. Maria Is.)	Capt. Glover	John Bailey (STK)	KL	Hut PL-BD, CL, FD	Plomley	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
26 October 1828	St Peters Pass		STK 2 SW	HR-SP 2 HR		Plomley	
29 October 1828	Bream Creek, Carlton	Gordon	William Stringer (STK)	KL	Hut PL-BD, 2 FR	Plomley	
November 1828	Kittys Rvt.	Mitchell	George Appleyard	WN	Hut PL	Plomley	
November 1828	Lake Frederic, Oatlands	Fisher	Richard Walters	WN-SP	Hut PL-BL, CL, T, S, V	Plomley	
November 1828	Western Rv.	Ritchie			H-KL	Plomley	
November 1828	Huntingdon parish, Oatlands	Field			PT, 2 DG taken	Plomley	
1 November 1828	Ben Lomond	Reed	ST	WN-SP, WD		Plomley	
5 November 1828	Sorell Springs	Presnell	ST	WN-SP		Plomley	
9-10 November 1828	Jerusalem		STK	KL		Plomley	
c.10 November 1828	Maloneys Sugar Loaf		M	WN-SP		CSOI/331, p170	
10 November 1828	Lake Sorell	A.F. Kemp	2 ST	2 HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
c.11 November 1828	Shannon	Ransome			Hut PL	Plomley	
12 November 1828	Clyde Rv.	Pitt	William Doby	WN-SP	Hut PL-BL, FD	Plomley	
14 November 1828	Ben Lomond	Sevior	ST	HR		Plomley	
16 November 1828	Oatlands (nr. Fisher's)		One Armed Dick	WN-SP		Plomley	
24 November 1828	Present day Legana	W. Archibald Thomson	Robert Willowise (free ST)	KL-SP		NLA, MS3251, b1, v4, pp51-68	
December 1828	Little Swanport	William Cullian			Hut PL-T, S	Plomley	
December 1828	Great Swanport	Allen			Hut PL	Plomley	
December 1828	Western Rv.	Ritchie			H-SP	CSOI/323, p316	
1 December 1828	Eastern Marshes	Adam Wood	Wood	KL-SP	Hut PL	Plomley	
1 December 1828	Maloneys Sugar Loaf	Thomas Presnell			Hut PL	Plomley	
1 December 1828	Maloneys Sugar Loaf	Thomas Presnell	John Croft (ST)	WN	Hut PL	Plomley	
			James Grey (SHP)	HR		Plomley	
1 December 1828?	Jerusalem	James Hobbs	James Hobbs	WN-SP		Plomley	
c.1 December 1828	Break-O-Day Plains	Cowie	M	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
c.1 December 1828	Break-O-Day Plains	Talbot	SHP	KL	Hut PL-TL	Plomley	
2 December 1828	East of Macgills Marsh	James Hobbs			Hut PL	Plomley	
3 December 1828	East of Macgills Marsh	William Cullian	Michael Murphy	HR	Hut PL-BD	Plomley; HTC13/12/28, p2	



DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
3 December 1828?	Hollow Tree Bottom	John Boyle	Boyle	HR		Plomley	
4 December 1828	Woodlands Lagoon	Earle	Joseph Good (ST) Wright Wood (ST)	KL KL		Plomley	
4 December 1828	Woodlands Lagoon	Loane			60 SH-SP, H-SP	Plomley	
13 December 1828	Sugar Loaf Hill, Black Marsh		Patrick McOwen (SHP)	HR	10 SH driven off	Plomley	
			Jonathan Kenzie	HR			
13 December 1828	Sideling Hill, Black Marsh	Michael & Henry Jones	James Jones (SHP)	KL		Plomley; CSO1/316, pp210, 706	
13 December 1828	Spring Hill parish	James Hooper	Hooper	HR		Plomley	
14 December 1828	Milton, Oyster Bay	John Allen	John Allen	HR		Allen	
15 December 1828	Quoin Hill (5m. Clyde Rv.)		Corpl. Hooper 40th	WN-SP		Plomley	
15-19 December 1828	Jerusalem	James Drummond	M	HR	House AK	Plomley	
15-19 December 1828	Jerusalem	James Gooding	M	HR	House AK	Plomley	
c.27 December 1828	Great Swanport	Meredith	2 ST	2 HR	2 H-KL	Plomley; Meredith, p81	
n.d. c.1829	Eastern Marshes	Lord			H & SH-KL	CSO1/323, p336	
n.d. 1829	Eastern Marshes	David Williams	ST	KL-WD		Plomley	
n.d. 1829	Lake Sorell	Kemp	Joseph Barlow (ST)	HR		CSO1/316, p765	
n.d. 1829	Lake Sorell	Kemp	Joseph Barlow (ST)	HR		CSO1/316, p765	
n.d. 1829	Butchers Bottom	Joseph Stags			Hut PL-BD, T, S	Plomley	
n.d. 1829	Ouse Rv.	Synnott	M	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
n.d. 1829	Ouse Rv.		Joseph Wilkinson	HR		Plomley	
			Robert Scott	HR			
Summer 1828/29	East Tamar (opp. Blackwall)	Kneale			Hut PL-FD, KN	CSO1/316, p710	
<b>1829</b>							
January 1829	Spring Hill		M	HR	CL	Plomley	
January 1829	Kittys Rvt.	Mitchell			Hut PL	Plomley	
2-5 January	Jones Rv., New Norfolk district		M	HR		Plomley	
2-5 January	Jones Rv., New Norfolk district		M	HR		Plomley	
2-5 January	Jones Rv., New Norfolk district		M	HR		Plomley	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
6 January 1829	Bothwell district	Barnes (Barr?)			Hut PL-BL, 2 FR, AM	Plomley	
6 January 1829	Ouse Rv.	Triffitt			Hut PL-BL, FR	Plomley	
6 January 1829	Ouse Rv.	Capt. Ramus			Hut PL-F, 2 FR, V	Plomley	
6 January 1829	Ouse Rv.	Jameison	Thomas Hardie (ST)	WN-SP	Hut PL-F, FR, V	Plomley	
c.6 January 1829	Ouse Rv.	Humphrey			Hut PL	Plomley	
16-30 January 1829	Great Swanport	Meredith	ST	HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
16-30 January 1829	Great Swanport	Meredith	ST	HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
16-30 January 1829	Great Swanport	Allen			Hut PL	Plomley	
25 January 1829	Duck Rv.	VDLCo.	Hellyer & party	HR	BN (attempt to immolate party)	Thomas, p159	
31 January 1829	Tamar Rv.	William Smith	SHP	HR-SP		Plomley	
8-14 February 1829	Campbell Town	Eagle	ST	HR		Plomley	
17 February 1829	Cummings Folly (Launceston)	J. W. Bell	SHP	DW-SP		Plomley	
c.17 February 1829	Western Rv.	Charles Dry	Dry	HR		Plomley	
18 February 1829	Pleasant Hills, West Tamar		Military party	HR		Plomley	
19 February 1829	Pleasant Hills, West Tamar		Morgan (aged 10)	WN-WD		Plomley	
c.20 February 1829	Western Rv.	Charles Dry	ST	WN-SP	Hut AK	Plomley	
20 February 1829	Government farm nr. Ross	Anstey?	Shepherd	WN-SP		CSOI/331, pp140-41	
Late February 1829	Great Swanport	Major Lord	Boat crew	HR		Plomley	
Late February 1829	Great Swanport	Wilkinson	ST	HR	CL	Plomley	
February-March 1829	Carlton	Cruttenden	Gov't messenger (ST)	HR			
10 or 17 March 1829	North Esk Rv. (nr. Cataract)		John Bell (ST)	KL		Plomley	
10 or 17 March 1829	North Esk Rv. (nr. Cataract)				Hut PL	Plomley	
12 March 1829	Piper Rv.	McGee	James Reece	KL		Plomley	
13 March 1829	North Esk Rv. (3m. Launceston)	William Chapman			House PL	Plomley	
13 March 1829	North Esk Rv.	John Kearne (Carns)			Hut PL-F, V	Plomley; Hobler, pp128-29	
13 March 1829	North Esk Rv.	William Russell	ST	WN-SP, WD	Hut PL	Plomley; Hobler, pp128-29	
13 March 1829	North Esk Rv.	Thomas Miller	Mary Miller	KL-SP, WD	Hut PL-BD, FR, AM, F, S, V	Plomley; Hobler, pp128-29	
			James Hales	KL-SP			

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
			Thomas Johnson	KL-SP, WD			
			ST	WN-SP			
			ST	WN-SP			
13 March 1829	North Esk Rv.	D. Williams	STK	MS		Plomley	
28 March 1829	Jones Rv., W. Ouse Rv.	McPherson	SHP	WN	Hut PL-BL, BD, T, S, FD, PD, F	Plomley	
28 March 1829	Ouse Rv. Opp. Hells Corner	J. Evans	William Cheshire (ST)	WN-SP		Plomley	
			2 ST	2 HR			
Early April 1829	Lake Rv.	Lawrence	ST	MK		Hobler, p77	
April 1829	Pooles Marsh	Capt. Wood	James West (ST)	WN-SP		Plomley	
			Charles (ST)	WN-WD			
April 1829	Oatlands district	Robert Jones			Hut PL-BL, F, T, S, V	Plomley	
April 1829	Black Marsh	G. Denholme	John Brown (ST)	WN-SP		Plomley	
c.2 April 1829	St Pauls Plains	Major Grey	Moses Garcia (SHP)	KL-SP, WD		Plomley; Wedge, p55	DU
			William Doria	KL			
c.4 April 1829		Sutherland	M	HR	Hut PL-BD	Plomley	
c.28 April 1829	Little Swanport	Jonathon Kinsey			Hut PL	CSOI/323, p121	
28 April 1829	Little Swanport	Buxton	James McKinnis (ST)	WN-SP	Hut PL-BD, V	Plomley	
			W	HR			
			Child	HR			
28 April 1829	Wye Rivulet	Harte			Hut BN	Plomley	
May 1829	West Tamar		M	HR-SN	Mill AK	Plomley	
2 May 1829	White Marsh (Brushy Plains)	Grant			Hut PL	Plomley	
3 May 1829	York Town		Henry Barrett	WN-SP	Hut AK-PD, SH-KL	Plomley	
8 May 1829	White Marsh (Brushy Plains)	Lord	ST	HR	Hut PL-BL, F, V	Plomley	
9 May 1829	Watery Plains		M	HR-SP		Plomley	
c.9 May 1829	St Pauls Plains	Mary Smith	Thomas James (ST)	KL-SP	Cart AK-F, V	Plomley	
			Thomas Watson (ST)	HR-SP			
c.9 May 1829	St Pauls Plains				Huts PL	Plomley	DU
c.9 May 1829	St Pauls Plains				Huts PL	Plomley	DU
c.9 May 1829	St Pauls Plains				Huts PL	Plomley	DU

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
c.9 May 1829	St Pauls Plains				Huts PL	Plomley	DU
13 May 1829	Brushy Plains	Lord			Hut PL-V	Plomley; HTC16/5/29, p1	
13 May 1829	Brushy Plains	Nickolls			Hut PL-V	Plomley; HTC16/5/29, p1	
13 May 1829	Prossers Plains	Olding			Hut PL-BD, V, fowls KL	Plomley; HTC16/5/29, p1	
15 May 1829	Prossers Plains	Josiah Spode			Hut PL-BL, F, V	Plomley; HTC16/5/29, p1	
15 May 1829	Prossers Plains	John Buchanan	John Franks (STK)	MS	Hut PL	CSO1/316, pp252-70; HTC16/5/29, p1; HTC23/5/29, p2	
15 May 1829	Prossers Plains	Redpath	Francis Dealy (STK)	KL-SP, WD		CSO1/316, pp252-70; HTC16/5/29, p1; HTC23/5/29, p2	
			SW	MS			
16 May 1829	Prossers Plains	Morgan	Mrs Morgan	HR	Hut PL, BN, BL, CL, V	Plomley; HTC16/5/29, p1; Hobler 16/5/29	
16 May 1829	Prossers Plains	Cruttenden	Holland (STK)	HR		CSO1/316, pp252-70; HTC16/5/29, p1; HTC23/5/29, p2	
16 May 1829	Prossers Plains	Josiah Spode	Spode's Boy	HR	Hut AK	Plomley; HTC16/5/29, p1	
17-23 May 1829	1m. from Launceston		Boy	WN-SP		Plomley	
1 June 1829		Evans	STK	HR		Plomley	
6-7 June 1829	Carlton	R Dodge	James Turlin (ST)	KL-SP		Plomley	
			Edward Horthill (ST)	MS			
6-7 June 1829	Carlton	Gordon	James Seal (STK)	MS		Plomley	
			Thady McNamara	MS			
7 June 1829	Sam the Butchers Hill	G. Robson	John Smith (ST)	HR		Plomley	
10 June 1829	South Esk Rv. (nr. Kearney's)	McLeod	ST	HR		Wedge 10/6/29	
c.12 June 1829	Pittwater	Downs	ST	KL-SP, WD		Plomley	
July 1829	Broad Valley	Harrison			Hut PL	Plomley	
July 1829	Ben Lomond	Batman			Hut PL, OX-SP	Plomley	
July 1829	Ben Lomond	Massey	SHP	HR		Plomley	
1-3 July 1829	Tamar Rv. (6m. Launceston)	Laughlan White	Mrs White	WN-SP		Plomley	
25 July 1829	Great Swanport (Kelvedon)	Cotton and Storey	ST	WN-SP	Hut PL-3 FR, V	Plomley; CSO1/323, p120	
			ST	WN-SP			
			ST	WN-SP			

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
25 July 1829	Great Swanport (nr. Kelvedon)	Laycock	Laycock	HR		CSOI/323, p120	
25 July 1829	Great Swanport	Meredith	Blacksmith	WN-SP		Plomley; CSOI/323, p120	
25 July 1829	Great Swanport	Reid			Hut PL-BD, V	Plomley	
Mid 1829	Lovely Banks	Guest	James Prior (ST)	WN-SP	Cart AK	CSOI/316, p769	
August 1829	Jerusalem	Underwood [Naimie]	Henry Wright (ST)	WN-SP	Hut PL	Plomley	
August 1829	Jerusalem (Penrice)		William Carrier	WN-SP		Plomley	
August 1829	Jerusalem	Tolmoy (J. C. Tolman?)	ST	HR	Hut AK, CT-SP	Plomley	
August 1829	Jerusalem	Drummond	STK	HR		Plomley	
August 1829	Ben Lomond area		3 M	3 WN-SP		CT28/8/29, p3	DU
9-14 August 1829	Jerusalem and Coal Rv.		M	KL		HTC15/8/29, p2	DU
9-14 August 1829	Jerusalem and Coal Rv.		2 M	2 WN		HTC15/8/29, p2	
9-14 August 1829	Jerusalem and Coal Rv.		M	WN		HTC15/8/29, p2	
9-14 August 1829	Jerusalem and Coal Rv.		M	WN		HTC15/8/29, p2	
10 August 1829	Brown Mt. (West of Kangaroo Rv.)		Terence Dougherty	KL	Hut PL	Plomley	
			Eleanor Doyle	WN-WD			
14 August 1829	Mt. Mangalore, nr. Richmond				Hut PL	CSOI/331, p82	
15 August 1829	Native Corners	Mrs Haines	William Shaw (ST)	HR	Hut PL-BD, F, FR	Plomley	
		Smith	SW	HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
15 August 1829	Native Corners, Tea Tree Brush	Thomas Howard	Mrs Howard	HR	House PL-CL, BD, FR, S	Plomley	
			Child	HR			
c.18 August 1829	Little Swanport	Callon (Cullen)	3M	3 WN	Hut BN	Plomley	
c.18 August 1829	Spring Bay	Gatehouse			Hut PL-BD	Plomley	
20 August 1829	Jordon Rv. (Grassy Hut?)	Capt. Wood	ST	HR-SP, WD	Hut PL	Plomley	
			SHP	HR			
16-22 August 1829	Ben Lomond	Lord	SHP	WN-SP		Plomley	
August 1829	Ben Lomond area		M	WN-SP		Plomley	
23 August 1829	Carlton	Dodge	ST	KL		Plomley	
25 August 1829	Little Swanport	Harte	Lawrence Wall	KL		Plomley; CSOI/323, pp120-21	DU
31 August 1829	Little Swanport	J. Castle	Castle	WN-SP	Hut PL	Plomley	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
31 August 1829	nr. Oatlands		SW	HR	Hut AK	CSOI/331, p83	
September 1829	Broad Marsh	E. Chaplin			Hut PL-S, F, BL	Plomley	
September 1829	Broad Marsh	Bailey	M	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
September 1829	Broad Marsh	McGronch	M	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
1-4 September 1829	Macquarie Rv.		4 SW	4 HR-SN		Plomley	
1-4 September 1829	Macquarie Rv.	Bayles (Bayly)	John McLeod (SHP)	KL-WD, SN		Plomley	
3 September 1829	Clyde Rv.	Allardyce	SHP	WN-SP		Plomley	
c.8 September 1829	Break-O-Day Plains	Talbot	SHP	HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
9 September 1829	Bashan Plains	Espie	William Claypole (ST)	KL-SP, WD	Hut PL, BN	Plomley	
10 September 1829	Black Marsh	William Brodribb	Brodribb's son	HR-SP		Plomley	
14 September 1829	Elizabeth Rv.	Dr Anderson	2 ST	HR		CSOI/320, pp146-47	
15 September 1829	Elizabeth Rv.	Dr Anderson	2 ST	HR		CSOI/320, pp146-47	
c.18 September 1829	Norfolk Plains	Lawrence			Hut PL	Plomley	
18 September 1829	Norfolk Plains	Lawrence			Hut PL-BL, FD	Plomley	
18 September 1829	Norfolk Plains	J. Archer			Hut PL	Plomley	
18 September 1829	Norfolk Plains	VDLCo.			Hut PL	Plomley	
18 September 1829	Sorell	Thomas Coffin	Emma Coffin	KL	Hut PL-BL, BD, F, T, S, CL	Plomley: CSOI/317/92	
			Coffin child	HR			
27-30 September 1829	Coal Rv.	Stokell	ST	WN-SP		Plomley	
27-30 September 1829	Coal Rv.	Naime	ST	WN-SP		Plomley	
13 September-12 October 1829	Clyde Rv.		M	WN-SP	House PL	CSOI/316, pp321-34	
13 September-12 October 1829	Clyde Rv.				House PL	CSOI/316, pp321-34	
October 1829	Hollow Tree, Hamilton	Michael Steel	ST	DW	Hut PL	Plomley: FM, p99	
October 1829	Hollow Tree, Hamilton	M. Best	ST	HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
			ST	HR			
October 1829	Quoin		Corpl. Hooper (40th)	WN-SP	Hut PL	Plomley	
October 1829	Quoin	Kemp			Hut PL	Plomley	
October 1829	Brown Mt., Jerusalem	Stokell	John Brown (SHP)	KL	Hut PL	Plomley	
October 1829	Brown Mt., Jerusalem	Robertson	2 STK	2 HR-SP		Plomley	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
October 1829	Constitution Hill	John Hayes	Hayes family	HR	Hut PL-BL, KN, FD	Plomley	
October 1829	Jordan Rv.	Jones			Hut PL-BL	Plomley	
5-6 October 1829	Maguires Marsh	Espie			SH-SP	Plomley	
5-6 October 1829	Maguires Marsh?	Evans	M	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
7 October 1829	Ouse Rv.	Bell			Hut PL	Plomley	
7 October 1829	Ouse Rv.	Lambe			Hut PL	Plomley	
7 October 1829	Maguires Marsh	Jameison			Hut PL	Plomley	
7 October 1829	Ouse Rv.	J. Triffitt Snr.	Robert Watts (SHP)	KL-WD		Plomley	
8 October 1829	Native Hut Creek (Ouse Rv.)	Marzetti	Henry Smith (ST)	WN-SP		Plomley	
9 October 1829	Mount Kingston				Hut PL-V	Sutherland 9/10/29	
12 October 1829	Blue Hill (Cluny Park)	William Clark	George Piper	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
18-24 October 1829	Shannon	Thomson	ST	WN	Hut PL	Plomley	
early November 1829	North Esk	Sutherland	ST	HR		CSO1/320, p159	
November 1829	Macquarie Plains	Steel	ST	WN-SP, WD		FM, p99	
November 1829	Clyde Rv.	Field	M	HR	Hut AK, DG-WN	Plomley	
November 1829	Clyde Rv.	Field	M	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
November 1829	Clyde Rv.	Field	SHP	WN-SP	Hut AK	Plomley	
1 November 1829	Lower Clyde		H. Williams	HR		Plomley	
1 November 1829	Lower Clyde	Nicholas (Newport)	Mrs Ann Newport	KL-SP	Hut BN	Plomley	
			Thomas Clark	KL-BN			
1 November 1829	Lower Clyde	Steel	ST	WN-SP	Hut PL	Plomley	
1 November 1829	Green Valley	Dixon			Hut PL	Plomley	
1 November 1829	Green Valley	T. Triffitt	Mary Roberts (ST)	KL		Plomley	
1 November 1829	Green Valley	Burn	M	HR	Hut AK	CSO1/320, p395	
2 November 1829	nr. Cross Marsh, Clyde	Champling			Hut PL	Plomley	
2 November 1829	Clyde Rv.	Davis			Hut PL	Plomley	
2 November 1829	Clyde Rv.	'The German'			Hut PL	Plomley	
2 November 1829	7m. Bothwell	Sherwin	M	WN		Plomley	
2 November 1829	Bothwell district	Sybley			Hut BP	Plomley	
2 November 1829	Bothwell district	Abel	Abel	HR		Plomley	
2 November 1829	Cockatoo Valley	Capt. Clark	James Bourne (Burn)	WN-SP	Hut AK, fence BN	Plomley	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
2 November 1829	Shannon Rv.	Thomson	ST	WN-SP	Hut PL	Plomley	
3 November 1829	Jordan Rv.	Murdoch	M	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
4 November 1829	Lagoon Bottom (Rotherwood)	Sharland	SHP	WN-SP	3 SH & 1 CT- SP	Plomley	
5 November 1829	Bluff Hill, Dromedary	Cawthorn	Stephen Barnes (ST)	WN-SP	Hut PL-TL, T, V	Plomley	
6 November 1829	Nr. Jordan Rv. (Green Ponds)	P. Pitt	James Halliday	KL		Plomley	
			ST	WN-SP			
6 November 1829	Green Ponds?	Lamelter (Lancaster)			Hut PL-BL, BD, F, T, S, V	Plomley	
6 November 1829	Clyde Rv.	Field			Fence BP, Corn BP	Plomley	
6 November 1829	New Norfolk	Brooks	2 STK	2 WN-SP	Hut PL-KN	Plomley	
6 November 1829	Deep Gully, New Norfolk	Lt. Fry	William Sells (ST)	WN-SP	House PL-BL, FD, KN, V	Plomley; Arthur, p87	
7 November 1829	Btw. Hampshire & Surrey Hills	VDLCo.	Thomas Lomas	WN-SP		Lennox	
9 November 1829	Mount Kingston		Shepherds	HR	Hut PL	Sutherland 9/11/29	
10 November 1829	Broad Marsh	Stansfield			PL	Arthur, p89	
12 November 1829	Mills Plains		ST	WN-SP		Plomley	
16 November 1829	Hunting Ground		Seymour	WN-SP		Plomley	
16 November 1829	Hunting Ground?	J. Hayes			Hut PL	Plomley	
16 November 1829	Jordan district	Langford	Son	KL	Hut AK	Plomley; CT26/11/30, p3	
16 November 1829	Constitution Hill	Hare	Daughter	WN	Hut PL-BL, KN, V, F	Plomley	
16 November 1829	Cockatoo Valley	Waltham			Hut PL-BL, FD	Plomley	
17-18 November 1829	Race Course	VDLCo.	William Murray	WN-SP		Lennox	
19 November 1829	Black Marsh	James Hoyle	Mary Every & child	HR	Hut PL	Plomley; CSO1/316, p766	
19 November 1829	Black Marsh	Hooper			House PL-BL, CL, T, S, V	Plomley	
21 November 1829	Meads Bottom	McGray			Hut PL	CSO1/320, p399	
21 November 1829	Meads Bottom?	Smith			Hut PL	CSO1/320, p399	
21 November 1829	Binadale (Rothiemay)	T. McRae			House PL	Plomley	
December 1829	East Tamar (opp. Blackwall)	Kneale			Hut PL-V	CSO1/316, p710	
December 1829	Blue Hills, Eastern Marshes	Hobbs			Hut PL-FR, FD, DG taken	Plomley	



DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
1 December 1829	Emu Bay	VDLCo.	Richard Sweeting	WN-SP		Lennox	
1 December 1829	Emu Bay	VDLCo.	Robert Ellis	HR		Lennox	
2 December 1830	Native Hut Bottom	Evans			Hut PL	CSO1/320, p399	
15 December 1829	Burleigh Hut, Hampshire Hills	VDLCo.	James Thompson	WN-SP		Lennox	
19 December 1829	Dry Creek, New Norfolk		SW		Hut PL-BL, BD, V	Plomley; FM, p106	
19 December 1829	Sorell Rvt.	James Doran	Doran	DW-SP	House PL-BD, 3 FR, CL, S, T	Plomley	
19 December 1829	Black Snake Rivulet	Francis Count			Hut PL-BL, BD, CL, T, S, KN, V	Plomley	
19 December 1829	Black Snake Rivulet?	J. Clissold			Hut PL, BL, BD, CL, T, S, KN, V	Plomley	
19 December 1829	Black Snake Rivulet		Man	HR		FM, p106	
20 December 1829	Sorell				Hut PL-BL, F, S, T	Plomley	
23 December 1829	Bothwell	McRae	ST	WD		Plomley	
23 December 1829	Race Course	VDLCo.	McKenzie (STK)	HR	Hut AK	Lennox	
23 December 1829	Race Course	VDLCo.	Jones (STK)	HR	Hut AK	Lennox	
23 December 1829	Race Course	VDLCo.	Powlett (STK)	HR	Hut AK	Lennox	
27 December 1829	Bothwell	McRae			Hut PL-BL, F, V	Plomley	
<b>1830</b>							
December 1829-March 1830	Bark Hut Plains	Piper			Hut AK	CSO1/323, p322	
December 1829-March 1830	Bark Hut Plains	Piper			Hut AK	CSO1/323, p322	
n.d. 1830s	Circular Head	VDLCo.	Robert Page	HR-SP		Emmett, p8	
n.d. c.1830	Northeast?		M	HR		FM, pp310, 318	
n.d. 1830	Rothemay	McRae			House PL-FR, F, V	Plomley	
n.d. 1830	Shannon	Synott	ST	HR	Wheat BN	Plomley; FM, pp538-40	
n.d. 1830	Shannon	Howells	James Heamer	WN-SP		Plomley	
n.d. 1830	Meads Bottom	Sharland			Hut PL-4 FR	Plomley	
n.d. 1830	Hollow Tree	Thomas Reece			Hut PL-T, S	Plomley	
n.d. 1830	Break-O-Day	Talbot	ST	KL		Plomley	
n.d. 1830	Avoca	J. K. Gray	SHP	WN-SP		Plomley	
January 1830	East Tamar	Kneale			Hut PL-BL, F, KN	Plomley	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
c. January 1830	Lovely Banks	Guest	M	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
c. January 1830	Lovely Banks	Guest	M	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
January 1830	Lovely Banks	Guest	Finley Downey	HR		CSOI/316, p/769	
			James Hush	HR			
			Long Bob	HR			
1 January 1830	Ouse Rv.	Triffitt junior	William Smith	KL		Plomley	
7 January 1830	Lake Frederick	Fisher	William Till (ST)	WN-SP	Hut PL-BL, BD, CL, 2 FR, T, S, F, KN, V	Plomley	
10-15 January 1830	Port Sorell	Capt. Thomas			Boat PL-V	Plomley	
15 January 1830		Dr. Henderson			Hut PL	CSOI/320, p167	
Mid January 1830	Broad Valley	Harrison			Hut PL	Plomley	
Late January 1830	Tier, Maxwell parish, Oatlands	Harrison	SW	HR		Plomley	
c. early February 1830			Jackson (free)		KL	Dow, p48	
February 1830	Black Marsh	Bisdee	M	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
February 1830	Jerusalem	Drummond			Hut PL-BL, BD, V	Plomley	
February 1830	Jerusalem		Jonas Prior	HR-SP		Plomley	
February 1830	Great Swanport	Buxton			Hut PL-BD, CL	Plomley	
February 1830	Clyde		M	KL		Plomley	
Early February 1830	Clyde	Reed	ST	KL		Plomley	
c.1 February 1830	Meads Bottom (Berriedale)				Hut PL	Plomley	
c.1 February 1830	Meads Bottom (Berriedale)				Hut PL	Plomley	
1 February 1830	Meads Bottom (Berriedale)	Brodie	Brodie	WN-SP		Plomley	
5 February 1830	Bark Hut Plains	Piper			Hut PL-BL, FR, S, V	Plomley	
5 February 1830	Bark Hut Plains	Capt. Clark	ST	HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
			Child	HR			
6 February 1830	Eastern Marshes	Loane	ST	HR		Plomley	
7 February 1830	Port Sorell	Jocelyn Thomas	ST	WN-SP	Hut PL	Plomley; CSOI/316, p707	
			2 ST	2 HR			
9 February 1830	Native Hut Creek	Marzetti			Hut PL	Plomley	
9 February 1830	Black Marsh, Ouse Rv.	F. Bell	Lawrence Deering (ST)	KL	Hut PL	Plomley	
			James McCarty (SHP)	WN-WD			

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
11 February 1830?	Hollow Tree Bottom	Hodgson	William Hopley	KL-SP, WD		Plomley	
11 February 1830?	Bath Mill	Hooper			Hut PL	Plomley	
12 February 1830	Shannon	Howell	Family	HR	House & Hut BN	Plomley	
15 February 1830	Weazels Plains	Sherwin			Hut BN	Plomley; CSO1/323, pp321-22	
15 February 1830	Great Jordan Lagoon	Lt. Thomas Betts	ST	WN-SP		Plomley; TAS19/2/30, p463	
			ST	HR			
16 February 1830	Bashan Plains	Espie			Hut PL-T, S, F, 20 SH-SP	Plomley	
17 February 1830	Shannon	G. Thomson			Hut PL-BD, FD, FR, V	Plomley	
c.17 February 1830	Shannon	G. Thomson			Hut PL	Plomley	
17 February 1830	Green Ponds	Poole	Philip Norby	KL		Plomley; CSO1/323, p336	
			John Blackaby	KL			
17 February 1830	Shannon	Mrs Patterson	SHP	HR		Plomley	
17 February 1830	Shannon	Bell	Lawrence Murray (ST)	KL		Shaw, p42	
c.17 February 1830	Blue Hills, Eastern Marshes	Hobbs	2 STK	HR	Hut PL	Shaw, p50	
c.17 February 1830	Green Ponds	James Blundle	Blundle	WN-SP	Hut PL-T, S, F, V	Plomley	
20 February 1830	Clyde	McRa			House PL-CL, 2 FR, F	Plomley	
20 February 1830	Ouse Rv. (Plenty Rv.?)	Jameison	SHP		Hut PL	Plomley	
20 February 1830	Hunting Ground, Upper Clyde	Capt. Clark			Barn & wheat BN	Plomley; CSO1/323, pp321-22	
21 February 1830	Constitution Hill	Plaistowe	Son (10)	KL-SP		Plomley	
21 February 1830	Bagdad	Thomas Starkey			House PL-BD, PT	Plomley	
21 February 1830	Bagdad	Thomas Barlow (or Darlow)	ST	HR	House PL	Plomley	
21 February 1830	Meads Bottom, Clyde Rv.	Sherwin			House, hut, & fence BN	Plomley; CSO1/323, pp321-22	
22 February 1830	Ben Lomond	Massey	Shepherd	HR		CSO1/320, p176	
Late February 1830	Ouse Rv.	Young	M	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
March 1830	Sussex district	Thady McNamara	Mrs McNamara	WN-SP		Plomley	
March 1830	Jerusalem	William Burgess	Burgess	HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
			ST	HR			
March 1830	Jerusalem	Nairne	John Smith (ST)	KL		Plomley	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
March 1830	Great Swanport	R. Allen	ST	HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
Early March 1830	Bashan Plains	Espie			SH-KL (many)	HTC13/3/30, p2	
2 March 1830	Davis Bottom, Black Marsh	J. Howe			Hut PL	Plomley	
8 March 1830	Blackmans Rv., Tunbridge	Eddie	SW	HR		Plomley	
9 March 1830	Whitefoord Hills, Rubicon Rv.	M. L. Smith	ST	HR-SP	Hut PL-V, 100 SH-KL	Plomley; CSO1/323, pp316-17	
9 March 1830	Blackmans Rv. (Antill Ponds)	Harrison	SW		Hut PL	Plomley	
9 March 1830	Tiers behind St Peters Pass	Daniel O'Connor	George Campbell		DG taken	CSO1/320, p315	
9 March 1830	Tiers behind St Peters Pass	Mr Bonnett		KL		CSO1/320, p315	DU
10 March 1830	Bark Hut Plain	Piper			Hut BP	Plomley	
11 March 1830	Pooles Marsh	Capt. Wood			Hut PL	Plomley	
11 March 1830	Black Marsh	Denholm	Brown (ST)	WN-SP		Plomley	
13 March 1830	Bream Creek	Hugh McGuinnis	ST	HR	Hut PL-2 FR, AM, F, S, T	Plomley	
c.15 March 1830	Carlton		Judith Chambers (Pearce?)	WN-SP, WD		Plomley	
16 March 1830	Lower Carlton	Ed Nathan	Mrs Nathan	WN-SP		Plomley	
16 March 1830	Carlton		M	WN		Plomley	
			W	WN-SP			
14-20 March 1830	Pipers Rv.	William Gee	James Sprangle (ST)	KL-SP	Hut PL-FR, AM, F, S, DG taken	Plomley	
22 March 1830	Ben Lomond (3m. from Batman's)	Murphy		HR		Batman 22/3/30	
28 March 1830	Spring Bay		John Rayner	WN-SP, WD	CL	Plomley	
30 March 1830	Black Marsh	Brodrigg	M	WN-SP	Hut PL, SH-SP	von Steiglitz, p66	
30 March 1830	Black Marsh	Thompson			Hut PL-V	von Steiglitz, p66	
30 March 1830	Black Marsh	Donavan	M	WN-SP	Hut PL	von Steiglitz, p66	
April 1830	Swanport				Hut PL	HTC17/4/30, p2	
April 1830	Prossers Plains				Hut PL	HTC17/4/30, p2	
April 1830	Prossers Plains				Hut PL	HTC17/4/30, p2	
April 1830	Lake Rv.	VDLCo.			Hut PL	Plomley	
April 1830	Lake Rv.	VDLCo.			Hut PL	Plomley	
April 1830	Swanport	Buxton			Hut PL	Plomley; HTC17/4/30, p2	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
April 1830	Two Mile Creek, Oyster Bay	Simpson			Hut PL-BL, BD, V, DG taken	Plomley	
April 1830	Lake Rv. (Kenilworth)	Bonnilly			Hut PL-CL, T, S, F, V	Plomley	
9 April 1830	Mills Plains				Hut PL	Batman 9/4/30	
9 April 1830	Mills Plains				Hut PL	Batman 9/4/30	
14 April 1830	Lower Clyde	Sharland			Hut PL	Plomley	
14 April 1830	Lower Clyde	Triffitt			Hut PL	Plomley	
14 April 1830	Green Valley	Dixon	Dixon	WN-SP	Hut PL	Plomley	
14 April 1830	Green Valley	Mrs Burns	Soldier	WN-SP		Plomley	
17 April 1830	Cape Grim	VDLCo.	McKenzie	HR	Hut PL-BL, PT	Lennox	
18 April 1830	Bonnie Flats (nr. Launceston)	Dalrymple			Hut PL-FR, AM, V	Plomley	
18 April 1830	Whitefoord Hills	M. L. Smith	George King (SHP)	WN-SP, WD		Plomley	
21 April 1830	Coal Rv., Jerusalem	Nairne	John Smith (ST)	KL-SP, WD		Plomley	
23 April 1830	Little Swanport Rv.	Adey			Hut PL-T, S, F, SH-KL	Plomley	
27 April 1830	Circular Head	VDLCo.			Hut PL	Lennox	
Late April 1830	Coal Rv., Jerusalem				SH-SP	HTC1/5/30, p2	
Late April 1830	Coal Rv., Jerusalem				SH-SP	HTC1/5/30, p2	
April-May 1830	Coal Rv., Jerusalem				Hut PL	HTC1&&8/5/30, p2	
April-May 1830	Coal Rv., Jerusalem				Hut PL	HTC1&&8/5/30, p2	
April-May 1830	Coal Rv., Jerusalem				Hut PL	HTC1&&8/5/30, p2	
May 1830	Eastern Marshes	Lord	James Holling (ST)	WN	Hut PL-T, S, F, V	Plomley	
May 1830	Little Swanport Rv.	Adey			Hut PL-BL, CL, T, S, F, V	Plomley	
12 May 1830	Macgills Marsh	Hobbs	Thomas Pennington	WN-SP	Hut BN	Plomley	
			Mrs Pennington	WN-WD			
			ST	WN-SP			
21 May 1830	Hermitage, Shannon Rv.	Synnott	ST	HR-SP		Plomley	
23 May 1830	Eastern Marshes	D. Lord	James Holland (ST)	WN-SP	Hut PL-BD, 2 FR, AM, FD, T, S, F	Plomley	
			Henry Horsfull (ST)	KL-WD			
26 May 1830	Western Rv.	Froggatt Junior			Hut PL-4 FR, S	Plomley	
26 May 1830	Western Rv.	Dry			Hut PL	Plomley	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
28 May 1830	Weazels Plains	Sherwin	SHP	HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
			STK	HR			
28 May 1830	Little Swanport Rv.	Adey			Hut PL	Plomley	
29 May 1830	Little Swanport Rv.	Adey	ST	WN-SP		CT11/6/30, p3	
c.June 1830	Race Course	VDLCo.	Searle (ST)	HR		Walker, p124	
June 1830	Emu Bay	VDLCo.			House PL	Lennox	
June 1830	Lake Rv.	Bonnilly			Hut PL-CL, FD	Plomley	
1-5 June 1830	Pleasant Hills (West Tamar)				Hut PL-FD	Plomley	
10 June 1830	Regents Plains, Lake Rv. (Den)	Capt. Wood	Mary Daniels	KL	Hut PL-KN, 3 FR, BL, CL, T, S, E, V	Plomley; Russell, p59	
			Richard Daniels	KL			
			Eliza Daniels	KL			
14-18 June 1830	Ouse Rv.	Evans	SHP	HR		Plomley	
20 June 1830	Lake Sorell	Kemp	Joseph Barlow (STK)	HR		Plomley	
22 June 1830	Jerusalem		M	HR		Plomley	
Late June 1830	Prossers Plains	Olding	Stephen Gespie	KL-SP		CT2/7/30, p3	
July 1830	Sideling Hill	Michael Jones	Mrs Jones	HR		Plomley	
July 1830	Little Swanport Rv.	Adey			Hut PL-T, S, F, FD, 2 DG taken	Plomley	
Early July 1830	Lake Rv.	Bonnilly			Hut PL-3 FR, S	Plomley	
2 July 1830	Ouse Rv.	Evans	Evans	HR-SP, WD		Plomley	
5 July 1830	Lake Rv. Cressy	VDLCo.			Huts PL	Plomley	
5 July 1830	Lake Rv. Cressy	VDLCo.			Huts PL	Plomley	
5-9 July 1830	Ouse Rv.	Nicholls	ST	WN-SP		Plomley	
8 July 1830	Jordan Lagoon	Betts	ST	HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
8 July 1830	Jordan Lagoon	Stokell			Hut PL	Plomley	
10 July 1830	Pooles Marsh	Capt. Wood	M	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
15 July 1830	Tier 4m. from Pooles Marsh		2 SW	2 HR	Hut PL-BL, F, V	Plomley	
25 July 1830	Oatlands	Anstey	Fencers	HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
August 1830	Jordan Lagoon		M	HR	Cart PL-F	CSO1/316, p/73	
August 1830	Bashan Plains (Lake Echo)	Espie			Hut PL	FM, pp541-42	
August 1830	Western Tier	J. Archer	SHP		Hut PL-CL, FD	Plomley	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
August 1830	Broad Marsh	E. Chaplin	John Bailey	WN-SP	Hut PL-BL, F	Plomley	
August 1830	Hollow Tree Bottom	Drummond	ST	HR-SP, SN		Plomley	
			ST	HR-SP, SN			
Early August 1830	Emu Bay	VDLCo.			Shed BN, OX driven off	Lennox	
2-4 August 1830	Shannon	Synnott	ST	HR		Plomley	
4 August 1830	Shannon	Howells	SW	HR		Plomley	
5 August 1830	Abyssinia Marsh		2 M	2 HR		Plomley	
5 August 1830	Meads Bottom	Sharland (Survey)			Tents PL-2 FR, AM	Plomley; CSOI/328, p185	
5 August 1830	Meads Bottom	Reid	SHP	HR		Plomley	
7 August 1830	Blue Hill		Government SW	HR	Hut PL-BL, V	Plomley	
7 August 1830	Den	Pitcairn			Hut PL	Plomley	
7 August 1830	Grassy	Capt. Wood			Hut PL	Plomley	
7 August 1830	Dysart parish	Samuel Stockman			Hut PL-BL, KN, S, V, H-SP	Plomley	
8 August 1830	Miles Opening	Barr	ST	DW		Plomley	
13 August 1830	Jacobs SL	J. Connell	Mrs Connell	HR		Plomley	
14 August 1830	Jacobs SL	William Robertson			Hut PL-BL, V	Plomley	
18 August 1830	Isis Rv.	Sutherland	Kelly (SHP)	WN-SP	Hut PL	Plomley	
18 August 1830	Isis Rv.	Taylor			Hut PL-FR	Plomley	
c.18 August 1830	Auburn	J. York			H-KL	Plomley	
Mid August 1830	Black Marsh				Hut PL	Plomley	
Mid August 1830	Cross Marsh				Hut PL	Plomley	
Mid August 1830	Muddy Plains				Hut PL	Plomley	
Mid August 1830	Bettsholme, Lake Tiberias		M	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
19 August 1830	Black Marsh	Thomas Hooper	ST	HR	House PL-BL, KN, S, F	Plomley	
19 August 1830	Black Marsh?	Bisdee			Hut PL	Plomley	
19 August 1830	Cross Marsh	Bent	2 ST	2 HR		Plomley	
19 August 1830	Whirlpool Reach, West Tamar	Ruffy	Ruffy	HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
19 August 1830	Whirlpool Reach, West Tamar?	Reid			Hut PL	Plomley	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
22 August 1830	Spring Hill	James Hooper Betts	Hooper	KL-SP, WD	Hut PL	Plomley; TAS19/12/28; ; CSOI/316, pp210-12	
22-27 August 1830	Black Marsh	Wood	M	HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
22-27 August 1830	Black Marsh	Wood	M	HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
22-27 August 1830	Black Marsh?	Ibbott			Hut PL	Plomley	
22-27 August 1830	Black Marsh?	Thomson	SHP	WN-WD		Plomley	
23 August 1830	Big Lagoon	A. Hudspeth			Hut PL	Plomley	
23 August 1830	Big Lagoon	Gough	Gough	HR		Plomley	
23 August 1830	Jordan Rv.	Watt	M	HR	Mill AK	Plomley	
23 August 1830	Jordan Rv.	Betts	M	HR	Mill AK	Plomley	
23 August 1830	Jordan Rv.	Betts	M	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
23 August 1830	Big Lagoon?		M (on horseback)	HR-WD		Plomley	
24 August 1830	Norfolk Plains	William Archer	STK	HR	Hut PL, BN	Plomley	
24 August 1830	Murderers Plains	Bisdee	M	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
24 August 1830	Murderers Plains?	Bradley (cart owner)	2 M	2 HR	Cart AK	Plomley	
24 August 1830	Murderers Plains?	Loane	Simpkin	HR-SP		Plomley	
28 August 1830	South Esk Rv., Guidons Bottom	Bonny	SHP	HR		Plomley	
29 August 1830	Ben Lomond	Massey	2 SHP	2 HR		Plomley	
Early September 1830	Muddy Plains	Bisdee			Hut PL-BL, KN, UT, F, T, S, V	Plomley	
September 1830	Bettsholme, Lake Tiberias	Betts	M	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
September 1830	Lake Tiberias	Farquarson	Farquarson (on horseback)	HR-SP, WD		Plomley	
1-4 Sep 1830	Elizabeth Rv.	Lt. Hill			Hut PL	Plomley	
6 September 1830	West Tamar nr. Exeter	Capt. Mcleod	Thomas Reeves (ST)	WN-SP		Plomley	
7 September 1830	Blue Hill Bottom	Clark & Nicholas	SHP	HR		Plomley	
7 September 1830	Sideline Hill	Lime kiln	SHP	HR		Plomley	
8 September 1830	Boomer Creek, Oyster Bay	Buxton	Soldier	KL		Plomley	
10 September 1830	Swan Bay, West Tamar		Freeman (SW)	HR-WD	Hut PL	Plomley	
			SW	KL-WD			
			SW	WN-SP			
10 September 1830	Great Swanport	Buxton	Wainright	DW-SP	Hut AK	Plomley	



DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
12 September 1830	Moltema, Whitefoord Hills	M. L. Smith	Gay (Government-SW)	WN-SP	Hut PL	Plomley	
19 September 1830	Oyster Bay	Duffy	King (ST)	HR	House AK	Plomley	
21 September 1830	Pipers Rv.	Thomas Gee	Francis Broker ST	DW		Plomley; FM, pp281-82	
22 September 1830	Ben Lomond, St Pauls Rv.	Boulbee	James Farrell	KL-SP	House AK	Plomley	
24 September 1830	Blackmans Corners, St Pauls Rv.	Major Gray	Mrs Boulbee & Children	3 HR			
			William Tidy	KL-SN		Plomley	
			Robert Wells	KL-SN			
			William Wells	KL-SN			
			SHP	WN-SN			
30 September 1830	Macquarie Rv., Mt. Morriston	George Scott	Charles Woodland (ST)	KL	House PL-BL, BD, CL, KN, F, S, T, V	Plomley; Scott, p143	
			ST	WN-SP			
			ST	HR			
30 September 1830	Macquarie Rv.	Cassidy	James Grey	HR	Hut PL-F, T, S, BL, BD KN, V	Plomley	
30 September 1830	Tier nr. Salt Pan Plains	Kernode	4 SW	4 HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
Late September 1830	Bettsholme, Lake Tiberias	Betts	M	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
c.October 1830	South of Launceston, Hobart-Launceston Rd.		2 SOL	2 KL		FM, pp297, 302, 307	
c.October 1830			2 Constables	2 KL		FM, pp289-90	DU
October 1830	Macgills Marsh	Hobbs			100 SH-SP	Plomley	
October 1830	Eastern Marshes	Lord			Hut PL-F, V	Plomley	
October 1830	Lagoon Bottom	Sharland			Hut PL	Plomley	
14 October 1830	3m. Launceston	Capt. Stewart	SHP	WN-SP		Plomley	
16 October 1830	Sorell	Joseph Clayton			House PL-BL, BD, FD, F	Plomley	
16 October 1830	Sorell	John Fines			House PL-BL, KN	Plomley	
16 October 1830	Sorell	Stacey	Thomas Pratt	KL-SP, WD	House PL-F	Plomley	
16 October 1830	Sorell	Thomas Coffin	Coffin	WN-SP	House PL-BL, FD, F	Plomley	
16 October 1830	Pittwater	Gatehouse	Edward Sturdy	HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
16 October 1830	Pittwater	Ayton	Family	HR		Plomley	
17 October 1830	Stoney Creek, West Tamar	Gildas	Gildas	KL	House PL	Plomley	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
c.17 October 1830	nr. Launceston		UC (SW)	KL		CSO1/316, p692	
c.17 October 1830	South Esk Rv., Fingal Valley	Talbot			Hut PL	Plomley	
c.17 October 1830	North Esk Rv.	H. Gray	2 SW	2 HR	Hut AK	CSO1/316, p692	
c.17 October 1830	North Esk Rv.	Yates	M	HR	Mill AK	CSO1/316, p692	
18 October 1830	Pittwater	William Gaskell	William Gaskell	WN-SP	House PL-BL, CL, FR, F, S, KN, BT, TB	Plomley	
			Son (11)	WN-WD			
18 October 1830	Pittwater	John Brown	Mrs Brown	HR	House PL-BL, CL, KN, UT, S, FD, V, BT	Plomley	
18 October 1830	Pittwater	David Lane	Mrs Lane	HR	House PL-BL, CL, KN, S, FD	Plomley	
18 October 1830	Black Wattle Hill	John Walker	Mrs Walker	HR		Plomley	
22-28 October 1830	Retreat, Westbury	Butler (McCasker?)	Peter (Patrick?) McCasker	KL		Plomley; HTC30/10/30, p2	
c.25 October 30	South Esk Rv.	Kearney / Archer			Hut PL	Plomley	
27 October 1830	Prossers Plains	Wise	ST	WN-SP		Plomley; HTC30/10/30, p3	
27 October 1830	St Pauls SL	Sinclair			Hut PL-FD, FR	Plomley	
c.28 October 1830	Black Marsh	Brodribb	SHP	HR		CT5/11/30, p3	
29 October 1830	South Esk Rv.	Grant (Mill)	SHP	HR	Hut PL-FR, V	Plomley	
30 October 1830	South Esk Rv.	Talbot	H. Murray (SHP)	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
			Davis (SHP)	WN-SP			
30 October 1830	South Esk Rv.	H. Gray	SHP	HR	Hut PL-BL, FD, AM	Plomley	
Early November 1830	South Esk Rv.	Patrick Dalrymple			Hut PL	FM, pp472-73	
Early November 1830	South Esk Rv.	Patrick Dalrymple			Hut PL	FM, pp472-73	
6 November 1830	Ouse Rv.	D. Taylor			Hut PL-V	Plomley	
6 November 1830	Ouse Rv.	Jameison			Hut PL	Plomley	
6 November 1830	Ouse Rv.	Triffitt			Hut PL	Plomley	
7 November 1830	Jerusalem	Goodwin (shoemaker)	Mary Anne Rucker	WN-SP, WD	Hut PL-BL, CL, V	Plomley; Prior	
9 November 1830	Constitution Hill		STK	HR	Huts PL	Plomley; HTC13/11/30, p3	
9 November 1830	Constitution Hill		STK	HR	Huts PL	Plomley; HTC13/11/30, p3	
9 November 1830	Sawyers Hill, Dysart parish	Robert Mason	ST	HR-SP	Hut PL-BL, S	Plomley	
9 November 1830	Sawyers Hill, Dysart parish	Daniel Banks			Hut PL	Plomley	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
9 November 1830	Sawyers Hill, Dysart parish	Stieglitz	SW	HR	Hut PL-F, FD, S	Plomley	
11 November 1830	Ouse Rv.	Young			Hut PL	Plomley	
12 November 1830	Ouse Rv.	Sharland			Hut PL	Plomley	
12 November 1830	Ouse Rv.	Sherwin			Hut PL	Plomley	
12 November 1830	Ouse Rv.	Jameison			Hut PL	Plomley	
12 November 1830	Ouse Rv.	Unnamed 'others'			Hut PL	Plomley	
13 November 1830	Hunters Hill,	Evans	SHP	HR	House AK	Plomley	
13 November 1830	Clyde Rv.	T. Triffitt			Hut PL	Plomley	
13 November 1830		Triffitt senior			Hut PL	Plomley	
c.14 November 1830	Shannon Rv.	Shone	ST	KL	Hut AK	FM, pp554-55; HTC27/11/30, p3	
			Woman	KL			
			Man	KL			
16 November 1830	north bank of South Esk Rv.	Capt. Wight	Bob Cooper (SHP)	KL	SH-KL-SP	Plomley	
16 November 1830	Bagdad	Thomas Peters	Ann Peters (16)	DW-SP		Plomley	
			Sophia Peters (7)	WN-SP			
c.23 December 1830	Blinkworths Hunting Ground	Phillip Pitt			Hut PL-F, S, T, V	Plomley	
December 1830	Whitefoord Hills	M. L. Smith			Hut PL	Plomley	
9 December 1830	Black Marsh	Brodribb	M	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
17 December 1830	Tier, Upper Macquarie Rv.	Kernode	SW	HR		Plomley	
19 December 1830	Eastern Marshes	Allardyce	Francis Burrell (ST)	WN-SP		Plomley	
			Thomas Duncan	WN-SP			
<b>1831</b>							
n.d. 1831	nr. Mole Creek	Lt. Vaughan	Vaughan	HR	Hut AK	FM, p631	
			M	HR			
19 January 1831	Macquarie Harbour		Charles Lucas (escapee)	KL		FM, p726	
26 January 1831	West Tamar (nr. Griffiths)	Margaret White	Margaret White	HR	House PL-BD, CL, FD, 2 FR, AM, V	Plomley	
26 January 1831	West Tamar	Birrell	Hamilton Wallace	WN-SP, WD		Plomley	
			Child	WN			
26 January 1831	West Tamar	Lackey White			House PL	Plomley	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
27 January 1831	Foot of Southern Tier				OX-SP	Plomley	
29 January 1831	Retreat, Westbury	Butler / McCasker	Mary McCasker	KL-SP, WD	Hut PL-BL, FR, AM, FD, F, S, T, KN, TB	Plomley	
			4 ST	4 HR			
29 January 1831	North Esk Rv.	Donald Sutherland			6 H-SP (3 KL)	Plomley	
c.31 January 31	Mills Plains				Hut PL-FR	Plomley	
c.31 January 31	Mills Plains				Hut PL-FR	Plomley	
2 February 1831	Barrowville, North Esk Rv.	R. P. Stewart	Peter Webster (SHP)	HR		Plomley	
9 February 1831	Ben Lomond (3m. Kingston)	Nowland	M	HR	Hut PL-BL, UT, FR, F, T, S, KN, V	Plomley	
			W	HR			
10 February 1831	Ben Lomond (2m. Kingston)	Hazlewood	ST	HR		Plomley	
1 March 1831	Ben Lomond	Massey	John Taylor (SW)	WN		Plomley	
			Edward Sharpe (SW)	WN			
c.9 March 1831	New Norfolk	Priest			House PL-BD, AM, F	Plomley	
			SW	HR	Hut PL	Plomley	
12 March 1831	East Arm, East Tamar	Cunningham (veteran)	Mrs Cunningham	DW-SP	Hut PL	Plomley; Browne 16/3/31	
			Daughter	WN-SP			
13 March 1831	Supply Rv., West Tamar		Watering Party	HR		McPhee, p55	
17 March 1831	Norfolk Plains	Lambe and Bell	2 SOL	WN	Hut PL-FR	Plomley	
19 March 1831	Lake Rv.	W. E. Lawrence	Joseph Yorke (STK)	KL-WD	Hut PL	Plomley; O'Connor	
19 March 1831	Lake Rv.	J. Parker	John Crohurst (ST)	WN-SP		Plomley; O'Connor; FM, p580	
19 March 1831	Lake Rv.		Walker (ST)	WN-SP		Plomley	
19 March 1831	Lake Rv.	R. O'Connor / Abel	ST	WN-SP	Hut PL	Plomley	
19 March 1831	Lake Rv.	Urquhart	Urquhart	HR		Plomley	
19 March 1831	Lake Rv., Cressy	VDLCo. (Kirby)	ST	KL-SP	Hut PL	IP11/4/31, p3; FM, p580	
			ST	WN-SP			
19-25 March 1831	St Patricks Plains	Capt. Clark			Hut PL	Plomley	
28 March 1831	nr. Launceston	Monagan	William Monagan	WN-WD		Lawrence 29/3/30	
5 April 1831	Tamar Rv. (Ivorys Bend)	Capt. Stewart	Thomas Rattan (ST)	WN-SP	Hut PL	Plomley	
6 April 1831	Tamar Rv.	Michael Fitzgerald	Fitzgerald	DW-SP	Hut PL-BL, FR, V	Plomley	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
6 May 1831	St Patricks Plains	Allright			Hut BN	Plomley	
9 May 1831	Lake Sorell	Kemp	William Carter (ST)	KL	Hut PL, FL, S, TB, 6 FR, Barn BN	Plomley; Russell, pp62-64; FM, p594	
			Moses Boss (ST)	KL			
			Flinn	HR			
12 May 1831	Plassey (nr. Ellenthorpe)	Bassett Dickson	Daughter	WN		Plomley	
			Others	HR			
17 May 1831	Tamar Rv. (Ivorys Bight)	Stephen Brow	Stephen Brow	HR-SP, SN		Plomley	
c.19 May 1831	Morven district	Darke	ST	WN-SP	Hut PL-BL, FR	Plomley	
c.22 May 1831	Morven district	Bonney	ST	HR		Plomley	
28 May 1831	Morven district	Capt. Gray	ST	WN-SP		Plomley	
c.29 May 1831	Morven district	Lord	ST	HR		Plomley	
30 May 1831	Morven district	Batman	SHP	HR		Plomley	
5 June 1831	Native Hut Creek (Ouse Rv.)	Evans	M	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
6 June 1831	Native Hut Creek (Ouse Rv.)	Bell	Jane Kennedy	KL-WD	Hut PL-BL, 2 FR, F, S, V	Plomley	
			Child	HR			
6 June 1831	Native Hut Creek (Ouse Rv.)	T. Triffitt	Mrs Triffitt	WN-SP	Hut PL-BL, 3 FR, S, V	Plomley	
6 June 1831	Native Hut Creek (Ouse Rv.)	Dr Robertson	Dr Robertson	HR		Plomley	
6 June 1831	Native Hut Creek (Ouse Rv.)	Marzetti			Hut PL-BL, FR, V	Plomley	
n.d. Mid 1831	nr. Launceston	Barnes			Hut-BN	FM, p546	
19 July 1831	Tupsley	VDLCo.	Thomas Smith	KL	Hut PL	Lennox; FM, p918	
27 July 1831	Weighbridge	VDLCo.	John Higginson	KL	Hut PL	Lennox	
Early August 1831	Circular Head	VDLCo.			Hut PL	Lennox	
c.13 August 1831	Bashan Plains (Lake Echo)	J. Espie	ST	WN-SP	Hut-BN	Plomley; FM, p541	
17 August 1831	Hibernia, Norfolk Plains	P. Minnitt			Huts PL-BD, CL, FR, FD	Plomley	
17 August 1831	Hibernia, Norfolk Plains	P. Minnitt			Huts PL-BD, CL, FR, FD	Plomley	
22 August 1831	Dunorian	William Stocker	Dalrymple Briggs	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
			Child (5)	WN-SP			

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
23 August 1831	Western Marshes	Gibson	James Cubbit	WN-SP		Plomley	
31 August 1831	Northdown	B. B. Thomas	B. B. Thomas	KL		Plomley	
			J. Parker	KL			
c.1 September 1831	Albany Vale	Daniel O'Connor	SHP	HR		Plomley	
7 September 1831	Dennistown	Capt. Wood	2 ST	2 HR		Plomley	
15 September 1831	nr. Blue Hill	F. Bryant	Bryant	HR		Plomley	
20 September 1831	White Marsh (16m. Pittwater)		Cook (ST)	WN-SP		Plomley	
20 September 1831	Brushy Plains	S. R. Dawson	Charles Hughes (ST)	WN-WD		Plomley	
25-30 September 1831	Lagoon of Is.	Allardyce	M	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
2 October 1831	Blue Hill Marshes	Bilton	Perry (ST)	HR		Plomley	
3 October 1831	Chilton	VDLCo.	William Abrahams	DW-SP		Lennox	
13 October 1831	Great Swanport	A. Reid			Hut PL-FR, FD	Plomley	
13 October 1831	Great Swanport	Amos Jr.			Hut PL	Plomley	
c.13 October 1831	Great Swanport	Meredith			Hut PL	FM, p524	
c.17 October 1831	White Marsh (Brushy Plains)	Dawson	2 ST	2 HR		Plomley	
20 October 1831	Norfolk Plains	Lt. Vaughan	Vaughan	HR	Hut PL-FR, AM, V	Plomley	
			ST	HR			
27 October 1831	nr. Westbury	William Archer	ST	WN-SP		Plomley	
31 October 1831	Circular Head Neck	VDLCo.	M	HR		Lennox	
November 1831	Ouse Rv.	Tirffit			Hut PL-F	FM, pp554-55	
6 November 1831	Maloneys SL	Bunster	M	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
6 November 1831	Albany Vale		John Collett	WN-SP		Plomley	
14 November 1831	Ouse Rv.				Hut PL	FM, pp554-55	
14 November 1831	Ouse Rv.	Clark			Hut PL	FM, pp554-55	
24 November 1831	Lower Eastern Marshes	David Lord			Hut PL-T, S, F, V, 3 DG	Plomley	
4 December 1831	Bothertons Marsh	Story	Backby (cook)	WN-SP		Plomley	
4 December 1831	Bothertons Marsh	Botherton	M	HR	Hut AK	Plomley	
29 December 1831	Bashan Plains (Lake Echo)	Espie			3 SH-WN-SP	FM, p600	
c.early 1832	Mouth of Leven Rv.	Kelly (sealer)	Kelly & sealer crew		Boat PL-F, T, V	FM, pp649, 926	
n.d. 1832	Surrey Hills	VDLCo.	Arthur Hillier	WN-SP		Lennox	

DATE	PLACE	SETTLER	VICTIM	ASSAULT	PROPERTY	SOURCES	P
18 July 1832	Liffey Rivulet	Minnett	James Wickham	HIR		C501/317, pp488-89	
7 June 1833	Surrey Hills	VDLCo.	ST	WN-SP		FM, p852	
n.d. 1834	West Point	VDLCo.			2 Hut PL	Lennox	
n.d. 1834	Green Point	VDLCo.	Reeve's son	HIR		Lennox; FM, p877	
n.d. 1834	Btw. West Point & Mt Cameron	VDLCo.			SH-KL	FM, p945	
11 August 1834	Hamilton				Hut PL	FM, pp959-60	
18 August 1834	Hamilton			HIR	Hut AK	FM, pp959-60	
September 1839	nr. Chiltern	VDLCo.			Hut PL	McFarlane, p172	
5 October 1839	Surrey Hills	VDLCo.	Neil McDonald	WN-SP		Lennox; McFarlane, p172	
Mid December 1840	Surrey Hills	VDLCo.	James Lucas	HIR-SP, SN	Hut AK	Lennox; McFarlane, p172	
6 July 1841	West Bay, Circular Head	VDLCo.			Hut PL-BL, CL, AM	McFarlane, p172	
14 July 1841	West Bay, Circular Head	VDLCo.			Hut PL-BL, CL, AM	McFarlane, p172	
19 July 1841	Circular Head?	Miller (VDLCo.?)			Hut PL	McFarlane, p172	
23 July 1841	West Bay, Circular Head	VDLCo.			Hut PL-BL, CL, AM	McFarlane, p172	
25 July 1841	West Bay, Circular Head	VDLCo.			Hut PL-BL, CL, AM	McFarlane, p172	
23 August 1841	Cape Grim	VDLCo.			Hut PL-V	McFarlane, p172	
25 August 1841	Cape Grim	VDLCo.			Hut PL-V	McFarlane, p172	
13 September 1841	Cape Grim	VDLCo.	3 M	3 HR	Hut PL-V	McFarlane, p172	
October 1841	Northwest	J. King (VDLCo.?)			Hut PL-SH-KL	McFarlane, p172	
October 1841	Table Cape	J. King (VDLCo.?)	2 ST	2 HR	Hut PL-SH-KL	McFarlane, p172	
January 1842	Studland Bay	VDLCo.	M	HIR	Hut AK	McFarlane, p172	
January 1842	Studland Bay	VDLCo.	M	HIR	Hut AK	McFarlane, p172	
1 January 1842	Surrey Hills	VDLCo.	2 ST	2 HR		McFarlane, p172	
16 February 1842	Circular Head	VDLCo.			Hut PL-H-SP (several)	McFarlane, p172	
27 February 1842	The Patch (Table Cape)	VDLCo.	2 ST	2 HR		McFarlane, p172	





## *Appendix*

### 3

#### **Black Casualties**

In attempting to understand the Aboriginal experience of the Black War, we must have some idea of how many perished in it. This is a fraught, but necessary task. Deriving a working estimate – specifically of the number of Aborigines killed violently by white men in the eastern theatre of the War between 1824 and 1831 – is the purpose of this Appendix. As it stands, the record provides plausible evidence of 348 Aborigines killed in total between 1804 and 1834 (see fig. 13), but because of the vagueness of some of the sources, only an approximate number – about 260 – can be attributed to the area and time-frame in question. Some historians write as if the recorded number – whatever they accept it to be – represents the actual total, or very close to it.<sup>1</sup> This is not reasonable. If we imagine, for arguments sake, that colonists killed 600 Aborigines during the War, we can hypothetically ask whether we should expect to have a record of each specific case. Surely, the answer is no – not even close. Considering the quality and quantity of the sources, the remoteness of the scenes, the low literacy among the perpetrators, and the government’s ambiguous threat to hang those who killed non-hostile blacks, it is extraordinary that so many cases *have* made it into the archives.<sup>2</sup>

If there really were unrecorded killings on the frontier, then we should expect plenty of references to both the prevalence of violence, and the fact that much of this went unreported. In a 2003 essay responding to charges of fabrication by Keith Windschuttle, Henry Reynolds claimed there were ‘literally dozens, if not hundreds of references to the murderous attacks by ‘borderers’ as they were called.’<sup>3</sup> He was referring here both to specific and (especially) non-specific references, for which he offered two typical examples.<sup>4</sup> This claim, and Reynolds’ apparent ‘reluctance’ to prove it,<sup>5</sup> was ridiculed by John Dawson in his book *Washout: On the Academic Response to the Fabrication of Aboriginal History*.<sup>6</sup> Dawson’s tone, however, was remarkably sardonic for someone with no expertise in the field. Had he trawled the primary sources he would have found, as Reynolds did, a plethora of non-specific references to killings occurring on the frontier; references that do not make it into the tallies. Such references are

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Ryan, *Tasmanian Aborigines*, p. 144 & Windschuttle, *Fabrication*, pp. 358-64.

<sup>2</sup> The record keeping system and reporting channels on which we rely on for evidence of frontier violence were far from perfect. The reasons for this are outlined in Appendix 2.

<sup>3</sup> Reynolds, ‘Terra Nullius Reborn’, pp. 128-29.

<sup>4</sup> Reynolds, ‘Terra Nullius Reborn’, p. 129. These examples were from Governor Arthur and the Aborigines Committee.

<sup>5</sup> Reynolds’ essay was thirty pages long, and his scope wide, so his claim that the brevity of his examples was due to space restrictions seems reasonable.

<sup>6</sup> J. Dawson, *Washout*, pp. 78-82. It should be noted that, despite his sarcastic bluster, Dawson did make some valid critiques of certain academics’ responses to Windschuttle.

emphatically in the dozens.<sup>7</sup> This thesis cites a number of such references, so I will only add a sample of those claiming that killings commonly went unreported. ‘It is said privately’, wrote the *Colonial Advocate* in May 1828, ‘that up the country, instances occur where the Natives are “shot like so many crows,” which never come before the public.’<sup>8</sup> The press made a number of such claims, but they were also made by those closer to the action. In his journal for 3 July 1829, Jorgen Jorgenson recorded that ‘Kemp’s and Pitt’s stock-keepers have had severe and bloody engagements with the natives that have never been made known.’<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Gilbert Robertson claimed the chief, Umarrah, told him ‘20 Natives have been killed for one white man’.<sup>10</sup> This was no doubt an exaggeration, but there is a clear implication from such sources that the majority of killings went unrecorded.<sup>11</sup> It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that 280 is only a portion of the actual number killed in the War, and the rest of this Appendix will be devoted to deducing what that number might be.

### The Pre-Contact Population

The size of the pre-contact (pre-1772) population in Van Diemen’s Land is widely debated.<sup>12</sup> Early settlers made a range of guesses from 7,000 to 20,000,<sup>13</sup> but these are highly unreliable, both because of the estimators’ limited perspectives, and because of the possible impact of disease in the years before or around the initial settlement. We must instead rely predominantly on more recent analyses. Scholars over the last forty years have looked closely at the ethnographic sources, but have also considered the archaeological, genetic, linguistic and carrying capacity evidence. These include the linguist John Taylor, who estimated 2,500-

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<sup>7</sup> The following dozen extra references, sampled from a range of sources, should suffice to make the point: *Tasmanian and Port Dalrymple Advertiser*, 19 January 1825, p. 2; *Hobart Town Gazette*, 11 February 1826, p. 4; *Colonial Times*, 2 July 1830, p. 2; Lloyd, *Thirty-Three Years*, p. 217; Melville, *History of Van Diemen’s Land*, pp. 31-32; Emmett, ‘Reminiscences’, p. 8; *Friendly Mission*, pp. 309-12, 869-70, journals 15 November 1830 & 15 January 1834; Smith to Parramore, 22 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/316, pp. 480-82; Arthur to Murray, 15 April 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 17; Clark & Gray to Aborigines Committee, 15 & 20 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 322, 347-48.

<sup>8</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 1 May 1828, p. 133. See also, for instance, *Hobart Town Gazette*, 9 October 1830, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Jorgenson to Anstey, 14 July 1829, TAHO, CSO1/320, section D. See also, for instance, Barnes to Aborigines Committee, 10 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, p. 300.

<sup>10</sup> Robertson to Aborigines Committee, 4 March 1830, in Shaw, *Copies of all Correspondence*, p. 48.

<sup>11</sup> There were exceptions. Wood, Hudspeth and Salmon (evidence to Aborigines Committee, 7 & 16 March 1830, TAHO, CSO1/323, pp. 295-98, 328-31, 336-38) claimed the Aborigines had not been provoked. These same men, however, had strong reasons for wanting the government to disregard the plight of their enemy. Remarkably, despite the fact that Aborigines were frequently trying to kill their servants and burn and plunder their property, many settlers spoke out about the violence being perpetrated against blacks. The number who attested to such violence dwarfed those who played it down or denied it.

<sup>12</sup> Because the number of Aboriginal deaths in Van Diemen’s Land is directly related to the size of the original population, this question has been central to the history wars.

<sup>13</sup> L. Ryan, ‘Estimating the Pre-1803 Aboriginal Population of Van Diemen’s Land’, paper presented to University of Tasmania, Riawunna seminar series, Sandy Bay, Tasmania, 2009. Ryan surveyed all known estimates from the time, and most of the significant estimates that had been advanced since.

5,000,<sup>14</sup> and the bio-anthropologist and archaeologist Colin Pardoe, who estimated 6,000 from his a study of crania and genetic drift.<sup>15</sup> The most respectable and thoroughly researched estimates, however, are still those undertaken by N. J. B. Plomley and Rhys Jones during the latter part of the twentieth century. For his part, Jones estimated 3,000-4,000,<sup>16</sup> while Plomley suggested 4,000-5,500.<sup>17</sup> Most historians defer to these men and accept an estimate within their ranges,<sup>18</sup> and I see no significant reason to depart from this consensus. This thesis, therefore, accepts Jones' more conservative estimate of 3,000-4,000 (3,500 for short).

### **Fertility & Early Violence**

Chapters 3 and 4 canvass the nature and extent of early violence, concluding, along with almost every other study, that compared to the War period there was relatively little frontier violence during the first two decades of settlement. This is not just because few incidents were recorded – most incidents probably went unrecorded, especially in this period – but because there were simply not many colonists in the interior. What is more, the few colonists who did venture into this hinterland were not as formidable as the more numerous and established colonists who followed in the 1820s, thus ambushes were more difficult and risky to conduct in the early period. So, whilst a number of people were killed in pre-War frontier conflict, it probably did not have an enormous effect on the eastern population. The other form of conflict that must have had some effect on the population was internecine. As noted in Chapter 10, it is possible that the pressure of the colonial invasion triggered a higher rate of internecine violence in the 1820s, but in the early period it probably occurred at much the same rate it always had.

Introduced venereal disease, on the other hand, was almost certainly a significant factor in the Aborigines' depopulation. Many women, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, engaged in sexual intercourse with white men.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, many of them contracted venereal diseases,

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<sup>14</sup> J. Taylor, 'A Study of the Palawa (Tasmanian Aboriginal) Place Names', MA thesis, University of Tasmania, Riawunna, 2006, p. 54.

<sup>15</sup> Cited in Mulvaney & Kamminga, *Prehistory of Australia*, p. 339.

<sup>16</sup> Jones, 'Tasmanian Tribes', p. 325.

<sup>17</sup> Plomley, *Tasmanian Tribes and Cicatrices*, p. 12.

<sup>18</sup> The one notable detractor has been Keith Windschuttle, who claimed the original population was 'less than 2,000' (*Fabrication*, p. 371). His discussion of the limitations of Jones and Plomley's methodology (pp. 364-72) was reasonable, except in two respects. In particular, his point about the fluidity of bands is weak, and in noting the fact that some of the bands mentioned by Robinson had ceased to exist by the 1830s he seems oblivious to the fact that this only strengthens Jones' case for assuming there were more bands than just recorded by Robinson (pp. 369-70). It would be strange indeed if Robinson had known about and recorded all the bands, given that most were decimated or destroyed by the time he was writing. Jones and Plomley were working with tenuous evidence, and there is certainly room to question their methodologies, but I feel from my own knowledge of the sources that the population was within their combined estimate range.

<sup>19</sup> See Chapters 3 and 4.

the most common of which appears to have been gonorrhoea.<sup>20</sup> In addition to a host of other unpleasant symptoms, this disease can lead to infertility in both men and women,<sup>21</sup> which may help account for the apparently low birth-rate among some bands.<sup>22</sup> There does not, however, appear to have been a disproportionately small number of young men and women in the late 1820s, so infertility was not a major factor during the first decade of settlement.<sup>23</sup> On the whole though, we must consider that lowered fertility was an important cause of depopulation, responsible for a decline of perhaps several hundred.

### Introduced Disease

Possibly the most significant, but also least understood variable is the impact of introduced diseases on the Aboriginal population. Judging from the accounts of early explorers, Plomley concluded that the Aboriginal population was originally free of serious endemic diseases.<sup>24</sup> The French scientific expeditions under d'Entrecasteaux (1792-93) and Baudin (1802) both made reference to 'a species of leprosy' – perhaps yaws – but there is no record of sickness in any of the explorers' accounts.<sup>25</sup> No one reported observing disease among the bands in the early decades, and two sources positively attested to their good health.<sup>26</sup> The first colonial

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<sup>20</sup> Plomley ('Disease Among the Tasmanian Aborigines', p. 667) found evidence of several possible cases of syphilis, but believed it was rare. However, Plomley was unacquainted with John Barnes' paper 'A Few Remarks on the Natives of Van Diemen's Land' delivered to the Royal College of Physicians in 1829. Barnes (cited in 'A Young Englishman's Observations', p. 21) observed that 'Gonorrhoea has been introduced among them and in many places it commits terrible ravages in the parts affected.' Examining this extremely rich source, Ian Gregg ('A Young Englishman's Observations', p. 24) found Barnes' description also strongly suggests syphilis (not known to be distinct from gonorrhoea until 1837). Barnes noted that calomel (a mercury compound then the only known treatment for syphilis) 'gave limited relief' to colonists who had contracted the infection from Aborigines. Syphilis causes a host of horrible symptoms, among them severe birth defects, but rarely infertility.

<sup>21</sup> If left untreated, gonorrhoea can cause epididymitis in men, and pelvic inflammatory disease in women, both of which can cause infertility.

<sup>22</sup> This claim (accepted by most historians) is evidenced mainly by the small number of children accompanying some bands at the end of the War, by the remarks of several contemporaries, and by the numbers of childless women among the sealers (see Chapter 6). There was also considerable sexual interaction in the interior. So, whilst none of this is conclusive, it provides good circumstantial reasons to assume that, to some extent, infertility impeded the maintenance of the Aboriginal population.

<sup>23</sup> This contention has been gleaned largely from Robinson's remarks throughout his journals, and the fact that he never mentioned such a shortage. See also *Weep in Silence*, Appendix 1. The child thefts that appear to have been common in the early years of settlement, predominantly impacted bands in the immediate vicinity of Hobart – bands that had practically disappeared by the 1820s.

<sup>24</sup> Plomley, *The Tasmanian Aborigines*, pp. 56-58.

<sup>25</sup> Yaws is an infectious condition, caused by the spiral bacterium *Treponema pertenue*, and is accompanied by red skin eruptions and joint pain. This matches the descriptions given by explorers. Later colonial reports of skin infection appear to refer to canine scabies, a more serious condition resulting from their close contact with dogs. See, for instance, Gregg, 'A Young Englishman's Observations', p. 22 & Hobler, *The Diaries of Pioneer George Hobler*, p. 77, entry by Frank Hobler, 26 April 1829. In order to distinguish skin and venereal infections from more deadly epidemic diseases such as tuberculosis and influenza, I have employed the term 'sickness' to refer exclusively to the latter.

<sup>26</sup> *Colonial Times*, 16 June 1826, p. 3 & J. Barnes, 'A Few Remarks on the Natives of Van Diemen's Land', cited in Boyce, *Van Diemen's Land*, p. 65.

reference to Aboriginal ill health appeared in 1819, again to skin infection.<sup>27</sup> In 1821, a similar condition was noted in the Oyster Bay area, and by 1826 it had been observed in several southern districts.<sup>28</sup> By this stage though, there had still been no mention of sickness.

In 1824, the settler William Parramore informed his family in England that ‘bad colds are very uncommon’ and that ‘everywhere in Van Diemen’s Land is remarkably healthy.’<sup>29</sup> The newspapers and other sources also suggest the colony was generally free of such conditions.<sup>30</sup> The first significant outbreak was in 1827, which is also when we see the first observation of sickness among Aborigines.<sup>31</sup> The *Hobart Town Gazette* remarked that ‘the catarrh which was lately so general throughout the Island, affected the Aboriginal Natives exactly in the same way as the Europeans’. However, the newspaper was only aware of two cases, ‘Black Kit’ and another woman, both apparently loitering about the settlement at Coal River.<sup>32</sup> There is no further mention of sickness until April 1829, when Robinson began recording the devastating effects of an influenza epidemic that tore through the Bruny Islanders, who lost more than half their number in just six months.<sup>33</sup> The full horror of disease was not realised until the bands were crammed together on Flinders Island, and by the time Robinson left for Port Phillip in 1839, spates of pneumonia, influenza and tuberculosis, had killed well over half of the Aborigines he had ‘conciliated’.<sup>34</sup>

European accounts, therefore, indicate that disease did not begin to take a serious toll on any of the bands until the late 1820s. But this may not be the full story. There was certainly sufficient contact for disease to have been transmitted – both before and after settlement – and when we look at what the Aborigines themselves said, this possibility appears more likely. Firstly, in 1829, the Bruny Island people gave Robinson ‘sufficient cause to believe that death

<sup>27</sup> Fisk’s Mill, in Hobart, was briefly utilised by Colonial Surgeon, Edward Luttrell, to treat a small group of Aborigines for ‘the Cutaneous disorder to which they are more or less liable’ (Sorell to Luttrell, 7 December 1819, in *Historical Records of Australia*, ser. 3, vol. 2, p. 750).

<sup>28</sup> See Buxton to family, 14 September 1821, NLA, MS902, p. 3; *Colonial Times*, 16 June 1826, p. 3 & Leake to Pike, 19 August 1824, in Hudspeth, ‘Experiences of a Settler in the Early Days of Van Diemen’s Land’, *Royal Society of Tasmania Papers and Proceedings*, 1935, p. 150.

<sup>29</sup> Parramore to family, 5 October 1824, Parramore, *Parramore Letters*, p. 54.

<sup>30</sup> Boyce, *Van Diemen’s Land*, p. 64.

<sup>31</sup> There was one Aborigine who died of a respiratory disease in a Hobart hospital in 1819 (*Hobart Town Gazette*, 3 July 1819, p. 1). This was ‘Black Mary’, the one time partner of the bushranger Michael Howe. This case has not been included because Mary was detribalised and had been living among the whites for some time.

<sup>32</sup> *Colonial Times*, 27 July 1827, p. 3. The paper claimed that, on 12 July, ‘Black Kit’ died of ‘Catarrh’, and ‘her Companion is labouring under the same distemper’. Bonwick (*The Daily Life and Origins*, pp. 87-88), however, recorded that ‘Black Kit, Queen of Black Tom’s band, has died of the leprosy.’

<sup>33</sup> *Friendly Mission*, pp. 55-108, journals April-December 1829. This band appears to have consisted of up to forty individuals when Robinson arrived in March 1829.

<sup>34</sup> *Weep in Silence*, Appendix 1; N. J. B. Plomley, ‘Disease Among the Tasmanian Aborigines’, *Medical Journal of Australia*, vol. 151, 1989, pp. 666-67. We know these were the diseases responsible based on the symptoms described, and the numerous postmortems carried out on Flinders Island.

hath visited with dire havoc a great portion of the aboriginal population'.<sup>35</sup> Six months later, having gained much more familiarity with his Aboriginal friends, Robinson recorded in his journal that they

informed me that plenty of natives had been attacked with RAEGERWROPPER or evil spirit, and had died. Thus the mortality with which the Brune natives had been attacked, appears to have been general among the tribes of aborigines.<sup>36</sup>

Presumably though, the Bruny Islanders did not know what was occurring among foreign bands in distant parts of the island, and it appears from a later report that the reference was to 'the numerous tribes of aborigines once inhabiting that extensive country to the westward of D'Entrecasteaux Channel and of the Huon River'.<sup>37</sup> This was confirmed several years later by Luckerrermicticwocken, who told the missionary James Backhouse that she:

was the sole relic [sic] of a band that inhabited the western side of the Huon River, on the south coast. I enquired of her what became of the people of her country. She answered, They all died. I then asked what killed them. An aged man of the Bruny Island band, who is one of their doctors, and was sitting by, replied, The Devil. I desired to know how he managed. The woman began to cough violently, to show me how they were affected, and she said, that when the rest were all dead, she made a 'catamaran,' a sort of raft, and crossed D'Entrecasteaux Channel to Bruny Island, and joined a band there.<sup>38</sup>

Neither Backhouse nor Robinson made clear reference to when this supposed epidemic occurred, but writing to James Bonwick in the 1840s, Wybalenna catechist Robert Clark claimed to:

have gleaned from some of the Aborigines, now in their graves, that they were more numerous than the White people are aware of, but their numbers were very much thinned by a sudden attack of disease which was general among the entire population previous to the arrival of the English, entire tribes of the Natives having been swept off in the course of one or two days' illness.<sup>39</sup>

This outbreak, he went on to add, occurred 'before the English ships arrived in Sullivan's Cove'.<sup>40</sup> There is some doubt about this timing, however, because early survey teams and settlers made no reference to sickness among the Aborigines they encountered in the vicinity of the Huon, or anywhere else. Nevertheless, these people were gone from the record by the time the War began, and the evidence clearly suggests that disease was the primary cause of their demise.

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<sup>35</sup> Robinson to Colonial Secretary, 23 September 1829, in Plomley, *Friendly Mission*, 1<sup>st</sup> edn., Tasmanian Historical Research Association, Hobart, 1966, pp. 76-77).

<sup>36</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 143, journal 2 February 1830.

<sup>37</sup> Robinson to Colonial Secretary, February 1831, *Friendly Mission*, p. 260.

<sup>38</sup> Backhouse, *A Narrative*, p. 103. Luckerrermicticwocken's people were from west of the Huon River.

<sup>39</sup> Bonwick, *Daily Life and Origins*, p. 85. Clark was appointed catechist on Flinders Island in 1834, and then assistant superintendent at the Aboriginal settlement at Oyster Cove until his death in 1850.

<sup>40</sup> Bonwick, *The Daily Life and Origins*, p. 87. This last quotation was Bonwick paraphrasing Clark.

Robinson, Backhouse and Clark all appear to have been referring to the same outbreak of disease south of the Derwent, but this does not rule out epidemics elsewhere. It seems there was little contact between the bands on either side of the Derwent,<sup>41</sup> so it is entirely plausible that the infection did not spread north, at least not during the abovementioned epidemic. There is, however, circumstantial evidence that suggests an outbreak may have occurred on Maria Island, where the Baudin expedition encountered a band in 1802. Although there does not seem to have been disease among Baudin's men at the time, the Maria Islanders disappeared from the record thereafter. Traditionally, these people did not spend the entire year on the island, so it may just be that sealers and settlers spooked them into declining this risky pilgrimage;<sup>42</sup> but the more likely explanation is that they were wiped out by an epidemic in the wake of Baudin's visit. If so, infection probably did not get a chance to reach the mainland, though if this or some other disease had infected mainland eastern bands we could expect high casualties. This expectation is based on the catastrophic toll that introduced diseases have taken on indigenous populations the world over. For example, tens of thousands of Aborigines in the Sydney area were killed by a smallpox epidemic in 1789.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, we must not simply assume Van Diemen's Land was the site of similar devastation. Other than the suspicious absence of the Maria Island people, there is no evidence of sickness among eastern bands north of the Derwent, and it is these people we are most interested in. All we can say is that at least one southern band was decimated by an epidemic before the War, and possibly others.

We can now ask the important question: how many Aborigines were there in eastern Van Diemen's Land on the eve of the War? Due to the number of unknown variables, it is impossible to make accurate deductions from an original population, but we must examine the figures all the same. Robinson recorded at least twenty-nine bands in this region,<sup>44</sup> but others were very likely unknown or unrecorded. Using Jones' methodology, we can assume the area was probably once home to at least forty bands, each comprising on average about fifty individuals.<sup>45</sup> That is, not less than 2,000 Aborigines were living in eastern Van Diemen's Land at the turn of the century. Even if we make the drastic assumption that for the reasons discussed above, this population had halved by 1824, there would still have been around 1,000

<sup>41</sup> Calder, *Levée, Line and Martial Law*, p. 112. There seems to have been fairly distinct socio-linguistic differences between the bands divided by the Derwent River.

<sup>42</sup> Making the two and a half mile voyage to Maria Island on bark rafts was dangerous enough, but it would also have left them more vulnerable to armed men in boats.

<sup>43</sup> See J. Campbell, *Invisible Invaders: Smallpox and Other Diseases in Aboriginal Australia 1780-1880*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria, 2002.

<sup>44</sup> *Friendly Mission*, p. 1006.

<sup>45</sup> Jones, 'Tasmanian Tribes', p. 325. Jones estimated that bands ranged in size from forty to fifty individuals. This range is perhaps too narrow given the vast differences in the carrying capacities of east and west Van Diemen's Land (the former being much richer in resources), but the figure of fifty, for eastern bands, is accepted here in the interest of conservatism.

Aborigines in the east. This accords with Reynolds' estimate that the *total* pre-War Aboriginal population was 'perhaps 1500'.<sup>46</sup> But to see if such a figure is near the mark, we must check it against the reported sightings of Aborigines, their smoke plumes and their huts, and indeed we find there were abundant reports of large bands traversing the interior throughout the mid 1820s.<sup>47</sup> Taken as a whole, the source material from this period supports an estimate of approximately 1,000 Aborigines in the east in 1824. We must therefore conclude that disease, violence and low fertility had not totally decimated the population before the War.<sup>48</sup>

### The Wartime Decline

Assuming, then, that the pre-War eastern population was in the vicinity of 1,000, and knowing as we do that only around 100 survived the conflict, then there are some 900 deaths to account for.<sup>49</sup> We must of course consider the impact of other causes of death before we can proffer an estimate of how many were shot. A small number would have died of natural causes, and several are recorded as having been killed in internecine conflict.<sup>50</sup> There were doubtlessly unrecorded deaths from these feuds, but, as Chapter 10 points out, they were generally very contained, typically resulting in one or two casualties. When it is also considered that the portion of Aborigines who remained alive during the War were amply preoccupied with resisting colonists, it seems probable that relatively few were killed in internecine conflict. Other causes of death were wartime expedients such as abandonment, but the combination of these and the other factors just mentioned are unlikely to account for very many deaths.<sup>51</sup>

Potentially the only serious rival to frontier conflict as a wartime killer of Aborigines was disease. We have relatively good records for the 1820s, however, and, besides the reference noted above to two (possibly detribalised) women with catarrh in 1827, there is no evidence of sickness among the hostile bands. Robinson did not witness signs of disease, nor did any of his

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<sup>46</sup> Reynolds, *An Indelible Stain?*, p. 71. Reynolds is one of the few historians who made a definitive estimate of the pre-War population. The southern and western bands were fewer and smaller than the eastern ones, so his estimate of 1,500 is actually quite close to the one advanced in this thesis.

<sup>47</sup> These include many (probably exaggerated) reports of hundreds of Aborigines together at the same time, as well as countless references to Aboriginal burning.

<sup>48</sup> One possibility, suggested by Plomley (*Weep in Silence*, p. 53), was that 'the eastern peoples, who had had greater contact with Europeans, had acquired a greater immunity than the western people.' Plomley ('Disease Among the Tasmanian Aborigines', p. 666) also noted, however (and his training was in anatomy), that with respiratory diseases in question 'immunity was not gained from the first infection, but others would follow the first, each causing systematic damage until a terminal infection occurred'.

<sup>49</sup> The total number removed by 1836 was 200, of which 73 had already perished (Robinson to Colonial Secretary, 4 July 1836, SLNSW, ML, A1771, p. 183). Judging from the number of women with the sealers (Plomley & Henley, *Sealers of Bass Strait*, pp. 71-88), the censuses taken in exile (*Weep in Silence*, Appendix 1), and from reports of the numbers captured by Robinson and others, it appears that about half this number (just less than 100) were survivors of the War in the east.

<sup>50</sup> See Chapter 10.

<sup>51</sup> For wartime expedients, see Chapter 12.



numerous Aboriginal informants suggest that the eastern bands had ever been afflicted. Likewise, given the entangled proximity of colonists and Aborigines throughout this period, and the many surprise attacks made by the former on the latter's campsites, it seems improbable that widespread disease could have gone unnoticed.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, Gilbert Robertson provided positive evidence against the disease hypothesis, when he recorded in his journal for 25 February 1829:

Taking a circuit from the [Jericho] Lagoon towards Prossers Plains we returned in the evening and slept by the Lagoon. ... in this latter District, there were ranges of old Huts within almost every mile for thirty miles. The huts at the oldest encampments that we saw appeared sufficient to contain Two Hundred natives, but their encampments appeared to decrease in size every year, and those of last winter could not contain Thirty people. We remarked the same decrease in the extent of encampments on the Forest which we this day explored.<sup>53</sup>

Such a gradual decline is consistent with a war of attrition, but not with epidemic disease. Of course, none of this rules out disease as a factor, but it strongly suggests its impact during the War was negligible.

Taking all this into consideration, it is unlikely that disease, natural deaths, internecine conflict or wartime expedients can account for a substantial portion of wartime deaths in the east. Based on discussions of each of these factors in the preceding pages, it seems reasonable to assume that no more than one third of the 900 probable wartime deaths can be attributed to them. According to this admittedly crude calculus, frontier violence must have been the primary wartime killer, responsible for around 600 deaths; and this is certainly more consistent with the circumstantial evidence than is the recorded figure of around 260 deaths.<sup>54</sup> The foundations of this figure are necessarily uncertain and unsatisfying – the true figure might be as low as 400 or as high as 1,000 – but it represents a reasoned attempt to establish a working estimate. It does not indicate that the unrecorded killings were 'cover-ups' by magistrates or government officials; it merely assumes that some frontiersmen were not eager to report their killings, or that those reports never made it into the archives. Such an assumption is not, as Windschuttle calls it, 'empirically and logically absurd', it is empirically weak and logically obvious.<sup>55</sup> We can safely assume that the written record does not tell the whole story of violence against Aborigines, and that a working estimate of 600 wartime killings in eastern Van Diemen's Land is both conservative and realistic.

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<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, if large numbers of Aborigines were seriously ill during the War, the constancy and rapidity of their movements is difficult to account for.

<sup>53</sup> Gilbert Robertson's journal, 25 February 1829, TAHO, CSO1/331, p. 142.

<sup>54</sup> This includes those killed outright and those who died from wounds in the hours and days after an ambush. Incidentally, this is close to the 500 casualties estimated in 1875 by the conservative historian, James Calder (*Some Accounts*, p. 25).

<sup>55</sup> Windschuttle, 'Whitewash confirms the Fabrication of Aboriginal History', pp. 11-13.

### Appendix 3: Tally

#### Black Casualties

P = Plausibility

K = Killed

W = Wounded

C = Captured

DATE	APPROX. LOCATION	K	W	C	DETAILS	SOURCES	P
n.d.	n.l.	1		1	Ambush described by Tongerlongerter.	WS, pp324-25	
n.d.	n.l.	2			Eyewitness describes killings.	Melville, pp71-72	
n.d.	n.l.	1		1	Stockmen tied up woman leaving her to perish.	FM, pp377, 379	
n.d.	n.l.	1			Carrots claimed to have cut off an Aborigine's head.	Shaw, pp49-50	
n.d.	n.l.	1			Russian Roulette with ignorant Aborigine.	FM, p379; Holman, p403; West, p89	
n.d.	Macquarie Harbour	1			Soldiers kill Aborigine. Known to be cruel.	FM, pp652, 682-85, 792-93, 796, 880	DU
n.d.	Macquarie Harbour	1			Woman named Cagee shot by soldier.	FM, pp776-78	
n.d.	Northwest	4		4	Penderoin tells of multiple attacks on coast.	FM, pp823-24	
n.d.	West Coast	1		1	Aborigines tell of shooting.	FM, pp681, 823-24	
n.d.	Cape Portland			1	Mannalargenna tells of being shot by Kelly.	FM, p646	
n.d.	South Esk	1			Man confesses killing to Glover.	FM, p867	
n.d.	North?	1			Stockmen shoot woman in tree.	FM, p629	
n.d.	Blue Hill, Clyde River	1			Pateteyaner shot at Captain Clark's.	FM, p629	
n.d.	Miles Opening	8			Stockmen killed seventeen Aborigines (7 then 10).	FM, pp537-38; Bonwick, pp67-68; TC14/4/38, p2	PE
n.d.	Tamar River?	1			Stockman killing Aborigines. Hand as trophy.	FM, p460	
n.d.	Northeast Coast?	5		4	Sealers 'killed several' and took several women.	FM, p226	
n.d.	Bagdad	1			Espie's overseer shoots Aborigine.	Bonwick, p124	
n.d.	nr. town?	2		2	Soldiers kill men, women and children.	Roth, pp171-72	
n.d.	nr. Campbell Town	2		1	Ambush described by Umarrah.	FM, p518; WS, p384	
n.d.	Huon River	3		3	Woorraday describes several attacks.	FM, p405	
n.d.	Recherche Bay	1			Soldier kills Aborigine in conflict over kangaroo.	FM, pp95, 751	
n.d.	Oyster Bay	1			Aborigine shot in kidnapping raid.	West, p10	

DATE	APPROX. LOCATION	K	W	C	DETAILS	SOURCES	P
n.d.	Northeast coast			1	Woman tells of being abducted by sealers.	FM, p345	
n.d.	Northwest			1	Lacklay describes wounding.	FM, pp585-86	
n.d.	Northwest			1	Lacklay describes wounding.	FM, pp585-86	
n.d.	Northwest	1			Lacklay describes killing.	FM, pp585-86	
n.d.	Northwest	1			Lacklay describes killing.	FM, pp585-86	
n.d.	Northwest	1			Lacklay describes killing.	FM, pp585-86	
n.d.	Northwest	3			Lacklay describes killings.	FM, pp585-86	
n.d.	Pittwater?			5	Big River tribe' ambushed. Many wounded.	Lloyd, p110	PE
n.d.	Pittwater?			2	Reprisal for Aboriginal plundering raid.	Lloyd, pp58-60.	
n.d.	Northeast coast	1			Ambush, woman killed then decapitated. Sealers?	Davis, p269	
n.d.	St Marys	1			Ambush, woman killed then decapitated.	Davis, p269	
n.d.	Mayfield Bay	3			Thomas Buxton's reprisal ambush	Bonwick, p117	
n.d.	Den Hill	5	1		Ambush described by Tongerlongter.	WS, pp324-25	
n.d.	Western Marshes	4			Party shoots several. Probable CFA.	FM, p253	
n.d.	Hunter Island	1			Sealer, Robert Gambell shoots woman.	Plomley & Henley, pp43, 45	
n.d.	East coast			3	Tenkotemaner describes kidnapping raid.	FM, p345	
n.d. various dates	Campbell Town	8	1		Sawyer Brady claims 16 shot over the years.	Emmett, p8	PE
n.d. various dates	Blue Hills district	10			Hibbens kills half 'eastern mob' over the years.	Shaw, pp54-55	
Early settlement	nr. Hobart	2			white men shoot two blacks dead'.	FM, p408	
3 May 1804	Risdon Cove	6		1	Confused confrontation. Soldiers fire on large band.	G. Calder, pp232-43	
12-25 November 1804	Port Dalrymple	1	1		Soldiers fire after Aborigines throw man in water.	HRA, s3, v1, p607	
8 January 1806	nr. Hobart			1	Convict brings home Aboriginal girl. Later escapes.	Knopwood, p99	
c.14 February 1807	New Norfolk	1			Robert Waring kills 1 in fatal attack on himself.	Knopwood, p126	
c.28 February 1807	Frederick Henry Bay	2			Hunters shoot 2 Aborigines in self-defence.	Knopwood, p128	
Mid April 1807	nr. Hobart	1			Hunters shoot Aborigine in self-defence.	Knopwood, p132	
Early 1808	various	5	4		Brown, Lemon, and gang kill at least one Aborigine.	SG5/6/08, p2; Fels, p61	
4 January 1816	Robbins Island			3	Some wounded by James Kelly's boat crew.	Bowden, p31	
31 August 1816	New Norfolk	3	1		Stockmen retaliate when attacked by 20 Aborigines.	HTG31/8/16, p2	
13 March 1817	Green Water Holes			1	Mahon pursuing Aborigines after cart attacked.	HRA3/2, p474	
c.1818	Bruny Isalnd	1			Sealers attack camp and stab Truganini's mother.	J. Calder, p104	

DATE	APPROX. LOCATION	K	W	C	DETAILS	SOURCES	P
c.1818	Oyster Bay?	1		3	Aborigine shot by stockmen. Children kidnapped.	HTG20/3/19, p2	
c.1818	East coast			1	Looerryminer tells of being abducted as a child.	Backhouse, pp88-89; West, p23	
c.1818	Northeast			6	Bullmb tells of sealers abducting her and 5 others.	FM, p284	
Early April 1819	Macquarie River	1			Stock-keepers shoot Aborigine in self-defence.	HTG17/4/19, p2	
n.d. c.1820	Cape Grim (doughboys)	3		10	Tunnerminnerwait tells of ambush. 7 taken, 2 killed.	FM, pp218, 236, 879-80	
n.d. c.1820	Bruny Island	1			Trugemann tells of mother killed by sawyers.	J. Calder, p104	
n.d. 1820	Northeast Coast			3	Woman tells of being abducted by sealers.	FM, p345	
n.d. 1820s	Bruny Island?	1			Lyne tells of Aboriginal man shot through the head.	FM, pp344, 347	
n.d. 1820s	East Tamar		3		Clark tells of Kneale's men ambushing camp.	FM, pp374-75	
n.d. 1820s	Western Marshes	1			Man throws woman on fire and burned her to death.	Shaw, p54	
n.d. 1820s	Bruny Island	2			Trugemann tells of 2 Aborigines killed in boat.	J. Calder, pp104-6	
n.d. 1820-30	Kent Group of islands	1			Sealer Gambell shoots the woman Murrerninghe.	FM, pp281, 372, 625; Plomley & Henley, p45	
n.d. 1820-31	Waterhouse Point	1			One of Robinson's party finds skeleton near lagoon.	FM, p444	DU
n.d. 1820-31	Tomahawk River	2			Two male aborigines found dead.	FM, p444	DU
n.d. 1820-31	Cape Barren Island	1			Crying 'half-caste' baby buried alive by sealer.	FM, p425	
n.d. 1820-31	Pittwater	1			Wade's man shoots Aborigine.	FM, p353	
c.September 1821	Boomer Creek		1		Buxton 'peppered' Aborigine with shotgun.	Buxton	
n.d. 1822-28	South Esk		11		Ambush party attacks at 3am.	Beams	
n.d. 1823-30	Hunter Island	1			Gambell shoots woman on Hunter Island.	FM, pp372, 625	
n.d. 1823-30	Kent Group of Islands	1			Gambell shoots 'Kit' at Kent Group.	FM, pp281, 372, 625; CSO1/317, pp216-33	
c.15 November 1823	Grindstone Bay	1			Woman shot in back by Radford and co.	FM, p347	
19 November 1823	Oyster Bay	4	4		Radford's revenge, deaths 'considerable'.	Bonwick, p99; Amos 20/11/23	
14 December 1823	Oyster Bay	1	1		Amos and co. reprisal ambush.	Amos 14/12/23	
n.d. 1824	Interior	1			Manning sees body of shot Aborigine.	A. Calder, p14	
Early 1824	Shannon River			1	Lord's stockman abducts and chains woman.	CSO1/323, p320	
Mid 1820s	D'Entrecasteaux Channel	2			2 men killed by splitters in boat. Truganini raped.	J. Calder, pp105-6	
n.d. 1826-30	Northwest	1			Stockmen kill woman.	FM, p226	
c.9 January 1825	Paterson Plains			2	Aborigines wantonly fired at and women abused.	TPDA12&19/1/25, pp2, 3	
n.d. 1826-30	Circular Head?	1			Woman kept as sex slave before being shot.	FM, p244	
n.d. after 1826	Circular Head		1	1	Woman tortured with firebrand	Stokes, pp458-59	

DATE	APPROX. LOCATION	K	W	C	DETAILS	SOURCES	P
Early March 1826	East of George Town	1			Perry, Jefferies and Russell rape and murder woman.	NLA, MS3251/2/2, pp215-17	DU
c.1 June 1826	Western Marshes	4			Gibson's man kills 4 or 5 in reprisal.	Thomas, p23	
Early September 1826	North	2	2		Many Aborigines 'severely wounded if not slain'.	HTG23/9/26, p2	
3 November 1826	Shannon River	1			Aborigines attack men in hut who shoot one.	CT10/11/26; Jorgenson, p70	
21 November 1826	Macquarie Plains	2			2 Aborigines killed in reprisal ambush.	Dow, p45; CSO1/316, pp13-14	
Late November 1826	4m from Bothwell	2			2 Aborigines felled by gunshot during attack.	HTG2/12/26, p4	
9 December 1826	Richmond district			10	Laing's party captures Kickertopoller and band.	CT15/12/26, p3	
n.d. 1827-30	Western Marshes			1	Thomas stabs Aborigine in gut.	FM, p244; WS, p464	
n.d. 1827-30	Ritchie's Sugarloaf	18			Party on horseback shoot whole band but 2.	FM, p253	
n.d. 1827-30	Western Marshes	4			Three men shoot several Aborigines.	FM, p253	
n.d. 1827	Richmond	7			Richmond police kill 14 Aborigines.	Shaw, p49	PE
c.1827	Eddystone Point	2			Jack and Murray killed by Tucker and Mansell.	FM, pp284, 435-36, 444; J. Calder, pp92-102	
c.21 February 1827	Macquarie Plains	2			Reprisal attack by Michael Steel and party.	Dow, p45	
March 1827	Mayfield Bay	1			Thomas Buxton shoots one in self-defence.	CSO1/316, p840; Bonwick, p117	
March 1827	Mayfield Bay	4			Thomas Buxton and party kill 'several' in reprisal.	Story	
22 April 1827	Jericho	4			Ambush by party of 4: 'several of the blacks fell'.	HTG5/5/27, p3	
June 1827	Dairy Plains	7			Dalrymple and Cupit shoot 14 in siege.	Jorgenson, p125; FM, p254; LE2/10/47, pp4-5	PE
17 June 1827	Western Marshes	4			Reprisal for attack on Baker.	FM, p254; CSO1/316, pp22-27; CT6/7/27, p4	
19 June 1827	Western Marshes	1			Baker shoots 1 Aborigine in self-defence.	CSO1/316, p27	
24 June 1827	Laycock Falls	1	1		Reprisal ambush for the killing of Knight.	FM, p254; CSO1/316, pp15-40	
8 November 1827	Richmond district			3	Field police ambush band.	HTC24/11/27, p2	
Early December 1827	Cape Grim	4			Stockmen try to get women 'several' men shot.	FM, pp206-7, 212-15; Lennox	
11 December 1827	Western Marshes	3			3 Aborigines killed during attack on cattle drivers.	Lennox	
18 December 1827	Macquarie district			6	Aborigines surprised and taken by reprisal party.	HTC22/12/27, p3	
n.d. 1828-29	Quambys Plains			3	Servants force women to their hut.	CSO1/323, p289	
Early February 1828	Cape Grim	6			Crew of the Fanny attack band.	Hare, pp40-41	PE
10 February 1828	Cape Grim	15			4 Stockmen pick off Aborigines at base of cliff.	McFarlane, pp90-101 (all sources)	PE
Early April 1828	Swanport			1	Woman captured, tied up, and forced to guide.	TAS11/4/28, p3	
April 1828	Avoca			1	Besieged stockman wounds Aborigine with slug.	TAS11/4/28, p3	
10 April 1828	Ben Lomond			1	Aborigine injured in pursuit by Batman's party.	HTC12/4/28, p3	

DATE	APPROX. LOCATION	K	W	C	DETAILS	SOURCES	P
Late April 1828	Interior'			3	Pursuit party overtakes 3 Aborigine women.	TAS2/5/28, p3	
May 1828	Elizabeth River	1			Aborigine killed whilst attacking Robertson's hut.	Shaw, p49	
1 May 1828	Mt. Cameron West			1	Surveyor Wedge's party captures Aboriginal boy.	Wedge, p48	
22 August 1828	Break O'Day Plains			2	Aborigines captured whilst attacking hut.	CSO1/316, pp152-59	
n.d. post-August 1828	Mersey	4			Goldie's party kill 'several' in reprisal.	FM, pp231, 270	
c.September 1828	Mersey	1			Aboriginal woman shot by 2 VDLCo. stockmen.	Lennox	
23 October 1828	Green Ponds	2	2		Aborigines attacked by pursuit party.	HTC25/10/28, p1; TAS31/10/28, p3	DU
25 October 1828	Sandspit	1			Walpole and stockman shoot one in self-defence.	CSO1/316, pp186-88	
14 November 1828	Eastern Marshes			1	Capture and wounding of Umarrah.	Melville, pp78-79; CSO1/331, pp168-77; Shaw p48	
c.1 December 1828	Break O'Day Plains	1			Cowie makes Aborigine 'suffer for his temerity'.	HTC13/12/28, p2	
9 December 1828	Tooms Lake	10		2	Military/civilian roving party ambush.	LA9/2/29, pp2-3; HTC13/12/28, p2; TAS12/12/28, p2; CSO1/320, section E; CSO1/329, p269; CSO1/323, p152; CSO1/330, p109	
10 December 1828	Kitty's Corner	1			Military/civilian roving party ambush.	CSO1/320, section F	
13 December 1828	Sugar Loaf Hill	2	2		McOwen and Kenzie shoot 2 in self-defence.	TAS19/12/28, p3	
27 December 1828	Oyster Bay	1			Meredith's men shoot one in pursuit.	HTC17/1/29, p2	
17 January 1829	Bothwell	1			Bruny Island' or 'Boomer' Jack killed by soldier.	FM, pp319, 539-40; CT30/1/29, p3	
c.17 January 1829	St Pauls River	9		3	Correspondent reports ambush.	CT30/1/29, p3	DU
19 or 26 Jan. 1829	Little Swan Port	1			Rayner shoots Aborigine near Lyne's farm.	CT30/1/29, p3	
11 February 1829	South Esk River			1	Grant and men storm camp, capturing 1 Aborigine.	CSO331, pp125-27	
15 March 1829	North Esk River	6			Pursuit party kills 4 men, a woman and a child.	CSO1/316, pp229-30; HTC7/3/29, p1; HTC21/3/29, p1	
30 March 1829	Jones's River	1			Woman mortally shot in leg and back by pursuers	CT10/4/29, p4; HTC18/4/29, p1	
29 April 1829	Mayfield Bay	4			Ambush party 'killed several of the Blacks'.	Bonwick, p117	
c.2 May 1829	White Marsh	1	1		Grant and Smith's pursuit party: 1 shot, 1 wounded.	HTC16/5/29, p1	
10 June 1829	South Esk River	1			McLeod's shepherd shoots woman.	Wedge, pp56-57	
12 June 1829	Prossers Plains			9	Party under O'Connor 'severely wounded' 8 or 10.	CSO1/316, p275	
5 August 1829	Ben Lomond	8	9	2	Batman's party ambushes band, executing 2.	CSO1/320, pp142-45; J. Calder, p18	
21 August 1829	Emu Bay	1		2	Goldie and men kill 1 woman and capture 2.	Lennox; FM, pp225, 270; McFarlane, pp108-16, 233-35	
August 1829-January 1830	Circular Head?			1	Detention of 'Thursday' in effort to 'conciliate'.	Lennox	
18 September 1829	Sorell	1			Splitters mortally wound 1 in reprisal attack.	CT25/9/29, p3	

DATE	APPROX. LOCATION	K	W	C	DETAILS	SOURCES	P
20 December 1829	Sorell	1			Aborigine shot whilst attacking hut.	CSO1/316, p382; Laing, p57	
n.d. c.1830	Behind Swanport	12	4		Convict describes role in vigilante group.	Fenton, pp53-54; NWP9/5/93	
n.d. c.1830	Woody Island	1			Everitt kills escaping Worethmaleyepodeyer.	CSO1/317, pp216-33; FM, pp284, 313, 333-34, 424	
n.d. c.1830	Northeast?	1			Bulrub tells of brother is killed.	FM, pp310, 318	
n.d. c.1830	Northeast?	1			Bulrub tells of another brother killed.	FM, pp310, 318	
11 January 1830	Lake Echo	1			Tyrell's party fires on 2, 1 killed instantly.	CSO1/320, p405; CSO1/320, section D	
15 February 1830	Bark Hut Plains		1		1 wounded whilst attacking Sherwin's hut.	CSO1/323, p321	
9 March 1830	Blackmans River		4		Peter Scott's roving party wounded several'.	CT19/3/30, p3; HTC13/3/30, p3; CSO1/323, p189	
April 1830	Prossers Plains	1			Following attack, Aborigine is killed in pursuit.	HTC17/4/30, p2	
18 April 1830	Whitefoord Hills	2	1		Shepherd George King attacked, shoots 2, stabs 1.	CSO1/316, pp489-98	
23 April 1830	Little Swanport River		1		Aborigine looses hand in mantrap.	CSO1/316, pp509-10; HTC1/5/30, p2; HTC12/6/30, p3; HTC14/1/32, p2	
Mid May 1830	Pipers River	1	3		Maynes and men kill 1 woman, capture and abuse 3.	Batman 24/5/30; CSO1/316, pp511-12; CSO1/317, pp167-68; NLA, MS3251/2/3, pp79-80	DU
28 May 1830	Little Swanport River		2		2 soldiers and a constable wound 2 Aborigines.	CT11/6/30, p3	
27 July 1830	Oatlands district		4		Anstey and 6 men ambush Aborigines capturing 4.	Jorgenson, p98; CSO1/317, pp169-70	
4 August 1830	Blue Hill, Shannon	3			Ambush by Howell and 2 men. 1 prisoner, 3 killed.	CSO1/316, pp545-48; CSO1/316, pp564-65; CT20/8/30, p3; FM, p539	
27 August 1830	Bothwell	4	1		Captain Wood's men kill 'several' and capture 1.	CT27/8/30, p3; CT3/9/30, p3	
25 September 1830	Whitefoord Hills		3		Banfield and soldiers capture 3 by subterfuge.	CSO1/316, pp635-45; HTC9/10/30, p2	
c.October 1830	South of Launceston	3			Aborigines tell of soldiers killing 3 kinsfolk.	FM, pp295-97, 303	
5 October 1830	Allenvale		1		Aborigine shot by Black Line party. Limped away.	Dumaresq 5/10/30	
18 October 1830	Pittwater	1			Gangel kills 1 with pitchfork in self-defence.	CSO1/316, pp676, 681; HTC20/11/30, p2	
Mid October 1830	Pittwater	4			Captured Aborigine claims 4 shot.	CSO1/324	
25 October 1830	Sandspit River	2	1	2	Walpole's party kills 2, captures 2 (1 stabbed).	CSO1/324; HTC6/11/30, p2	
29 October 1830	Break O'Day Plains	2			2 killed by constables when attacking Talbot's hut.	CSO1/316, pp712-3, HTC13/11/30, FM, pp309-12, 319	
c.15 November 1830	Shannon / Clyde district	2			Shone's reprisal party kills woman and man.	FM, pp554-55; HTC27/11/30, p3	
n.d. c.1831	Big Lagoon	4			Bryant's men shoot 'several' Aborigines.	FMI/11/30, pp295-97	
2 February 1831	North Esk River	1			1 Aborigine killed in attack on shepherd.	CSO1/316, p881	
13 March 1831	Supply River		1		Ship's 'gun party ... shot at and knocked over' 1.	Glover, p55	

DATE	APPROX. LOCATION	K	W	C	DETAILS	SOURCES	P
2 July 1831	Macquarie River			3	Headlam's party captures man, woman and boy.	LA11/7/31, p213	
c.13 August 1831	Bashan Plains	1			John Espie's men kill 1 in self-defence.	HTC20/8/31; FM, pp541-42	
4 September 1831	Race Course	1			James Searle kills Aborigine.	Lennox	
4 October 1831	Gatcombe Plains		1		Reprisal for killing of Abrahams. 1 wounded.	CSO1/316, pp1033-37	DU
November 1831	St Marys Plains	3		4	McKay and two VDL Co. servants ambush band.	CSO1/316, pp1056-58; FM, pp597-98, 615, 720-21	
Late 1831	Northwest		1		McKay and party kill man in 'wilful slaying'.	FM, pp721-22	
February 1832	Flinders Island			2	Mansell shoots two Aborigines trying to escape.	FM, p623	
18 August 1834	Hamilton		1		Aborigine killed whilst attacking shepherd.	FM, p959	
February 1842	Cape Grim			1	Victoria Lanne abducted and abused by shepherd.	McFarlane, p174	



## Appendix

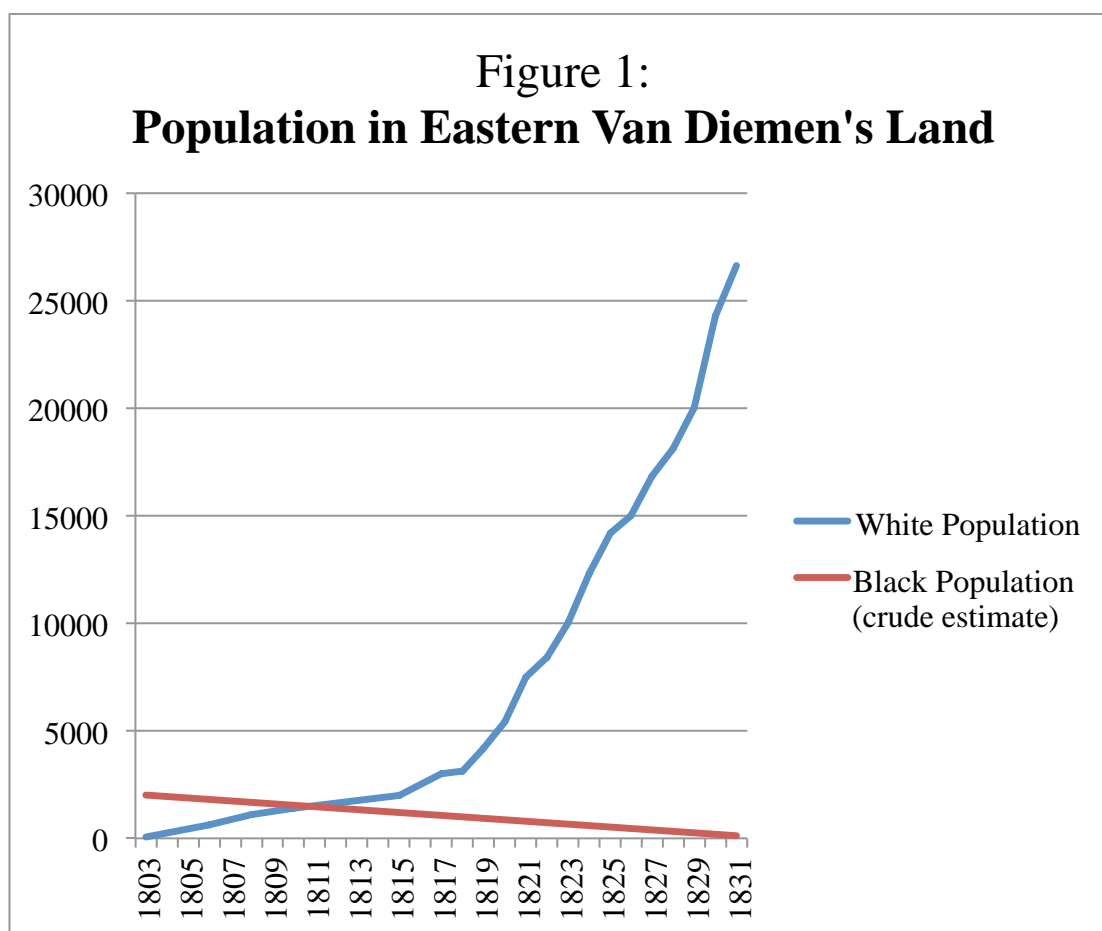
### 4

### Figures

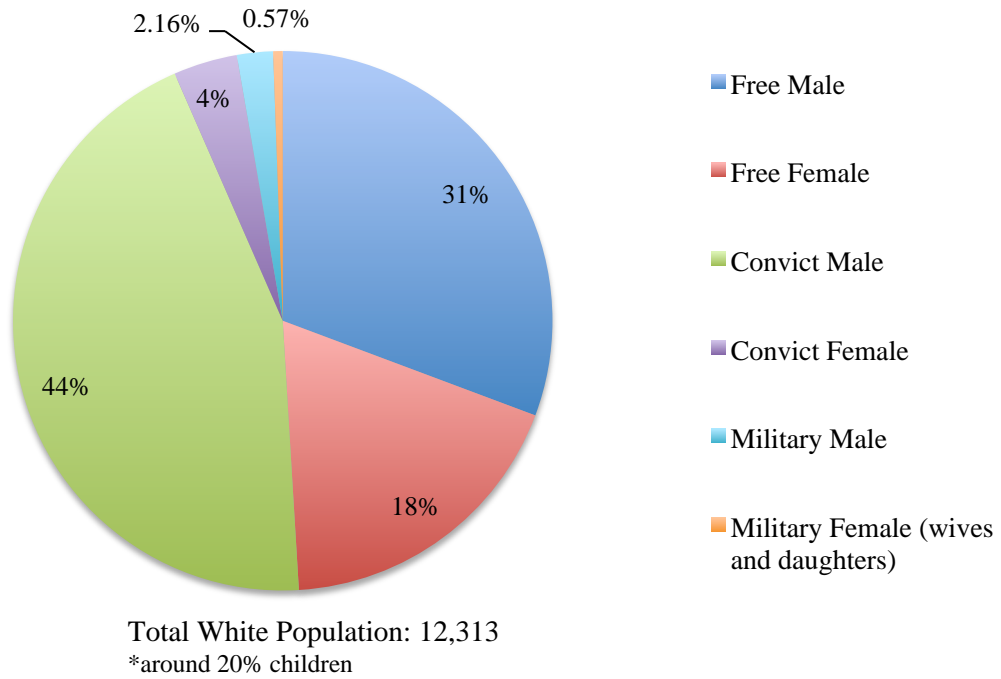
#### Note on Sources

Figures 1-4 are derived from data found in the following publications: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Tasmanian Statistics 1804-1902', compiled by Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, 1989, SLT, 319.46 TAS; J. Montagu (ed.), *Statistical Returns of Van Diemen's Land from 1824-35*, Government Printer, Hobart, 1836, fig. 17; Plomley, *Aboriginal/Settler Clash*, p. 29; general muster results, 30 October 1815, *Historical Records of Australia*, ser. 3, vol. 2, p. 137. The Aboriginal population estimates in figures 1 and 5 are based on evidence discussed in Appendix 3.

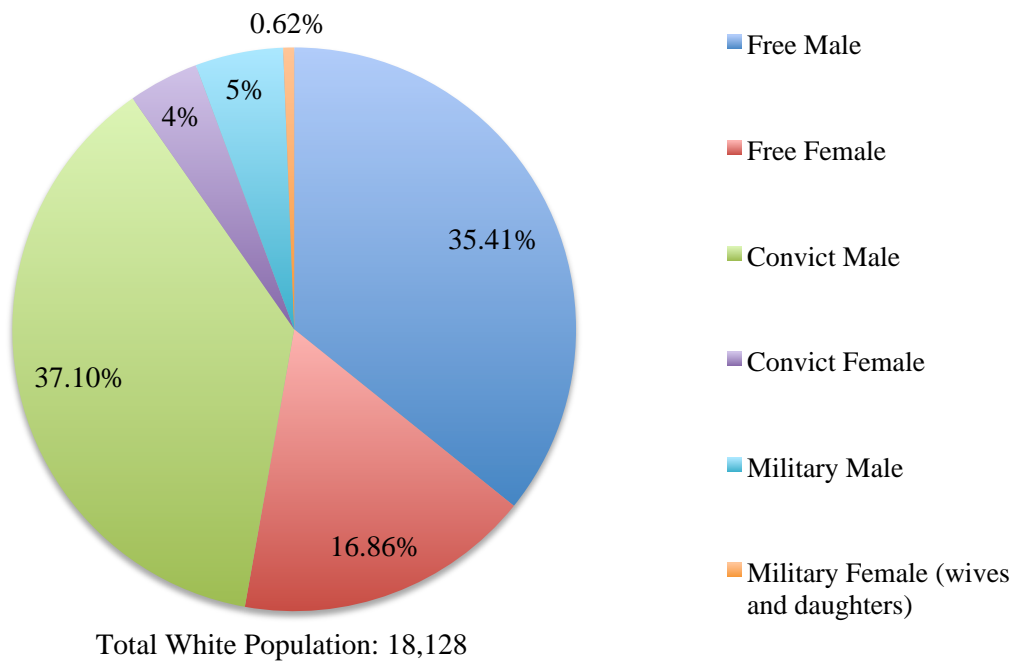
Figures 5-16 are derived from the data in the tallies in appendices two and three. They reflect *only* those instances of violence that were recorded.



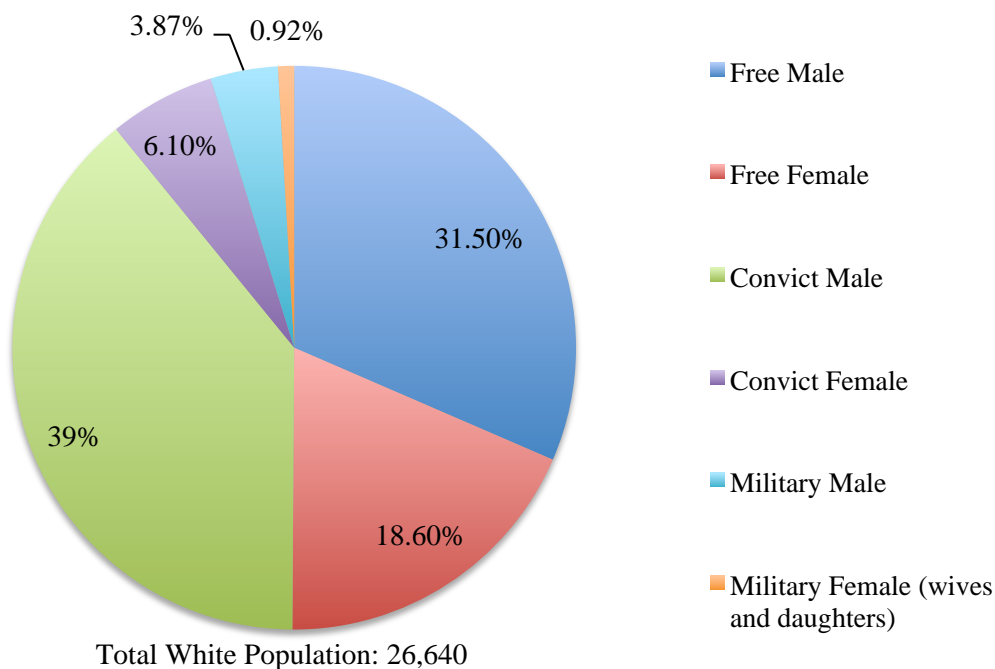
**Figure 2:  
Colonial Demographics 1824**



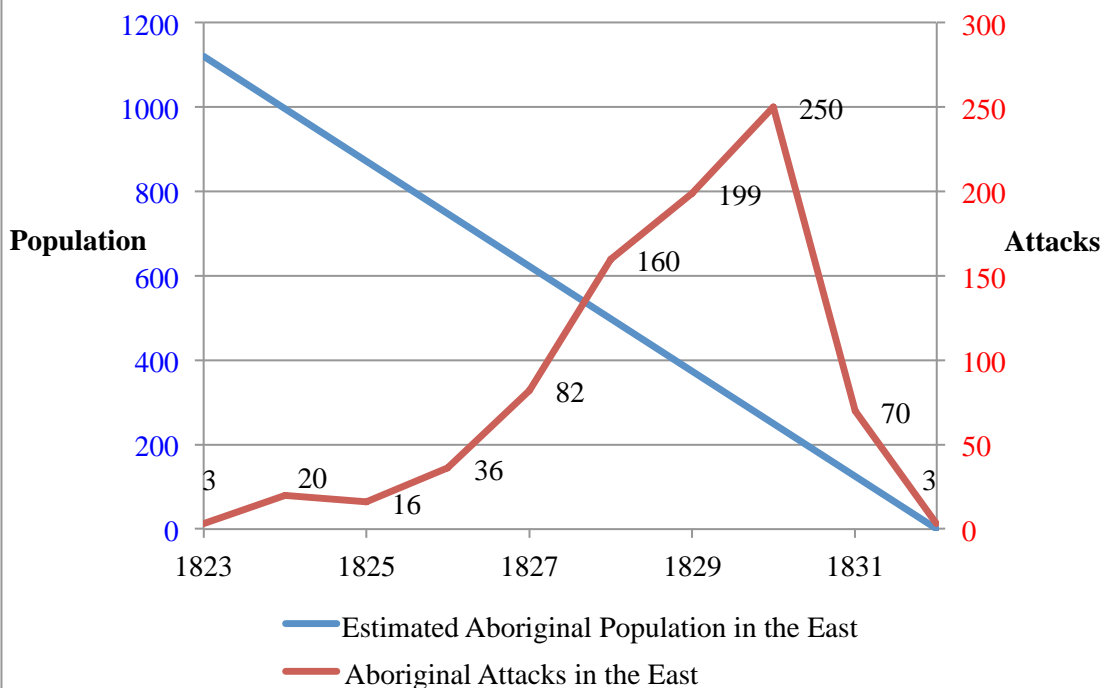
**Figure 3:  
Colonial Demographics 1828**



**Figure 4:  
Colonial Demographics 1831**

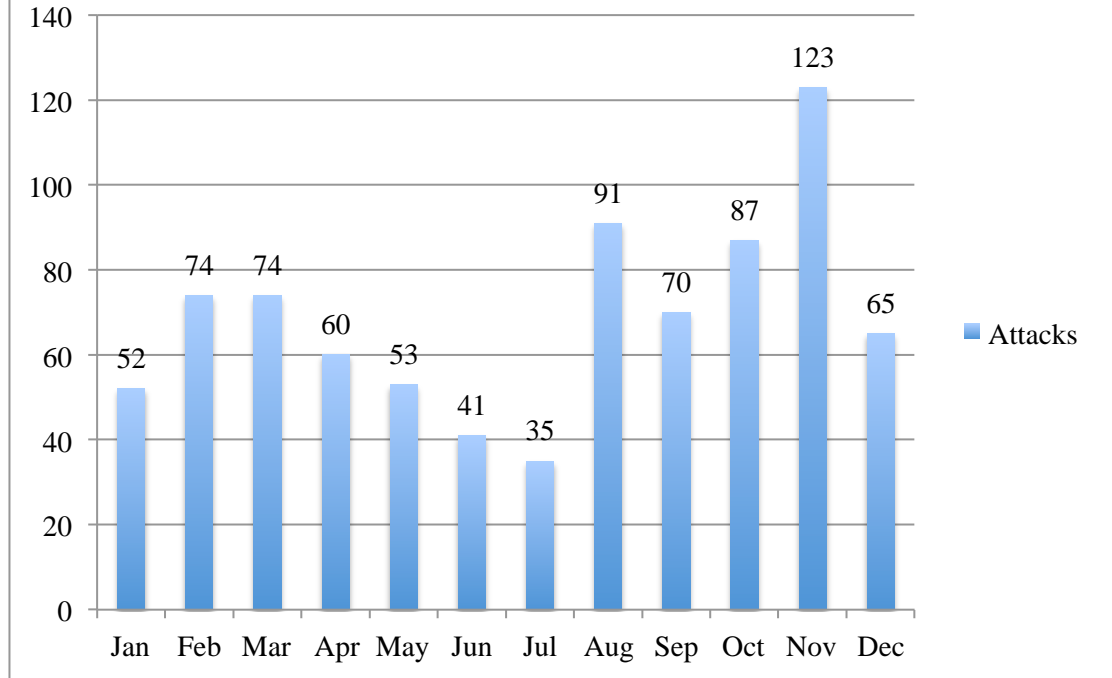


**Figure 5:  
Aboriginal Population and Violence in the East**

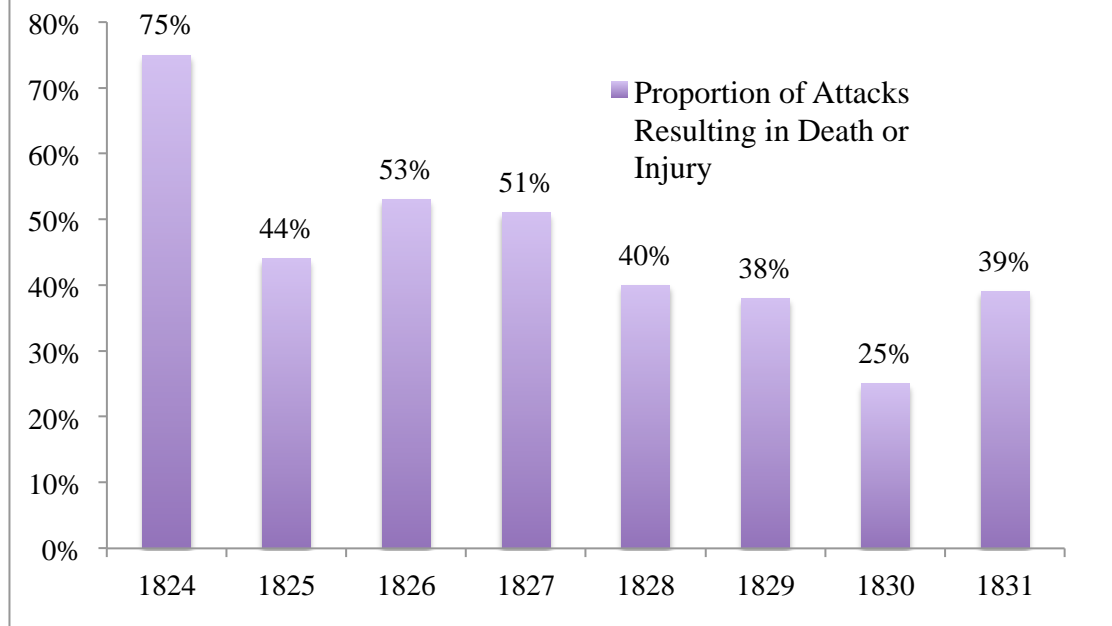


**Figure 6:**  
**Monthly Attacks 1824-31**

\*exclusive of attacks on non-specific dates



**Figure 7:**  
**Proportion of Aboriginal Attacks Resulting in Death or Injury to Colonists**



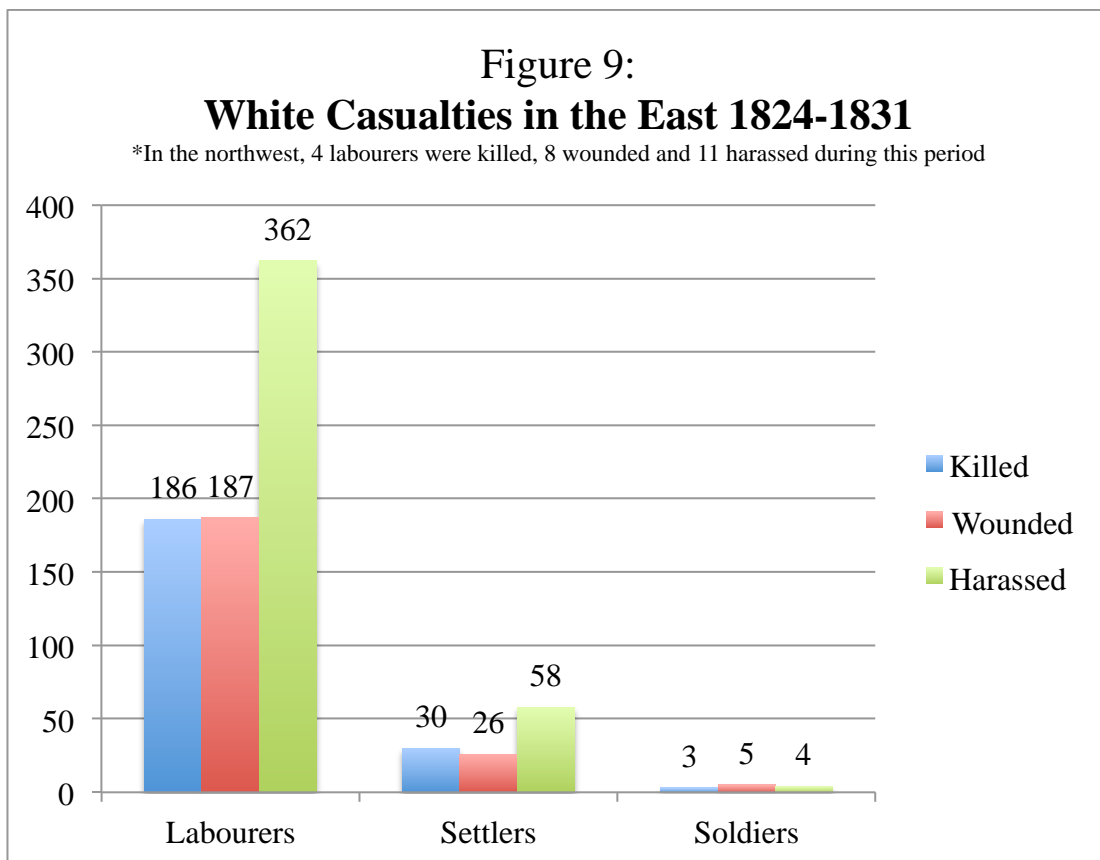
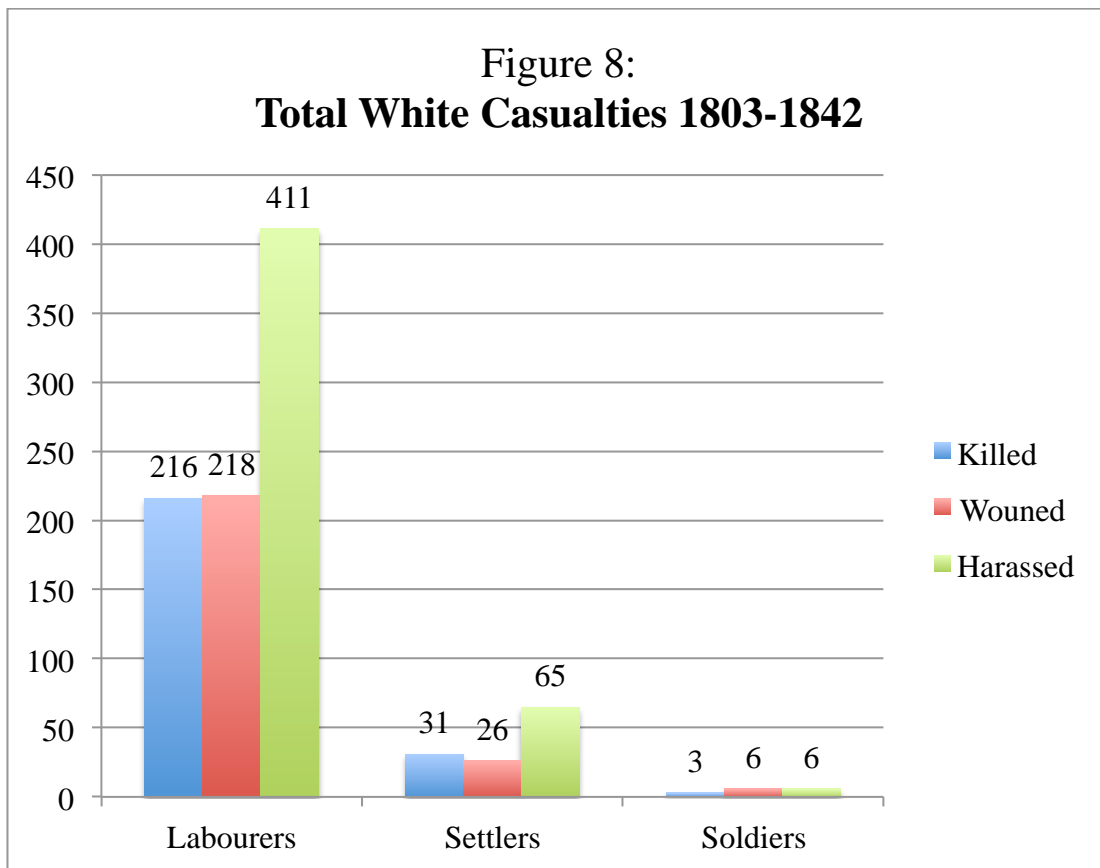


Figure 10:  
**Number of White Women & Children  
 Wounded by Aborigines**

\*no attacks on women or children were recorded prior to 1824 or after 1831

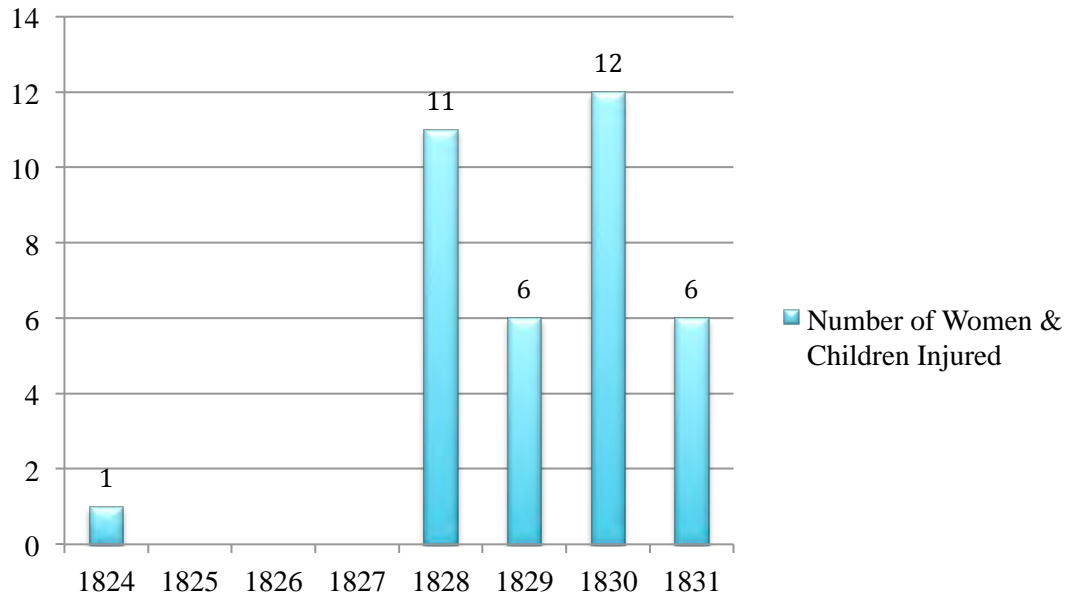
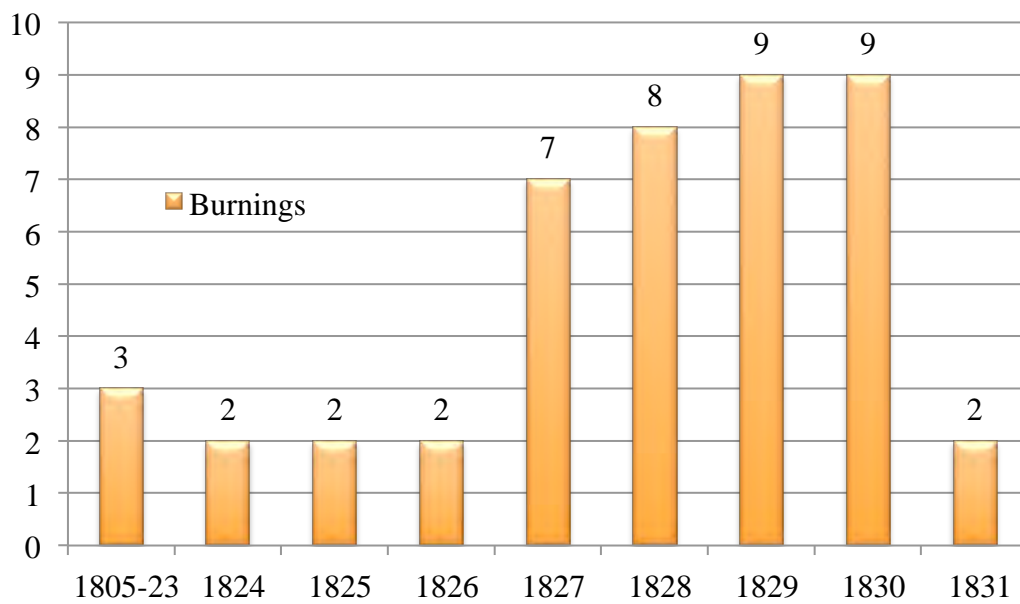


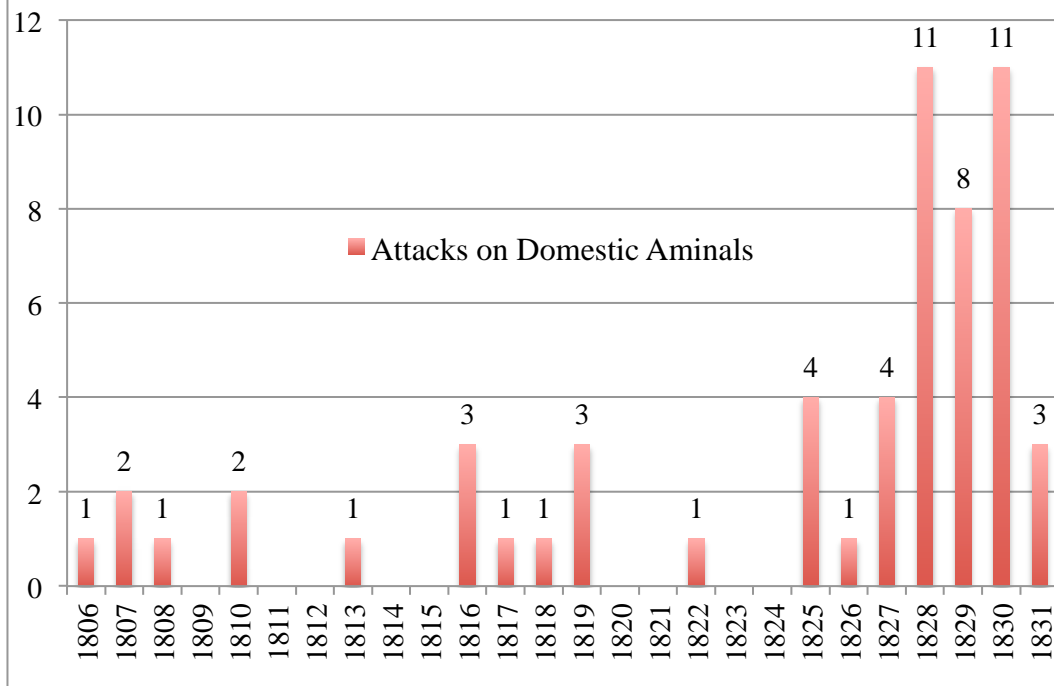
Figure 11:  
**Aboriginal Arson Attacks**

\*exclusive of unsuccessful attempts to set premises alight



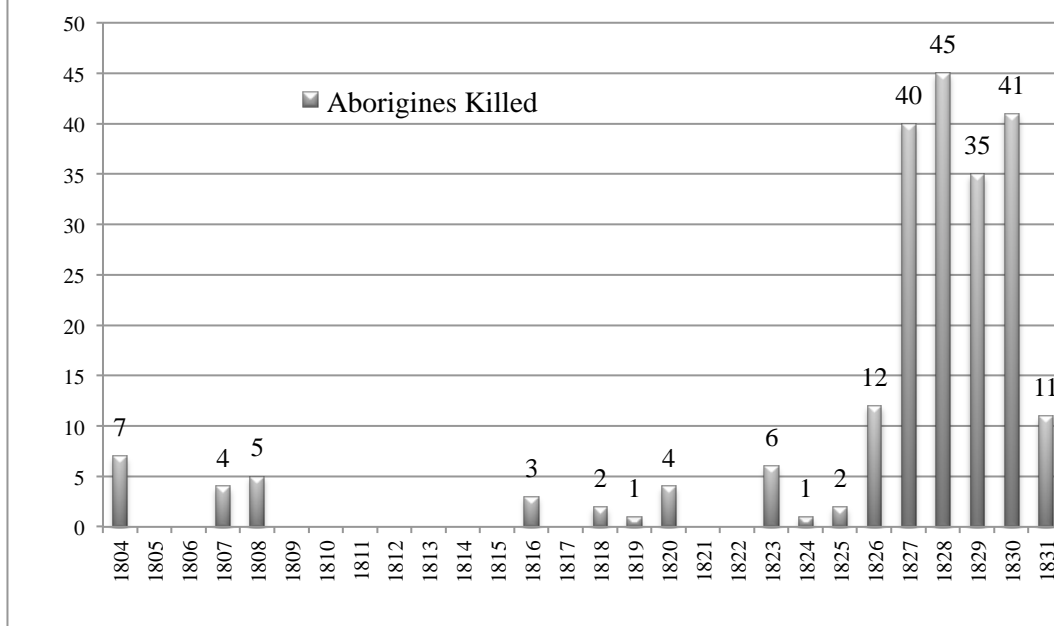
**Figure: 12**  
**Aboriginal Attacks on Domestic Animals**

\*mostly sheep & cattle

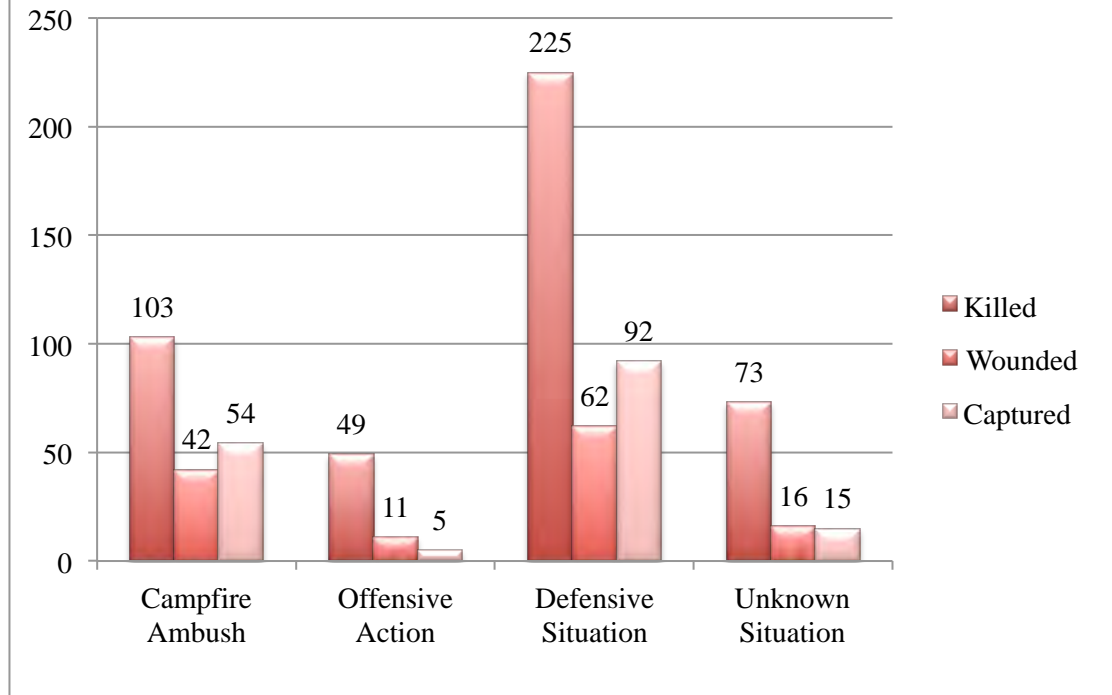


**Figure 13:**  
**Aborigines Killed by Colonists**

\*no date for 129 of the recorded killings



**Figure 14:  
Circumstances of Aboriginal Casualties**



**Figure 15:  
Location of Aborigines Killed**

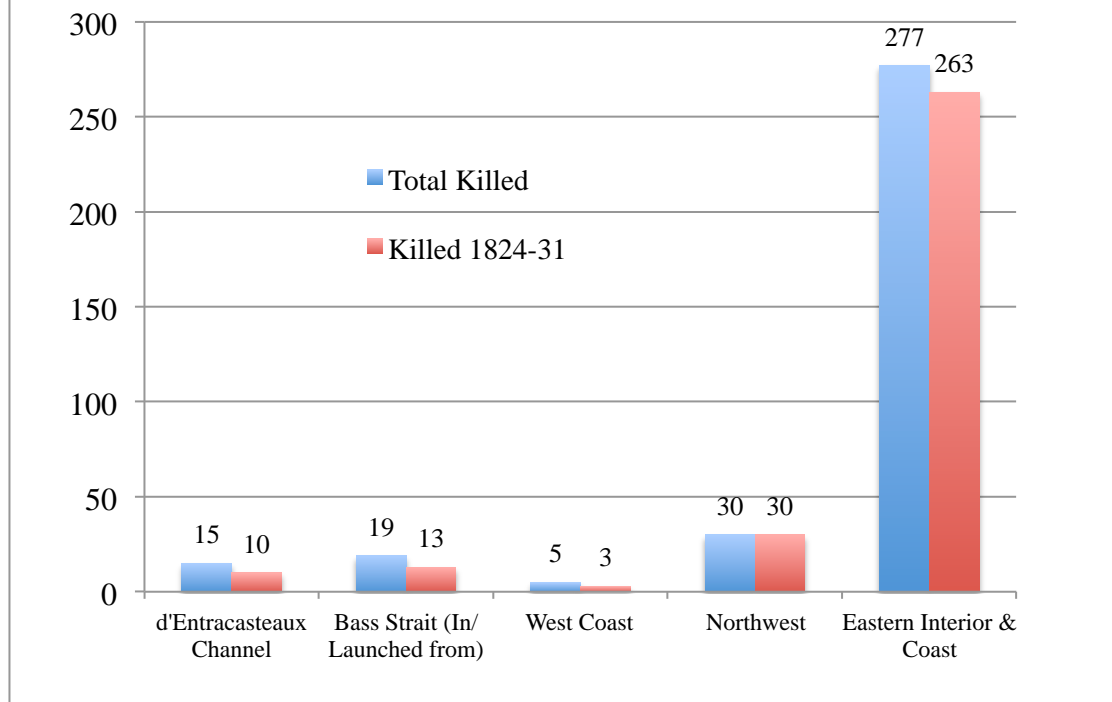




Figure 16:  
Violence in the Northwest

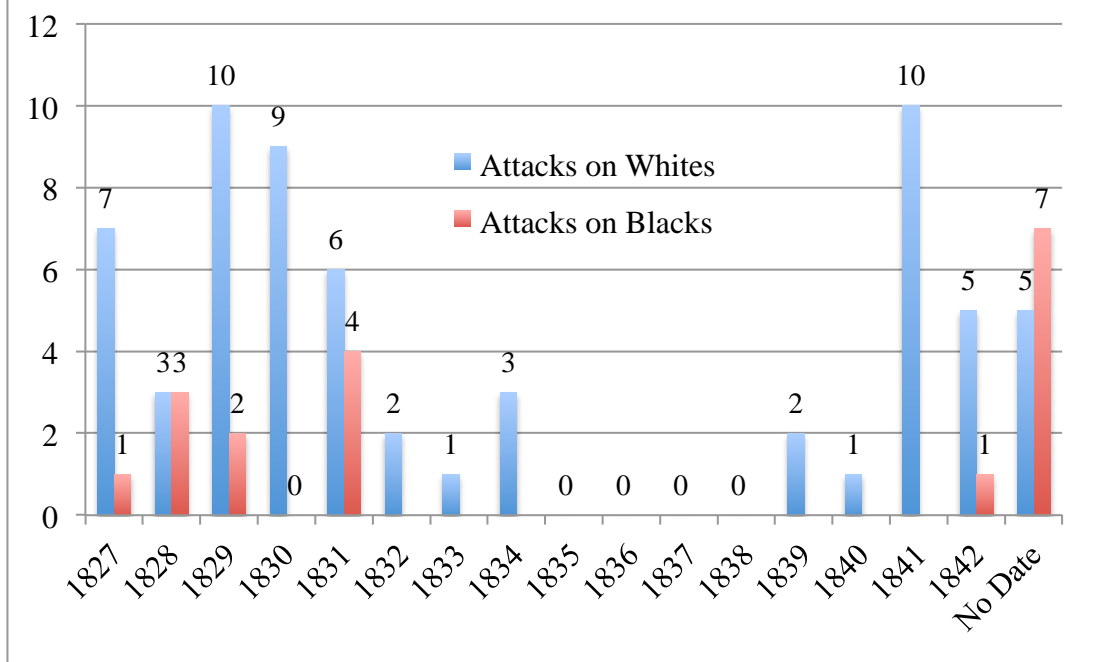


Figure 17:

Frontiers of Conflict

Eastern Frontier

Northwest Frontier

Sea Frontier

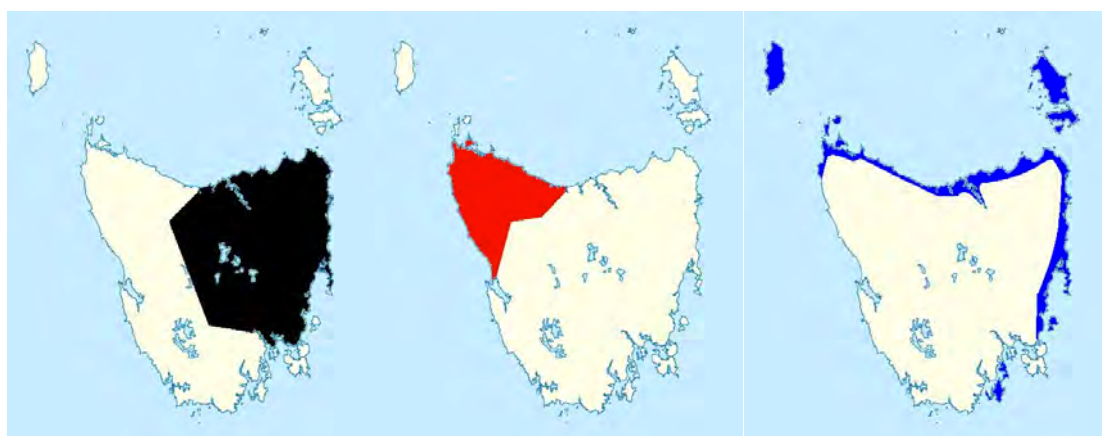


Figure 18:

Van Diemen's Land Company grants  
(Source: McFarlane, *Beyond Awakening*, p. 219)

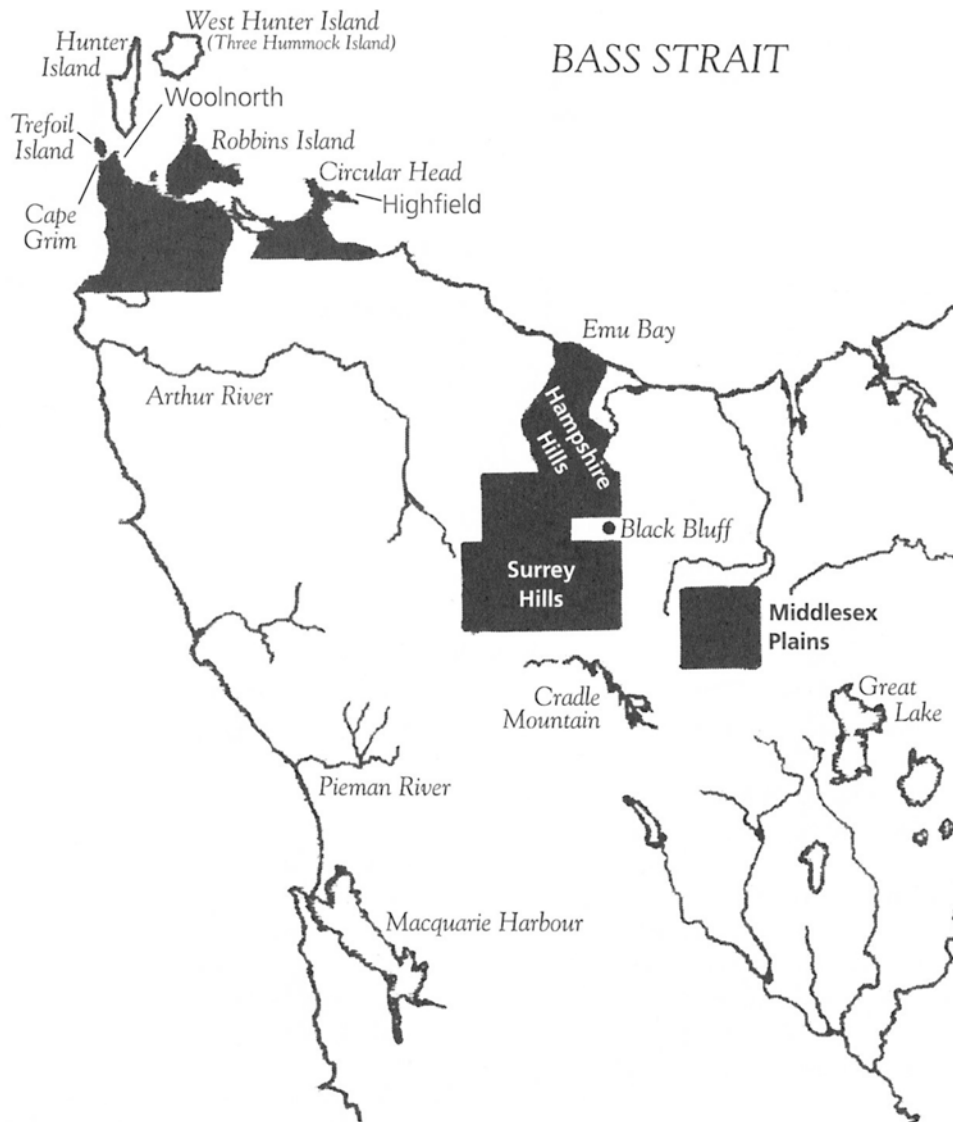


Figure 19:

Rhys Jones' nine tribes of Van Diemen's Land

The author is skeptical of this delineation (see chapter two)

(Source: Alexander, *The Companion to Tasmanian History*, inside cover)



Figure 20:

Map of Black Line operations  
 (Source: Plomley, *Jorgenson and the Aborigines*, map insert)



Figure 21:

## Fortifications

(Source: "Montacute", *Bothwell*, John Glover, 1838, in D. Hansen, *John Glover and the Colonial Picturesque*, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, 2003, p. 117)



Figure 22:

## Campfire Ambush (in South Australia)

(Source: *Ambush at night, Adelaide Hills*, John Michael Skipper, 1860s, courtesy of the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide)





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<sup>1</sup> With the exception of several informative reference works, this bibliography lists only those items that appear in the footnotes.

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<sup>2</sup> Most of these files are not footnoted, but were read for the purpose of contextualising the War. The most important CSO files used cited in this thesis are CSO1/316-31. Several files are unpaginated or have confused pagination, most significantly CSO1/320 & CSO1/324. The former is referenced according to the sections of the file (A-F) and the latter is referenced as unpaginated.



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<sup>3</sup> This is a revised and expanded version of Taylor's MA thesis listed below.

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