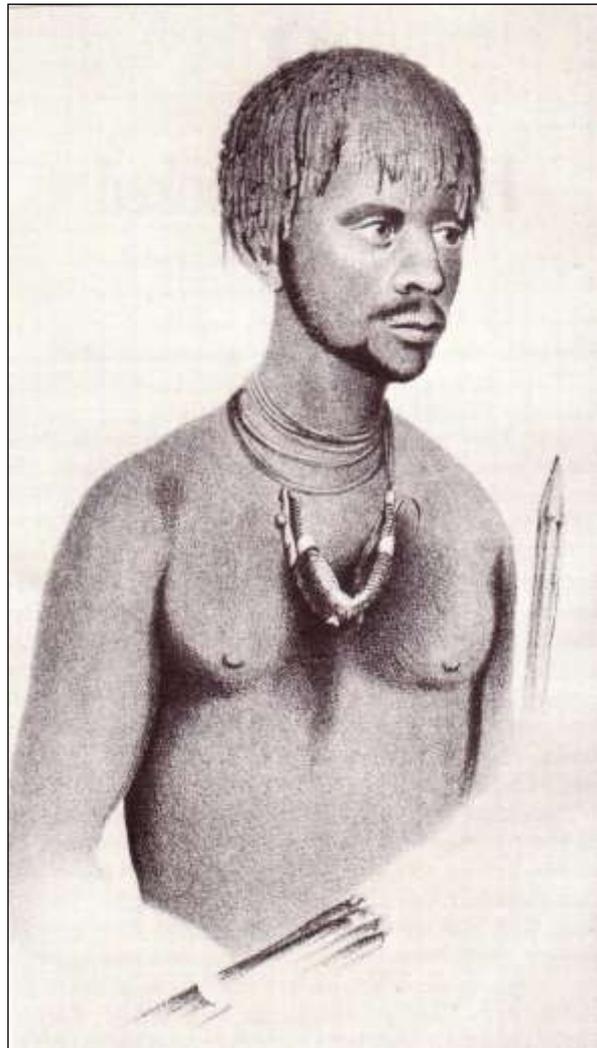


THE TASMANIAN CONFRONTATION

by

Reg. A. Watson



THE TASMANIAN CONFRONTATION.

Confrontation between the natives of Tasmania and the white settlers.

**A detailed report on the steps leading up to the Black Line of
1830 and the aftermath.**

By

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(often referred to erroneously as The Black War)

(C)
by

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1. INTRODUCTION

This is not a story of Aborigines, nor is it a story of the implantation of Western White-man living in one of the most far-flung colonies of the British Empire. It is a story, however, of the inevitable clash between two cultures totally alien to each other; one being urbanised and knowing intense rural cultivation whilst the other, a society which was basically nomadic.

The Tasmanian Confrontation, was the result of this clash continued for decades, culminating with the infamous Black Line. This pseudo military campaign was waged, once and for all, to solve the “Black Problem”.

The black versus white conflict has faults on both sides and we cannot condemn one race over another. It is well worth stating that whilst all white men were not guilty, neither was all blackmen guiltless. It is easy, particularly in this age of political motivation, manipulation and sensitivity, to look in retrospect and to become involved in current issues, which may not allow us to have a factual reflection on past events. We must not forget that the historian must remain a scientist and that his appraisals must not be influenced by the current political and social trends of the day. He should report matter-of-factly.

Before we study The Tasmanian Confrontation and the Line, we must look briefly at the coming of the British and European and at the Blackman and his society. We should endeavour to understand why the Line was organised and appraise the result; was it a success or a failure?

To deduce briefly, the Black Line of 1830 did not achieve the hoped for results. The campaign involved a huge amount of man-hours, cost (1) and military and civilian personnel. (2) The Governor, George Arthur, organised the expedition after pressure primarily from the press and the large landowners. Yet, he did not need a great deal of persuasion to implement the operation. The problem and outrages of the natives were accumulating and his administration was plagued by calls from the populace to implement a plan that was both constructive and decisive. In a letter to Governor Darling (3), Arthur wrote: *“I wish it were in my power to state that the animosity of these savages were abated ... the hostile spirit of the aborigines has hitherto resisted an anxiety to bring about a cordial reconciliation and their movements have baffled all our efforts to take or expel them from the settled districts ... scarcely a day now elapses without some white person either murdered or most severely wounded.”*

The local natives were aggressive and warlike and there can be no doubt. Early historian, Erskine Calder, who arrived in Tasmania on the “*Thomas*” in November 1829, said that they had developed remarkable skill for surprise attacks. They would stealthily creep up on an isolated farm and surround it. After watching for hours, sometimes days, they would take the occupants by surprise, massacre them and burn their house and out-buildings. Then, they would move on to some pioneer family in another part of the island and repeat the massacre.

According to an article published in *The Bulletin* (Feb 23, 1982 P32) a trick they frequently employed was to approach isolated settlers, apparently unarmed. They would wave their arms about in a friendly way and the naive settler, seeing no weapon, would greet them, often offering food or drink. When the natives were close enough to the house they would flick the spears from between their toes and plunge them into the hapless frontiersman and his wife and children. After that, colonists learned to be wary of natives who walked through long grass, knowing that they could be dragging spears between their toes.

The confrontation appeared to commence in the year 1824 and lasted to 1831. During that time there were in excess of 800 aboriginal attacks on settlers and in excess of 400 settlers either being killed or wounded. The panic among the settlers at this time can only be imagined. Everyone on the frontier was afraid.

An answer had to be found and everyone naturally looked to Arthur. With the military and police already over extended in containing the convicts, battling with crime and protecting the settlers from both bushrangers and Blackman, Arthur considered that he a right in calling upon civilian help, who proved willing, particularly when the affair smacked of adventure.

Before we thrust ourselves back to the year 1830, let us even go back further to when the first meeting of white and black occurred, for all subsequent events leading up to 1830 resulted from those very early visitations from the newcomers.

2 VERY EARLY CONTACT

For centuries the lands of the south were a mystery to the European; but in 1642 (24th November) as all school children ought to know, Abel Jansen Tasman, Dutch Navigator and Explorer, sighted the West Coast of Tasmania. It is from his journals, which is recorded the first awareness that this new land was inhabited. No direct contact was made, but Tasman recorded that they heard certain human sounds and sounds resembling a trumpet or small gongs. Clearly the Dutch were being watched. Tasman goes on to remark on the notches in the trees that were obviously made for climbing purposes. As the notches were fully five feet apart, that it was considered by him and his men that “*the natives here must be of very tall stature*”.

The death soon after of the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies, Anthony van Diemen to whom Tasman was then under the command, put an end to further Dutch efforts in the exploration of Australia.

Probably the first direct contact between the two peoples occurred during the voyage of the French Navigator, Marion du Fresne when on the 3rd March, 1772, he sighted the west coast of Tasmania. (4) Marion continued his voyage and anchored at a bay called by Abel Tasman, Frederick Henry Bay. This bay is now called Blackmans Bay on the Forestier Peninsular, not to be confused with Blackman's Bay, Channel. This latter bay was named after a Mr Blackman, not after the blackman. It was at the former bay the first contact took place.

This contact can be separated into three developments:

(i) Initially the natives ignored them and went about their daily routine. Their wives and children accompanied them.

(ii) Attempts were made by the French to "win them over" (5) by offering them presents, which they refused. Conditions remained cordial by when Captain Marion lit a pile of wood; the Blacks saw it as a challenge or a declaration of war.

(iii) Unfortunately hostilities resulted. The natives threw rocks and spears whilst the French retaliated with their muskets, wounding several and killing one.

The first blood had been spilt. Decades of conflict were to follow this small, but unfortunate misunderstanding. Marion left the bay six days afterwards. It was regrettable, especially for the future that those particular natives were of the most war-like of the natives. Nevertheless, now the people, who could offer no effective resistance, had formally come in violent contact with a race of men who were strong and compelling.

Captain Furneaux in March 1773 revisited Frederick Henry Bay and although he saw many signs of natives, he had no contact with them. When Captain Cook visited Adventure Bay four years later natives, who showed no fear, approached them. Cook treated them kindly and the two people departed on this occasion without any disagreement. Cook's surgeon, William Anderson, wrote of the natives: "*Had little of that fierce and wild appearance common people in their situation, but on the contrary seemed mild and cheerful, without reserve or jealousy of strangers.*"

Frenchman, d'Entrecasteaux visited the island in 1792. One of his surveying parties, under the command of d'Aunibeau, at an inlet on the Huon estuary, on landing came in contact with four natives. Squatting around a fire, they ran when they saw the Frenchman come near, leaving behind various items, such as water-bags made of kelp, crabs, other shell fish and kangaroo-skin coverings. In a gesture the whitemen left behind handkerchiefs, knives, biscuits, cheese and an earthen jug. An aboriginal man returned and regained his flint that he had left behind. These natives were described as "*not very black and had beards and woolly hair.*"

There followed another encounter when a boatload of sailors disturbed eight aborigines warming themselves by a fire. Again they fled, but an old lady was caught, given a handkerchief and was let go.

In January 1793 there was another interaction on the north arm of Recherche Bay with several native families. It was a friendly contact with one of the French party, Labillardiere displaying the effect of muskets. While this frightened the natives, their men in turn displayed their talents with spears. There were further contacts, all very friendly, but was time for the French to go and the natives, it seemed, were sorry to see them do so.

The French left detailed descriptions of the natives... "*pleasant faces with a kindly gaze, the eyes deep set (especially the men's) and the chin prominent, the men bearded. The hair was short and woolly.*" These descriptions, however, are not born out by the French artist who accompanied them, Piron. According to Labillardiere, polygamy existed and there appeared to be no chief, although d'Auribeau doubted the polygamy side.

On February 16th, the French made contact with some other natives living on Bruny Island. This lot was different and was somewhat less friendly and much more nervous. (5A)

Alas, things were moving to a climax...

3.EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE ORGANISATION OF THE 'LINE'

In September 1803, under the initiative of Governor Philip Gidley King of New South Wales, Lieutenant John Bowen, formed a settlement at Risdon Cove (erroneously called Restdown) (6) on the River Derwent. The Risdon Cove site was determined not by Bowen, but however, if a superior site was found the Governor did not bind him by orders. The number of those who sailed was small, just 49 in all, which included 24 convicts.

Some natives were seen when the ships arrived, but they were very shy and retired from the cove. Bowen considered that he would be well off if he never saw them again.

Earlier in the year (March) in the north of the island Captain J. Chase master of the sailing ship *Good Intent* sailed to investigate the potential of the Hunter's Island groups for sealing; he wrote: "*We afterwards overhauled to Hunter's Is in search of seals and found those islands 12 or 13 in number, well populated with natives. They appeared to be much terrified at our approach having no canoes, swam from one island to another with surprising facility against very strong current.*" (Wealth for Toil – a history of the north west – western Tasmania 1825-1900 by Kerry Pink.) This was more an observation rather than any physical contact.

In 1804, Governor King instructed Lt-Governor David Collins to remove Bowen's settlement either to Sullivan's Cove or to Port Dalrymple. Bowen was in Sydney at that time and Collins had already been despatched. On Bowen's arrival back to the Derwent, he found that Collins had formed his settlement at Sullivan's Cove. Young Bowen left the Derwent in August of that year for Sydney and in 1805 he sailed to England never to return.

During the administration of Collins a few cases of aggression or violence on the part of the natives were reported. The happy-go-lucky, warm Rev. Robert

Knopwood generally spoke well of the natives. In 1805, the north was settled under the command of Colonel William Paterson.

The first recorded incidents between white and black since permanent settlement was on the 4th and 15th January 1804. Though they were small encounters and no blood was shed, the settlers now, unfortunately, considered themselves in danger and were on their guard.

The first casualties occurred just four months later at Risdon Cove when Lieutenant Moore, who was confronted by a large party of natives, ordered his troops to open fire. Several of the natives were killed, others were wounded. Dr J. Mountgarret said that several hundred natives confronted Moore (8).

Later years in 1996, when the Ray Groom Liberal State Government handed the historic site of Risdon Cove to the Aboriginal Land Council (ALC) under the administration of Mike Mansell, there were erroneous claims concerning the affair. Mr Mansell said that Lieutenant Moore was drunk at the time; I have found no evidence of this. Another claim is that hundreds were massacred. This is simply not true. Hundreds of natives appeared but accounts of the incident are sparse. The Rev Bobby Knopwood for his entry May 4th 1804 records a letter from Dr Mountgarret to Collins about the incident, but does not mention how many of the aborigines were killed. A supposed witness, Edward White, 26 years later while giving evidence before Gov George Arthur, stated that he knew not how many were shot, but believed that a great many were slaughtered. How many, is equated to “a great many”? Was it ten or one hundred? The problem with Edward White’s testimony is that he lied. He said he was there at the time (May 1804) when in actual fact, he did not arrive at the colony at Risdon Cove, the earliest June 1804, but probably much later. There are several Edward White’s and it difficult to establish which Edward White. Therefore his testimony can be fully discounted. Another controversial point is that the confrontation was most probably NOT on the Risdon Cove site. A forensic search for any type of evidence of the encounter has turned up exactly nil. By my reckoning, I surmise that the affair occurred at where the highway roundabout exists (July 1999 and still the same June 2013) and where the East Derwent Highway joins the Risdon Road. If not there, it could have been further away near the Bedlam Walls, a good mile away. Or it could be west to where Lt Bowen had his government house and vegetable gardens at Risdon Cove. Supposedly a claim for the site by the ALC was to honour the place where the Aborigines were killed. The exact location is rather difficult to find, but in reality the decision to hand over the Risdon Cove Park was political rather than cultural or historical.

It would appear that the meeting of the sad affair was purely accidental. The natives, not out of curiosity, were returning quite innocently to their old corroboree ground only to find that strangers occupied it.

Knopwood (9) makes mention the death of two natives and writes that they were shot by “my man” who apparently was threatened whilst out kangarooing by 60 natives.

As stated there is no definite historical evidence to suggest Lt William Moore was drunk at the time.

Another “witness” was the well-known sealer, Captain James Kelly, who said that the numbers reported killed, “have been estimated as high as 50”. It should be noted, however, that Kelly was NOT at Risdon Cove at the time. His comments were noted in the Minutes of Evidence. (1830)

The conflict had not begun in earnest. Many more atrocities and murders were to follow, resulting ultimately with the eradication of the full-blooded Tasmanian aborigines.

It would be well for us, at this stage to pause and ask; just who were these people?

The Tasmanian Aborigines were quite different, racially, to his mainland counterpart. J. Bonwick (early Tasmanian historian and school teacher) suggests that he preceded the Australian Aborigine and that the migration of the latter aborigine forced the former south and it was with the sinking of the land bridge now called Bass Strait that allowed the Tasmanian future survival until the coming of the white man.

Last century the Tasmanian Aborigine was identified as being of a Papuan race (Ulotrici) and not the Indian Aborigine, (Cymotrici) meaning the mainlander. In addition there were no dingoes in Tasmania, suggesting the Aboriginal invasion of Australia was a recent occurrence and not 60,000 plus years ago. The dingo has been in Australia for fewer than 4,000 years. Indeed there is increasing evidence to show that there was even a pre-mainland* Aborigine race here in Australia. Australian megalithic sites are dated from 20,000 to 25,000 years old and the race that erected these structures has been termed Wadjack Man, therefore proto-Australian. It is possible these people were fairer skinned.

The Tasmanian did not know the boomerang or the art of the mainlander. Whilst the Australian had straight, coarse hair, the Tasmanian had curly or woolly hair. The numbers in 1803 were not large; perhaps as few as 800 or as many as 7,000. However, according to a brilliant article which appeared in The Bulletin (Feb 23, 1982) by Patricia Cobern, the Tasmanians were dying out in any case because of their own life style. In short, life had become intolerable. Authoress Elizabeth Wayland Barber, in her fascinating book, “The Mummies of Urumchi” (1A) stated that it was because of isolation and non-interaction with other peoples and cultures, which was so detrimental to the natives of Tasmania. She states, “*The Tasmanians, for instance, cut off for several thousand years from the rest of humanity, not only made no progress but actually backslid, losing one important skill after another, such as how to make bone tools (including needles for sewing clothes - an inconvenient loss) and how to craft handles to stone blades (to make tools capable of felling trees and hollowing out boats - a fatal loss)*” (P.206-207) Physically The Tasmanian was slim and swift in his movements. Knopwood described him as a “*well made man*”. Their language was considered melodious and their dialects varied considerably. Dancing was a recreation. They lived in crude huts and were exceedingly superstitious.

As a weapon they used a spear, which was along thin tea tree pole, ten feet or more in length, pointed at both ends. The other weapon was the waddy. Stones were used in a fight. Mostly they were naked. How long had they inhabited this temperate land? It is debated but can say for at least 10,000 years.

A curiosity has developed. Since the coming of the Whiteman, various skeletons have been unearthed which show a native of extraordinary height with very large skulls. These 'giants' were over 7 foot tall. The study of these people has not seriously been undertaken. Does it possible that there were actually two races of aborigines exist at the time of the coming of the whiteman?

After Collins, came "mad" Colonel Thomas Davey R.M. Davey was not, however, without humanity and endeavoured to curb the cruelty that some settlers were showing towards the aborigines. Davey hoped to establish a friendly intercourse in an attempt to win their confidence. Alas his hopes were not fulfilled.

The tension produced the inevitable consequences. The aborigines began slaughtering cattle and sheep and as settlement grew the number of conflicts increased. Murder and killings resulted on both sides. The situation had deteriorated further when Lt-Governor Sorell arrived. Sorell provided for the native children many of who had become orphans. According to Jane Sorell, biographer of Governor Sorell (see Major Sources used) Sorell shared Governor Macquarie's human attitude towards aboriginals, and two weeks after his arrival issued a manifesto stating that it was his duty as well as his disposition to prevent and punish any ill treatment of the natives. To quote: (P.37). "*The cruelties that were being perpetrated upon the aborigines were, repugnant to humanity and disgraceful to the British character.*"

Whilst, however Sorell's administration was no doubt honourable, it appeared to have lacked the firmness to punish effectively the numerous cases of where the law was broken.

When Commissioner Bigge visited Van Diemen's Land, he said very little regarding the affair, even though the position had deteriorated. Another ugly aspect was to arise. Those natives who had left their tribes and chiefs roamed into the major towns and took to pillaging and alcohol. In time, many of these "tame" natives became, in Rev. Mr. Horton's words, "*demoralised savages*". Understanding and tolerance was at an all-time low with both peoples. To begin with there were great misconceptions of the blacks by the whites. A large number of settlers believed that treachery embittered every mind and that they delighted in blood.

Within the first twenty-five years of European settlement hundreds of clashes were officially reported. The reported incidents in 1827 when there were 82. The previous year there was 36. In the year 1821 there were no reported incidents. By 1829 the year of the greatest number of incidents (250) the white population was nearly 15,000 while the native population may have dropped to less than 1,000.

However, the aboriginal attacks on whites were very ferocious. It was not only the loss of life, but the financial loss, because of the burning of homes, the

killing of stock and even the destruction of crops. These continual losses were a major setback for the settlers.

One appalling incident was that of Patrick Gough on the 9th October 1828 at Lake Tiberius, when he was confronted with a bleeding wounded daughter. He found his wife brutally wounded (was to die some days later), his four year old daughter Elisha killed and his 13 month old baby wounded. According to his dying wife, the black man whom she begged to not kill her and her children, replied, “*No you white bitch we will kill you.*”

One of the main areas of danger was the Blue Hills, east of Oatlands.

At Swanport, a James Stanton was killed with his body being dreadfully mutilated. It was a common practice to disfigure the bodies.



The grave of James Taylor Jnr who was killed by aborigines at Kirklands, not far from Campbell Town.
Reg Watson photo.

Aboriginals never attacked at night and the most at risk were labourers. To counter the attacks, there was a great demand for a military presence. Guard dogs were used and were very effective in warning the settlers of an imminent attack. The best form of defence against the increasing boldness of the ‘enemy’ was the gun, which in those days was not all that efficient.

In February 1830 seven year old James Plaster was speared to death. He is buried in the St Mary’s church-yard, Kempton (pic below).



James Plaster (7) was speared and killed at Constitution Hill
Reg Watson photo

Many people, however, over the years on both sides were killed and maimed. Both groups committed shocking atrocities with the killing of not just men, but of women and children. By the late 1820s the settlers were so alarmed that the press was screaming to the new Governor, George Arthur, through its headlines. (10) “THE GOVERNMENT MUST REMOVE THE NATIVES.” Arthur was forced into a corner. Now, it was the time for greater concerted action.

Arthur had previously implemented plans to solve the problem. In 1828, a soldier was sent to the natives to issue rations. However, four years before a man by the name of George Augustus Robinson arrived in Van Diemen’s Land. In May, 1829 Arthur employed Robinson as a conciliator. Robinson, full of Victorian zeal for his God and faith could finally claim much success in his peaceful efforts, but when the new decade began the settlers, particularly the landowners, were in no mood for conciliation. Their feelings ran high and the sometimes hysterical “Colonial Times” said “*until the aborigines are sent out the island there will be continual slaughter on both sides which no human hand can possibly prevent.*” (11)

For a while Robinson’s methods were to take a back seat.

*Because of the science of genetics, a study by Mr Mike Collins from Western Australia called “Aboriginal Heredity by Blood Group” (2002) show that there have been several waves of settlers in Australia by various racial groups, long before the coming of the white man.

4. THE LINE

It is sad, but a lot of misconceptions have been written on the “Line’. Historian, Henry Reynolds, for instance, states that the Tasmanian Aborigines were “*a superior force of guerrilla fighters who outclassed the bumbling, red-coated British soldiers.*” This, as we will see, is simply not correct. He went to state that these “*guerrilla fighters*” should be included on the honour roll at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. He then criticised the concept of Anzac Day as we know it, believing the day should be an inclusive national day which commemorates and mourns black Australians who died defending their homelands from invading Europeans*.

Well, let's look further at the subject...

Gov. George Arthur was the most famous Governor of the Island. He was never popular and was often called a petty tyrant. By the time of his appointment in 1824 the conflict was in full swing. It was not a confrontation waged in the conventional sense. No large artillery was used, nor was there any glory to be found.

Arthur made a decision. It was time to round up the natives once and for all. They then could be placed on one of the Bass Strait Islands, preferably either King or Flinders where the aborigines could live contented unmolested lives and be looked after (12). Robinson's efforts could wait. The plan itself seemed simple.

The aborigines were roughly encased in area, which was bounded by the sea on the east to the rugged mountains in the west. The plan was to organise a great cordon of troops and civilian auxiliaries, which would march from the north, west and south, gradually closing on the narrow land bridge of the Tasman Peninsular. The Peninsular is joined to the mainland Tasmania by a thin neck, which would easily be controlled by soldiers.

Colonel Arthur was a soldier. He served with distinction in such places as Egypt, Sicily and Jamaica. Earlier in his career he went to British Honduras and gained promotion. He is recorded to have said, "*promotion being my idol*". Arthur in Honduras became not just a good soldier, but also a good administrator. He was full of religious zeal and was in favour of Wilberforce's efforts to get rid of slavery.

To the Colonial Office, Van Diemen's Land was primarily a gaol. They appointed him as an administrator with the objective to make the colony an efficient gaol.

When he arrived he ordered the capture of the aboriginal leaders and further ordered that hostile natives were to be treated as "*open enemies*". On the 1st April 1828, he issued a proclamation forbidding all natives to enter the settled districts. At times, however, he attempted as we have seen friendly parley. Yet Arthur told Murray, a journalist, (13) that the "*hope of conciliation cannot be reasonably entertained.*"

Arthur was to personally supervise the operation in the field. He issued a number of Proclamations outlining his plan and strategy. Hostilities against the natives took a final step with the Government Order No. 9 (9th September 1830) when he called upon the inhabitants of the colony at large... "*that whoever embarks in the service will do zealously and firmly and that he will devote his whole mind and energies exclusively to insure its success; for as services of this kind have on some former occasions been greatly perverted, His Excellency is desirous of cautioning all those who feel the necessity of coming forward on the present occasion, that it is not a matter of amusement or recreation, but a cause of the most important and serious kind, which the lives and property of the whole community are more or less at stake.*"

Consequently he left his pregnant wife, to direct manoeuvres. 1830 was particularly a nasty year for aboriginal attacks and killings on white settlers and their stock. From 1 January 1830 through to the middle of March, there were at least two attacks per week some of which was very ferocious. As an example: 15th March 1830 – “A hut ;near the mouth of the Carlton River attacked; a man and woman dangerously wounded, the latter four spear wounds and a cut on the head, supposed mortal. Another woman speared through the arm”. Again: 17th February 1830 – “John Blackaby and Philip Norboy killed in Dysart Parish, Oatlands at noon today, Lawrence Murray, servant to Mr Bell killed. A child killed at Bagdad near the road side.” In essence there were probably more white people killed by the natives, than natives being killed by whitemen. It was quite apparent to Arthur that something had to be done...

On the 25th September the plan of the campaign was minutely described in a government order and operations were fixed for the 7th October, 1830. Briefly its thrust was against the Oyster Bay and Big River tribes. Volunteers came from all over the colony which drew a sarcastic remark from the Colonial Times: “Of all the banditti we were recollect as coming before our eyes on the stage, none have equalled the mob which left Hobart Town Tuesday last in pursuance of the proposed operations in the interior.”

It was plan that George Augustus Robinson was very much against.

It was a curious mix, both master and servant.

The Governor was, at least, ever watchful of the volunteers. He realised that any aborigine captured by them could be spared little mercy; therefore he issued a stern warning and ordered that only two out of five civilians could bear arms. Soon a chain of posts were occupied, under Captain Welman, from St. Patrick's Head on the East Coast including the source of St. Paul's River and stretching to Campbell Town. A second chain under Major Douglas, extending from Campbell Town passed south of the Macquarie River to its junction with the Lake River. Both divisions marching in a southerly direction formed a line from Oyster Bay Tier to Lackey's Mills. During these manoeuvres, a party was sent to examine the Tier, extending from Swan River to Spring Bay.

In the first week about 3,000 men were found in the field, with about 550 coming from Launceston. Both towns were virtually void of any able bodied males. *The Colonial Times* was not enthusiastic. It stated: “Were there fifty times as many person to assist in the expedition as are now likely to come forward there would be but little chance of success.” (24th Sept. 1830)

Other parties were employed under Captain Wentworth to force the aborigines from the neighbourhood of the lakes in the west, towards the same centre, advancing due east to the Jordan. The line being compressed and thickened by joining settlers were then moved forward, followed by scourging parties, to guard against their escape. Fires were kept burning to direct the troops who were expected to march in unbroken order.

The distribution of provisions to this force was entrusted to Messrs. Scott, Wedge and Sharland, surveyors. The natives caused Mr Sharland's later death when they robbed him and his men of muskets, powder and shot.

The front line extended for one hundred and twenty miles and Arthur's plan was to have each man sixty yards from his comrade. Even after just one day, the impracticability of this idea because of geography was apparent. Henry Melville (14) was to write: "*During the advance of the line, the despatches received and sent equalled those forwarded by the allied armies during the last European war - in fact everything was carried on as if it were a great war in miniature: the reports - the gazetted proclamations of the advance of the lines - the stories told by the persons of their falling in with the natives and so forth kept the people alive and caused a fund of amusement.*"

Unfortunately, like many military men Arthur over-rated the efficacy of his forces (15). He told a fellow officer that he was perplexed in fighting such an enemy and every hour he faced the danger of the blacks passing through his lines. Yet, in his private journal he writes: "*All is going well.*"

To increase the number in the field it was allowed to have assigned servants to join, but Arthur made it known that, "*The police magistrates and masters will be careful to entrust with arms only such prisoners as they can place confidence in.*" Each prisoner was issued with a pass describing the divisions to which he was attached.

As the campaign continued the weather deteriorated. Crossing rivers was dangerous and bridges of a temporary nature had to be constructed. Rapidly the enthusiasm of the campaigners began to wane. There were many desertions. At night parties were divided into three and fires were lit. Guards were placed within hailing distance from each other. To check his troops and to bolster their morale, Arthur rode continuously up and down the line, from the Clyde to Spring Bay. Fatigue, however, was setting in and it was increasingly apparent that little success was to be made of this adventure.

Few of the campaigners ever saw a black. The Line was not without its casualties. One settler was killed when four aborigines attacked him with his pitchfork. When the other settlers searched for the murderers, they found a wounded young lady, Miss Peters. This brave girl had been speared in the breast. Tragically, she was to die.

To the north, the leaving of settlements by those who joined the Line left many homes inadequately defended. A Mr Guildas who lived on the River Tamar and now was temporarily alone was attacked with spears and killed. The aborigines plundered his cottage, destroying everything.

On the 22nd October it was thought that at least partial success was possible. On that date, a number of natives were discovered hunting and were closely watched. Night fell and the natives' fires were lit. The whites waited until twilight when they attacked. Quickly the majority of the natives fled, although two were shot whilst doing so. The attackers managed to capture a man and a boy of about 15 years. The fleeing natives left a large store of spears and baskets behind.

Five days later there was an attempt by the blackmen to cross the line. Many of them tried to break through when they observed a sentry resting. The luckless man was assailed by spears, but apparently without effect. The sentry

sounded the alarm and help arrived almost immediately. The blacks retreated and only a few of them were seen.

As the days passed there was a mounting concern regarding the low capture rate (only two). On one occasion it was discovered that the natives had actually been receiving help from certain white men, to elude them from capture. Tracks were seen that gave the impression of shoe-nails and other evidence of the presence of white men. It was assumed that the whites were informing the blacks of the Line's progress and whereabouts.

The Line and the aborigines came in contact again when at Norfolk Plains, a tribe of forty were pursued right through to the Shannon. The blacks were followed for three days, but without success so the whites returned. The blacks continued, surprised an unsuspecting settler and killed him.

The several murders during the campaign made those remaining behind naturally nervy. A number of the campaigners accidentally came upon a number of sawyers, who dropped their tools and ran for their lives, thinking that the noises were from an advancing tribe. It was for some time before the sawyers were persuaded that all was safe.

As fatigue and disillusionment increased combined with home-sickness, discipline and observance relaxed. The aborigines were able to take advantage of this and filter through the Line.

Much of the bush was impenetrable so that the natives just remained unobserved. When this was realised by the campaigners, they would surround such thickets and attempt to storm them, but with no success.

The Governor suspected that convicts had incorporated themselves with the blacks. This belief was not without foundation. Arthur himself came across a man called Savage who testified that natives who came under the influence of a white man named Brown surrounded him. Brown allowed Savage to escape. Savage was fortunate to have a conversation with this fellow and exhorted him to surrender the blacks. Brown replied that he would not do so and testified that he had been to Hobart Town on several occasions to buy clothes for the black women and muskets for himself. Upon hearing of this story, Arthur and his companions started off in pursuit, but by the time they had got to Mill's Lagoon where the incident had taken place there was no trace of them.

Disappointment followed disappointment. The military at times were less disciplined than some of the civilians. The soldiers were not permanent settlers and had no interest in the colony. They rated themselves as superior to the civilian campaigners and therefore decided not to co-operate, if possible, with them.

The officers sadly, were not always examples to their men. Under their leadership, discipline relaxed. Colonel Arthur complained the "delay in carrying out orders of Major Douglas and Captain Wentworth." Excuses were given by the officers to exempt themselves from this inglorious, if not, humiliating affair. One officer presented a doctor's certificate saying that he was ill and must return home. Another said that he must go back to Hobart Town on some vague and

mysterious reason. Supplies were deliberately allowed to fall low so excuses were made to procure more with a trip to the capital.

Arthur, aware of the falling morale, "*told them off!*" This only had the effect of dampening morale even further and the officers called for an inquiry to vindicate their honour.

By late November, it was apparent to Arthur that the results hoped for were not forthcoming. The expenses accumulated to 30,000 pounds in an age where Keynesian economic policies prompting Government spending was not appreciated. Henry Melville was later to write that it cost in excess of 35,000 pounds. Only two blacks had been captured, so on the 26th November 1830, and Arthur decided that further efforts would be futile. The troops were therefore dismissed with praise and thanks.

Immediately Arthur's order was criticised by some. It was claimed that the Line forced several hundred of the blacks to be enclosed, but by now the Governor was not deceived; this was only supposition. Arthur, as a soldier, felt disgraced at the failure. He blamed it on his unreliable personnel and he knew that there was now ample ammunition that would be used by his political enemies. In his despatch to Sydney Arthur praised those who participated, "*All classes of the community have manifested the greatest alacrity and zeal in seconding the measures of the Government on this occasion.*" To his delight, however, the Home Government was to congratulate him on his efforts and his future career was not affected.

The Black Line had ended. The settlers returned to their homes with their shoes worn out, their clothes in rags, unshaven and with long hair. Generally speaking they met no enemy other than the scrub and bush.

Afterwards a public meeting was called to thank the Governor for his work in the field. Mr Kemp of Mount Vernon gave the meeting held at the Macquarie Hotel and the toast to the Governor. In appreciation, Kemp addressed the crowd and said, "*Gentlemen, you see a sample before you of what this colony can produce, which we are now one and all making unanimous effort to insure the enjoyment of in peace and comfort; if, when not only the necessities, but many of the luxuries of life are thus bountifully supplied us, we are not loyal we shall never be loyal. Fill your glasses gentlemen, the health of His Excellency; Hip, hip, hip - Hurrah!*"

The Governor voiced pleasure in the conduct of the prisoners who took part. Many hundreds had been armed and they performed their duty well. Crime diminished during this period and the papers found themselves free from such reports.

It was now all over and everyone had returned to their previous occupation and employment, but the black problem continued and the tension did not abate. A solution was yet to be found. Reports of atrocities continued to flow into Arthur's office. The Governor once again turned to Robinson for help. Robinson during the proceedings had ample time to consider his future movements. He had adopted a plan that was not only humane, but also reasonable, but there was a lot of work to do and there still existed much distrust and misunderstanding between

the two peoples. The sad ending of the story of the full-blooded Tasmanian aborigine was to gain momentum.

*Bruce Montgomery, "The First Patriots", *Australian* 3 April 1995. Features P.10, Henry Reynolds, "A War to Remember", *Weekend Australian*, 1-3 April 1995. Features, page 3.

5.AFTERMATH

One of the most horrific murders against the whites was the killing of the family, Hooper, near the London Inn at Spring Hill, when beside Mr and Mrs Hooper, all their seven (Meredith states eight) children were butchered. Louisa Anne Meredith wrote of the case: "*One day some persons went to see Hooper and were surprised at not finding him or any of the children about or at work as usual and proceeded towards the cottage where, lying all around mangled and full of spears were the dead bodies of Hooper, his wife and all of their children (eight). As usual with the savages when not disturbed in their work of fiendish butchery, they had cruelly mutilated their helpless victims, hammered their bones in pieces, broken their fingers, etc.*"

This was not an isolated case. There are many examples one could choose that was so typical of an attack. Another is of the Dicksons estate in the Midlands on a property called Plassy, near Auburn, west of Ross. When after viewing the men folk leaving for work, the natives swooped on the farmhouse, ransacked it and terrorised the womenfolk. One young girl Eliza was speared in the thigh, but she lived to tell the tale. The incident at Plassy was one of the last of such attacks, but not the very last. Several vicious and brutal murders at lonely homesteads still were to occur. In six years, up to 1830, 121 what was termed "outrages" by the aborigines, had been reported to the authorities.

Arthur, however, was able to write to Murray, on the 1st January 1831, "*a party of thirteen from two of the most hostile tribes, including three chiefs have lately peacefully come in and sought protection and there are grounds for anticipating that others will follow their example.*" In a further dispatch, dated the 12th February 1831, Arthur wrote: "*I have the honour to report that since I addressed to you my dispatch of 1st January last, although the native tribes against whom the measures of the Government had been chiefly directed, have not committed any aggressions.*"

Another was that of the Daniels family in June 1830 when Mrs Daniels and her baby twins when observing they were left alone, were butchered by the aborigines, after her husband Richard left the premises. They swooped down and attacked. The event took place at the Den Hut, Regents Plains, Lake area in the Highlands. *The Courier* reported on the affair, (19th June 1830). There was an inquest afterwards stating the murders took place on the 16th June and outlined the series of events. To quote the inquiry, "An inquest was held on the bodies by Mr Anstey and a verdict was given of wilful murder by the aborigines". This terrible incident was followed eleven days later when Mrs Langford of Green

Ponds (Kempton) was killed along with her fourteen old daughter and wounding her son, John, whom they killed a year later.

Although further murders did occur, particularly in the north, Robinson's conciliatory mission was finally having its effect. He travelled the length and breadth of Van Diemen's Land and on voyages around and about the islands off shore and in the Straits as whalers, sealers and sailors of various nationalities, i.e. both white and Negro American had taken many aborigine women. Robinson learnt the languages and endeavoured to understand and interpret the customs of them. For his work he received high praise for the success of his first mission. He was granted 2,560 acres of land and a salary increase to 250 pounds per annum, back-dated to his initial appointment to the mission. He also received a gratuity of one hundred pounds in recognition of his "intrepidity, persevering zeal and strenuous exertion".

Although Robinson came to love his black friends he had actually helped to banish them from the land they loved.

On the 3rd March 1831, on a sad, gloomy day, the vessel, "Charlotte" sailed from Hobart. Aboard were several dozen natives who were eventually to be taken to Clarke's Island or to Gun Carriage Island (16). Robinson had previously protested to Arthur that the "Charlotte" was over crowded, but the ship's captain, Jackson, slipped anchor before time so that the protest would fall on deaf ears.

Robinson frantically followed the ship's voyage which first went to Port Arthur then to Swan Island, finally anchoring off Preservation Island which is south of Cape Barren Island. Now there were 54 aborigines aboard. When Robinson saw their condition, tears streamed down his cheeks. Here a temporary camp was set up. Finally an aboriginal establishment was set up on Gun Carriage.

Warfare back on the Tasmanian mainland continued so the number of natives deported increased. Once at the establishment, the natives pined and it was obvious that a permanent settlement would have to be made as there was little game, little water and was fearfully exposed to the extremes of the weather. Food had to be provided.

By September, 1831, the Aborigine Committee suggested alternatives. After discussions with Robinson and John Batman, who also was involved in conciliation, it was decided that the natives should be removed to Great Island, better known as Flinders Island.

Further deportation continued to Great Island and when Mr Backhouse and Mr Walker (17) went to the island in December, 1833, the population included not only the aborigines, but also administrative personnel such as the military, the doctor, blacksmith, the keeper of stores, a tailor and carpenters. A whole community including wives and children resided there. Backhouse and Walker found that the natives wore European clothing and had changed their eating habits. The Quakers returned the following year with supplies, but by this time, black babies were not being born and the number of aborigines began to decrease.

In 1835, George Robinson became Superintendent at the settlement on Flinders Island, called Wybalenna, a name coined from various tribal sources,

suggesting, 'Blackman and house'. Under Robinson's guidance proper accommodation for the aborigines was erected and the village that had arisen at Wybalenna put into order. Gardens were planned. Robinson himself used his own talents as a builder and bricklayer. The centre of life was the chapel. The following year, Governor Arthur left the shores of Tasmania to become Governor-General of Canada. Sir John Franklin was his replacement. Matters regarding the welfare of the natives passed between and through the various government departments, but sadly, the numbers of the natives continued to decrease. Another blow was to happen in 1839, when Robinson left Wybalenna. He finally conceded defeat. After he left, the remaining natives suffered neglect. They became sad and remorseful. By 1842 of the 200 aborigines taken to the settlement more than 150 had perished. When Sir and Mrs Jane Franklin and Bishop Nixon visited the area they found but 54 aborigines left.



Chapel, Wybalenna 2020. Reg Watson photo



Buildings at Wybalenna 2020. Reg Watson photo



Interior of Wybelenna Chapel 2020. Reg Watson photo.

Robinson and his efforts have come under close scrutiny in these latter days, with some defending him, whilst others are scathingly critical. That he acted out of humanitarian reasons there should be no doubt, but he did become a very wealthy man out of his exertions. While many applauded him in his own day, surveyor, John Calder, wrote in reference to Robinson, *“though he was never known to take part in any dishonourable act, still the current of popular dislike ran so strongly against him on both sides of the island, that he was universally denounced as an impostor, and no terms, however vulgar, were too vulgar if only applied to him. The Government, too, while it affected to applaud him in print, and even to reward his services, was not a sincere encourager of his, and its petty subordinates, with many of whom he had necessary transactions, taking their cue from above, seemed to view with each other to impede, distress and annoy him, from no other motives, I believe, than those that sprang from an illaudable sentiment of jealousy.”* (Calder, *Some Account of the Wars, Extirpation, Habits &c., of the Native Tribes of Tasmania* P. 73 – 1875)

Finally it was decided to remove them back to Tasmania to Oyster Cove. There, the numbers dwindled slowly. On the 2nd March 1869, the reputedly last full-blooded Tasmanian male aborigine, William Lanne (or Lanna) also known as King Billy died in the Dog and Partridge Public House, Goulburn Street, Hobart. His body was dreadfully mutilated for *“scientific”* purposes by doctors Stokell and Crowther.

On the 8th May, 1876, the last full-blooded female Tasmanian aborigine, Trucanini, (Lalla Rook) to die in Tasmania passed away aged 64 years, not 73 as often stated. George Augustus Robinson had named her *“Ligugee”* sometimes spelt Lydgugee. Lanne was Trucanini’s third husband and was her junior in age. Trucanini died at the Drandridge home near the corner of Harrington and Macquarie Streets, Hobart.

Truganini was not, however, the last female full-blooded Tasmanian native to survive, that distinction belongs to *“Old Suke”* who died in 1888 on Kangaroo Island off South Australia, a full 12 years after Trucanini’s death.

6. CONCLUSION

Although the Black Line was a failure, it did, however, promote the end of the problem. The sight of hundreds of armed men backed by hundreds more within signalling distance showed the natives the power of the whites. It did a lot to impress upon them the hopelessness of their position more than any other action taken by the Government or settlers.

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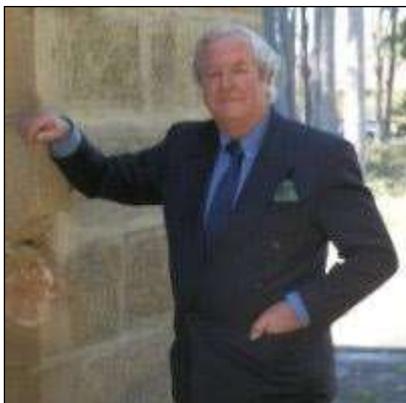
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REFERENCE:

1. Henry Melville says that the expedition cost more than 35,000 pounds.
1A Published by Pan Books, 2000.
2. The maximum people in the field at one time were about 3,000.
3. 18th November 1829
Thought to have been just a little north of Port Davey.
4. So wrote Crozet, Marion’s Lieutenant.
- 5A “Looking for la Perouse” - Frank Horner.
6. Governor King instructed Bowen to name the Risdon settlement after Lord Hobart, Secretary of State for War and Colonies.
7. See Australian Dictionary of Biography. Vol. 1788 - 1850
8. Dr. Mountgarret performed autopsies on some of the dead.
9. His diaries, 1807, 11th February.
10. Colonial Times.
11. December 29th, 1829.
See “Friendly Mission” - Journals of George Augustus Robinson, 1829-1834 (Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1966)
12. Robert Lathrop Murray, early editor of, first the Hobart Town Gazette, then the Colonial Times.
13. Journalists, publisher and author. He was the editor of Colonial Times.
14. His full military plans are outline in a communication dated 22nd September, 1830 and is addressed to the Colonial Secretary’s Office. (Gov. No. 11) - see sources.
15. Now known as Vansittart Island.
16. Two Quaker missionaries.



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