Send in the Sydney Natives! Deploying Mainlanders Against Tasmanian Aborigines

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As the English rapidly expanded their empire between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, strategies were required to subdue indigenous peoples who resisted incursions into their territories. In altercations with indigenous peoples on other continents the English military built up a 'repertoire of strategies and tactics' that were later adapted and applied in skirmishes between colonists and Aboriginal people in New South Wales. As John Connor has explained, one common tactic involved making alliances with indigenous groups and utilising indigenous peoples as military personnel. Examples include the use of Khoi at the Cape Colony in a dedicated regiment (the Cape Mounted Rifles), English use of colonial troops against the French, and the use of Indian troops to take Mauritius and Java. The recruitment of 'friendly Maoris' to supplement colonial troops in the New Zealand land wars provides another well known example.

In the Australian colonies, Aboriginal men were recruited to accompany both exploratory and punitive expeditions as guides. They were also recruited into the native police forces that operated in New South Wales (including the Port Phillip District), Queensland, and South Australia. In these latter two categories, Aboriginal men were utilised in a military capacity. As Jonathan Richards has pointed out, 'the native police should be regarded as a military force ... the appointment of former military officers alerts us both to the special operational requirements of the force and to its connection to other armed units in different parts of the empire.'

The wider connection drawn by Richards dovetails neatly with Connor's assertion that colonial action against Aborigines at the Australian frontier 'must be seen in the context of frontier warfare in the rest of the

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2 Connor, The Australian Frontier Wars 1788-1838, p 12.
3 See, for example, J Belich, The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict, Auckland, 1986.
4 See M Fels, Good Men and True: The Aboriginal Police of the Port Phillip District 1837-1853, Carlton, 1988; B Rosset, Up Rode the Troopers: The Black Police in Queensland, St Lucia, 1990; J Richards, The Secret War: A True History of Queensland's Native Police, St Lucia, 2008. Because of the violence that was characteristic of these earlier frontiers, the imperial authorities would not permit the formation of a native police force in Western Australia. See H Reynolds, This Whispering in Our Hearts, St Leonards, 1998, p 141.
5 Richards, The Secret War, p 8.
empire. The events detailed in this article pertaining to an aspect of the Black War of the 1820s—that is, the deployment of mainland Aborigines against locals—writes back into the historic record an almost forgotten Vandemonian example of this common colonial strategy.

Henry Reynolds has described in detail how tensions between colonists and Aborigines in Van Diemen's Land escalated rapidly in the 1820s, particularly from 1824 onwards. According to Reynolds, 'with the inflow of capital, free immigrants and convicts during the 1820s, settlement expanded rapidly in the areas of open forest and grassland between Hobart in the south and Launceston in the north'. This had a significant impact on Aboriginal hunting grounds and largely deprived the indigenous peoples of their mode of living. Connor noted that 'by 1823 land grants stretched in an unbroken line across the island from north to south', a phenomenon that led a Lairmairrener (Big River tribe) man, Monpeliatta, to observe that 'if Aborigines “left any place to go ahunting elsewhere ... when they returned in the course of eight days, they found a hut erected”'. The heightened scale of the colonial intrusion from the mid-1820s led to Tasmanian Aborigines engaging in guerrilla warfare against the settlers. The resultant conflict involved 'some of the bitterest fighting of any Australian war, and the largest deployment of British troops to an Australian frontier'. This conflict has since become known as the Black War.

Colonial responses to the conflict were military in flavour, with martial law being declared over the settled areas, soldiers stationed to protect outlying areas, pursuing parties and roving parties sent out to capture Aborigines, and a large scale operation—the Black Line—being mounted to try and drive the remaining Aborigines into the 'easily guarded peninsulas' in the south-east of the island. The conflict subsided in the early 1830s following the appointment of George Augustus Robinson as the conciliator of Aborigines. He and his entourage (the Friendly Mission) travelled the island, coercing the remaining Aborigines to enter into captivity on the Bass Strait islands where the majority later died.

One particular tactic devised when the Black War was at its height was described by a Mr Macdonald who was employed by the Commissariat Department at Port Macquarie in a letter to his father in Sydney. He wrote that:

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10 Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, p 4.
at one time, it was the intention of the Government to have sent a Tribe of
Port Macquarie Blacks in conjunction with a strong military force to attack
the natives of Van Diemen's Land, who have been committing great ravages
there for some time past; and I was then strongly recommended to the
Governor to be appointed to accompany the expedition; but the intention
was afterwards abandoned.\textsuperscript{11}

While the strong military force referred to by Macdonald never
eventuated, a smaller cohort of Aboriginal men (some of whom were
associated with Port Macquarie) were shipped south and deployed against
Tasmanian Aborigines as black trackers, interpreters, and emissaries for the
colonists as explicated below. This deployment was consistent with colonial
strategies used elsewhere in the empire, yet as this article demonstrates in
Van Diemen's Land the idea of deploying one indigenous group against
another was not embraced wholeheartedly by all colonial commentators.
The members of the Aboriginal contingent, too, had mixed experiences
during their respective stays in Van Diemen's Land as will be discussed.

As a curious postscript to these events, in the 1830s a cohort of mainland
Aboriginal convicts exhibited extreme reluctance to be transported to Van
Diemen's Land on account of their relatives (the principal subjects of this
paper) having previously been deployed there. As will be elaborated later,
they feared reprisals from the local indigenous population against whom
their kinsmen had collaborated with the Vandemonian colonists.

‘The Expediency of Procuring a Party of Sydney Natives’\textsuperscript{12}

The idea of recruiting mainland Aboriginal men to be deployed against the
Tasmanians was the brainchild of Vandemonian landholder John Batman,
Australian-born son of convict parents and one of the founding fathers
of Victoria. Batman initially raised the prospect of utilising mainlanders
against local Aborigines with Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur during
an interview he was granted while visiting Hobart in August 1829.\textsuperscript{13} He later
described the plan as providing ‘the only means of carrying into effect so
desirable an object as pointed out by His Excellency viz the bringing about
terms of reconciliation from close observation and personal knowledge of

\textsuperscript{11} Macdonald to Major Macdonald, Sydney, December 1830, \textit{Historical Records of
Australia Series I: Governors' Despatches to and from England}, vol XVI, 1831-1832, Sydney,
1923, p 449.
\textsuperscript{12} John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 22 February 1830, Colonial Secretary's Office
(hereafter CSO)1/320/7578, Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office (hereafter TAHO).
\textsuperscript{13} Colonial Secretary to John Batman, 14 August 1829, CSO1/321/7578, TAHO.
the character of the Aborigines of this colony'.

it was dubious that the colonists could achieve the desired reconciliation with local Aborigines without outside assistance given the 'deadly hatred' that existed 'on the part of many of the tribes towards the whites'.

Rather, he was optimistic that on seeing men of their own colour the local Aborigines would act cordially and become more open to negotiations.

Batman's optimism as to the potential usefulness of the mainlanders as intermediaries stemmed from an encounter between him and his companions and an Aboriginal woman while the former was travelling with a party that included two mainland Aboriginal men. These men, known by the English names Johnny Crook (Figure 1) and Pigeon, had joined Batman sometime prior to September 1829. On seeing Batman's party, the woman fled into a river and swam away. However, when one of the mainland men pursued her into the water, she was persuaded to turn back and took the man's hand in what Batman interpreted to be a cordial manner. Batman took this to be sufficient evidence to demonstrate that sending two parties of 'Sydney Natives' (he proposed ten men in each, with Crook and Pigeon as leaders) into the Vandemonian bush would ensure that 'the object of a reconciliation may be achieved in a very short time'.

Not everyone shared Batman's enthusiasm. Men such as James Hobbs aired divergent views before the 'Committee for the Care and Treatment of the Captured Aborigines', known as the Aborigines Committee, established in Hobart in November 1830 to decide what ought to be done with those Tasmanian Aborigines who had been taken into captivity. Hobbs told the

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14 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 22 February 1830, CSO1/320/7578, TAHO.
15 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 22 February 1830, CSO1/320/7578, TAHO.
16 N J B Flomley (ed), Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals and Papers of George Augustus Robinson, Hobart, 2008, p 472, note 277. As these men generally used their English names in cross-cultural contexts, the convention of using these names has been adopted throughout this article.
17 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 22 February 1830, CSO1/320/7578, TAHO.
committee that ‘the Sydney Natives would not be able to bear the cold of our winters’.\textsuperscript{18} It was his opinion that only Aborigines from the Five Islands or Twofold Bay localities in New South Wales would be able to cope with Vandemonian weather conditions. Yet others were unduly optimistic. Gilbert Robertson, a man in charge of several parties sent in pursuit of Tasmanian Aborigines, claimed before the Aborigines Committee that ‘Ten Sydney Natives would drive all the natives in the colony before them’.\textsuperscript{19} He had seen the New South Wales Aborigine Musquito successfully use a ‘bent stick’ to remove the head of a pigeon while the bird was in full flight.\textsuperscript{20} This act, in Robertson’s eyes, illustrated the superiority of the mainlanders and demonstrated that the local Aborigines would prove to be no match against men such as these.

Notions of mainland superiority underpinned colonists’ concerns in relation to the risk that the newcomers would abscond to join the locals. The issue at stake was not so much an augmentation of numbers, but the fear that the mainland Aborigines could instruct their Tasmanian counterparts in more effective tactics against the colonists. Such had been the case with Musquito, an Aboriginal convict formerly of New South Wales who had absconded from captivity in Van Diemen’s Land and joined forces with some Tasmanian Aborigines the previous decade.\textsuperscript{21} Despite the mixed response to Batman’s suggestion, Arthur eventually agreed not only to employ the two mainlanders who had originally accompanied Batman’s roving party, but also seven more ‘Sydney natives, who were originally induced to come to this Colony at his [Batman’s] insistence’.\textsuperscript{22}

At this point it ought to be noted that the term ‘Sydney natives’ is something of a misnomer. It simply signified the port of departure for the mainlanders. Most of the men hailed from the south coast of New South Wales, and have been identified by Brian Plomley (the editor of Robinson’s Tasmanian journals) as Johnny Crook or Kanninbayer (from the mainland near Five Islands), Joe the Marine or Quanmurer and Stewart or Nillang (both from near Jervis Bay), Lewis or Macher (from Shoalhaven) and

\textsuperscript{18} Minutes, 9 March 1830, Committee for the Care and Treatment of Captured Aborigines (hereafter CBE) 1/1/1, p 36, TAHO.
\textsuperscript{19} Minutes, 9 March 1830, CBE1/1/1, p 19, TAHO.
\textsuperscript{20} Minutes, 9 March 1830, CBE1/1/1, p 19, TAHO. The ‘bent stick’ to which Robertson referred was a boomerang, an item of material culture amongst Aborigines in New South Wales but unknown in Van Diemen’s Land.
\textsuperscript{22} Lieutenant Governor George Arthur, memorandum, 12 October 1831, CBE1/1/1, p 139, TAHO.
his brother Pigeon or Beewurher, Jack Radly or Garrammilly (of the Mullalogwong tribe), Sawyer or Numbunghundy (Kaithernywrher tribe), and Jack Waiter, also known as John Peter or Bulberlang (from near the headwaters of the Shoalhaven River). Another of Batman's party, William or Budgergorry, was thought to be from Eden in New South Wales. He had worked on a farm as a boy and later on a whaling vessel. He travelled to Kangaroo Island with a sealing vessel and joined Batman and the other mainlanders in 1832 after his arrival in Launceston.  

The ease with which Batman persuaded mainland Aboriginal men to join his venture in Van Diemen's Land is explained through his having spent his youth in Sydney. It was here that Batman established the relationships that later enabled him to procure the mainlanders' help against the Tasmanians. One of Batman's biographers described the Sunday school he attended as catering for 120 children (including nineteen Aborigines) by 1818. This institution, according to Alastair Campbell, was 'the seedbed of many important relationships' for the Batman family.  

Certainly it was to a Sydney-based friend, Thomas Hassall, that Batman wrote in 1829 to request help in sourcing more mainlanders to join him, Crook, and Pigeon in their pursuit of Tasmanian Aborigines. In response, Hassall advised Batman to visit Sydney to make his own selection from amongst the men who were available, although eventually Crook and Pigeon were sent in Batman's stead.

'It Was ... Impossible for the Sydney Natives to Track Them Further'

Towards the end of 1829 as the settled districts of Van Diemen's Land were engulfed in the heightened phase of the Black War, Batman the erstwhile pursuer of bushrangers began to pursue Aborigines instead (Figure 2). Batman's roving party was allocated nine convicts who were to be offered conditional pardons for serving a specified period in the bush or field police. He also gained approval 'to employ in this special service two of the Sydney natives, now in Launceston'. Should those

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25 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 22 February 1830, CSO1/320/7578, TAHO.
26 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 22 February 1830, CSO1/320/7578, TAHO; Plomley, Friendly Mission, p 506, note 277.
27 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 7 September 1829, CSO1/320/7578, TAHO.
28 Colonial Secretary to John Batman, 14 August 1829, CSO1/321/7578, TAHO.
29 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 11 August 1829, CSO1/321/7578, TAHO. Approval annotated in the margin.
men not be available, Batman had already sent for two more mainlanders to be shipped down from Sydney. As he pointed out to Anstey, 'these men, of course, would be expected to be clothed and rationed by the Government'.30 This entitled them to the same daily ration as the convicts who made up the remainder of the roving party: 1½ lb of flour, 1½ lb of meat, ½ an ounce of tea, 3oz of sugar, ½ an ounce of soap, ½ an ounce of salt, and ½ an ounce of tobacco.31 Batman had been prepared to take

30 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 11 August 1829, CSO1/321/7578, TAHO.
31 Colonial Secretary to John Batman, 14 August 1829, CSO1/321/7578, TAHO.
the men out into the field at his own expense in anticipation of receiving 'a certain stipulated remuneration for the capture of each individual of the Aboriginal tribes', but the Government was tardy in implementing its bounty system. The reward of £5 per adult and £2 per child captured without injury was not announced until February 1830, several months after Batman's roving party set out after their indigenous quarry for the first time.33

The idea of establishing roving parties to capture Tasmanian Aborigines had originated with Oatlands magistrate Thomas Anstey, possibly drawing on the precedent established by Sir Thomas Brisbane's Executive Council which had recommended:

that small parties, composed of three or four Soldiers and one or two Natives under the direction of one Constable for each party, should be employed on the roads between Sydney, Liverpool and Windsor, and other roads of frequent resort, to be ready on the first alarm of Highway Robberies to track and secure the offenders.34

The methods of pursuing bushrangers were quite readily adapted for use against indigenous quarry, and men like Batman with experience pursuing the former were later recruited to locate and capture Aborigines. Anstey initially oversaw the roving parties, and it was to him that Batman was required to furnish a monthly report. His letters provide frank accounts of the expeditions he undertook in pursuit of Tasmanian Aborigines. The utility of using the mainlanders as black trackers is evident in Batman's first account to Anstey, where he described how on Wednesday 2 September 1829 he 'fell in' with the tracks of Tasmanian Aborigines 'with the assistance of the Sydney Native Blacks'.35 The local tribe was suspected of having 'committed many outrages' in the district.36 The mainlanders tracked the locals to a hut site at which they found ten huts that appeared to be about three days old. This indicated that they were pursuing a party of about 100 local Aborigines.

32 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 11 August 1829, CSO1/321/7578, TAHO.
33 Plomley, Friendly Mission, p 31.
34 Members of the Council to Sir Thomas Brisbane, 8 November 1825, Historical Records of Australia: Series I Despatches to and from Sir Thomas Brisbane, vol XI, January 1823 – November 1825, Sydney, 1917, p 899. See also Connor, The Australian Frontier Wars 1788-1838, p 91, who distinguishes between two types of patrols established by Lieutenant Governor Arthur: pursuing parties comprising soldiers and police who patrolled the area under martial law, and roving parties that included civilians.
35 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 7 September 1829, CSO1/320/7578, TAHO.
36 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 7 September 1829, CSO1/320/7578, TAHO.
The mainlanders continued to follow the tracks, and came across five more huts constructed a day earlier around the east side of Ben Lomond, a dominant mountain in the north of Tasmania. From this vantage point, the roving party observed smoke in the distance and 'could hear the natives conversing distinctly'.  

Batman devised a plan whereby he and his men would wait until nightfall, leave their gear at a distance, and stealthily approach the unsuspecting Tasmanians with a view to capturing them. The plan went horribly wrong. As Batman explained to Anstey:

[We] made towards them with the greatest caution at about 11 o'clock PM. We arrived within 21 paces of them. The men were drawn up on the right by my orders intending to rush upon them before they could arise from the ground, hoping that I should not be under the necessity of firing at them, but unfortunately as the last man was coming up he struck his musket against that of another of the party, which immediately alarmed the dogs (in number about 40). They came directly at us. The natives arose from the ground and were in the act of running away into thick scrub when I ordered the men to fire upon them.

The roving party took two prisoners that night, a woman and a boy about two years old. The following morning, the roving party observed 'a great number of tracks of blood in various directions'. Two more prisoners were taken, adult males too badly wounded to have escaped. It was from these prisoners Batman learned that ten men and two women had been wounded such that they had either died or were expected to die from their wounds.

Presumably sometime during the tumultuous encounter the local Aborigines observed that mainland black trackers were accompanying the roving party. As the escapees moved further inland, they took the precaution of crossing a tier of rocks. This ensured that 'it became quite impossible for the Sydney Natives to track them further'. While having the mainlanders on hand probably enabled Batman to pursue his quarry further than he might otherwise have done, it did not result in the capture of anyone other than the four prisoners taken during and shortly after the initial affray.

Before setting out on the thirty mile journey to return to Batman's property, 'Kingston', the roving party shot 21 large dogs from the Aboriginal encampment and looted 'a great number of spears, waddies, Blankets, Rugs,'

37 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 7 September 1829, CSO1/320/7578, TAHO.
38 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 7 September 1829, CSO1/320/7578, TAHO.
39 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 7 September 1829, CSO1/320/7578, TAHO.
40 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 7 September 1829, CSO1/320/7578, TAHO.
Knives, a tomahawk, a shingle wrench etc etc'. On the return journey, the two wounded Tasmanian Aboriginal men 'found it quite impossible... [to] walk', so Batman felt 'obliged therefore to shoot them'. His female captive was sent to Campbell Town to be confined in gaol, while Batman kept her infant son to raise as his own.

"[I] Endeavoured to Have Them Understand Through Pigeon, a Sydney Black"

When Batman was lobbying Anstey to facilitate his plan of sending more mainlanders into the bush after Tasmanian Aborigines, with Pigeon and Crook in charge, he told the magistrate that 'the knowledge which these men have acquired of the language and the intricacies of the bush etc, I conceive fully to answer all purposes as leaders'. Some material evidence pointing to a commerce of sorts between the mainlanders and locals that extended beyond language acquisition was noted by James Backhouse Walker, who wrote that 'any instances of stones with a handle may be safely referred to a time subsequent to intercourse with the Sydney blacks brought over by the English'. This strongly indicates that a sufficiently close relationship was formed between the indigenous cohorts to facilitate the sharing of technology, resulting in an adaptation in Tasmanian material culture. Such relationships are consistent with the mainlanders' acquisition of local language, the usefulness of which Batman learned through utilising Pigeon as an interpreter and intermediary.

Shortly after their return from the Ben Lomond expedition, Batman's roving party headed down the east coast of Van Diemen's Land to Oyster

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41 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 7 September 1829, CSO1/320/7578, TAHO.
42 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 7 September 1829, CSO1/320/7578, TAHO.
43 Alastair Campbell identified the woman as Luggenemenener and the boy as Rolepana. See Campbell, John Batman and the Aborigines, p 32. According to George Augustus Robinson, Luggenemenener was allowed by the Governor to return to her own country. She later took a group of her countrymen to Batman's house for shelter from soldiers in the bush. They did not remain long at Batman's, and two of the men were later shot. Luggenemenener spent some time living at Robinson's Hobart residence, and later travelled with his 'friendly mission'. She died at the Aboriginal Establishment on Flinders Island on 21 March 1837. Rolepana, the son of Rolepa (Chief of the Ben Lomond tribe) and Luggenemenener, was retained by Batman, and accompanied him when he moved to the Port Phillip District as one of its founders in May 1835. After Batman's death, Rolepana and another boy, Lurnerminner, who had also resided with Batman, joined Robinson's party at Port Phillip. See Plomley, Friendly Mission, pp 309-10, 315, 946.
44 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 15 October 1829, CSO1/320/7578, TAHO.
45 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 22 February 1830, CSO1/320/7578, TAHO.
46 J Walker, 'Answers to Mr Ling Roth's Questions About the Tasmanian Aborigines', 1896, University of Tasmania Library Special and Rare Materials Collection (unpublished).
Bay, traversing The Tiers to Little Swanport and Great Swanport on 12 and 13 September 1829 respectively.\(^7\) They remained in the area several days, searching for the tribe who had allegedly robbed a shepherd’s hut about ten days earlier. Batman came across two men whom he described as ‘Doctor Anderson’s’, and heard from them that local Aborigines had tried to spear them just a few days earlier. He acquired two days’ provisions for his party from these men, and on 17 September set out to capture the local tribe.

Late morning, at about 11 o’clock, Batman and his party came across a woman who had fallen behind the rest of her party. She was taken into captivity and the pursuit of the remainder of her tribe continued on throughout the rest of the day and night. It was not until early afternoon on 18 September that Batman and his roving party managed to locate their quarry. Seeing the tribe heading towards them, Batman ordered his party to lie down and not to fire their weapons. When Batman gave a prearranged signal (a whistle), his men rushed at the tribe and captured three women, three boys, two young men, and two infants, making a total of eleven prisoners including the woman who had been captured the previous day. They were sent, in the first instance, to Campbell Town gaol. According to Batman’s estimate, the entire tribe numbered only about seventeen, and he assumed that only six had managed to escape into the surrounding scrub.\(^8\)

One of the intriguing aspects of Batman’s ambush of the Tasmanian Aborigines is the way in which he utilised Pigeon as an interpreter and intermediary. He later described to Anstey the scene that had unfolded:

After having endeavoured to make them [Tasmanian Aborigines aware] through Pigeon, a Sydney Black who speaks a little of their language learned by residing amongst some of the women on the islands in the Straits, that our intentions towards them were most peaceable and friendly, one of the women stood upon a hill, looking down into a thick scrub, where I have no doubt some of her tribe were concealed, and spoke for several minutes, seeming by her gestures to be earnestly informing something of import upon those whom she addressed.\(^9\)

Batman observed that the two tribes that frequented the area (the Oyster Bay and the Big River tribes) had since been quiet for some time, and attributed their placidity to the speech he had inspired the local woman to make through his having used Pigeon as an interpreter.

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\(^7\) John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 21 September 1829, CSL1/320/7578, TAHO.
\(^8\) John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 21 September 1829, CSL1/320/7578, TAHO.
\(^9\) John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 13 October 1829, CSL1/320/7578, TAHO.
The *Hobart Town Gazette* of 26 September 1829 described the ‘action’ as having been ‘successful’, and reported that Crook, Pigeon, and the convicts who comprised Batman’s roving party had ‘behaved extremely well on this occasion’. The arduous marching took its toll on the men, leading Batman to complain about the insufficient nature of the rations and to request that he might be assigned a shoemaker to ensure that the well-travelled party could remain well shod. His men’s shoes had been ‘nearly worn out’ during their first two expeditions, and Batman anticipated that they would be continuing to ‘travel over a large extent of country to afford protection to the colonists and prevent the natives committing many murders in a short time’.

*They Would Make the Best Pacific Overtures*

Part of Batman’s plan to deploy mainlanders against Tasmanian Aborigines involved sending them out into the bush as emissaries. As he assured Anstey in February 1830, if cast in this role the mainland Aboriginal men ‘would make the best pacific overtures, carefully avoiding the appearance of hostility by [not] carrying firearms, and I am certain upon falling in with a tribe, seeing men of their own colour would induce them instantly to fall in with them’. The men would carry only their own traditional weapons.

In April 1830, a modified version of Batman’s plan was tested in northern Tasmania. Four Tasmanian Aboriginal women captured by Batman’s roving party the previous September were released from gaol on the proviso that they would go into the bush with Pigeon and Crook to make contact with the remainder of their tribe and encourage them to surrender. Because of the state of heightened hostility between the colonists and Aborigines, special measures had to be taken to ensure the women’s safety. They were provided with brass plates as symbols of their status as emissaries, and to ensure their safe passage. Batman also requested that Danvers, the leader of another roving party in the area, be instructed not to fire upon any Aborigines, at least until the outcome of the mission was known.

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50 *Hobart Town Courier*, 26 September 1829, p. 2.
51 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 7 and 30 September 1829, CSO1/320/7578, TAHO.
52 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 22 February 1830, CSO1/320/7578, TAHO.
53 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 22 February 1830, CSO1/320/7578, TAHO.
54 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 15 April 1830, CSO1/320/7578, TAHO. Brass plates were worn around the neck; hanging from a chain, these items were also known as breastplates, kingplates, or gorgets. They were presented as rewards to Aboriginal people for services to the colonists, to create a local ‘king’ with whom colonists could negotiate, or to commemorate the recipient as ‘the last of’ their tribe. For more information, see J. Troy, *King Plates: A History of Aboriginal Gorgets*, Canberra, 1993.
55 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 12 April 1830, CSO1/320/7578, TAHO.
A lot was at stake. Batman was optimistic that if only 'we can get a tribe on friendly terms, I have no doubt in a short time to effect a reconciliation all over the Island'.56 Batman's hopes were soon dashed. Within several days of their having set out with Pigeon and Crook, the women absconded. The two mainlanders returned to Batman's farm with differing accounts about what had transpired. It defied Batman's belief 'that the women could deceive me in the manner stated by my two Blacks', and he questioned the men separately to ascertain what had happened.57 The mainlanders claimed to have been 'unwell living on kangaroo and opossum', and had agreed to return to Batman's for more flour before rejoining the women later.58 The women, in turn, had allegedly agreed that if they located their tribe, they would bring them to Batman's farm within five days. They would also 'make smoke every day' so that the mainlanders could relocate them.59

This left Batman 'anxiously looking for the Tribe coming down' to his farm to surrender.60 However, he was to remain disappointed. Neither the tribe nor the women ever appeared. Eventually, Crook and Pigeon claimed that the women had absconded during the middle of the night, having 'thrown away their brass plates' beforehand.61 It was clear that they had no intention of being emissaries for the colonists who had captured and confined them. Three of the women were later recaptured, probably by Arthur Maynes at Piper River on 15 May 1830, and were sent to Launceston gaol. The fourth of the emissaries had apparently been shot and killed in the interim.62 Batman's plan had been a dismal failure.

‘You No More Shoot’63

Ongoing conflict between the Tasmanian tribal remnants and colonists created a precarious situation for the mainlanders as they travelled through the Vandemonian bush. Being Aboriginal was viewed as advantageous by the colonists who deployed them as emissaries, yet on at least one occasion it also led to serious trouble for one of their number. On 20 September 1831, Batman and Robinson (in accordance with the

56 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 12 April 1830 (emphasis in original), CSO1/320/7578, TAHO.
57 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 15 April 1830, CSO1/320/7578, TAHO.
58 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 15 April 1830, CSO1/320/7578, TAHO.
59 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 15 April 1830, CSO1/320/7578, TAHO.
60 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 15 April 1830, CSO1/320/7578, TAHO.
61 John Batman to Thomas Anstey, 15 April 1830, CSO1/320/7578, TAHO.
62 Plomley, Friendly Mission, p 466, note 5.
63 Launceston Advertiser, 29 February 1832, p 76.
Lieutenant Governor’s instructions) met in Launceston in the north of Van Diemen’s Land to discuss the best means of continuing to deploy the mainlanders. At a further meeting on 12 October, it was decided that Crook, Pigeon, and the other mainlanders since recruited for deployment against the Tasmanians would be stationed at Batman’s farm near Ben Lomond. At Batman’s recommendation, Anthony Cottrell was appointed to oversee their activities. Cottrell took his instructions from Robinson, for by this time the latter’s ‘friendly mission’ to the ‘hostile tribes’ was well underway.

In February 1832, the Launceston Advertiser reported a serious incident that had taken place ‘a few days earlier’ in which Pigeon had been shot at by a shepherd. It turned out that while travelling with Cottrell on route to meet up with Robinson, Pigeon had left the main party to go up a tree after a possum. The shepherd spied him, and fired buckshot that wounded Pigeon’s chest, arm, and leg. It was evident that the man thought Pigeon to be one of the Tasmanian tribal remnants, and it was on this basis that the man fired at him. To protect himself from further attack, Pigeon evidently shouted ‘you no more shoot’ and proceeded to explain that he was working with Cottrell. Unfortunately the shepherd was deaf and proceeded to reload his weapon. When Pigeon realised his predicament, he jumped from the tree and went to find Cottrell’s party with the shepherd in pursuit. As they came up to Cottrell, ‘it was with great difficulty’ that the mainlanders in the party ‘were prevented from killing the shepherd’. As it was, one of them killed the shepherd’s dog by throwing a waddie at it.

This incident demonstrates that some Vandemonians were comfortable with shooting on sight those they thought to be local Aborigines, even when such people were not posing a direct threat. It also demonstrates that at least some Vandemonians were not familiar with the visual appearance of local Aborigines as the mainlanders were described by a visitor to the island, Peregrine Masingberd, as being quite distinct in appearance from their Tasmanian counterparts, having ‘hair [that] is not wooly as is that of the natives of this Island, on whom they look down with ineffable contempt’.

Not all encounters with people outside of the mainlanders’ immediate group were hostile. The following vignette conveys some alternate perspec-

64 Plomley, Friendly Mission, p 461.
65 Plomley, Friendly Mission, pp 505-08, note 277.
66 ‘An Unlucky Mistake’, Launceston Advertiser, 29 February 1832, p 76.
67 ‘An Unlucky Mistake’, Launceston Advertiser, 29 February 1832, p 76.
68 ‘An Unlucky Mistake’, Launceston Advertiser, 29 February 1832, p 76.
69 Peregrine Langton Masingberd, Diary, 1832-33, partial transcript by J Masingberd Campbell, MSS1644, p 56 Mitchell Library, Sydney.
tives, on the part of both the mainlanders and the colonists with whom they were interacting. One of Batman's friends and near neighbours was the celebrated colonial artist John Glover. Both men enjoyed the natural environment, and in January 1833 Glover joined Batman and a party that included Crook, Pigeon, and Joe the Marine (a more recently arrived mainlander) to a summit nearby Ben Lomond (Figure 3). While up the mountain, the artist sketched caricatures of the three Aboriginal men. Expressions of jollity at the expense of other members of the climbing party were not confined to Glover. Pigeon and Crook entertained their companions with clever imitations of the 'gestures and stumbles' that had characterised the aged artist's style as he awkwardly traversed the slopes of Ben Lomond.70

Clearly, the relationship between Glover and his neighbour's mainland guests was comfortable enough to allow the artist the liberty of producing a comic likeness of them. At the same time, the way in which the mainlanders delighted their appreciative audience with their impressions of Glover indicates a degree of familiarity and ease that allowed them to share such deprecatory humour. Outside of this informal circle, though, not everybody approved of the mainlanders' antics. One of their strongest critics was Robinson, the Conciliator of Aborigines.

70 Peregrine Langton Massingberd, Diary, 1832-33, partial transcript by J. Massingberd Campbell, MSS1644, p 57, Mitchell Library, Sydney.
'It is a Mistaken Notion to Bring Them Down Here'\textsuperscript{71}

On Sunday 18 September 1831, while at George Town in the far north of Van Diemen's Land, Robinson noted in his personal journal the arrival of 'two aboriginal natives of Sydney... named Crook and Stewart'.\textsuperscript{72} The men carried with them a letter to Bateman from Bateman, proposing the meeting in Launceston at which the future employment of these men and five other mainlanders was to be discussed. Robinson decided to go to Launceston at the earliest possible opportunity, which proved to be at 2 am the following morning on the night tide that facilitated their voyage south down the Tamar River. Crook and Stewart accompanied him, as did a servant, and two Aboriginal men from Van Diemen's Land.\textsuperscript{73} As the boat travelled down the Tamar his four Aboriginal travelling companions 'entertained' him 'with their songs'.\textsuperscript{74}

Robinson decided to stage a further entertainment involving the men when they disembarked half way down the Tamar to wait for the tide to turn. He had them engage in a spear throwing competition. On observing the differences in style, Robinson concluded that 'the Sydney natives... could not throw the spear as my natives did, and could not throw it with any precision'.\textsuperscript{75} He also observed that the mainlanders' use of the weapon was different from the locals as they sometimes used a womera to facilitate the launch of the spear. The longer they spent together, the dimmer Robinson's view of the mainlanders became. In his private journal entry for 19 September 1831, Robinson described Crook and Stewart in less than flattering terms and called into question the efficacy of their having been brought to Van Diemen's Land:

They are great drunkards and since their arrival in Launceston have been rolling about the streets in a beastly state of intoxication. It is a mistaken notion to bring them down here. They are small effeminate creatures and know nothing of the language of these people. The natives of this country would soon destroy them. They cannot throw their spear except with a womera.\textsuperscript{76}

Although some of the mainlanders travelled with Robinson during parts of 1831 and 1832, he later rescinded any suggestion that they had facilitated

\textsuperscript{71} Plomley, \textit{Friendly Mission}, p 460.
\textsuperscript{72} Plomley, \textit{Friendly Mission}, p 458. According to Robinson's journal entry, Crook's English name derived from his having formerly lived with 'Mr Crook, the London missionary'.
\textsuperscript{73} Plomley, \textit{Friendly Mission}, p 460.
\textsuperscript{74} Plomley, \textit{Friendly Mission}, p 460.
\textsuperscript{75} Plomley, \textit{Friendly Mission}, p 460.
\textsuperscript{76} Plomley, \textit{Friendly Mission}, p 460.
his Friendly Mission in any way. It was reported that in an 1838 speech to the Aborigines Protection Society, Robinson went out of his way to:

correct an erroneous conception which had been formed with regard to the Sydney blacks, who were forwarded to Van Diemen's Land to assist in the capture of the Van Diemen's Land natives. He [Robinson] had never received any assistance from them, and had from the first set his face against their being employed, because they knew nothing of the language or habits of the Van Diemen's Land blacks, and would consequently have been a burden, rather than any assistance in the expedition.\textsuperscript{77}

The conciliator was keen to protect his reputation as 'Black Robinson', celebrated by Vandemonian colonists as 'the Black-man', as they affectionately called him, who had solved their 'Aboriginal problem' and for whom they had taken up a collection.\textsuperscript{78}

\textit{The Native Blacks... Have Expressed... Extreme Fear of Being Destroyed by the [Tasmanian] Aborigines}\textsuperscript{79}

An unanticipated consequence of the mainland Aboriginal men having volunteered their services to help locate the remnant Tasmanian Aboriginal population was that following a series of events in New South Wales, some of their kinsmen were left living in terror of being forcibly relocated to Van Diemen's Land. These events took place in the Brisbane Water district to the north of Sydney and, later, in the Supreme Court of New South Wales.

As Robinson's Friendly Mission in the wake of the Black War that had been fought in Van Diemen's Land was drawing to a close, what can only be described as warfare between Aborigines and colonists erupted in the Brisbane Water district. At the time, colonists had only recently settled in the Brisbane Water district owing to difficulties in accessing the area readily from Sydney. By 1834, they were about 315 in number with the vast majority (271) being men. Of these men, more than half were convicts.\textsuperscript{80}

During 1834, several hundred Aboriginal men from a number of different tribes joined forces in the Brisbane Water district to wage war


\textsuperscript{78} Launceston Advertiser, 23 October 1834, pp 2-3.

\textsuperscript{79} Hobart Town Courier, 20 March 1835, p 2.

\textsuperscript{80} C Swancott, The Brisbane Waters Story, Booker Bay, 1953-61, Part 1, pp 22-3.
on the colonists. They met to plan their militant actions and attacked colonists throughout the district, working together in a combined effort to drive them from the area.\textsuperscript{81} They ranged as far north as the Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld's mission at Lake Macquarie, where provisions, clothing, and blankets were taken from the mission huts. Threlkeld observed that some of the Aboriginal men who stripped the huts of their contents 'danced in the men's clothes in defiance,' signalling that what could be termed a political motivation and sensibility informed their actions.\textsuperscript{82}

The colonial garrison was sent to subdue the Aboriginal force, and the military action culminated in eighteen Aboriginal men, or just under ten per cent of those who acted against the colonists, appearing before the Supreme Court of New South Wales in eight separate trials heard during the following year. Because Aboriginal people were considered to be British subjects, and it was not considered possible for some British subjects to be at war with others, the Aboriginal men's acts were criminalised.\textsuperscript{83}

Of the eighteen Aboriginal defendants, eight were sentenced to transportation. As one of the two men sentenced to death was later reprieved, ultimately nine men were destined for Van Diemen's Land to be worked as convicts. This outcome caused great alarm in Van Diemen's Land, where the Executive Council raised all sorts of objections to Governor Richard Bourke's request to send the men to the island. Of particular interest is the persistent view in Van Diemen's Land that the New South Wales Aborigines might incite local Aborigines against the colonists. The Executive Council considered sending the men to join the Aborigines in exile on Flinders Island, but worried that they would 'endeavour to incite discontent amongst those who had gone there voluntarily'.\textsuperscript{84}

Interestingly, the members of the Executive Council were not the only ones to express concerns about the possibility of the men being transported to Van Diemen's Land. The Aborigines themselves were most alarmed, as was made evident in a report published in the Sydney Herald and reprinted in the Launceston Advertiser in March 1835:

The native blacks who have received sentence of transportation to Van Diemen's Land have expressed – in their ignorance of the manner in which

\textsuperscript{81} See Harman, 'Aboriginal Convicts'.
\textsuperscript{82} Lancelot Threlkeld to F A Heley, 26 November 1834 in N Gunson (ed), Australian Reminiscences & Papers of L. E Threlkeld, Canberra, 1974, p 255.
\textsuperscript{83} See Harman, 'Aboriginal Convicts'.
\textsuperscript{84} 'At a Council Held at the Council Room Hobart Town on the 31st day of March 1835', Minutes of the Proceedings of the Executive Council, ECA/3, TAHO.
they will be disposed of, supposing that they will be turned adrift into the woods – extreme fear of being destroyed by the Aborigines of that colony, in revenge for the assistance which six of them rendered to the military and police in pursuing them about two years ago, having volunteered their services from this colony for that purpose.85

The Aboriginal prisoners awaiting transportation were relatives of those who had come voluntarily to Van Diemen's Land to help round up the locals, some of whom had returned home in 1833. The prisoners believed that they had every cause for concern, clearly not realising how the convict system worked nor that the few remaining local Aborigines had been exiled to an island in Bass Strait. In any event, once the Executive Council made its views on the subject known, the men were transported to Goat Island at Port Jackson instead, where they were put to work under an Aboriginal overseer and tutored in Christianity and English by the Reverend George Langhorne.86

‘Good Conduct and Useful Service’87

By the time the Aboriginal convicts from New South Wales were shipped to Goat Island, the mainlanders had left Van Diemen's Land. William was repatriated to Sydney, probably in January 1833, after having received a £7 reward. Six more of the men returned to Sydney two months later on board the Ellen after being rewarded with £10 each.88 The most substantial rewards were reserved for those mainlanders who had served with Batman the longest, Pigeon and Crook, and a local Aborigine known to the colonists as Black Bill who had also worked for Batman.

On 18 September 1830, a notice appeared in the Hobart Town Gazette that informed the public of the following:

Mr John Batman having represented the good conduct and useful services of the undermentioned persons during the period which they have acted under his directions in pursuit of the hostile Aborigines the Lieutenant Governor has had great pleasure in ordering for each of them a grant of one thousand acres of land: Pigeon [and] John Crook, Aboriginal natives of New South Wales, Black Bill, Aboriginal native of Van Diemen’s Land.89

85 _Hobart Town Courier_, 20 March 1835, p 2.
86 See Harman, 'Aboriginal Convicts'.
87 _Hobart Town Gazette_, 18 September 1830, p 262.
88 Plomley, _Friendly Mission_, p 507, note 277.
89 _Hobart Town Gazette_, 18 September 1830, p 262.
The following week, a correction appeared in the *Hobart Town Gazette*. The land grant for each of the Aboriginal men was to be one hundred acres, not the one thousand acres previously reported. The land grants, in the County of Cornwall on lots adjoining Batman’s property, were never taken up by the Aboriginal recipients. Batman himself left Van Diemen’s Land for the Port Phillip district on the *Rebecca* on 9 May 1835, taking with him most of the remaining mainlanders, including Pigeon. Crook followed later, in July 1835. The last of the ‘Sydney natives’ deployed against the Tasmanian Aborigines departed for Port Phillip on 9 October 1835, closing this chapter in Vandemonian contact history.  

### Conclusion

Using indigenous people in military capacities against other indigenous people was a common strategy adopted by England as an imperial power. However, when John Batman first touted this idea in Van Diemen’s Land, it met with a mixed response. Ultimately, the inherent potential in using people of colour as intermediaries and black trackers during the Black War outweighed some colonists’ fears that mainland Aboriginal men would not cope with the winter weather or might abscond and instruct local Aborigines in more effective methods of warfare against them.

Despite the deployment of the mainlanders against Tasmanian Aborigines over a period of half a decade, colonial hopes that they would facilitate open communication and reconciliation with the locals remained unfulfilled. Their tracking abilities led to the capture and deaths of some Tasmanian Aborigines who, based on subsequent events, would probably have experienced a similar fate following Robinson’s *Friendly Mission*. Although two of the mainlanders were among the few Aboriginal people to be rewarded with land grants during the early colonial era, neither took up their allocations. Seven of the men also actively participated in negotiating Batman’s ‘treaty’ with indigenous people in Victoria, but there, too, their involvement has largely been overlooked.

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90 *Hobart Town Gazette*, 25 September 1830, p 271.  