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Mission 101 - The Operational Centres

The hidden Australian involvement in Ethiopia - WW2 and the formation of the Special Operations Executive, "SOE"

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Preface

Mission 101 started its days as a covert operation planned by Britain's Military Intelligence community MI(R). The Mission was designed to open a second front in North Africa by inciting rebellion against the Italian occupiers of Ethiopia with the objective of re-installing the Ethiopian Emperor, Haile Sellasse, onto the Ethiopian throne. Undoubtedly part of the motivation for Mission 101 was the appeasement of a disillusioned British population who had, in general, never accepted the British political acquiescence to the Italian invasion of 1935/6. Mission 101 ended its days as Gideon Force, which was part of the Allied invasion force that eventually entered the Ethiopian Capital, Addis Abebba in May 1941, thereby ending the Italian colonial era.

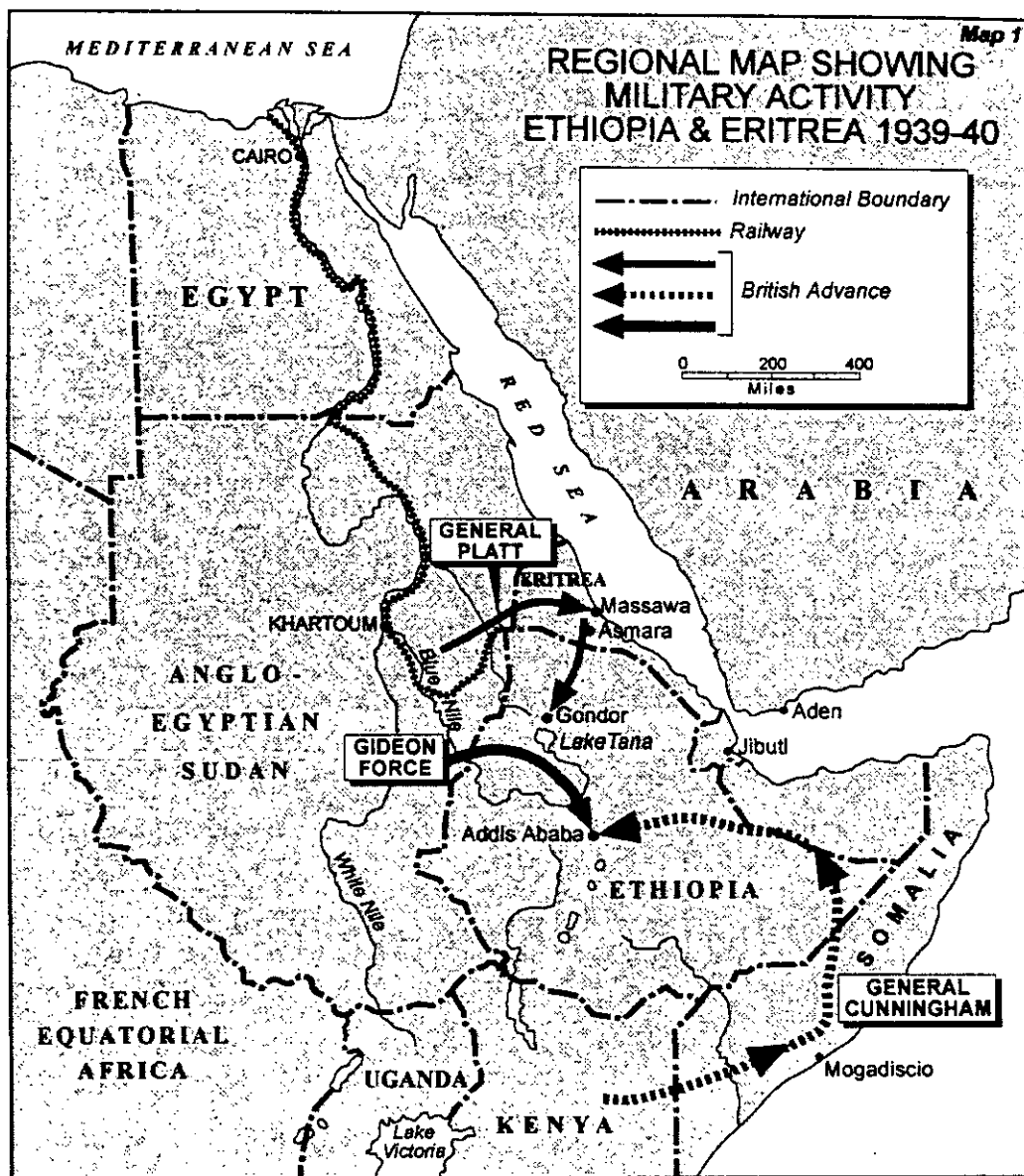
While Australia's involvement in North Africa and the Middle East during WW2 is well known, our involvement in East Africa is almost completely forgotten.

According to one writer on the East African campaign, Michael Glover in *An Improvised War*, there were nine Australians involved in the campaign. This article will briefly mention the contribution of Australian "Master Spy", Arnold Wienholt² and discuss the activities of the five Australians that made up the No. 1 Operational Centre.

The Operational Centres

Mission 101 has an interesting history. It was a military operation conceived by Britain against a sovereign state (Italian Ethiopia) before it had entered a state of war with that country – Italy not entering the war until 10 June 1940. In May 1939, British and French intelligence officers met secretly in Aden to consider the question of stirring up trouble in Ethiopia. The French (General Le Gentilhomme) were somewhat hesitant about initiating the revolt, but were keen to support one should a revolt break out. The British were keener; they had actually been training Ethiopian guerrillas in the Sudan since the 1935/36 Italian – Ethiopian War, despite their public pronouncements to the contrary. Accordingly they appointed Lt Col Dan Sandford, to commence work on Mission 101.³ Sanford arrived in Khartoum in October 1939 and immediately started

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- 1 The author, geologist, has been a member of and has led prospecting expeditions to the regions described in this report. It was as a result of talking to locals on one of these prospecting expeditions that his interest in Arnold Wienholt was established.
 - 2 The extraordinary career of "Master Spy" Arnold Wienholt, through three wars is the subject of a major paper being prepared by Geoff Blackburn. To my knowledge, Arnold Wienholt is the only Australian Federal Politician to have been shot as a spy by enemy forces.
 - 3 Mission 101 was named after Fuse 101, which was a percussion-type fuse used widely by the Royal Artillery in many calibres of guns before and during WWII. It was intended that Mission 101 would be the "fuse" that would ignite the Ethiopian revolt. Mission 101 was the forerunner of Gideon Force, which was formed in February 1941 from some elements of Mission 101 and liberated Ethiopia that year from the Italians. Orde Wingate, who was later to become famous for his Chindits in Burma, originally the liaison officer in Khartoum effectively took command of Mission 101 as Sandford and the remainder of the command were basically out of touch within Ethiopia. On the 20 September 1940, Wingate flew into the Gojjam Plateau to meet with Sandford. This hazardous flight, landing on a roughly cleared bush strip at the Mission 101 camp was piloted by a volunteer, Flight Lieutenant Collis who was awarded the DFC for undertaking this mission.



organising the Ethiopian exiles and collecting weapons and ammunition in several stores, within Sudan, along the Ethiopian border. This was all part of a British Government strategy designed to relieve pressure on the Allied forces in North Africa. This strategy – named Mission 101 – had as its aim the reinstatement of the exiled Ethiopian Emperor, Haile Selassie, onto his throne by means of a popular uprising inside Ethiopia.⁴ To implement this plan, the British War Cabinet appointed Lt. Col Dan Sandford, a former British Consul to Abyssinia, who, in retirement, had stayed on in Abyssinia after he had completed his term of office. Like many Europeans he left the country when the Italians invaded in 1935. Sandford's expert knowledge together with that of Major Robert E.

⁴ For the official account of Mission 101 see, *The Abyssinian Campaigns* (Anon.) chapters 11-13 pp. 56-67. Reginald Kirby, the war time novelist, wrote an interesting story titled *Mission 101*. In this novel the Italians ambush the central character, David Bannister - who appears to be based on Wienholt - as he attempts to cross the border into Ethiopia. Like Wienholt he is wounded. However, unlike Wienholt he survives his wound and goes on to complete other adventures in typical Wienholtian style.

Cheesman⁵, another former Consul was the basis on which this high-risk operation was founded. Initially working in London, the two men put together an irregular force of experienced former guerilla war fighters and old Ethiopia hands. A significant number of these were former journalists, hunters, bushmen and adventurers. Arnold Wienholt, a former Queensland Federal Politician and alleged Red Cross worker during the Italian – Ethiopian War (1935-36) was attached to Mission 101 as an Intelligence Officer. Arnold Wienholt had in fact been working for British Military Intelligence since at least 1913.

It appears that Mission 101 was probably the first of the covert operations that the Special Operations Executive (SOE) was to run throughout the war. Douglas Dodds-Parker, an SOE Mission Commander, describes how Mission 101 had its gestation in his British Intelligence activities in the Sudan and Ethiopia during the Italian Ethiopian War. Unfortunately many of SOE's records are unavailable. As Dodds-Parker states in 1984;

Few records of SOE's organisation have survived. Instinct and training required minimum records and early destruction when outside the UK. There was little opportunity, even had regulations allowed, to keep diaries. Only Field Marshals and senior officials seemed, from their post war publications, to have been beyond the risk of courts martial.⁶

Foot in his "Official" history of the SOE, confirms that Mission 101 was instigated by MI(R) and then controlled by SOE in London. He also notes that the RAF operation that flew Wingate into Ethiopia to meet with Sanford on 20 November 1940 was "the RAF's first successful operation for SOE" and that the subsequent pick-up was SOE's "first pick-up operation."⁷

Allied forces in the Horn of Africa and the Middle East were under the control of General Archibald Wavell who seems to have been the originator of the scheme. He called Sandford out of retirement in August 1939, promoted him to Colonel and appointed him in charge of the Ethiopian Section within Middle Eastern Intelligence (MI2). Sandford put together a team comprising Capt R A Critchley (GSO3)⁸, A/Major D H Nott (DAA&QMG), A/Capt T M Foley (Royal Engineers), A/Capt C B Drew (surgeon and medical officer), S/Sgt (later CSM) G S Grey (radio specialist), Maj Count A W D Bentinck (GSO2), 2nd Lt A Wienholt (Intelligence Officer), S/Sgt G S Rees and Cpl Frost. Despite detailed planning having begun as early as January 1940, official appointments were delayed, for political reasons until Italy entered the war on the 10 June 1940.⁹ Wienholt who was in Aden at the time immediately flew to Karthoum, arriving there on the 20 June to join Mission 101.

The plan called for a number of "Operational Centres" to be set up under British or Australian officers who together with four NCOs and a group of some thirty Ethiopians would infiltrate into

5 Cheesman published his memoirs in two books as:

- Cheesman, Major R.E. *In Unknown Arabia* (Macmillan & Co), London, 1926, pp xx, 447 with map
- Cheesman, Major R.E. (1936) *Lake Tana and the Blue Nile. An Abyssinian Conquest* (Macmillan & Co), London, 1936. pp. xiv, 400, with two folding maps. Facsimile reissued in 1986 by Frank Cass & Co, London

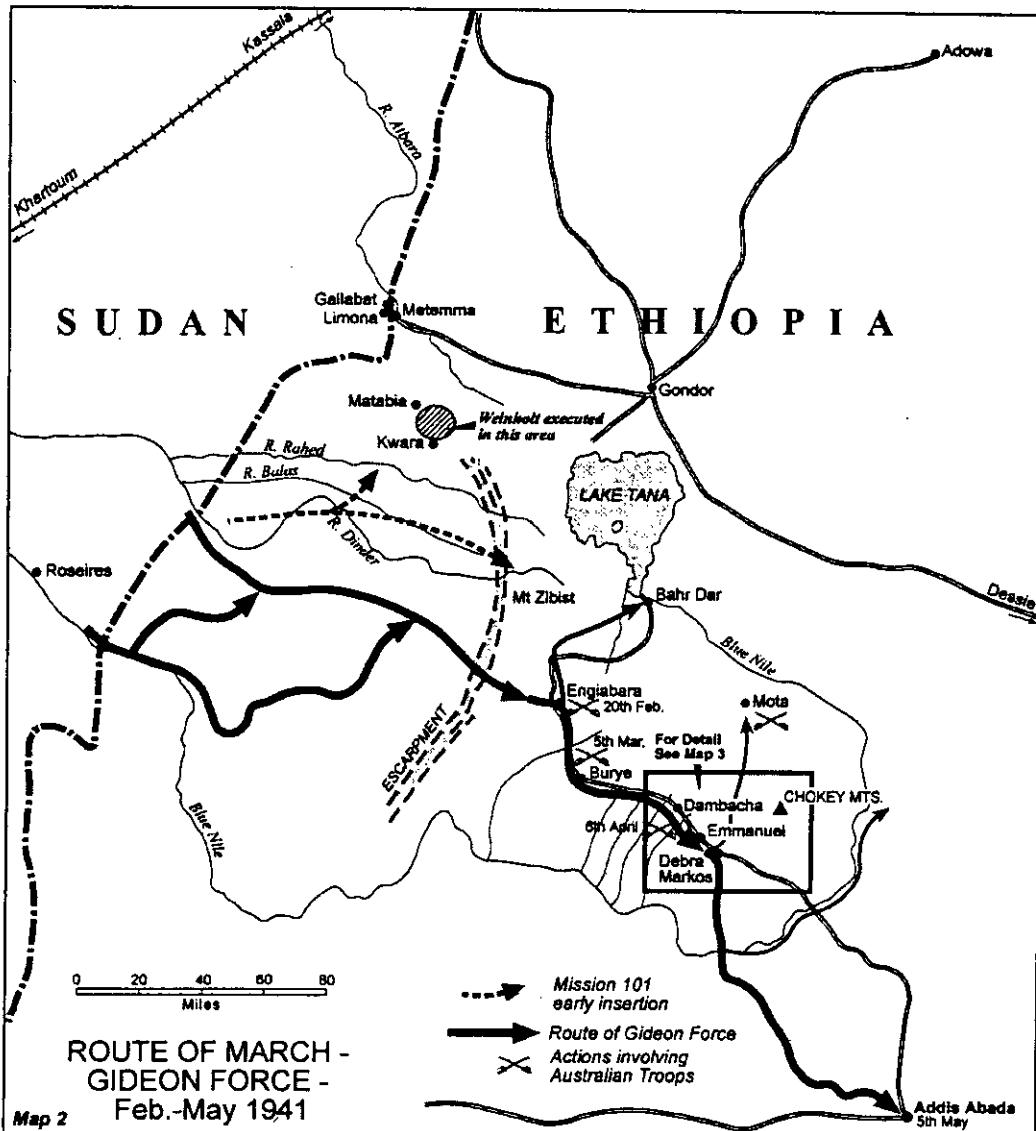
Cheesman's role was to set up and maintain an Intelligence Bureau in Khartoum.

6 Dodds-Parker, (1984) p. 4

7 Foot (1984) pp.175-76, 185-191

8 After the war, Lt Col Ronald Ashton Critchley DSO MC farmed in Zambia before moving to Western Australia where he died at Keysbrook, WA on the 27 August 1999 aged 93 years. Obituary - *The Times* (London) 29 September 1999.

9 The first Mission 101 incursions into Ethiopia were by a group of British Intelligence agents who crossed the Sudanese Border into Ethiopia on 10 May 1940 – fully a month before Italy entered the war. Their task was to contact local chieftains and to give them a message from the GOC of the British Forces in the Sudan, General Sir William Platt. The message in part read "Peace be with you, England and Italy are now at War. We have decided to help you in every way to destroy the common enemy. If you are in need of rifles, ammunition, food or clothing, send as many men and animals as you can spare to the place where our messengers will tell you." Platt was clearly being liberal with the truth here.



Ethiopia.¹⁰ There they would attach themselves to various guerrilla groups operating within that country to act as coordinators and to supply the guerrillas with arms and advice. The Mission's objective being to stir up popular revolts so that the Emperor would be able to return.

The first of these Operational Centres, called the No. 1 (Australian) Operational Centre was sent into Ethiopia's Gojjam Province in mid 1940.¹¹ This unit, sometimes called Brown's No.1 Intelligence and

¹⁰ According to Dodds-Parker each Operational Centre was accompanied by 100 Sudanese, each armed with an American rifle and 200 rounds of ammunition. See Dodds-Parker (1984) p. 57. There were to eventually be 10 Operational Centres. Others were led by Billy Maclean, Basil Ringrose and W. (Bill) E. D. Allen.
¹¹ Little has been written about the activities of the Operational Centres. The sole comment in the official Australian war history is one sentence in a footnote (fn. 7) in Long, G. *To Benghazi* (1951) p. 282. All were from N.S.W. Only No.1 Operational Centre was Australian manned. The others were all British manned.

Operational Centre, was under the command of Lt Allan H. Brown formerly of the 2nd/1st Field Regiment, 6th Australian Division supported by Sgts W.R. Howell, R.C. Wood, E.M. Body and J.K. Burke.¹²

The Ethiopian component of Brown's No.1 Operational Centre was made up from elements of the 1st Ethiopian Battalion, recruited inside the Sudan¹³. This Battalion was considered to be of "indifferent quality" and was disbanded, the better elements of it being assigned to Brown.

Brown's Operational Centre was infiltrated into Ethiopia in the vicinity of Dinder. Dodds-Parker was to later note of them that:

They were to add distinction to the ANZAC reputation for bravery and endurance, and to return home safely.

He also noted that:

I had one other difficulty with them. Months later a letter arrived from the Game Warden's Office, saying that they had shot, without a licence, a giraffe with a Bren gun and an elephant with a Boys anti-tank rifle. The fine was £5.¹⁴

It was the success of these Operational Centres that led to them being the *modus operandi* of the SOE in the Balkans and Italy.

In July 1940, Sandford decided that the Headquarters of Mission 101 should establish itself inside Ethiopia. Consequently the Mission HQ was split into three parts. Sandford and his party¹⁵ infiltrated into Ethiopia on the 12 August crossing the border at Limona, 12 miles south of Metemma and established himself near Mount Belaya, Maj Count A W D Bentinck, Sandford's GSO2, followed three weeks later in early September. The third group led by Wienholt was delayed by a lack of pack animals and left shortly afterwards and attempted to cross the border into Ethiopia.

The attempt by Mission 101 to infiltrate into Ethiopia had been leaked to the Italian forces. The Italian, Captain Giovanni Braca and his irregulars, assisted by the local Gumz tribesmen were actively patrolling the border region. They were based at the Ethiopian border town of Metemma with detachments at Kwara and Matabia. Gallabat, the corresponding border town to Metemma on the Sudan side of the border had been attacked and taken by the Italians on the 5 July.

The Italians ambushed a group of Patriots (as the Ethiopian guerillas were called) at Limona on their way to rendezvous with Sandford. When he heard this news, Wilfred Thesiger of the Eastern Arab Corps operating near Gallabat chased after Sandford on his horse and warned him that the mission had been

¹² The story is that Lt Alan Brown, a pre-war bank employee and militia officer, who, while serving in Palestine, met an Ethiopian Coptic Priest who convinced him to assist the Ethiopian Patriots. Brown volunteered and was accepted for Mission 101. He selected four sergeants from the 2nd/1st Field Regiment 6th Australian Division and convinced them into accompanying him. They were: Sgt. E.M (Ted) Body; Sgt J.R. Burke; Sgt W.F. Howell; and Sgt R.C. Wood. At the completion of Operation Gideon, the Centres were disbanded and the men rejoined the Australian 6th Division. All four sergeants were commissioned on return to the Division. Before the outbreak of war all had been working on sheep and cattle properties. Howell was later killed in action at Buna, Papua, in 1942. Steer, G. (1942), p. 191, relates an entertaining story about Burke with respect to the night after the capture of the fort at Mota in Gojam province. "That night (of the capture of Mota) Sgt. Burke, who had played full back for Australia, rushed into (Col.) Hugh's (Boustead) room and asked him straight and clear, 'Who has won this bloody war, sir, us or them?' 'It looks like us,' said Hugh sleepily. 'That's just what it doesn't look like,' answered Burke, and took him along to a large room where the Italian officers had made themselves comfortable for the night, each with his Ethiopian lady friend." Burke had played, prewar, as full back for the Warratahs (NSW team) against the New Zealand 'All Blacks'

¹³ The plan had been to raise four Ethiopian Battalions from the Ethiopian refugees that were located within the Sudan and Kenya. These Battalions were to accompany the Ethiopian Emperor on his expedition into Ethiopia. However, only the 2nd Battalion, from Kenya, was ready to take the field with the Emperor. The 3rd later saw action around Chilga, near Lake Tana and the 4th was never raised.

¹⁴ Dodds-Parker (1984) p. 64

¹⁵ Sandford's party comprised of Capts Critchley (GSO 3) and Drew (Medical Officer), CSM Grey (Radio Specialist) and Cpl Whitmore.

compromised.¹⁶ Sandford altered his route and by zigzagging and avoiding all villages he managed to successfully enter Ethiopia where he intended to establish his HQ at Sakala.

Wienholt left Khartoum to infiltrate into Ethiopia via Gedaref and the border town of Gallabat. Wienholt and his party of three men and eight donkeys left Khor Otrub (seven miles from Gallabat) on 31 August 1940 and nothing was heard of him until a telegram was received in Khartoum from the military operating in the vicinity of Gallabat. The telegram reported the arrival of two of Wienholt's native servants into the camp with the news that they had been ambushed by an Italian patrol and that Wienholt had been shot and was missing.

Bearing in mind the difficulties that Sandford had encountered crossing into Ethiopia, Wienholt planned to take a different route. Leaving Khor Otrub heading for Kwara, he passed south of the newly established Italian defence post at Matabia. Between Matabia and Kwara, Italian forces from the Matabia post attacked his camp one morning as he and his men were loading the pack animals. He and his men scattered and Wienholt was last seen running into the bush holding his side.

Wienholt's fate remained unknown until September 1941, although his wife had been informed that Wienholt was "missing presumed dead". In July 1941 a reconnaissance party visited the area to investigate his disappearance. The party found his camp site and questioned the local natives who informed them that Wienholt's camp had been attacked early on the morning of the 10 September 1940 whilst they were packing up. Wienholt had two days previously observed Italian officers patrolling in the district. Apparently the Italians picked up Wienholt's tracks and recruited local tribesmen to assist in the attack on his camp. A party of 38 men, 18 Italian soldiers and 20 tribesmen attacked while Wienholt was packing up camp. Wienholt was shot in the side and observed running away in the bush. A later patrol in September 1941 found some human remains, presumed to be Wienholt's, together with some of his gear in the general location where he was last seen.¹⁷

Clearly Wienholt had failed to place out a sentry to give advance warning. This resulted in him being fatally wounded in circumstances reminiscent of those in which he was attacked and shot by a German patrol in 1917 where he had again neglected his own advice as given in his book *The Work of a Scout*.¹⁸

The above has been the standard version put out by English or Allied writers when discussing Wienholt's death. However, the Italians have always maintained that he was executed as a spy, after

16 Wilfred Thesiger is arguably the Richard Burton of the 20th century. Born in Addis Ababa in 1910 with an impeccable colonial family lineage he was educated at Eton and Oxford where he gained a boxing blue. A noted Arabist he undertook expeditions to the Danakil (1930-34) which he describes in his *The Danakil Diary, Journeys through Abyssinia 1930-34*, London 1996. He spent 1935-1937 in the Sudan Political Service followed by service in the Eastern Arab Corps, Sudan Defence Force, before joining Mission 101 where he replaced Lt. Col. Ron Critchley. He afterwards became a SOE operative in Syria. Between 1945 and 1950 he lived with the nomadic Arabs in the "Empty Quarter" of Saudi Arabia. During this time he crossed the "Empty Quarter" twice as well as the Mountains of Oman. These experiences are described in his book *Arabian Sands - The Remarkable true story of one of the last great adventures of modern times*. (Dutton), New York & London. He then spent seven years living with the Marsh Arabs in Iraq. These experiences are described in *The Marsh Arabs* London 1964. He also wrote several limited edition autobiographies (160 copies); *Desert, Marsh and Mountain. The World of a Nomad* (Collins), London 1979; followed by *The Last Nomad. One Man's Forty Years Adventure in the Worlds most Remote Deserts, Mountains and Marshes*. (Dutton), New York & London 1986; and, *The Life of my Choice* (Collins), London 1987. He also wrote *Among the Mountains: Travels through Asia* Harper Collins, London 1998.

17 The Statutory Declarations made by the patrol leader and Major Cheesman, the General Staff Officer, are reproduced in full in Grabs, C.B. (1987) *Australian and a Hero* pp. 179-183 and this is probably the easiest source from which to obtain these documents. The official history, *The Abyssinian Campaigns*, says: "Another officer of the Mission was caught by an Italian patrol in the border bush, his caravan scattered and he himself never heard of again." (p.57). Interestingly, the author spent several months during 1994 prospecting an area not far from where Wienholt was killed. Several of the older locals referred to the Australian that was killed in the area.

18 Wienholt (1923) *The Work of a Scout* (1923). See the section on setting up a camp at pp. 68-69.

being discovered within their territory, out of uniform in charge of a convoy running guns, ammunition and money to insurgents.

Interestingly the "Official" history of SOE written by M R D Foot, disclosed for the first time in an British publication that

Wienholt, last seen by his own side crawling badly wounded into the bush after his convoy had been ambushed by some Italians of enterprise, was captured by them, and - though in uniform - sentenced to be shot, he faced his firing party calmly, wrapped in a Union Jack.¹⁹

Wienholt was officially listed as died of wounds received in the action of 10 September 1940. He was most likely the first SOE agent killed by the enemy during WW2.

When Wingate visited Sandford inside Ethiopia in November 1940 he discussed among other matters the proposals for the formation of the Intelligence Centres.²⁰

The official titles and the (European) staffing levels that I have been able to determine of these operational centres is shown below. All Operational Centres were located within Ethiopia by the end of February 1941. However most centres, apart from the No. 1 (Australian) Operational Centre and the No. 2 (Canadian) Operational Centre saw very little action.

Events in Ethiopia rapidly moved beyond the original aim of the Operational and Intelligence Centres. By early 1941, a full scale invasion of Ethiopia was underway. Lt Col Wingate, who had been appointed "Commander British and Ethiopian Forces", reorganised the Operational Centres into the main strike components of Gideon Force.²¹ Gideon Force was to be one of the most unusual armies to take the field in modern times. It numbered about 1800 men of whom less than 100 were of European origin. The Europeans were a motley bunch of generally tough older men, who had been playing around in Africa for decades. Transport was the province of a French Canadian named Le Blanc who had built roads across Africa for American oil exploration companies; explosives and demolition were the province of Tim Foley, an Irish Australian who was managing a gold mine in Eritrea when war broke out. Another was Guy "Tough Tim" Turrall, a Cornish geophysicist, with a profound knowledge of French classical literature, who had prospected for oil in most parts of the world from Somaliland to Venezuela.²² George Steer (given the title of 'Field Propaganda Officer), who had made his name during the bombing of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War, handled propaganda. To assist in these aims, he carted a printing press on the back of a donkey throughout the campaign. Gideon Force commenced its advance, supported by 15,000 camels, on the Ethiopian capital on the 19 February 1941. But that is another story.

¹⁹ Foot (1984) p 187. Foot notes that the official British position was that Wienholt would have been in uniform. Of course Foot's inclusion of Wienholt in his work confirms that Wienholt was a SOE agent at the time of his death in 1940, just as Anthony Clayton's inclusion of Wienholt in his Official History of the Intelligence Corps confirms that Wienholt was a British agent during WW1. Foot also notes, p 176, that due to Wingate's personality "it has hardly yet been possible to rebuild the history of SOEs effort into Abyssinia as a coherent whole, and to present it in its proper context in the history of the war. Wingate, Wingate, Wingate has overshadowed everything ... Moreover the fact that Wingate had any connection with SOE, though well known to such well informed authors as W.E.D. Allen (who was in SOE himself at Wingate's elbow) ... had to remain secret so long as SOE itself was secret, that is, till the mid sixties."

While Wienholt's treatment at the hands of the Italians seems a bit abrupt, it needs to be realised that Wienholt had in fact been on their "wanted" list since at least 1936, when his covert activities whilst posing variously as a Journalist or Red Cross worker had him taking an active role as a military adviser in the Ethiopian retreat from Dessie to Addis Ababa. Wienholt's close "involvement" with Sylvia Pankhurst and her London based and published left wing newspaper, the *New Times and Ethiopia News* that was used as a vehicle for promoting the cause of Ethiopian Liberation

²⁰ Despatch MM/101/G/11 (Most Secret) dated Sakala, 1st December 1940; Col. D.A. Sandford to HQ. In PRO WO201/278. See paragraph 11.

²¹ Gideon Force was so-named by Wingate as a consequence of his fondness of Biblical matters.

²² Guy Turrall was later to be promoted Major in the Royal Engineers. In 1945 he was parachuted into Burma to take command of a group of Karen irregulars that were advancing on the flank of the Fourteenth Army. Awarded DSO & MC.



Capt W E D Allen, No. 5 Operational Centre

Right - Typical Ethiopian patriots, with "McLean's Foot" No. 7 Operational Centre



No. 1 (Australian) Operational Centre

OIC - Lt Allan H. Brown, 2/1st Field Regt RAA

NCOs - Sgts W.R. Howell, R.C. Wood, E.M. Body, J.K. Burke

No. 2 (Royal Artillery) Operational Centre

OIC - Captain MacKay, Canadian Forces. Wounded (shot through the stomach) 18 March 1941 and evacuated. Replaced by Lt Neil L.D. McLean on the 7 April 1941.

NCOs - Sergeants Morrow, Smith, Powell, McLure, King (killed in action)

The NCOs were recruited in Egypt from the North Irish Anti Aircraft Regiment. The efforts of this centre are described in Xan Fielding's 1990 biography of Neil McLean, *One Man in his Time*.²³ Following the completion of Mission 101, McLean was attached to SOE's operations in Albania.

No. 3 (Beds & Herts) Operational Centre

OIC - Lt Gordon Naylor; NCOs - Sergeant Cannon, Goode, Lewis, Bartlett

No. 4 (Kings Own) Operational Centre

OIC - Lt Bathgate, King's Own; NCOs - Not known

²³ See Fielding (1990) pp 11-26

No. 5 (13/18 Hussars and Coldstream Guards) Operational Centre 24

OIC - Captain Van der Post, South African Army, later succeeded by Lt W.E.D. Allen
NCOs-Sgts Thornton, MacDonald (13/18 Hussars), Pringle, Harrison Edge (Cold Guards)

No. 6 (The Buffs) Operational Centre

OIC - Lt Welsh; NCOs - Sgt. Carr, others not known.

No. 7 (Household Cavalry) Operational Centre

OIC - Lt Neil L.D. McLean, Royal Scots Greys
NCOs - Sergeants Bain, Brown, Blakeman, Fairhall, Saunders

No. 8 (Yorks Hussars) Operational Centre

OIC - Lt Stanton; NCOs - Not known

No. 9 (North Somerset Yeomanry) Operational Centre

OIC - Lt Cope, NCOs - Not known

No. 10 (Household Cavalry) Operational Centre

OIC-Lt M.L. Pilkington²⁵; NCOs - Sergeant Mills, Strachan, Preedy, Johnston, West

Service of the No. 1 (Australian) Operational and Intelligence Centre 26

21 December 1940. Departed Khartoum on 21 December 1940 and arrived at Mission 101 HQ in February 1941. They were attached to Bimbashi Thesiger's group (Sudan Defence Force)

20 February 1941 Night attack on the Italian fort at Engiabara. The attack was not a success due to the lack of support from Mangasha Jemberie, whose men contended that the Italians were about to evacuate the fort anyway. Their intelligence proved correct and the Italians moved out the following day under the cover of the Garrison from Burye under Col. Natale.

5 March. Captured and occupied Burye before handing it over to local Patriots and joined Gideon Force for the invasion of Eritrea.

15-25 March. (about) In action (machine gunning) around Gulit and laying land mines along the road leading from that position into Debra Marcos.

31 March. Italian troops retreating from Fort Emmanuel to Gulit lost two lorries to the land mines laid by Brown. In the sharp action that followed the Italians lost another 23 men killed.

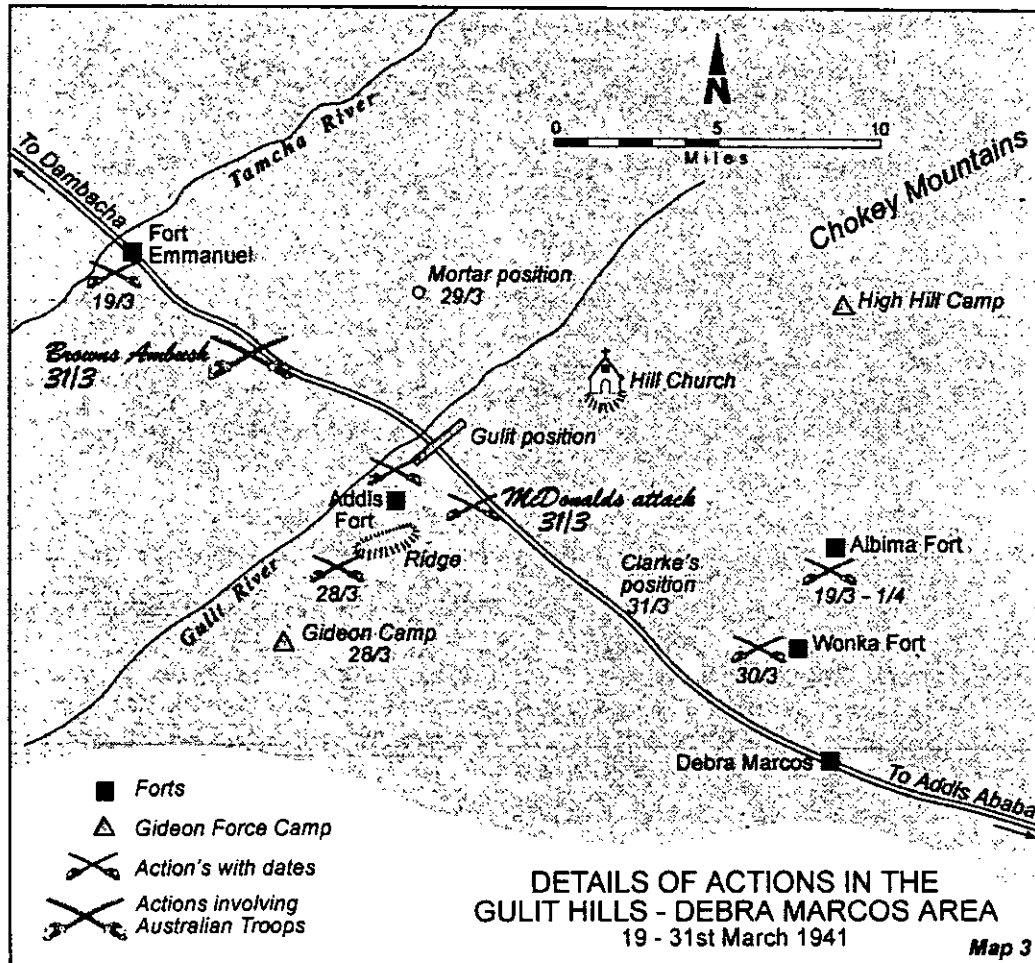
20-24 April. Took part in operations against Mota (about 100 kms north of Debra Markos). Lt. Brown and Sgt Burke opened the attack on Mota some days prior to the arrival of the main force under Col Boustead.

25 April. Escorted the prisoners back to Debra Markos.

²⁴ This Operational Centre never saw action, Laurens van der Post being sick and being evacuated by air to Khartoum.²⁴ The Centre was then effectively disbanded. Following the completion of Mission 101, van der Post was posted to the SOE Mission 43 in the Dutch East Indies. After the War he became a successful author, publishing at least 27 books. Well known, he was an adviser to Maggie Thatcher, the British Prime Minister on the Falklands' question for which she knighted him in 1981. A close friend of Prince Charles with whom he shared an interest in "Spiritual Matters." Despite being a member of the British establishment, van der Post is a somewhat controversial character from the Australian perspective. This relates to allegations of his conduct during Mission 43 following the surrender of Java and in particular to the circumstances relating to a massacre by the Japanese of Australian troops under his command. This was compounded by some of his actions taken while Governor of Java following the Japanese surrender. See Kriek, D.W.N. & Clarke, Phillip (2000) 43 Special Mission SA

²⁵ Captain Mark Pilkington, killed in action, Libya November 18th, 1942.

²⁶ Compiled from various sources, a prominent one being Allen (1943) pp 43, 80, 92, 95-96, 109



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OPERATION 'POTSHOT' – EXMOUTH GULF 1942-44

Alan H Smith

Introduction

The impact of the United States entry into the Pacific war was more noticeable on the east coast of Australia than elsewhere. However, residents of Western Australia were concerned about the threat of a Japanese incursion, either naval or military, into the Indian Ocean. Their State was closer than Brisbane or Sydney to Malaya, Singapore and the Netherlands East Indies (NEI), now occupied by the Japanese. Whereas Australia's armed forces involvement in Europe and the Middle East had been their emotional preoccupation, now Western Australia's focus was to be on the defence of Western Australia. In 1942 Australian and American defences were stretched right across the South West Pacific Area. The Japanese were at their zenith of expansion, and promising more of the same. To counter this threat, 3rd Australian Corps deployed the 2nd and 4th Infantry Divisions and 1st Armoured Division for the defence of Perth and northern areas.

So it came to pass that the United States Navy (USN) sent submarine and air forces to Perth/Fremantle that year to provide a counterweight to forces already deployed on the east coast of the continent. While there is adequate coverage in Australian and American historiography on forces concentrated near Perth, less is known about Operation Potshot – the establishment of an advanced aerodrome and submarine base at the southern end of Exmouth Gulf. Here RAAF and AMF units combined with USN forces to construct, man and defend a base, the aim of which was to increase the number of submarine patrols sailing from the west. The USN closed down their facility when its utility was no longer necessary. The aerodrome continued to be developed into a modern air base known as Learmonth.

The Establishment Phase

In early 1942 the first USN forces arrived in Fremantle and Perth. Their commander, Rear Admiral Charles Lockwood, set up his headquarters on St. George's Terrace, Perth. Initially, his force consisted of a submarine tender and it was followed by submarines that had sortied from Pearl Harbor (Hawaii) to terminate their patrol in Fremantle. A squadron of Catalina PBV-1 maritime reconnaissance aircraft soon followed to augment RAAF patrols that already covered convoy routes of the Indian Ocean and was based



Rear Admiral C Lockwood USN

at Crawley Bay. As Fremantle was closer than Pearl Harbor to the northern war zones, as was Brisbane, from whence submarines were sortieing to cover the Solomon Islands and New Guinea, it made sense to create a base to improve coverage of the NEI and beyond. Resources directed to Fremantle were considerable, and soon Lockwood could say submarines operated there from. Coincidentally, once the Japanese logistical organization extended to the NEI, their bombers began the bombardment of targets on Australia's north coast from airfields in Java and other islands. Principal targets were Darwin, Broome and Wyndham and their aerial reconnaissance and bombing extended south to Exmouth Gulf. A chain of RAAF radar stations with a range of 60 miles had been constructed along the coast, but responding meaningfully to their warnings was a problem as yet unsolved.

Aerial reconnaissance at this time reported large numbers of invasion barges at Timor. Something had to be done. General Macarthur's Headquarters sent an instruction to Lockwood to form a task force to propose a military installation to deal with the threat. Perth was also Headquarters of 3rd Australian Corps,

GOC Lieut General H Gordon Bennett. In July Bennett seconded his Corps Commander, Royal Artillery, Brigadier Bruce Klein¹ to the task force, whereupon Klein learnt that a new base was to be established in the North West Cape area. Surveys showed that the Exmouth Gulf region was an ideal location to base submarines should a Japanese invasion threat materialise. By not having to proceed to Perth, submarines could refuel and replenish at Exmouth and thus spend more time on patrol.

The Australian War Cabinet had approved the construction of an airfield at Yanrey, about 40 miles (60 kms) east of the southern end of Exmouth Gulf, to provide protection for the proposed advanced naval base. It was closer to the main northern road than Exmouth and the response time for fighter aircraft to intercept raiders depended on their incoming direction. If, as anticipated, the enemy would approach from the west the extra distance to be covered would be crucial to limiting their damage. In the event Brigadier Klein was asked to make a reconnaissance of the area. His report suggested that it was feasible to construct an airfield near the area where the USN would ultimately select as suitable for their facility. Klein was to select two sites – one next to the USN area and another three miles further north.

At Klein's first briefing with Lockwood, the latter remarked, "Well, we'll take a potshot at it".² From then on the venture (initially a Quonset hut camp) was known by that name. The American initiative's first step was to reconnoitre the area on foot, and Commander 'Pinky' Thorpe took a carload of colleagues to look over the site. They pronounced it suitable, and based on spring seasonal conditions, even for submarine crews' recreation leave. On this latter point he was wildly astray, as events later showed.³

On 11 September 1942 Admiral Lockwood flew Brigadier Klein and Lt Col John S Young, a Staff Corps officer and commander of Fremantle's anti-aircraft defences as well as Klein's anti-aircraft artillery advisor, north in a US Navy Catalina⁴. The group took quarters in an American seaplane tender (USS *William B Preston*) and next morning the ship moved towards the beach. As it approached the shore Lockwood turned to the captain and said, "Take her in as close as possible". The captain turned a doubtful eye on the uncharted waters and replied respectfully, "We have never had the honour of having an admiral aboard, sir. Will you take her in?" The admiral did. There was grinding sound as the ship hit bottom. Turning to the captain, Lockwood ordered, "Lower a motorboat for us and have this damned ship off before I come back."⁵

Brigadier Klein, Young, together with Lockwood and Commander J L Thew (USN) made up the first landing party, who had to wade ashore and view a desolate landscape of sand dunes, spinifex and hundreds of kangaroos. Nearest habitation was 20 miles (32 km) away. Klein's preliminary recce party covered about 10 miles (16 km) on foot and they decided the layout for the aerodrome and anti-aircraft defences. Lockwood and Thew sited their facility east of the aerodrome on the coastal dunes. Then it was back to the tender, which was then floating free. On his return Lockwood said to the captain, "You will not inform the Navy Department we went aground".

On 6 November 1942 Admiral Lockwood flew Maj General John Whitelaw, MGRA (Maj General Royal Artillery at AHQ the most senior artillery officer), the RAN's Commander H J Buchanan (Naval Headquarters staff officer) and Klein in a Catalina to Exmouth gulf to get the final approval for the project.⁶ After engine troubles with the first Catalina the party eventually made its destination in another. At this time an agreed 'modus operandi' had been established by American, British and Australian navies

¹ Brigadier Bruce Edmunds 'Briekie' Klein, b. Perth 31 JAN 1900, d. 28 NOV 63, Mona Vale, CCRA and other staff appointments. (Klein used a RAAF 19 Communication Flight De Havilland Dragon aircraft to visit the Gunners. The aircraft code letters were B EK).

² C. Lockwood, *Sink 'Em All*, pp.29-34.

³ op. cit., p. 45-47. See also AWM 54 831/3/26 Area Reconnaissance of Exmouth Gulf Bay – 1942.

⁴ Young had been Adjutant/Quartermaster of 3rd Field Brigade, RAA (M). A tall, thin man, he was 'Streak' to his intimates.

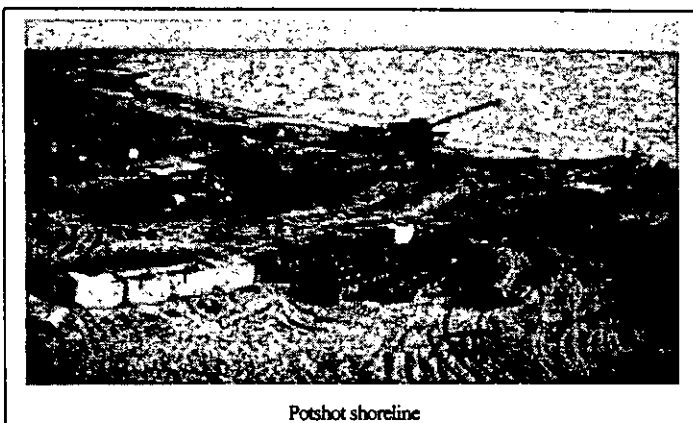
⁵ The Westralian, undated press clipping in B E Klein's Scrap Book.

⁶ G H Gill, *Royal Australian Navy, 1942-1945*, AWM Official Series, p. 105. The document was 'The Planning, Operation and Provision of Personnel for Naval Bases'.



Major General John Whitelaw, MGRA, AHQ,
Rear Admiral Charles Lockwood, USN, Captain
H J Buchanan, RAN at Potshot.

for the operation of joint facilities, but the Americans were generally exempt from their directives. Approval was forthcoming and the Americans (4 officers and 64 enlisted men) swung into action. The Base Commander was Lt W J R Hayes, USN. One of his engineers had devised a 'Perth Hut', a rectangular, portable galvanised iron affair. This enabled the insulated Quonset huts to be used for personnel purposes. During the next three months a base capable of holding 1,000 men bloomed in the desert, known as 'Yankeetown'. Huts, stores, oil storage tanks, jetty were the major building constructions. Adjacent to the airstrips were the major civil engineering projects.⁷ The latter comprised three runway layouts north of the Australian aerodrome area: one was oriented 80 degrees (magnetic) and was never completed: the other two intersected, their bearings being 155/335 and 139/319 respectively, and were for US Navy use.



Potshot shoreline

The Americans also installed a section of 75 mm M1A1 field guns in sandbagged gunpits close to the shoreline to engage any surface targets. After the devastating Japanese air raid on Port Hedland the Americans were very concerned about the air defence of the facility. This was agreed by the commanders as being an Australian obligation.

Anti-Aircraft and Coastal Defences

At this time the coastline of WA was divided into seven sectors for ground and air defence. Exmouth fell between De Grey River near Port Hedland south and west to north of Geraldton. Ground troops comprised 11th Volunteer Defence Corps (VDC) Battalion with detachments at Port Hedland (40), Roebourne (23), Onslow (18) and Carnarvon (60). 29th Garrison Battalion had full time troops at Port Hedland and Carnarvon. A mobile force (13th Infantry Brigade) based at Melville Camp had the role of moving quickly to a threatened area of the coast in the event of an enemy landing, for which it trained.⁸ The RAN's official historian (Gill) noted that a sergeant commanded a section of 18 pounder field guns at North West Cape. Another feature of the defence security was the use of low-level codes to refer to locations. Onslow became 'Jarrah', Yanrey 'Poker' and Potshot was unaltered until its security was compromised by sloppy signal work a short time after its establishment. It then became 'Erosion'. There was also another convention of referring to these delivery destinations for stores. The three above were 'Mike', 'Soup' and 'Fish'.⁹

⁷ C Lockwood, op. cit., p.54-55. pp.59-60.

⁸ By the end of November 42 2nd Division was based at Geraldton and 4th at Morawa.

⁹ AWM 52.4/1/7 HQRAA 3Aust Corps Memo 20 JAN 43.

Brigadier Klein reported his requirement for anti-aircraft defences to Army Headquarters (AHQ) in Melbourne. On 3 December an advance party of Captain Fred Ingram (ASC), 3 officers and 52 other ranks of 5th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Training Battery sailed on USS *Trinity*, a fleet oiler, to Potshot in preparation for the installation of the guns. On 27 December 11 Officers and 224 ORs of 4th Heavy Anti-Aircraft (HAA) Battery and its associated support units (searchlights, radar, signals detachment and workshop section) arrived at Fremantle en route from its previous Goode Island base (near Melbourne) with eight 3.7 inch mobile heavy anti-aircraft (AA) guns, two Bofors 40 mm light anti-aircraft guns, two AA radars Mark 2 and four AA searchlights.¹⁰ On 30 December it left for Exmouth Gulf where equipment was transferred onto barges, unloaded at the pontoon jetty and taken to the gun areas selected. In all 4,600 rounds of 3.7 inch ammunition was landed. Captain Ingram was able to report that the guns were 'proofed' by 5 January. The balance of the unit's equipment arrived on 14 February on MV *Koolinda*. Q Movements, the army organization responsible for transferring personnel, vehicles and weapons between centres had much experience in this field.

In fierce heat gunners dug gunpits to protect the embryonic airstrips, installing their equipment and calibrating and 'surveying in' their guns. No. 1 Battery (No. 452 Gun Station) was sited a mile (1.6 km) south and No. 2 Battery (No. 453 Gun Station) a mile north of the American jetty. Their HQ was sited nearer the former and searchlights either side (half a mile) of the US Camp. 12 Browning 0.5 inch calibre machine guns arrived with RAAF airmen and became part of the air defences.

When all the anti-aircraft gunners had arrived and had a chance to settle in Brigadier Klein arrived for his inspection on 19 February, and was not impressed with what he saw. Personnel were slovenly, unshaven and lacked discipline. No.1 Gun Station was congested, and Battery HQ and Workshops were wrongly placed. Camouflage was poor and he gave directions for its improvement. Every time a plane was in the air it was to be used for training. There were numerous administrative matters also requiring rectification and attention.¹¹ The battery commander was put 'on notice'.

Lt Col Jones inspected the unit a month later and found much had changed for the better – general smartness good and turnout improved. The Base Commander was evacuated to Perth on medical grounds and Captain G K Richards appointed Acting Base Commander. On 22 March the first practice shoot was held for both heavy and light weapons which coincided with an inspection by the Maj General Royal Artillery, (MGRA), Maj General John Whitelaw, of Army Headquarters. It was reported that the shooting was well controlled and effective results obtained from both gun stations. LAA gun crews lacked experience and their results were less noteworthy. Most importantly Klein was able to report 'a remarkable improvement was seen in general conduct, bearing etc.. a very favourable impression was gained'. However there were still deficiencies to be made good, and it was noted that the appointment of a Camp Commandant had been wise.¹²

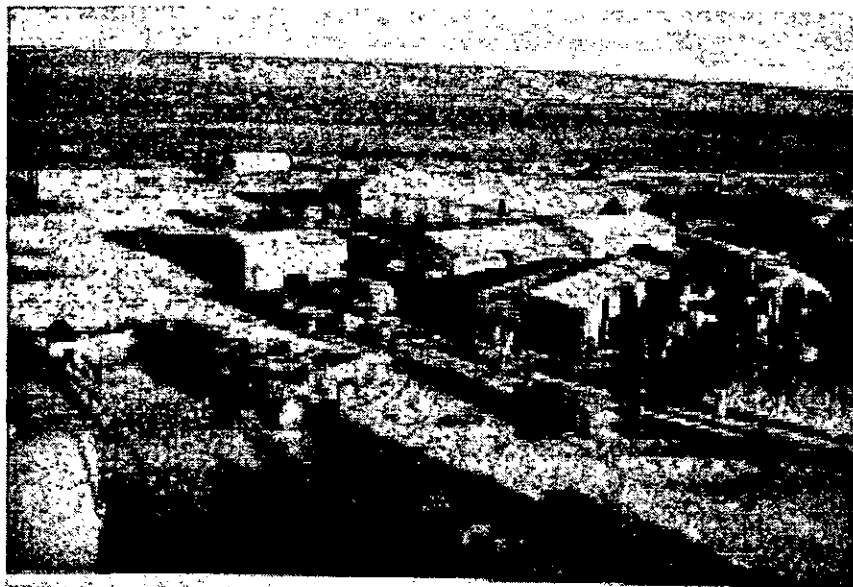
However, in the hustle and bustle attendant on establishing the base many of the soldiers and airmen had never been trained in the use of weapons and other vital stores had not arrived. In the planning stages it had been agreed by Klein and Lockwood that American personnel were not to mix with the Australian. The underlying reasons for this was the differing ration scales, standard of amenities, service 'cultural differences' and disciplinary codes. However, an important amenity had not been forgotten for the Australians – there was a beer ration!¹³

¹⁰ AWM WD Anti Aircraft Units Order of Battle NOV 1941 – SEP 45. See also R K Glyde, *Coast Defences of Western Australia, 1826-1963*, MS, pp. 191-192. Unloading equipment took eight days. One account states that personnel from 5th Training Battery were at POTSHOT for about six weeks from October.

¹¹ AWM 52 4/1/7, CCRA's Report, 19 FEB 43, Appx. 16. Supplies of razor blades had not arrived. Klein's visit next day to the Detachment, 2/3 LAA Regiment at Onslow was a much happier (for him) occasion.

¹² AWM 52 4/1/7, Notes and Observations made by MGRA and CCRA Visit 18-26 Mar 43, 27 Mar 43, App. 15, pp.3-5.

¹³ AWM RAAF File A11243 of March 1943. There was one Chaplain to service the spiritual needs of the military.



Potshot Buildings

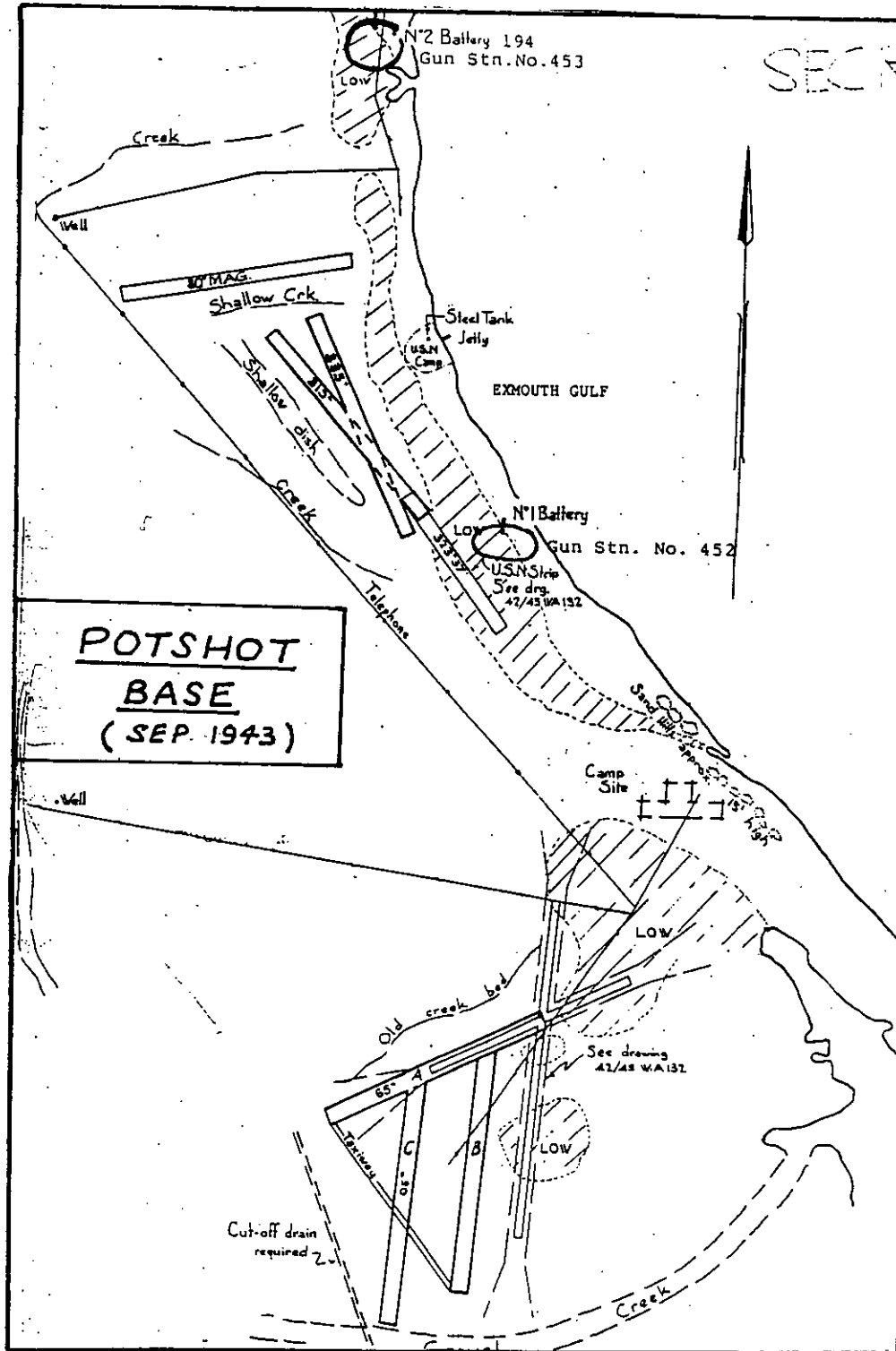
With the arrival of the RAAF 76 Operational Base Unit (OBU) command and control arrangements had to be put in place to ensure the smooth administration of the site with the least possible friction between the services. The command of AMF troops was given to Maj J Stokes-Hughes as Camp Commandant, for, in addition to the gunners there were part of a General Transport Company (Army Service Corps), a Detachment from an Employment Company (comprising alien Chinese labourers on the site), a Detachment from 2/2nd Boring Platoon (Engineers) for water supplies and a Detachment from 8 Supply Personnel Company. In May 1943 Potshot boasted 27 officers and 757 other ranks – almost an infantry battalion in numbers.¹⁴ As with all military establishments, Standing Orders were soon in place, which practice was also a feature of the RAAF administration of its personnel. A feature of both of these documents was that they detailed the procedures to be followed should the Japanese attack along the north coast by amphibious or aerial assault, especially the destruction of warlike stores. The tender USS *Pelieus* would be withdrawn south should that occur. All commanders orders, even those of the OC 76 OBU, were enjoined to ‘react vigorously to any enemy threat’.¹⁵ The air defences were first tested at night (2309 hrs) on 21 May when 4th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery engaged two Japanese aircraft at 17,400 feet (4,580 m) for one minute and despatched 47 rounds from their eight 3.7 inch guns. Their bombs dropped into the sea. Next night, (0036 hrs) a single aircraft dropped nine bombs which caused neither damage nor casualties. On 16 September two Japanese aircraft approached the area, and 4th Battery despatched 27 rounds. This was the last occasion when enemy aircraft entered the area, although there were several occasions when alerts were sounded, guns were manned but no engagements took place. ¹⁶

¹⁴ AWM 52 4/1/7, 3 Corps Operation Instruction of No. 42 of 24 FEB 43 ‘Control of POTSHOT Area’. The AMF Artillery sub-units were:

452 & 453 Australian Heavy Gun Station
166 & 167 Australian Coast Artillery Search Light Section
4 Australian AA Bty Signals Detachment & Wksp Section (EME Workshops)

¹⁵ AWM 52 4/1/7, 3 Corps Operation Instruction No. 48 of 18 MAR 43.

¹⁶ AWM 52 4/1/7 WD 3 Corps MAY 43: R K Glyde, op. cit., p. 191 and G Odgers, *Air War Against Japan, 1943-1945*, AWM Official Series, p.158. See also E N S McNabb, *Pot Shot Profile, 1942-1946*, p.21. Three occasions and ‘warning status’ were 8 DEC 43 and 23 JAN 44 (Yellow) and 31 MAY 44 (Red).



Plan of Potshot Base shows both USN and RAAF aerodrome layouts, gun positions

On 18 September 1943 4th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery was designated 140th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery under the command of 102nd Composite Regiment which had nominal control over all WA AA units. It moved further north to Corunna Downs whence it was disbanded.

Light anti-aircraft (LAA) defences were not neglected, and in the event a Troop of six Bofors 40 mm anti-aircraft guns of 2/8 LAA Battery moved from Onslow in April. In May 1943 the other Troop deployed to Potshot and was replaced by A Troop, 151 LAA Battery under command of 102nd Composite Regiment in September 1943. It was at Naval Base as part of the overall defence of Fremantle from August 1942. By November that year all the military units in WA were being wound down and 151st LAA Battery was disbanded at Bellevue Camp in December 1944.

Building the Airstrips

The construction of what was to become RAAF Learmonth air base was to be a long-lived saga of 'bureaucracies in action' that lasted well beyond the time frame of this account of Potshot. To begin with the terrain was inhospitable, being low sand dunes 15 feet high (5 m) intersected by numerous washaways that were beholden to the prevailing winds all through the year and torrential rains during the 'cyclone season'. If there was an advantage that Brigadier Klein saw it was ease of construction in moving earth for those newly invented machines, bulldozers.

The land was secured under National Security (NS) Regulations and the WA State Government Country and Main Roads Board became involved in December 1942 through contractors to construct the strips. Each strip was 5,000 feet (1525 m) long and oriented 65/245 degrees (true) and 5/185 degrees respectively. Expenditure approved was £48,800 for the 'aerodrome' and £29,400 for 24 dispersal areas and connecting taxiways. Dispersals had to be strong enough to support a loaded fighter aircraft, Kittyhawk, Boomerang and Spitfire, and (to anticipate) a medium bomber, for example, B-25 Mitchell, later on. An amount of £1,250 was allocated for gravel and tar sealing both strips.¹⁷

The contractor chosen by the government engineer was not part of the Civil Constructional Corps organization and, ergo, beholden to Manpower Regulations then applying through industry and defence works and projects. Labour problems soon arose. Potshot was 100 desolate miles (160 kms) north from the main north coast road junction. This added enormously to feelings of isolation. Whereas servicemen were relatively well provided for by ration scales, shelter etc., contractors were a different story altogether with little flexibility, short of coercion, to get the workmen 'on side'. In high summer the situation begs one's imagination when the engineer's report noted that 'the men were in primitive camp conditions'.

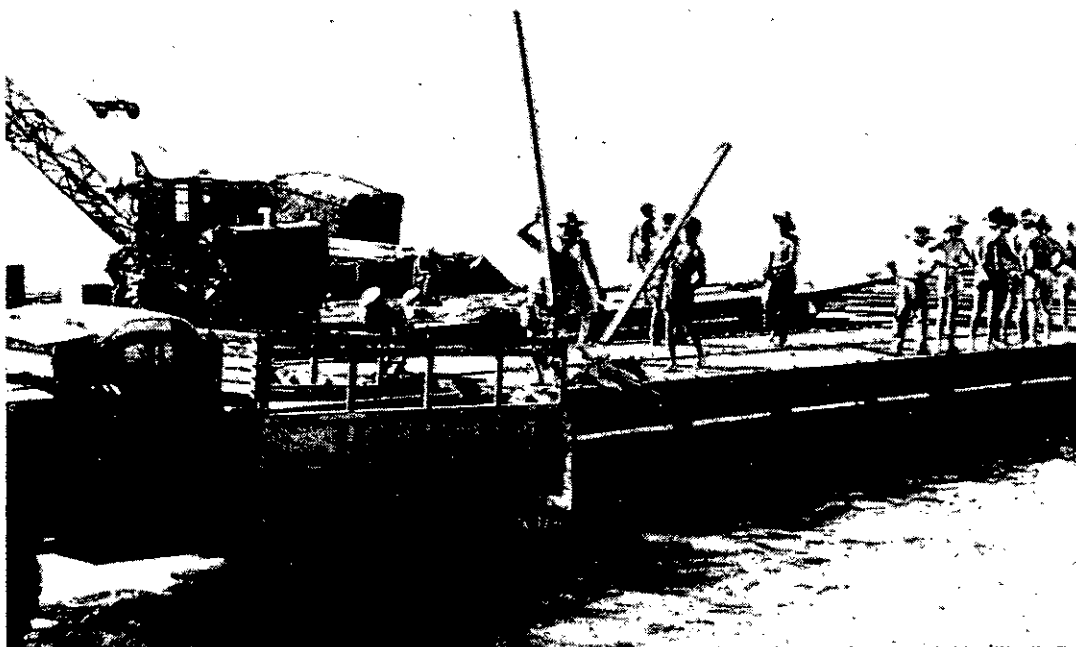
Despite these difficulties progress was made. The 'aerodrome' site was described as 'ideal' in one report - 'on sandy ground high above the flat surrounds; no lying water; sea breezes and 300 yards to the beach'. A hydrographic survey was also requested as Exmouth Gulf was seen as an alighting site for the Ceylon (Sri Lanka) - Australia seaplane route. It was not long before the airmen began asking for improvements to the basic design of the aerodrome. The south and south western ends of the strips were connected by a taxiway with a refuelling area closer to the 65 runway. Taxiway layout was circular, beginning and ending at the ends of each runway, as shown in the diagram. Each runway was extended by 500 feet (150 m) and 1,700 feet (500 m) respectively, and a 2,000 feet (600 m) stopway for overshoots added to the northern ends of both runways. A 5 KVA Toledo flarepath for night operations was installed.

In mid March 1943 a cyclonic storm of immense proportions and fierce winds drenched Potshot and surrounds with 4 feet (1.3 m) of water. It blew down and flooded tents and stores and added to the airmen's difficulties of operating from the runways until the water subsided, when as it eventuated,

¹⁷ NAA Western Area Headquarters, A705/A11243 of 23 MAR 43 for months of MAR - MAY 43



Potshot beachfront with jetty. American 75 mm gun was for seaward defence. AW 051818



Pontoon Jetty at Potshot, showing Australian soldiers unloading building materials. AWM 051810

the base was under its most significant threat. Worse occurred at the USN installations. Their timber jetty escaped damage but the pontoon wharf and tank barge were blown ashore and beached one and a half miles (3 km) to the north. The crane barge suffered a similar fate.

The Japanese Threat and Naval Responses

In February 1943 Rear Admiral Lockwood learned that his superior officer in CINCPAC Headquarters at Pearl Harbor had been killed in an aircraft accident and he was to succeed him and be promoted vice admiral. His own strong preference was to remain operating from Fremantle "because it would be going backwards to go to Pearl Harbor". He was overruled by Admiral Chester Nimitz and to Hawaii he went. Lockwood's style had made Fremantle and Perth a popular place for his crews. Before he left he made generous references to the warmth of Australian people.¹⁸

His successor, Rear Admiral Ralph Christie, was a torpedo specialist, and arrived at a time when a second more modern submarine tender joined his station. He and his staff were of the opinion that Potshot base was unsuitable. During the monsoon/tropical cyclone season refuelling from a tender was hazardous and disrupted often. The desolate landscape contrasted unfavourably with Perth as a recreation destination. The last straw came when the tender USN *Pelieus* in the gulf and was spotted by a Japanese reconnaissance plane. Next nights the base was raided and the tender withdrawn soon afterwards.

The Japanese Navy was very active in the Indian Ocean more so with surface warships than submarines. The latter were augmented by several German U-Boats that patrolled the major sea routes to and from Fremantle to the Middle East via Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and South Africa. On 8 March 1944 there was considerable anxiety when the presence of a heavy cruiser squadron (flagship *Aoba*) was reported to be standing off the Western Australian coast west of Carnarvon, 800 miles north west of Fremantle, heading south west. Quite by chance after a rain squall had cleared it had been sighted by a 6,100 ton tramp steamer, SS *Behar*, which sent a sighting report before being sunk by gunfire. Naval Intelligence deduced from other Japanese fleet movements and sightings that it was probably heading for the Naval Base at Fremantle or on a raiding foray on convoy routes in the Indian Ocean. There was a full moon and the estimated time of seaward bombardment was placed as 11 March. The USS *Pelieus* and HMS *Maidstone*, a Royal Navy tender, and eight freighters were despatched to Albany. Five submarines put to sea on picket lines and HMAS *Adelaide* and HMS *Sussex* anchored in Gage Roads as anti-aircraft defences. Extra air reconnaissance patrols were mustered. Coastal Artillery defences were fully manned in readiness – even eager anticipation. Full 'Red Alert' was reached in the afternoon of 10 March, but by 12 March the situation eased. It was the high point for testing the western coastline defences in the war.¹⁹

RAAF Operations

As mentioned 76 OBU was first on the ground at Potshot and its commander had the onerous task of establishing a base "from scratch". It was not an auspicious beginning to his unit's task when not long afterwards a powerful cyclone struck. Nonetheless, RAAF logistics delivered to him two thousand 250 and 500 lb high explosive bombs with instantaneous and 5 second delay fuses. Supplies of .303 inch and 0.5 inch machine gun ammunition and defence stores soon followed. The unit's official records of the period are, on the one hand, requests for all sorts of equipment to make good deficiencies and the need for trained personnel. The reverse traffic from higher headquarters was for returns showing the status of stocks of warlike stores and noting that trained personnel were at a premium and relief could not be expected at least in the short term. For example, there was an acute need for a Cypher Clerk, probably one of the key other rank appointments on the unit, and this provides the reason for the earlier comment on security of messages by wireless.

¹⁸ C Lockwood, op. cit., p. 255 and 'United States Navy Operations 1943', Journal of the Naval Historical Society, Monograph No. 183, p.8.

¹⁹ G H Gill, op. cit., p. 338-340.

In the RAAF way, explanations were sought first from the unit CO, and this was commented on by his wing commander, and this in turn was commented upon by the group commander. 1 Fighter Wing was commanded by Group Captain P Jeffrey and 79 Bomber Wing by Group Captain C Eaton. Given that the air war was being directed by HQ 5th Air Force General Kenny (USAF) in Brisbane and Port Moresby, the real 'air war' was between Darwin and Rabaul and points north.

There was a compounding problem with the short range of the radars. At their best a range of 60 miles (100 km) was possible, and during the cyclone season, much less. The Air Officer Commanding Western Area, Air Commodore R J Brownell, maintained that "fighter interception was impossible" in a report at the time. However, it was possible for 'alerts' to be given to Potshot so that the appropriate response could be organised and coordinated.²⁰

The first Fighter Squadron to occupy Potshot was No 76 Squadron, led by Squadron Leader Keith Truscott, DFC in February 1943.²¹ Their Kittyhawks were replaced with a Flight of CAC Boomerangs of No.85 Squadron in April. On 21 May when the radars at Onslow and Vlaming Head located enemy aircraft approaching the area, two fighters were scrambled to intercept. The enemy dropped their bombs aimlessly into the gulf and the Boomerangs returned without a sighting. Next night the enemy returned and again a section of aircraft sent aloft to intercept. Nine bombs fell into the gulf and that was the last incident of Potshot's aerial war, although there were further 'alarms'.

As previously mentioned, the ominous Japanese naval presence in the Indian Ocean concentrated the minds of the air force command. Air Vice Marshal Bostock was ordered by Allied Air HQ in Brisbane to take immediate action, as a result of which Nos 18 Squadron (Kittyhawks), 31 Squadron (Beaufighters) and 120 Squadron (Mitchells) were to deploy to Potshot and two other Spitfire squadrons to Perth. Brownell was already organising his area command defences. He disagreed with Bostock on sending three squadrons to Potshot. Brownell's appreciation was that the Japanese would be unlikely to attack Potshot and that 750 miles (1,200 km) was too far away to aid the defence of the Perth area. Were Darwin to be the enemy's objective squadrons at Exmouth could return to Darwin more rapidly. At No. 1 Fighter Wing Jeffrey told his squadron commanders that, "a Japanese naval task force was loose in the Indian Ocean and headed in the general direction of the Perth area".

The concentration of squadrons from far away places called for leadership, organisation and luck of a high order. Each squadron would move in two phases – aircrew and aircraft in the first followed by maintenance crews with sufficient stores (light equipment) for a fortnight. Urgency was the keynote. One record shows that 23 transport aircraft were assigned to the movement of squadrons from the east. Two Spitfire squadrons from Darwin fared the worst. Their track to Perth via Potshot encountered dust storms, torrential cyclonic rains and finally bushfire smoke at their destination. The official historian noted, "they arrived scarlet eyed, bearded, sunburnt and unkempt". No 120 (Netherlands) Squadron flew across the Nullarbor and arrived at Potshot without any basic stores, such as messing, tentage etc. They explained, "no one told us to bring anything". Given the state of Potshot and the travails of 76 OBU, this was one of a series of omissions, some humorous, some serious with which the airmen had to grapple. It was some days before all the squadrons, not only those at Potshot, were fully operational again. On 20 March all the squadrons were ordered to return to their home stations.

Both Jeffrey and Eaton noted that the exercise "provided experience of the rapid movement of squadrons".

²⁰ Radar Station 310 was at Vlaming Head and 314 at Onslow. Brownell's comment is from G Odgers, op. cit., p.136-139.

²¹ Squadron Leader Keith Truscott, DFC and Bar, b. 17 MAY 16, Killed in Aircraft Accident 28 Mar 43. Truscott was practising shooting at the shadow of an aircraft on the water and misjudged his height. Other relevant NAA documents are: A705 7/1/1709 RAAF Potshot Landing Ground, 1943-1953 and A11095 2/50/INT, Reports by F/O G F Hill – Exmouth Gulf Visits, 1943.

Conclusion

During World War 2 many temporary 'bases' and fortifications were established around Australia's 12,000 mile (19,200 km) coastline. The sites of radar stations, Letter Batteries – heavy and medium artillery for coast defence - emergency landing grounds (ELGs) and advanced air strips, temporary camps for all services (and Americans) are now more militarily or archaeologically important to the map maker or student of military history. Potshot is unique to some extent because it remains as a much upgraded facility. However, in its dual role as a forward submarine base and aerodrome it had its singular moment of importance to the war effort in March 1943 and owes its genesis to a dynamic American naval commander who was one of the best admirals in the war. The role of Brigadier Bruce Klein and his AIF/AMF personnel was contributory but essential nonetheless, and Potshot cements his and their place in our military historiography. What the Japanese may have ventured had Potshot not been defended can only be speculated. Their aerial efforts were no more than nuisance value, but it was enough for 140th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery Commander to raise with the Army hierarchy the 'question of eligibility of the gunners for a Returned from Active Service' badge for those who served, like their brethren in Papua New Guinea.²²

Aftermath

The site was wound down as the Japanese threat diminished. The USN facilities and personnel were off the site in July 1943 but fuel supplies were kept topped up. On 4 September, Operation Jaywick an Australian and British operation against Japanese shipping in Singapore harbour was mounted from Potshot, where the *Krait* refuelled before heading north.

76 OBU's main role, it is surmised, was to improve the site and cater for aircraft movements between Perth and Darwin, provide fuel and other services within its competence. Both No 18 (Netherlands) and No 120 Squadrons were still there in March 1944. As Allied successes continued, the Department of Civil Aviation (DCA) started to take a post-war interest in the aerodrome as did Qantas Airways. The latter operated Catalinas on across Indian Ocean missions for personnel, documents, stores, light equipments of various kinds. If land based transport aircraft continued to develop, as portended by the Douglas DC-4 and later DC-6 types at the expense of flying boats, then Potshot should be upgraded to reflect that. The importance of the 'Empire' link was much to the forethought in official thinking, based as it was on wartime experience. Thus, in October 1944 Qantas and the Shell Petroleum Company, with DCA backing, sought additional funds for the 5/185 runway extension to 9,000 feet (2,700 m) and 300 feet (90 m) wide, hardstandings, fuel storage and appurtenant works to the tune of £245,000. In making a case for this development, one RAAF officer noted that, in a 'minuted' comment against it that the difference in the great circle route distance between Sydney and Colombo via Pearce Air Force Base was a mere 65 miles (100 km).²³

On the initiative of the Camp Commandant, Maj Stokes-Hughes, a plaque was set on the exact spot of the original landing when the army moved out. A 1945 cyclonic storm washed it away, but its site is recorded on the topographical map of the gulf (Series R611, Sheet 1753, Ed. 2-AAS). Learmonth continued to be developed into the facility for use by civil and military aircraft.

Epilogue

The area became famous from the discovery of petroleum beneath the featureless scrub in 1952 when Ampol Petroleum and Caltex Oil Companies drilled for oil. Their geologists knew nothing of Operation

²² NAA 'Returned from Active Service Badge', A5799 65/1947, 1947.

²³ NAA Western Area Headquarters, A705, RAAF Potshot (Learmonth) Aerodrome Works, 1944-46 and Report on Operations, 10/20 May 1944 and Routine Orders.

Potshot so in June 1952 a new plaque was set, this time at the entrance of the oil field search headquarters not far from the site of the original.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank Mr Graham McKenzie-Smith and Mr D A S Lambert, Historian, The Heavy Anti-Aircraft Association (WA) for their help in the preparation of this article. Mrs Susan Davies (daughter of Brig. B E Klein) provided her father's photograph albums and other material. Margaret Lewis, Australian War Memorial Research Centre, was generous in her support for information on 3rd Australian Corps, and also Maj General John Whitelaw, (junior) Retd.

—oooOooo—

Society Members Honoured

Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Clem Sargent

9 June 2003 - Queen's Birthday Honours
Medal of the Order of Australia

For service to the community, particularly through the Military Historical Society of Australia.

Paul Anthony Rosenzweig

23 April 2003
Centenary Medal

For long and outstanding research on Australia's military history

Federal Council and the Editor extend their congratulations to these worthy recipients.



Armstrong's Protected Barbette Mechanical Loading System for South Australia

Frank Garie

In 1997 I had the pleasure of reconstructing the carriage and platform for one of the two existing 10 inch 20 ton RML (Rifled Muzzleloading) Armstrong guns at Fort Glanville, South Australia (SA).¹ In 2001 the mechanical loading system was reconstructed and rendered operational. (excepting the hydraulic washing out apparatus). At the time of writing 2002, the elevating mechanism is being reconstructed. Before describing some of the points of interest with the reconstruction of the mechanical loading system itself, the following is a brief history and description of the system as was designed for South Australia in 1878.

Historical context

War scares: South Australia's immediate reason for purchasing modern coastal guns in February 1878 was the fear of attack by Russian cruisers during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78. This fear arose because Britain was at that time by diplomacy, attempting to prevent Russian expansion towards India. This situation prevailed for many months, during which time the Australian colonies sought up to date advice on their defences.

Defence advisers: The British Colonial Office was requested in December 1876 to seek the services of the renowned Col Sir W F D Jervis RE (Royal Engineers). His services were secured, and after some months delay he reported upon the defences of Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia in Oct 1877 and finally Tasmania. The man who initially assisted Jervis and who subsequently supervised the nuts and bolts of many Australian forts and batteries was Lt Col Peter Scratchley RE. Another RE officer of great assistance to South Australia was Lt Col E Harding Steward, whose role in England was to advise upon all matters of land defence.

South Australian Defence Scheme: Jervis' defence scheme for South Australia recognised that the only probable form of attack would be by an unexpected arrival of a small squadron or a single cruiser, with the object of capturing merchant ships in coastal waters, seizing coal, or threatening to bombard South Australian ports for contribution and the destruction of commerce.² The landing of enemy troops was seriously expected by the populace and although never a realistic scenario, gave cause to many decades of volunteer rifle and field artillery preparations, before fading away until the next war scare. The main target in South Australia was Port Adelaide, six miles from the inland capital of Adelaide. Because of Adelaide's long straight coastline, the primary choice of Jervis for coastal defence was a seagoing armoured cruiser of greater power than the perceived threat. In addition he proposed two batteries (since known as Forts Glanville and Largs), to essentially defend Port Adelaide, which town was within easy reach of the guns of cruisers in the offing. Within weeks South Australia's Agent General in London was made aware of various designs for ships in contemplation, including Armstrong gunboats for China, and although the matter was pursued with some vigour, it was dropped because of both the waning of the scare and the reluctance of the South Australia government to afford the expense of such a purchase, especially as an addition to forts, at that time.³

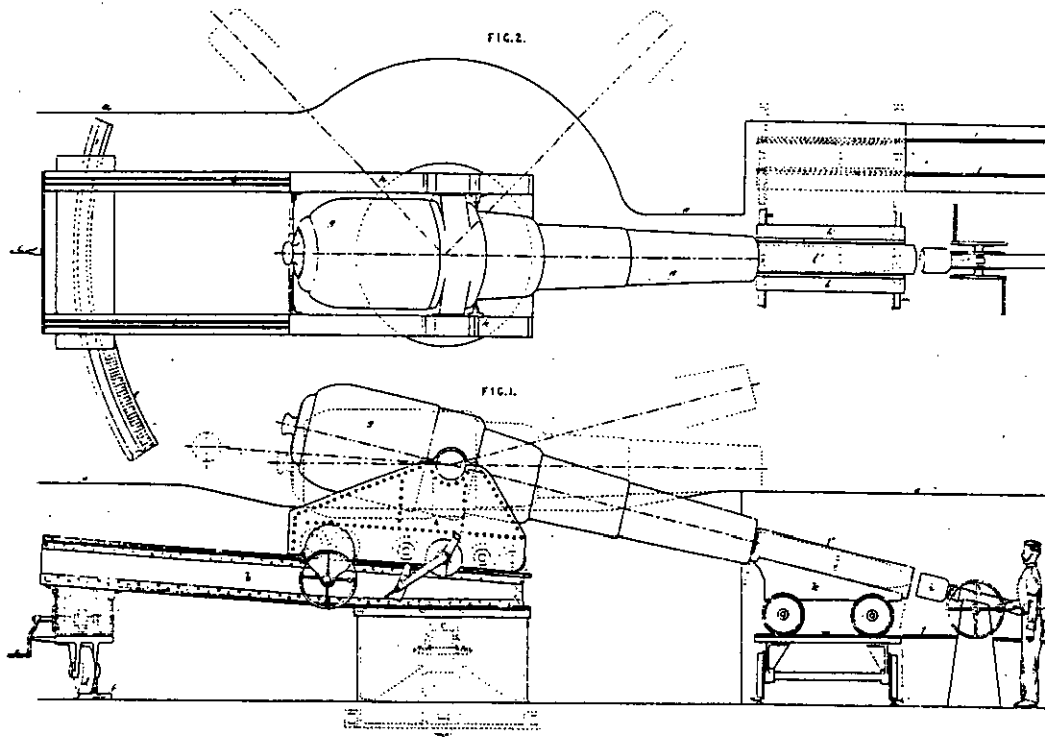
¹ Journal of the Ordnance Society (UK) Vol. 10-1998.

² SAPP (SA Parliamentary Paper) 240/1877.

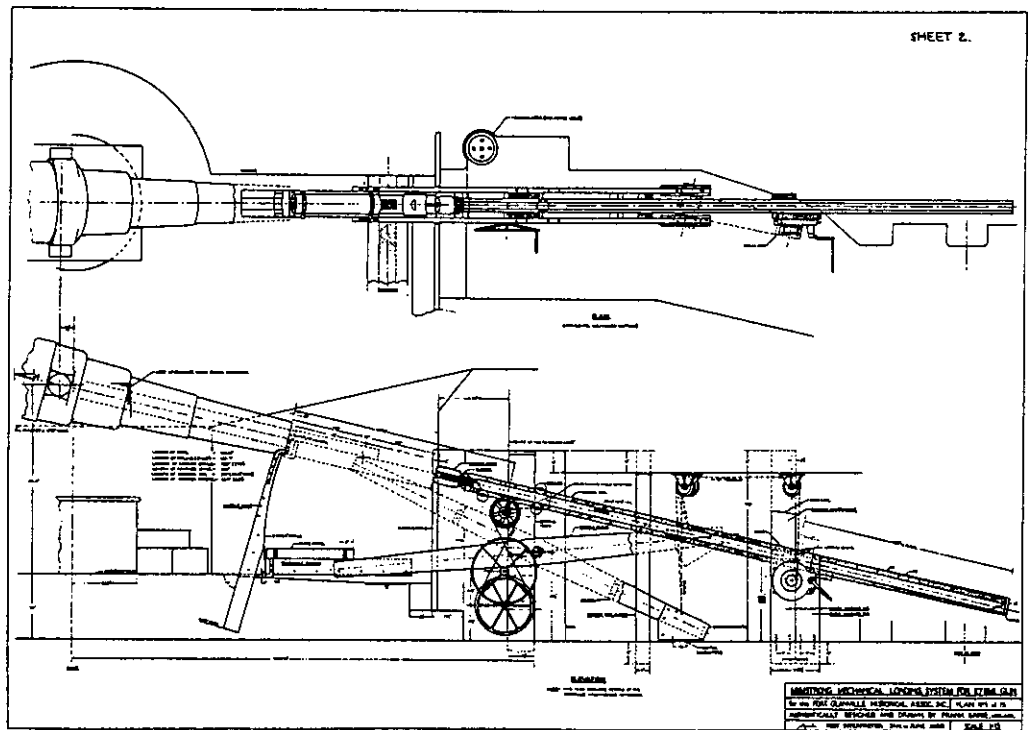
³ When in England, Jervis was anxious to purchase an ironclad destined for Argentina, but was unsuccessful.

A.D.1878, J^o 7, N^o 2282.
KENDEL'S SPECIFICATION.

SHEET 1.



SHEET 2.



IMITING MECHANICAL LOCOMOTION FOR STEAM LOCOMOTIVES
BY THE ROBEY & CO. WORKS, LEEDS, ENGLAND
SPECIFICALLY DESIGNED AND DRAWN BY HENRY KENDEL, ESQ.
LONDON, 1878. SHEET 2.

Indent for ordnance

In Feb 1878 the South Australian government telegraphed the Agent General to expedite an order on the War Office for ordnance, among which were two 10 inch 18 ton RML guns, carriages, platforms and "C" pivot racers.⁴ At this time South Australia's newly commissioned Governor (Jervois) was enroute to England for private reasons. In late May 1878 he visited Stewart Rendel at the London office of Sir W G Armstrong & Co.⁵ Jervois was shown a model of a system of loading guns in an open barbette battery, but under cover of the parapet (to avoid the annoyance of shrapnel!) He was impressed and immediately telegraphed the Chief Secretary in South Australia, strongly recommending that the new Armstrong system should be purchased, and that instead of the Woolwich "service" gun, a new more powerful (3.5 calibres longer) piece of the same 10 inch calibre should be adopted. The South Australian Commandant (Lt Col M F Downes RA), the South Australia Government and the British War Office made no objections to this new untried system; it appears Jervois' professional opinion thwarted all doubts. Jervois subsequently obtained the services of Col Stewart RE to oversee the technical details of the order, and arrived back in South Australia in August 1878 to take up his governorship.

Stewart Rendel, the salesman, contacted his brother George W Rendel, Civil Engineer at Elswick, Newcastle upon Tyne, and apprised him of the impending contract for South Australia. George was apparently quick to take advantage of South Australia's urgent need for ordnance, for on the 7 June 1878 he filed for Patent (No. 2282). The order for the contract was given on 3 July and completion given as four months from that date.

In mid-November 1878 Stewart advised Jervois of his dealing with Armstrongs.⁶ Stewart had requested that the parapet be raised by 6 inches to 7 feet so as to give more overhead cover to the men at the gun. Although Rendel's provisional patent only provided for protection against direct fire, Stewart requested that the gunners at the loading apparatus be further protected by overhead (bombproof) cover, viz: wrought iron plates and concrete.⁷ To effect this the floor of the loading gallery was lowered 3 feet. He also requested a change in the design of the loading system, from a trolley with rack and pinion driven rammer, the provisional patent (Sheet 1 on p.26), to a trough moved by a counterpoise lever (or 'seesaw') and adopted for filling by hand, the approved patent dated 15 November 1878 (Sheet 2 on p.26). As to who actually conceived of these changes I am unable to discern, but if it was not Stewart, then Rendel (who was pro-hydraulics) may have had other designs at hand for contemplation during the early stages of the contract. Rendel was quite an inventive man, and it is noted that although the Patent mentions a chain driven rammer (not meaning a chain-rammer), wire rope was used instead as the driving medium. It is presumed that much of this detail was worked out on the shop floor as testing or experimentation progressed by Elswick Ordnance Company (EOC) employees, and all at colonial rather than Imperial risk and expense.

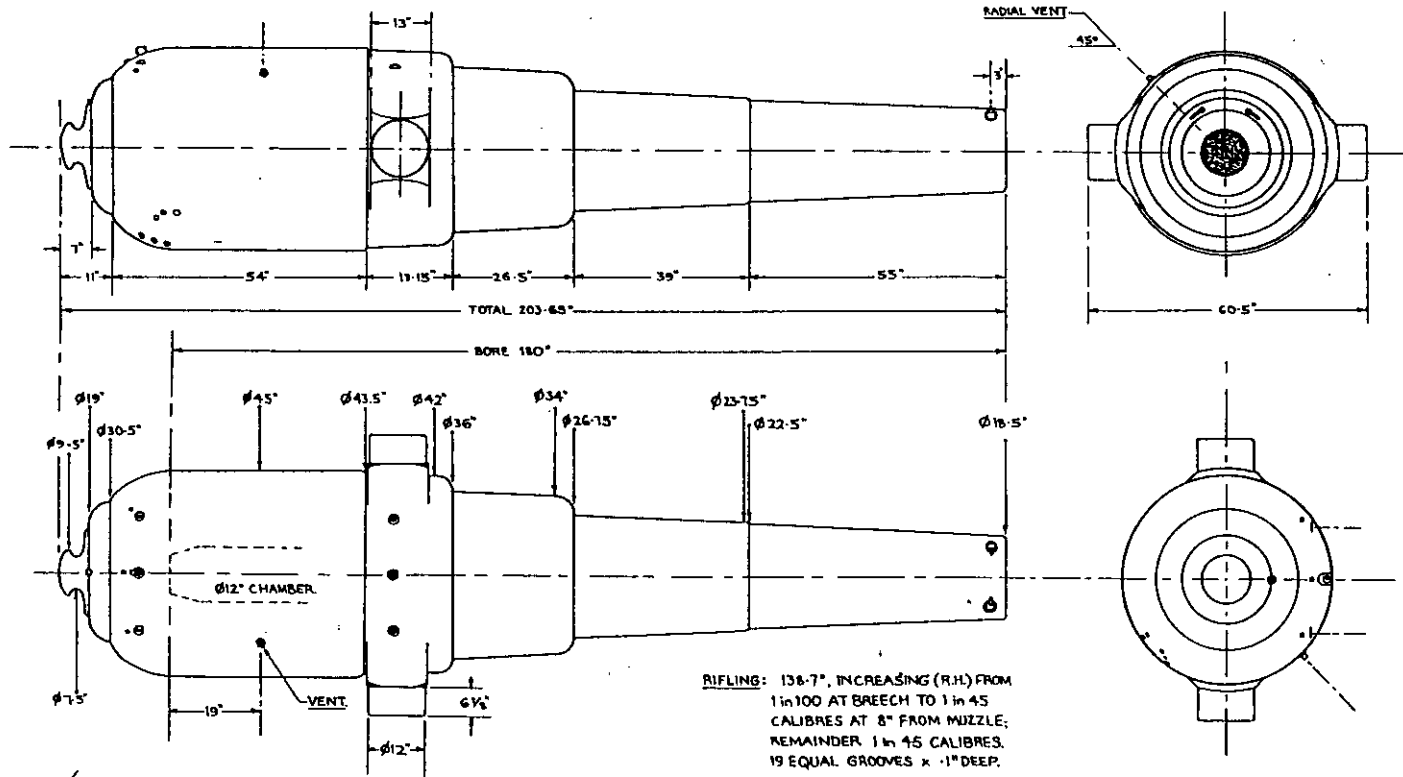
4 "C" pivot refers to a Central pivot gun emplacement where the mounting could turn a full 360 degrees.

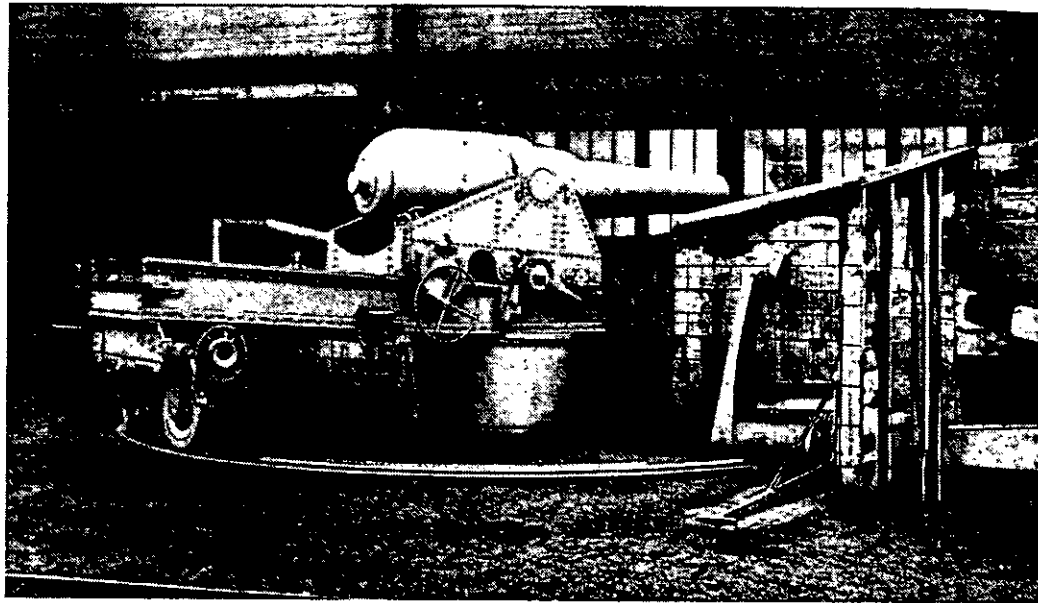
5 Rendel Papers 31/5884, Tyne & Wear County Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK; and SASR:GRG (SA State Records: Government Record Group) 24/6/1878/1794.

6 Letter of 18 November 1878 enclosed in Spec. 36/78: Alterations to Semaphore Battery SRSA: GRS 1800.

7 The 100 ton Armstrong Protected Barbettes in Gibraltar and Malta took gunner safety to even greater heights by the use of hydraulic power. Whereas at Fort Glanville the gunners were exposed to vertical fire during traversing, elevating, compressing, washing, sighting and firing, only the latter was exposed for any length of time at the 100 tonners. These guns were also made in 1878 but were not operational until the mid-1880's! Rendel had in fact advocated hydraulic systems for loading guns since the early 1870's.

10" 20 ton RML. Armstrong Gun. (400pr.)





Mounted in the open at the factory behind a dummy parapet and loading gallery.

Another later version of the mechanical loading system (sheet 3 of Patent No. 2282, on p.28) was adopted at Fort Lytton (QLD), Outer Middle Head (NSW), Bluff Battery (TAS), Batteries Naam and El Baroud, Tangier (Morocco) and Puckpool Battery (UK). The author is unaware of any other existing emplacements.

Steward visited EOC on two occasions. Upon the second occasion one of the guns had been mounted in the open at the factory behind a dummy parapet and loading gallery. This event appears in the miraculously surviving photograph on the opposite page. Steward reported that the system worked remarkably well. After sorting out the details of the hydraulic jet washing-out apparatus and satisfying himself with final details, one of the guns was sent to Shoeburyness for range and accuracy trials, ie, graduation of the sights in degrees.

The two protected barbette systems were shipped to South Australia at the end of June 1879 and arrived at Port Adelaide in late September. The 20 ton guns were off loaded by crane onto flat top railway carriages and taken by special railway spur line to a point outside of the fort, then winched up a wooden ramp and mounted by the contractor John Robb. The loading systems and both guns were first tried on 2 October 1880.

Description of the Mechanical Loading System

The following is an extract, but has been modified by the author to refer to Fort Glanville in the present tense so as to project the Armstrong sales-pitch of 1882.

**Memorandum by Sir W G Armstrong & Co
"Protected Barbette" system of mounting and working coast guns.⁸**

Before entering upon a description of the arrangement and advantages of the "protected barbette" system, it may be well to state that though this system is applicable to either muzzle or breech-loading guns, its advantages are more fully developed in the use of the former, and the preference is given to them, for the following reasons:

⁸ Appendix A to "Australian Defences and New Guinea"-Compiled from the Scratchley Papers, C. Kinloch Cooke, Macmillan, London 1887)

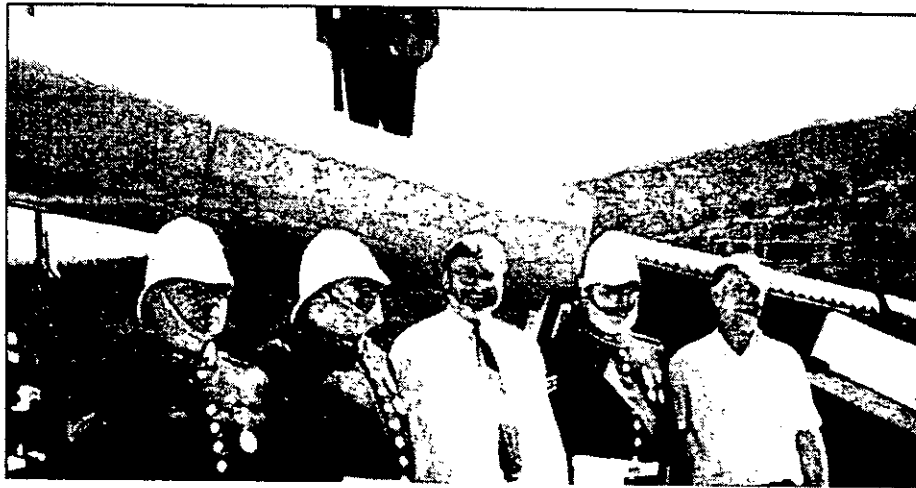
1. It is now conceded that there are no inherent advantages in breech-loading guns which cannot be obtained with muzzle-loaders; but that if two guns have the same proportions of bore and rifling, and fire the same charges, the same ballistic results can be obtained whether the gun be loaded at the muzzle or at the breech. The choice between the two systems depends therefore upon the relative convenience in working, and adaptability to situation and circumstances.
2. The advantages of simplicity of construction, absence of small details, and non-liability to derangement by exposure or rough usage, are greatly in favour of the muzzleloader.
3. On board a ship, where constant supervision is available, and cleaning of the guns forms part of the daily routine, and where on account of the limited space, muzzleloading with guns of the present length presents serious difficulties and great exposure of the men, breech-loading guns are employed with great advantage.
4. In a coast battery, where the guns are left exposed to the weather, often for long periods without any supervision or attention, it becomes imperative to adopt the simplest possible construction, to avoid all loose pieces and details which require to be kept in a store; and in fact, to have a gun that will remain for years in good condition simply by excluding the air from the bore, and be serviceable after a few minutes' cleaning whenever required.
5. Choosing then the muzzleloader for coast service the objects kept in view in designing the "protected barbette" system have been the following:-
 - (a) To obtain for the men working the gun the greatest possible protection.
 - (b) To reduce the number of men required to a minimum.
 - (c) To provide the most effective and economical arrangement of emplacement.

The "protected barbette" earthwork has been designed to fulfil, as far as possible, all the conditions laid down above.

Description of the apparatus: The interior of the emplacement is rectangular, lined on three sides with brick walling to support the earthwork. The front wall has a height at its lowest point of 7 feet (2.1 metres), while the height gradually rises in the return walls of the traverses (merlons) on both sides. In the traverse between the guns is a bombproof arched gallery in which the mechanical loading apparatus is fixed, and in which the men loading the gun are protected. The 400 lb (182 kg) projectiles are brought up to the loading trough (or cradle) by a special lever trolley, while the cartridge cases are brought up by a bearer, both charges reaching the trough by a pathway around the outside of the traverse.⁹ The front end of the gun platform rests upon a strong pivot (B pivot) fixed close to the front wall of the emplacement, and at about the middle of its breadth. The gun is loaded when run out, in which position the centre of gravity of the gun and carriage is almost directly over the pivot, so that the whole mass is in the most advantageous position for being traversed, which is done with traversing gears, and is so arranged as to give a rapid movement when changing the gun from one position to another, or a slower motion when laying the gun.¹⁰ For loading, the gun is traversed until its axis is parallel with the face of the parapet, and the muzzle pointed towards the loading gallery. The men performing these tasks are below the parapet and sheltered by the mass of the gun and mounting. The muzzle is then depressed about 13 degrees until it rests upon a wooden muzzle rest, in which position the axis of the gun is in a line coincident with a wooden rammer. The rammer (approx 8 metres long) slides in a long wooden sheath (hollow beam) fixed in the gallery, its lower end is embedded in the parapet wall. A flexible wire rope passes several times around a 30" (760 mm) diameter drum and thence over a two-grooved guide pulley (both attached to a pair passes several times around a 30" (760 mm) diameter drum and thence over a two-grooved guide pulley (both attached to a pair of wooden posts firmly attached to the floor and ceiling) The ends of the wire rope then pass over metal rollers, front and rear, on the underside of the sheath and are securely

⁹ It was not possible to pass through the gallery because of the high steps between the ammunition lifts and trough.

¹⁰ Armstrong protected barbette platforms had two large unflanged trucks (wheels) to run on the racer for the purpose of easier and faster traversing.



Rod Sawford MP for Port Adelaide (middle), Frank Garie (right)

attached to the ends of the rammer. By turning the drum in one direction the rammer is drawn forward out of the sheath, and by turning the drum in the reverse direction the rammer is withdrawn. Also pivoted to and straddling the aforementioned posts is a counterpoise lever or "seesaw". Pivoted between the front end of the seesaw is a cradle which receives the cartridge and projectile. Iron counterweights are bolted to the other end to assist in balancing the seesaw (when charged) on its pivot. Attached below the rear end of the cradle is an iron counterweight to ensure the cradle resists turning about its pivot during raising and lowering of the charge. The seesaw is raised by a chain-winch connected by a chain over a pulley to a bar below the ceiling, and to which bar two chains extend over two pulleys down to the counterweights of the seesaw. Before the apparatus can be operated a double sliding door is opened, and handles are attached to the rammer and seesaw drive gear shafts.

Loading operation: The front end of the seesaw (nearest the muzzle of the gun) is lowered to the ground and kept there by a pawl (catch) on the chain winch. The lid of the cradle is then raised, and a cartridge, stored inside a zinc cylinder (cartridge case) is brought up from the cartridge lift by two men on a wooden bearer and slugged out of its case into the cradle nearest the gun. The battering (full) charge is 46" (1170 mm) long, and contains 130 lbs (59 kg) of P² gunpowder; the service (reduced) charge is 35" (890 mm) long and contains 100 lbs (45.5 kg) of P². The lid is then closed. A 400 lb. projectile is then collected from the top of the shell lift, automatic gas-check (dual purpose driving band) attached, fuze if a shell (common or shrapnel), hooked up to a special lever trolley by selvagee (sling), run around the outside cast iron tramway to the cradle, fuze set, and projectile laid in the cradle by tilting the long lever handle of the trolley. It is necessary during this action to align the lugs on the gas-check with the rifling guide grooves in the cradle so as to ensure the projectile in ramming is in alignment with the rifling of the gun. The sling is then removed, projectile chocked (so as to prevent it sliding to the rear during raising), and if common shell or shrapnel, the fuze safety pin/s withdrawn. The catch is then released and the seesaw, supplemented by the action of one man at each end of the seesaw, raises the front end of the cradle up the muzzle rest & guide post to the muzzle of the gun. Just before the cradle reaches its uppermost point the hooks at the front of the cradle come into contact with similar hooks on the post. This action, as the seesaw continues to rise, causes the cradle to rotate about its axis, and as the cradle moves to a position where the longitudinal axis of the cradle is in alignment with the axes of the gun and rammer, the cradle also in effect moves away (60 mm) from the muzzle of the gun. (This allowed the excess water from the hydraulic jet washing-out apparatus to escape without running through the cradle.) The motion of the seesaw is arrested by its lower end coming to rest upon the gallery floor. The drum

carrying the wire rope is now revolved and the rammer is drawn forward, pushing the charge before it into the gun. A continuous motion is maintained so as to cause the motion to be arrested by the lugs on the gas-check being forced into the ends of the rifling grooves where they die out just before reaching the 12" (305 mm) diameter chamber of the gun. This prevents the projectile from moving once the rammer is withdrawn.¹¹ As soon as the charge is home the rammer is rapidly withdrawn, the cradle lowered to receive another charge, while the gun is elevated till it clears the edge of the parapet, traversed round into any required position (135 degrees maximum traverse) and laid in the ordinary way, ie, with open metallic sights. As soon as the gun is fired it is trained round to the muzzle rest, depressed to lay upon it, and a jet of water sprayed up the bore from the hydraulic jet apparatus. (This was a vertical cylinder filled with water, above which was a moveable heavy weight (accumulator) mounted upon a brass piston. Upon opening the stop-cock the weight forced the water out of the cylinder via a hose and nozzle up to the breech face and chamber of the gun.) This dispenses with the need for the normal damp sponge to douse any live embers.¹² The gun is then reloaded. (The rate of fire was roughly one round every three minutes).

In the event of any damage to or derangement of the apparatus, which from its protected situation and simple construction is not likely to occur, the cartridge and projectile may be lifted to the muzzle of the gun when depressed into the loading position by a davit fixed to the front of the platform, and passed home into the gun by an ordinary hand rammer in the usual way, the men performing this operation being almost as perfectly protected (standing upon a banquette in front of the mounting, and on both sides when using "bell" ropes to pull the rammer) as they are while working the mechanical loading system.

Performance in South Australia

On 8 April 1880 the Director of Artillery in England sought a report from the South Australian commandant as to whether the system was satisfactory. This request was not responded to until the system had been first tried in South Australia on 2 and 16 October 1880 when several rounds were fired at 3,500 and 2,500 yards (3200 & 2286 metres).¹³ Col Downes replied that the system had worked satisfactorily and made the following observations (in brief):

1. That there was a tendency for the gas check to override and tear the silk bag of the cartridge. He solved this by loading the cartridge separately. ¹⁴
2. From oblique fire there is not nearly the same amount of protection, especially if shrapnel is used.
3. In order that the loading and working of the gun should be satisfactory, the pivot and drum upon which the gun revolves as also the loading trough through which the rammer works, must be placed with mathematical accuracy. Any incorrectness in first mounting, subsidence of the foundations, construction of the masonry, &c would be fatal to the working of the guns until some correction were applied. (Apparently one of the pivots had already slightly subsided with corrective action being necessary). Again, as regards the loading trough, this must be placed so that the rammer working therein is in exact prolongation of the axis of gun when depressed to the loading position.

Downes found that at one stage the rammer was out of alignment, but was able to remedy it. He pointed out the absolute necessity of the most perfect alignment of all parts so as to avoid a

¹¹ The gun being already "up", it consequently avoided suffering any unwarranted shock of hitting the buffers (as in the normal method of loading where the gun was loaded in the "back" position, and thus cause the projectile to be dislodged forward with possible catastrophic results.

¹² The rammer head was fitted with a piasaba brush to prevent gunpowder residue from building up in the rifling grooves.

¹³ SASR:GRG 55/1/1880/AG8021, and Report No. 12 of the Special Committee on the Working of Heavy Guns 1881:- PRO (UK) SUPP. 6/530).

¹⁴ This slowed the loading cycle a little, but could have been avoided by using a tighter cartridge, or shorter becket. For reasons unknown the practice of using split charges does not appear to have been adopted, especially considering the weight of the full charge!

failure of the system during action. Downes included in his report a description of the mechanical loading drill

Some of the points which are worth highlighting from the drill are as follows:

1. Most of the Armstrong Protected Barbette batteries comprised two guns, a left-handed and a right-handed mounting. This was because both guns pointed into a central loading gallery located between them, which for the greater protection of the two detachments had the elevating and compressor gear mounted on the rear side of the mountings when they were in their loading positions.
2. Each gun detachment consisted of 14 gunners (26 when both guns were operated together), 5 of whom were underground in the shell and cartridge stores and two more constantly in the loading gallery.
3. Most of the gunners had several functions and positions to attend to, rather than being at fixed stations. (Not to be confused with changing Numbers)
4. Since the axis of the gun was more than 8 feet above the gun floor the radial firing vent was located at 45 degrees to the vertical, ie, in a position where it was more easily served than if on top of the gun.¹⁵

In December 1881 Col Downes made another report upon the system.¹⁶ This was in response to enquiries by officers of the Royal Artillery in England. He reported little change to his previous report other than that when both charge and projectile were rammed together the greater strain on the wire rope tended to cause it to get onto the cogs of the wheel and damage the rope.¹⁷ No further changes of any consequence were made to the loading system after this date. Artillery practice continued with the guns until March 1893 when the mechanical loading system was taken out of service.¹⁸

Adoption by Her Majesty's service: The Armstrong Protected Barbette system occurred during a time of crisis. The British War Office saw merit in the novel system, but as they were committed to reliable service systems, they chose to wait and see how the Armstrong system fared. They did however in November 1880 conduct some undercover loading experiments with a 12.5" 38 ton gun mounted en-barbette at Cliff End Battery, Isle of Wight with some success.¹⁹ Later, and it might be supposed after they had time to paw over Col. Downes's reports, another experiment was tried at Shoeburyness with a 10.4" 25 ton RML,²⁰ but using the Armstrong system. The Ordnance Select Committee reaffirmed the advantages of the system, but in light of developments in ordnance and gunnery, they noted that the gun and part of the carriage were exposed during traverse from firing to loading positions during the time of loading, and during traverse back to the firing position, an interval of nearly three minutes. The time occupied by these operations would, they said, render the following of a passing enemy difficult and uncertain. The nature of the emplacement was not suitable for an arc of fire of more than 140 degrees. The mounting, which was practically front pivot, necessitated a large and open emplacement of 35 feet (10.6 m) frontage, which was much exposed to projectiles having a falling trajectory.²¹ They then proposed a central pivot carriage with a smaller emplacement, but an Armstrong of this form was already operational at the Bluff Battery, Bellerive, Hobart,

¹⁵ The protected barbette guns installed by the Australian colonies of Queensland, Tasmania, New South Wales, and the 100 tonners, all adopted axial vents.

¹⁶ SASR: GRG45/3/1881/TO737 and GRG55/1/1881/AG9481.

¹⁷ The author has been unable to reproduce this problem and can only surmise that the wire rope may have become permanently stretched and not repaired or replaced. Of continuing annoyance was that owing to some further subsidence of the pivot (the gunblock and fort were built on sandhills) one of the guns (the gun since restored with corrective tilted and eccentric pivot collar) now required four men to traverse it.]

¹⁸ *The South Australian Register* (Newspaper) 31 March 893.

¹⁹ PRO SUPP. 6/530.

²⁰ This may have been the gun eventually mounted at the Puckpool Battery, Isle of Wight, the unaltered emplacement still existing.

²¹ The theoretical was apparently still to the fore in the minds of these experts rather than what was reality at that time and for many years to come!

Tasmania. Other authorities were unhappy with the fact that every time the gun was loaded you had in effect a loaded gun pointing into the magazine. Again, this was not new.

The War Office had something even larger underway; Armstrong 17.72" (2000 pounder) 100 ton guns (1878) with full hydraulic operation and two rammer systems, the latter to avoid delays in traversing. These systems were not mounted until 1883 nor fully operational until 1886. Unlike the mechanical systems, the detachment for this hydraulic system was wholly protected from both direct and plunging fire, except for the very short length of time it took a gunner to reload the axial vent firing tube!

During the construction of South Australia's system an event occurred which gave the South Australia government second thoughts as to its purchase. This was the report of a fatal loading accident aboard HMS *Thunderer*, an ironclad mounting an Armstrong hydraulic loading system for two 12 inch RML guns in her fore turret. Steward advised South Australia not to worry. An inquiry and duplicated trial of the other gun later reported that the first gun had been accidentally double-loaded, the simple remedy for South Australia being the marking of the rammer to indicate when each projectile had been loaded to its correct depth in the gun.

Reconstruction

In January 2000 I was invited by the Fort Glanville Historical Association to take up the challenge of creating the mechanical loading system for the mounted 10" 20 ton Armstrong gun at Fort Glanville. Funds at the disposal of the Association had come about through an application for a Centenary of Federation Grant. The amount was a guesstimate, which as things turned out was not far off the mark, thanks to a lot of voluntary labour.

Having carried out a considerable amount of research on the system since 1969, I agreed. My work initially consisted of putting all of my notes and drawings together, followed by a detailed survey of the site. This took several months and many site visits to check and double check the geometry of the emplacement and loading gallery. Some things of note about the site were:-

The main supporting posts for the rammer system still existed complete with plummer-block hole locations. All other timber and fittings had been scrapped.

The rammer sheath where it penetrated the wall for 3 metres had been almost entirely removed by the action of termites. This was a blind hole and would have posed a major problem to clean out. The holes for the other posts and muzzle rest were located and excavated (termites again having prepared the site in advance). This meant an invasion of the heritage fabric of the fort was avoided.

The ceiling mounted chain pulley brackets and one pulley still existed, fortunately with only minor termite damage to one of their wooden supports. To have fixed the problem either the supporting beam would have to have been replaced by cutting through three feet of lime concrete from above, or by the addition of an intrusive steel truss in the arched gallery.

The three pairs of posts in the loading gallery were all in fact leaning 1.5 degrees from the vertical, which did not pose a great problem, but it was then found that the muzzle rest post holes were inclined in the opposite direction. This required cutting the guide posts to lines inscribed by a pencil attached to a template of the cradle running up the posts. It also necessitated the adding of lugs to the cradle hooks to stop them jumping sideways off the guide post hooks as the cradle moved the odd 2 inches (60 mm) away from the posts. No original details of this problem were found, except to say that the hooks shown in the Elswick photograph were not, by the evidence of later photos, the type used.

Since there had been some uncertainty about the actual height of the gun platform originally purchased as opposed to the replica, the site survey resulted in a loading angle of 12.5 degrees (instead of the 13 degrees as planned, or the angle found in the rammer hole in the wall, viz: 12 degrees!) Minor but painstaking adjustments had to be made when it came time to test the motion of the cradle to effect a full alignment of gun, cradle and rammer. One of these minor

adjustments allowed for the short dive the gascheck (and projectile) made as it jumped the gap between the end of cradle and muzzle of the gun.

The timber sizes were not of today's standards, moreover suitable timber was generally unavailable and after long delays the major components were made from laminated oregon, up to 8 metres long. The cradle was made from laminated ex-woolstore karri (Australian hardwood) floor joists. As shipwrights were unobtainable for making the cradle, recourse was made to computer aided machining. In hindsight I could have saved a thousand dollars if I had cut the 7 feet x 10 inch (2130 mm x 254 mm) diameter groove by hand with gouges!

Another problem was the actual design of the rammer, was it metal-lined or hollow? I opted for a laminated oregon rammer with a rope groove in its underside and 2 mm clearance. During testing the wire rope drive, having performed perfectly without slippage, suddenly became harder and harder to operate. To my surprise I found that sawdust was being formed by the friction of the rammer against its sheath and was galling up into hard lumps. In effect these lumps were being drawn along by the rammer and gouging long grooves (approx 1.5 mm deep) into the softer shim laminates glued to the sides of the rammer. This was subsequently remedied by thinning down the rammer in situ, it not being timely to withdraw the sheath from the wall for this adjustment. The idea of coating the rammer with a lubricant of any sort was rejected because of the possibility of wind-blown sand sticking to it and thus making matters worse. This problem is being monitored. The interpreter gunners sweep off any gunpowder fouling and sand which falls upon the top of the rammer as it moves outside of its sheath.

The method used to allow for any changes in the height of the cradle axis was to attach an adjustable oregon spacer/buffer to the bottom of the seesaw counterweights.

Following the excavation of the muzzle-rest post holes it was found that water was seeping in beneath the gunblock and filling the almost metre deep holes to a depth of 35 cm. The remedy was to coat the feet of the new posts with fibre-glass.

All steel parts were hot-dip galvanised, cast iron was carefully painted and other parts were of stainless steel (the wire rope for example) and non-ferrous metals.

The gears and pinions of both winches were computer-cut from mild steel to cut costs, with negligible visible detriment to the form of cast gears.

While the staked end of the wire rope is now possibly inaccessible within the bottom of the fort wall, the outer end, after getting rid of any slack, was fitted to a multi-screw clamp behind the rammer head. This was designed to allow for any future adjustment of slack even though the amount of friction of four effective coils of wire rope around the large smooth drum would in any case negate this during rotation.

The rammer head of hardwood laminates was attached to the end of the rammer stave (125 mm x 75 mm in cross section) by a long spring-loaded bolt, designed to cushion any blow to the head when stopped by the sheath. The basine bristled rammer head is withdrawn undercover when not in use.

The two pairs of missing system support posts were all made in halves, fitted into their respective holes in floor and ceiling and joined with some finesse where they straddled the rammer sheath.

To give effect to the demonstration of the apparatus and instead of dummy loading the gun with "service" drill cartridge and shell, I used a hollow pine cartridge (a solid karri cartridge was just too heavy for the interpreters to lift, even though it was lighter than the real thing) and common shell of karri fitted with dummy copper gas check and dummy fuze. During the loading drill the cartridge was linked to the shell, and which in turn was linked to the rammer head. This system of removable steel linkages thus enables the shell and cartridge to be rammed and withdrawn

together, thus avoiding the problems of "losing" the components in the chamber by other methods on visitor open days.

The crank handle for the chain winch was copied from those found in the well at the Bluff Battery, Hobart.

Initially it was thought that the stop on the racer fixed the point of traverse for loading, but during testing it was found that this was not so (by 25 mm), this function evidently being obviated by signal between the traversing number and gun captain at the muzzle rest. Traversing and elevating were done by volunteers during reconstruction because the mechanisms did not yet exist.

One of my scaling and proportioning tasks ended up being spot-on, viz: the lever-trolley. Apart from carting projectiles, its special function was to deliver projectiles over the edge of the cradle and lay them in it. For this to succeed the height of the trolley lifting arm and length of selvagee were critical so as not to foul the edge of the cradle. The system is demonstrated on open days at the fort.

I am forever grateful to my assistant on this job who passed away after all the major work had been completed, he unfortunately missed out on seeing the system work.

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An Australian Perspective on the English Invasions of the Rio de la Plata in 1806 and 1807¹

Robert J. King

On 13 September 1806 Prime Minister William Grenville and his ministers in London received a despatch from Brigadier-General William Carr Beresford in Buenos Aires informing them of the capture of that city on the preceding 27 June by the small detachment of 1,635 troops under his command, which had been transported to the Rio de la Plata from Cape Town by a squadron of six warships and five transports commanded by Commodore Sir Home Popham.² The expedition had been carried out entirely on the initiative of Popham. He had commanded the fleet which had transported the forces under General David Baird that had captured Cape Town from the Dutch some months before, and he had persuaded Baird to provide the detachment under General Beresford for the expedition to the Rio de la Plata. The unexpected and unlooked for success of this expedition provoked a spasm of activity from the Government in London to take advantage of the situation. A force of a little more than 4,000 troops under the command of Sir Samuel Auchmuty sailed from England directly for the Rio de la Plata on 9 October. In addition, in the belief that the moment had come for decisive blows to be struck against the Spanish Empire, plans were drawn up for wide-ranging expeditions against Chile, Mexico and the Philippines.

Brigadier-General Robert Craufurd was given command of a force of 4,000, with instructions drafted by the Secretary of State for War and Colonies, William Windham, to sail for Chile in a fleet commanded by Admiral Sir George Murray, with the object of capturing Valparaiso and other ports and reducing the whole of that country to British rule. Murray intended to take his fleet to Chile by way of Cape Town and Port Jackson (Sydney) in New South Wales, in accordance with advice from Grenville's brother, Lord Buckingham, who had urged him to "advert very particularly to the advantage of ordering Murray to carry Crawford's force direct from their *rendezvous* [at Cape Town] through Bass's Straits to refresh at New South Wales—Port Jackson; and to exchange their less active men for the seasoned flank companies of the New South Wales corps; and to take with them 100 convict pioneers, who will invaluable, as seasoned to work in the sun".³ Once he had gained control of Chile, Craufurd was instructed to establish "an uninterrupted communication with General Beresford" in Buenos Aires, "by a chain of posts" between Valparaiso and that city.⁴

In a memorable phrase, the Hon. John Fortescue characterized this in his magisterial *History of the British Army* as "one of the most astonishing plans that ever emanated from the brain even of a British Minister of War". "Military officers," he wrote, "by incapacity and misjudgement have frequently placed Ministers in situations of cruel difficulty, but it may be doubted whether any General has ever set them a task so impossible as that prescribed, not in the doubt and turmoil of a campaign but in the tranquility of the closet, by Windham to Craufurd."⁵

Writing in the *United Service Magazine*, Captain Lewis Butler was equally withering in his comment: "In truth, among the innumerable wild projects which chased each other at this period through the restless brain-pans of successive Ministers, it would be difficult to find a parallel to this effusion of Windham,

1 Originally presented at the *Iras. Jornadas Internacionales de Historia Naval y Maritima*, Buenos Aires, 8-10 November 2000.

2 *The Times*, 15 September 1806.

3 Buckingham to Grenville, 16 November 1806; quoted in *Report on the Manuscripts of J.B. Fortescue*, Preserved at Dropmore (Dropmore Papers), London, Vol. VIII, 1912, pp.435-6.

4 Robert Craufurd, *An Authentic Narrative of the Proceedings of an Expedition under the Command of Brigadier-Gen. Craufurd, until its arrival at Monte Video*, London, 1808; *The Trial of General White Locke*, London, 1808, Vol. I, App. xvii, "Instructions for Brig-Gen. Craufurd"; and *Annual Register for 1807*, pp.215-6.

5 J.W. Fortescue, *A History of the British Army*, London, 1906, Vol. V, pp.376-8.

either as regards its ill-defined objective or of its inconceivable ignorance, not only of military requirements, but of the most elementary geographical considerations."⁶

These vivid phrases by the two historians who were considered to have written the definitive accounts of the British campaigns in the Rio de la Plata have echoed through all subsequent discussion of those events.

In addition to the Craufurd/Murray expedition to Chile, Lord Grenville in October 1806 also proposed complementary expeditions against the Philippines and against Mexico from both the west and east.⁷ Maj-General Sir Arthur Wellesley was directed in November to report upon the matter and draw up a plan of operations.⁸ Grenville referred to his attention a strategy proposed by Sir John Dalrymple, who had studied and promoted the idea of expeditions against the Spanish Empire in the Americas and Pacific for over twenty years.⁹

"Fortunately," wrote Fortescue, "Grenville's wild idea was abandoned."¹⁰ Craufurd's force sailed from the Cornish port of Falmouth at the end of November. He reached Cape Town on 20 March 1807, finding there Admiral Murray who had preceded him to the rendezvous, with new orders. News that the local population had thrown the British out of Buenos Aires and compelled Beresford to surrender on 12 August 1806 had reached London on 2 January, and the fast sloop *Fly* had been sent to Cape Town with orders for Murray to take Craufurd's force directly across the South Atlantic to the Rio de la Plata to reinforce Auchmuty in an attempt to re-take Buenos Aires. This was done, with the result that five months later Craufurd was involved in the debacle of 5 July 1807 when the combined British forces under the command of Lt-General John Whitelocke (who had superseded Auchmuty) was defeated in a second attempt to capture Buenos Aires. Craufurd himself was compelled to surrender with his surviving men, and only regained his liberty as a result of the capitulation agreed to by Whitelocke on 7 July, under which all prisoners were exchanged and British forces withdrew completely from the Rio de la Plata.

Considering the whole episode, Fortescue passed judgement on Grenville's Ministry: "they acted in complete ignorance or misconception the true condition of affairs on the Rio de la Plata. No ignorance or misconception, however, can excuse the absurdity of the orders given to Craufurd, or the contradictory injunctions addressed to Whitelocke."¹¹

It is understandable that the failure of the campaign should have exposed the weaknesses of the strategy upon which it was based, and laid open the policy of the Grenville administration to the bitter ridicule and sarcasm of Butler and Fortescue. But they were writing with the advantage of hindsight, and within a narrow compass. Grenville and his contemporaries saw themselves, not as reacting with shocked incoherence to the surprise good fortune of an errant commodore, but as taking advantage of favourable circumstances to put into action a deeply-matured strategy which had been a favourite object of successive British administrations, especially during the long tenure of William Pitt. Grenville and his ministers were acting on advice which carried the weight of the most respectable authority. In his letter to Grenville of 20 October 1806, Sir John Dalrymple recalled how he had been led to propose to Lord North's administration in 1779 the project of complementary expeditions against the Atlantic and Pacific coasts of the Spanish Empire:

6 Lewis Butler, "Minor Expeditions of the British Army from 1803 to 1815", *The United Service Magazine*, no.920, July 1905, p.387.

7 Cabinet Memorandum from Secretary of State for War and Colonies Lord Castlereagh, 1 May 1807, in Charles Vane (ed.), *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh*, London, Vol.VII, 1851, pp.314-24.

8 Supplementary Despatches and memoranda of Field Marshal Arthur Duke of Wellington, London, John Murray, 1858-72, Vol.VI, pp.35-61.

9 Sir John Dalrymple to Lord Grenville, 20 October 1806, Huntington Library (San Marino, Calif.), Stowe MSS, Admiralty Boxes 9 and 37; Charles F. Mullett, "British Schemes against Spanish America in 1806", *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol.27, no.2, May 1947, pp.269-78.

10 Fortescue, p.379.

11 Fortescue, p.435.

After my Brother Captain William Dalrymple not then 24 years of age had with 109 soldiers taken by Storm Fort Ornoah [on the Gulf of Honduras at the boundary of Honduras and Guatemala] Garrisoned by 800 Soldiers, I presented from him to Lord Germain a project to make an attack upon the South Seas from the bay of Honduras through the province of Guatemala to Sansonate... supported by an armament to India, to sail either by New Holland or by the Philippines to Mexico.¹²

Sir John had described the project fully in the book he had published in May 1788, *Memoirs of Great Britain and Ireland*. He wrote in the book's preface, dated 3 November 1787, that he had sent his manuscript to the publisher in the expectation that Britain would soon be at war with France and Spain as a result of the civil war which was then taking place in the Netherlands.:

if the war should take place, I imagined that some of the papers I had written, pointed out weak spots in the French and Spanish monarchies, which England might take advantage of in the course of the war... These are chiefly to be found in the Notes and Appendix, and I account them the best part of the publication, because the most useful.¹³

The Appendix, "Account of an intended expedition into the South Seas by private persons in the late war", described his brother's plan. Sir John wrote that the Spanish war had broken out so late in the summer that there was little chance of getting an expedition ready to pass Cape Horn in the proper months of December or January, and that there was therefore a prospect that the most vulnerable parts of Spain's empire, her South Seas, would be safe from attack for twenty months. Since the voyages and discoveries of Captain Cook, there were two easy ways of getting into the South Seas at any time of the year, one from Britain by way of the Cape of Good Hope; the other from India, either by the Philippines and the North Pacific (the Manila Galleon route), or by New Holland and the South Pacific:

The other route from the East Indies is by the south, to get into the latitude of 40° south in New Holland; and from thence to take advantage of the great west wind, which about that latitude blows ten months of the year, in order to reach Chili, where the south land wind will be found. The facility of this last route was not known till the late discoveries, which will make the memory of Sir Joseph Banks, of Captain Cook, of Lord Sandwich, and of his present Majesty, immortal in history... The very circumstance of the consciousness of Spain of her security for twenty months gave an advantage to those who should attempt to make her feel her mistake. The proper mode of conducting an expedition from Britain in the South Seas, was to run by the Cape of Good Hope and New Zealand to the coast of Chili, from thence along that coast by the south land wind into the gulf of Panama, from thence upon the trade wind with the prizes and such of their goods as were fit for the eastern markets, to the eastern islands, China or India.¹⁴

Immediately upon publication of Dalrymple's book, the Spanish Ambassador in London, Bernardo del Campo, reported to his Prime Minister in Madrid, Count Florida Blanca, transcribing and translating these passages, and discussing the strategy it described. "Fortunately," he said, the British Government had not given the proposal "the confidence and attention it merited," and peace had supervened to remove for a time such expectations. He continued:

But after having read it with the most serious attention, and having compared it with the kinds indicated in the voyages of Anson, Bougainville, Cook and others, I formed the judgement that the enterprise would have been successful, with very considerable losses on our part, and that in any other succeeding war it would be equally so.¹⁵

12 Charles F. Mullett, "British Schemes against Spanish America in 1806", *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol.27, no.2, May 1947, p.274.

13 Charles F. Mullett, "British Schemes against Spanish America in 1806", *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol.27, no.2, May 1947, pp.269-78.

14 Edinburgh and London, 1788, Vol.2. Dalrymple's "Account" was published in *The Scots Magazine* of August and September 1788 (pp.384-8, 438-42) and it was fully described in *The London Review*, August 1788, pp.107-110.

15 Campo to Florida Blanca, 4 June 1788, *Archivo General de Simancas, Estado*, legajo 8145; also at *Museo Naval (Madrid)*, Ms. 475, ff.280-304; quoted in Juan Pimentel, *En el Panóptico del Mar del Sur: Orígenes y desarrollo de la visita australiana de la expedición Malaspina (1793)*, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid, 1992, pp.50-51.

William Knox, Under-Secretary to Lord Germain in the Home Office during the North Administration, published his memoirs, *Extra Official State Papers* (London), in 1789. In this work (Pt.II, pp.62-3) he stated that he had read Dalrymple's *Memoirs*, in particular his Appendix, and went on: "Lest it might be supposed from that publication that it was not properly attended to, I will take upon me to assure Sir John and the public, that whoever can obtain leave to read over his Lordship's secret correspondence with Governor Dalling at Jamaica, and Governor Robertson at New York, will find sufficient information to satisfy him, that the object of that plan was so far from being treated with neglect, that it was comprehended in one of *much greater extent*." Dalling, he added, had thought so highly of the scheme and had been so confident of its success that he had applied to be appointed the King of England's first Viceroy of Peru and Mexico. "How it happened to fail will, I hope, become one day the object of Parliamentary enquiry."¹⁶

Dalrymple apparently took some action in accordance with Knox's suggestion when war with Spain again appeared imminent over the Nootka Sound incident, for in the second edition of his book, published in London and Dublin in 1790, he said:

Since publishing the first edition of these Memoirs, I have learnt the circumstances of the above expedition. It was planned and proposed to the cabinet ministers by Col Fullarton of Fullarton, who acted in conjunction with the late Col (then Maj) Mackenzie Humberstone... They raised 20,000 men at their own expence with unusual dispatch... The object of it was, an attack upon the coast of Mexico; the troops were to sail to Madras, and to be joined there by a body of Lascars, who were to proceed with them to one of the Luconia islands, in order to refresh the men; and then to make for the coast of Mexico, in the tract of the Acapulco ships. Lord George Germaine added to this idea, the idea of another expedition to the Spanish main; which was, to go across to the South Sea, and join that on the coast of Mexico; and there is no doubt that if the junction had been made, Spain must have instantly sued for peace. But the unexpected breaking out of the Dutch war obliged the expedition intended for Mexico, to be sent upon an attack on the Cape of Good Hope; and when that was found improper, it was employed in the war of India...

Sir John's brother, William, was in 1779 an Army captain based in Jamaica, where John Dalling was at the time Governor. Sir John was better placed than his brother to promote the plan. As a baron of the Scottish Exchequer, Sir John had the ear of the Secretary of State for Home and American Affairs, Lord Germain, who had charge of the conduct of the American War. The complete Dalrymple plan was for the trans-Pacific expedition to be complemented by another from Jamaica through Guatemala to gain possession of Sonsonate on the Pacific coast, and thus access across the isthmus of Central America to the South Seas. An operation of this nature but, at Dalling's insistence using a route across Nicaragua up the San Juan River, was actually attempted in 1780 from Jamaica under the command of Lt Col John Polson and Captain Horatio Nelson, but without success.¹⁷

Ambassador Campo wrote to Prime Minister Florida Blanca in his letter of 4 June 1788 discussing Dalrymple's book:

if until now we have seen as the greatest security of our South Sea possessions the circumstance that, having once passed Cape Horn, the enemy would have neither port nor shelter in such a vast extent of coasts.... today I do not believe we should flatter ourselves with such obstacles, for in the many islands which the English have frequented they have found at all times provisions, firewood and all kinds of assistance; they can leave their sick to be cured; form magazines for as much as they require; they will have shelters not only to careen and repair their vessels, but also to construct others.¹⁸

¹⁶ Quoted in Vincent Harlow, *The Founding of the Second British Empire*, London, Longmans, Vol.II, 1962, p.639.

¹⁷ Dalrymple to Grenville, 20 October 1806; quoted in Mullett *op.cit.* See also Tom Pocock, *The Young Nelson in the Americas*, London, Collins, 1980.

¹⁸ Campo to Florida Blanca, 4 June 1788; quoted in Pimentel, *op.cit.*, p.51.

Although Germain told Dalrymple in October 1779 that "secrecy and prudence were of the last consequence" for the success of the expedition, an article in *The Whitehall Evening Post* of 20 January 1780 would have been read attentively in Spain and Spanish America:

The power of France being totally annihilated in the East-Indies, it is said, that an expedition was planned, and ready to be carried into execution, against the Spanish settlements in the South Seas, as soon as three ships of the line could be spared, and it was known that Spain was preparing to break with us. So early as the 23d. of May last a person was dispatched over land to India, to inform the Company's servants there of the approaching rupture with Spain; so that we may reasonably conclude by this time, that Sir Edward Vernon is in the neighbourhood of Acapulco, and beating up the Dons quarters in that part of the world. The force destined for this service is said to be three men of war of the line, frigates, country ships &c. and six thousand land forces. It is not above six or seven weeks sail from part of the British dominions in India to the Coast of Chili, in South-America, if care be taken to reach a certain latitude at the time the monsoon or trade wind sets in.

As Dalrymple said in the second edition of his *Memoirs* published in 1790, instead of his own scheme, which was essentially a privateering venture, the North Administration took up a plan proposed by William Fullarton in June 1780, for an expedition to proceed from Madras by way of the "Luconian Islands" (the Philippines) and New Zealand. This plan involved, not merely spoiling raids as Dalrymple proposed, but the ambitious aim of rousing Chile and Peru to revolt against Spain. Fullarton explained:

The object of this force should be to secure one of the small Luconian Islands, and then proceed to some healthy Spot in New Zealand, in order to establish means of refreshment, communication and retreat; from New Zealand the Armament should sail directly to South America; there is not one place, from California to Cape Horn, capable of resisting such an equipment, if properly provided and properly conducted. Some advantageous Ports should be fortified and Terms of *Independence* offered to the Native Mexicans, Peruvians and Chilians. If these Settlements are effected it is evident that the Trade of South America would be opened to our East Indian Territories: if they were not effected still the Blow to Spain must be fatal because her richest possessions would be alarmed, their Commerce and remittances interrupted, their Ships destroyed, their Towns plundered and the Inhabitants incited to revolt.¹⁹

After much delay and several changes of plan, the South Seas expedition was finally approved by the North Cabinet on 3 August 1780. A further Cabinet meeting on 25 November decided to combine the South Seas expedition with an attack on Monte Video, to capture the Spanish treasure fleet which was reported to be assembling there. Naval command of the expedition was given to Commodore George Johnstone. Dutch entry into the war against Britain in December led to a further Cabinet decision on 29 December 1780 to direct Johnstone to first direct his efforts toward the capture of the Cape of Good Hope. The expedition sailed on 12 March 1781 but, on the way to the Cape Johnstone's fleet was mauled at the Azores by a French squadron under Admiral de Suffren, who then sailed on to reinforce the Dutch at Cape Town. Suffren's action effectually blocked Johnstone from achieving the goals of his expedition.²⁰

Johnstone's return to England in February 1782 coincided with the fall of his patrons in the North Administration. Germain was replaced as Secretary of State for Home and American Affairs by Lord Shelburne. Shelburne took up William Dalrymple's scheme for attacking the Spanish possessions in America but, on becoming Prime Minister in July 1782, left it to his successor in the Home Office, Thomas Townshend, to undertake the organization of the new South Seas expedition. Shelburne left a memorandum to Townshend, setting out the major tasks requiring his attention. This memorandum indicates how closely the two matters of an expedition against Spanish America and the disposal of the convicts who could no longer be transported to America were juxtaposed in the Home Office's order of priorities. Six matters were listed as requiring his urgent attention, among them:

¹⁹ Public Record Office, War Office, 1/178: 93-5, "Extract of a Proposal by Mr. Fullarton for an Expedition to Spanish America, by India, 3 June 1780". Also held at India Office Records, Political and Secret, 1/6.

²⁰ G. Rutherford, "Sidelights on Commodore Johnstone's Expedition to the Cape", *The Mariner's Mirror*, vol.28, 1942, pp.189-212, 290-308.

Preparations and Plans for W.India [i.e. Spanish America] Expeditions require to be set forward — Major Dalrymple has a Plan against the Spanish Settlements;

and immediately following on the list

Convicts require to be sent to the Coast of Africa.— Something must be done immediately about them, for the Judges have repeatedly remonstrated, and the Hulks are in a State, which will excite a Publick Clamor if not attended to.²¹

For assistance in planning the "West Indian" expedition, Townshend turned to Captain Arthur Phillip. Phillip had served as a captain in the in the squadron of the Portuguese Royal Navy in Brazil commanded by Robert McDouall during the Colonia War of 1775-1777. This war was fought between Spain and Portugal over the southern frontier of Brazil. He had rendered outstanding service in the defence of Colônia do Sacramento, the frontier colony on the north shore of the Rio de la Plata opposite Buenos Aires. During the organizing of Johnstone's expedition in 1781 he had provided First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Sandwich with valuable charts of the Brazilian and Rio de la Plata coasts, which he had prepared during his period of service in McDouall's squadron.²² When they first learned of the expedition, the Spanish suspected that Phillip would have command of it, "por su conocimiento de este Río"²³

The Phillip plan involved a squadron of three line-of-battle ships and a frigate attacking Monte Video and Buenos Aires in the first instance, and from there proceeding to the coasts of Chile and Peru to maraud, and ultimately crossing the Pacific to join Admiral Hughes' squadron in the Indian seas: "This expedition might proceed to the Isle of St Catherine's or Rio Negro for intelligence or water, and failing of success at the River of Plate to proceed immediately round to Callao. On success at the River of Plate, such force as could be spar'd might be sent as a Reinforcement to India, or to the south Seas, as the circumstances of the case should make most prudent."²⁴

The plan bore a remarkable similarity to a plan promoted by Captain William Robarts, who had been, like Phillip, a British officer commanding a Portuguese ship in McDouall's squadron.²⁵ It is possible that the two had discussed such an operation in 1777, when both were at Rio de Janeiro. Robarts had also been at Colônia, in January 1763 when he had commanded the frigate *Ambuscade*, which formed one of a squadron of nine vessels under the command of John MacNamara which had attempted unsuccessfully to re-take the settlement for Portugal after it had been captured by the Spanish under Pedro de Cevallos.²⁶ McDouall, who like Phillip had returned to the British Navy following his service in Brazil, sailed with Johnstone's expedition, but had been detached from it to sail to Rio de Janeiro in the *Shark* sloop, where he had obtained information on Spanish defences from Robarts, who was still serving in the Portuguese Navy.²⁷ This information was used in planning Phillip's expedition.

The expedition, consisting of HMS *Grafton*, 70 guns, HMS *Elizabeth*, 74 guns, HMS *Europe*, 64 guns, and the *Iphigenia* frigate, sailed on 16 January 1783, under the command of Commodore Robert Kingsmill, with Phillip in command of the *Europe*. Shortly after sailing, an armistice was concluded between Great Britain and Spain. Phillip put in for storm repairs at Rio de Janeiro (the other ships of

21 Brotherton Library (Leeds), Sydney Papers, MS R8.

22 Phillip to Sandwich, 17 January 1781, National Maritime Museum (Greenwich), Sandwich Papers, F/26/23.

23 Francisco de Medina to Vertiz, 18 May 1780; cited in Anibal M. Riverós Tula, "História de la Colonia del Sacramento, 1680-1830", Revista del Instituto Histórico y Geográfico del Uruguay, Montevideo, 1959, P.209.

24 John Blankett's memorandum to Shelburne, August 1782, Clements Library (Ann Arbor), Sydney Papers, 9.

25 John Dalrymple, *Memoirs of Great Britain and Ireland*, London, 1790, pp.315-9.

26 Anibal M. Riverós Tula, "História de la Colonia del Sacramento, 1680-1830", Revista del Instituto Histórico y Geográfico del Uruguay, Montevideo, XXII, 1959, pp.646-7; cited in Abeillard Barreto, "Tentativas Espanholas de Domínio do Sul do Brasil, 1741-1774", História Naval Brasileira, Segundo Volume, Tomo II, Ministério da Marinha, Rio de Janeiro, 1979, p.204.

27 McDouall, report of 3 June 1782 from Rio de Janeiro, PRO, Pitt Papers, 30/8/345, ff.104-5; *Gazeta de Lisboa*, 21 Agosto and 11 Setembro 1781; Biblioteca Nacional (Rio de Janeiro), MSS 4,4,3, nums.58-63, cited in Daunt Alden, *Royal Government in Colonial Brazil*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1968, pp.500-01. "Extract of a Letter from Mr Cornelle (late Governor of St Helena) to Mr Hippisley", November 1781, Correspondence and Memoirs of Lord Castlereagh, London, 1851, Vol.VII, p.267.

Kingsmill's squadron having been driven back to England by bad weather). He wrote to Townshend from Rio de Janeiro on 25 April 1783, expressing his disappointment that the ending of the American War had robbed him of the opportunity for naval glory in South America:

I have been under the necessity of putting into this port, and I can assure you Sir that the situation of the Spanish Settlements are such as I always thought them... All the Regulars in Buenos Ayres Monte Vedio, and the different Guards in the River of Plate do not amount to five hundred Men No ship of the Line, and only two frigates in the River. You will Sir, easily suppose how much I must be mortified in being so near & not at liberty to Act.²⁸

Rather than return immediately to England to be paid off, he decided to sail on to India by the Cape of Good Hope to join Admiral Hughes' squadron at Madras, which was still confronting Suffren's fleet in the Indian seas. When news of the conclusion of peace reached India, he left Madras in October 1783 with a convoy for England, where he arrived in April 1784. In September 1786, having spent the intervening period on secret service under Home Office direction in France, he was appointed by Townshend founding Governor of the new convict colony the British Government was establishing at Botany Bay in New South Wales.

Even after the conclusion of peace with Spain, Townshend (Lord Sydney as he became after March 1783) remained interested in schemes for liberating South America from Spanish rule. Ambassador Campo reported to Florida Blanca on 23 July 1783 that Sydney had received one Luis Vidal.²⁹ Vidal presumably laid before Sydney a version of the plan he drew up in a memorial he presented to the British Government dated 12 May 1784, for a revolution in New Granada.³⁰ The Viceroyalty of New Granada had been the scene of a Creole revolt against the Spanish authorities in 1781 which, as it took place at the same time as the large-scale revolt of the Indians of Peru led by Tupac Amaru, had assumed very serious proportions before it was put down. Vidal came to London as a representative of the Creole gentry of New Granada, seeking British aid in a new rising which would liberate the Viceroyalties of New Granada and Peru. While Vidal was in London, and probably not unconnected with his mission, another South American Juan Antonio de Prado and his English sponsor, Edmund Bott, during the autumn and spring of 1783-84 pressed upon the British Government a scheme for a force of 1,200 men in six vessels manned by English volunteers which would land at Callao to instigate a native uprising in Peru. This was a scaled-down version of a plan devised by Prado and the Creole revolutionary "Association" of which he was a member, during the 1779-83 American War. That plan was to request the British Government to dispatch a squadron with 6,000 troops to the province of La Plata. Of these, 4,000 would proceed to occupy Buenos Aires, whilst the remainder were to make the Chile coast, and thence advance upon Peru. These operations were to be assisted by an uprising in New Granada (i.e. the present Venezuela and Colombia), where the Association had for some time been organizing and drilling a force. The war had ended before these plans could be brought to fruition.³¹

Campo was even more concerned when the South American revolutionary conspirator, Francisco de Miranda appeared in London in February 1785. He reported in a despatch to Florida Blanca dated 18 March 1785 that Miranda had been interviewed by Sydney, Howe and a former Lord of the Admiralty.³² Miranda had given valuable information about the fortifications of Havana to the British Governor of Jamaica, John Dalling, in 1781. He had been a member of the same Association as Prado (and probably Vidal), and was to devote his life to the liberation of his native South America from Spanish rule. He desired to see all of Spanish America, south of a border drawn along the west bank of the Mississippi to its

28 British Library, India Office Records, H 175, f237.

29 Archivo General de Simancas, Estado, 8139; cited in W.S. Robertson, "Francisco Miranda and the Revolutionizing of Spanish America", *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1907*, Vol.1, pt.xii, p.209, in *United States 60th Congress, 2nd Session, 1908-09, House Documents, Vol. 126, no.1282, CDS 5536, pp.189-490.*

30 PRO, Chatham MS 351 and Pitt Papers, 30/8/345; quoted in Robertson, *op.cit.*, pp.513-4.

31 Edmund Bott's memoranda of 6 and 21 December 1783, and 7 April 1784, PRO, Pitt Papers, 30/8/345; cited in Robertson, *op.cit.*, pp.203-5. Cf. Hubert Hall, "Pitt and General Miranda", *The Athenaeum*, No.3886, 19 April 1902, p.498.

32 Archivo General de Simancas, Estado, 8141; cited in Robertson, *op.cit.*, pp.252-3.

source and junction with the 45^o North Parallel of Latitude, and including all the lands southward to Cape Horn, constituted a huge federal state, headed by an Emperor of Inca descent and governed through a bicameral legislature, one chamber of which to consist of hereditary caziques, the other a house of commons elected by universal franchise. A close alliance with Britain would guarantee its independence from Spain. A small British expeditionary force would be all that would be required to spark the great uprising which would accomplish this project.³³

Sydney, Pitt himself, and other members of the British Government were fascinated by Miranda's idea, the more so in view of the near success of the revolt led by Tupac Amaru between 1780 and 1783. In fact, the Viceroy of La Plata, José de Vertiz, when informed of Johnstone's expedition, had pointed out to Secretary of State for the Marine and the Indies, José de Galvez, in a despatch dated 30 April 1781 his fear that Johnstone would proceed to Peru to join up with the Indian rebels under Tupac Amaru.³⁴ The project of establishing a British colony in New South Wales was linked to this strategy.

All the proposals made to the British Government for establishing a colony in New South Wales referred to the strategic importance of the colony as a base for naval operations against the Spanish possessions in the Pacific. John Call began the proposal which he presented to Sydney in August 1784 for a colony in the South Pacific by referring to a plan he had proposed in 1779 during the American War for an expedition to assist the natives of Chile and Peru to revolt against Spain: "Had it been undertaken at the time and in the Manner suggested, it must have been attended with great Loss to the Spaniards, and probably with future Advantages to this Country in its consequences, because the Natives soon after, without foreign assistance, attempted to liberate themselves, and tho' their Endeavours are suppressed for the present, yet it is more than probable their Efforts will in the end be successful."

Comment on the Botany Bay project published in the press, pamphlets and books in Britain could not but have aroused Spanish curiosity and suspicions. An article in the London newspapers on 13 October 1786 said:

The central situation which New South Wales, in which Botany Bay is situated, holds in the globe, cannot fail of giving it a very commanding influence in the policy of Europe. It extends from 44 to 10 South lat. and from 110 to 154 long. — a month's sail from the Cape of Good Hope; five weeks from Madras; the same from Canton in China; very near the Moluccas; less than a month's run from Batavia; and lastly within a fortnight's sail of New Zealand, which place is covered with timber, even to the water edge, of such an enormous size and height, that a single tree would be much too large for a mast of a first rate man of war. . . . When this colony from England is established, if we should ever be at war with Holland or Spain we might very powerfully annoy either State from the new settlement. We might, with equal safety and expedition, make naval incursions into Java, and the other Dutch settlements, or invade the coast of Spanish America, and intercept the Manilla ships. Thus this check would, in time of war, make it a very important object, when we view it in the chart of the world with a *political eye*.³⁵

This report was an excerpt from the memorial to the British Government from James Matra, who under the direction of Sir Joseph Banks had drawn up a proposal in 1783 to Sydney for the formation of a colony at Botany Bay. Ambassador Campo immediately forwarded a translation of this passage, and others drawn from Matra's memorial referring to the advantages of a settlement in New South Wales, to Prime Minister Florida Blanca in Madrid.³⁶

33 PRO, Pitt Papers, 30/8/345; cf. Vincent Harlow, *The Founding of the Second British Empire*, London, Longmans, Vol 2, pp.644-6.

34 Archivo General Nacional (Buenos Aires), Correspondencia Vertiz-Gálvez, 1781, num.469; published in *Boletín del instituto de investigaciones históricas* (Buenos Aires), Año VIII, no.43, octubre 1929, pp.459-60.

35 *The Daily Universal Register*, *The General Advertiser*, *The London Chronicle*; *The Morning Chronicle*; *The Whitehall Evening Post*; and *The Morning Post*, of 13 October 1786 all published the same excerpt from Matra's proposal, and from these were widely copied in the press of other European countries.

36 Campo to Florida Blanca, 13 October 1786, AHN, Estado, legajo 4250/1. This document was drawn to my attention by Dr Eric Beerman.

Captain Sir George Young, Matra's co-sponsor together with Sir Joseph Banks of the Botany Bay project, published his own proposal in April 1785. As one of the principal advantages of the proposed colony, he said:

Its great extent and relative situation with respect to the Eastern and Southern parts of the Globe, is a material Consideration; Botany Bay, or its Vicinity, the part that is proposed to be first settled, is not more than Sixteen hundred Leagues from Lima and Baldivia, with a fair open Navigation, and there is no doubt but that a lucrative Trade would soon be opened with the Creole Spaniards for English Manufactures. Or suppose We were again Involved in a War with Spain, Here are Ports of Shelter, and refreshment for our Ships, should it be necessary to send any into the South Seas.³⁷

In late 1786, the London publisher (and friend of Banks), John Stockdale, published *An Historical Narrative of the Discovery of New Holland and New South Wales*, to explain the reasons for the Government's decision to settle Botany Bay. The conclusion of this book stated (p.53), in summarizing the advantages of a settlement at Botany Bay:

Should a war break out with the Court of Spain, cruizers from Botany Bay might much interrupt, if not destroy, their lucrative commerce from the Philippine islands to Aquapulco, besides alarming and distressing their settlements on the west coast of South America.

The preface of a revised edition of this book, published by Stockdale in early 1787 under the title of *The History of New Holland* stated that the Spanish of the preceding century had abstained from making use of the discoveries of Torres, Mendaña and Quirós to establish colonies in the South-Sea islands, as that "would not but serve to encourage other powers to dispossess them, and thereby not only to gain the settlements from which they might be driven, but fix themselves perhaps in a situation commodious for annoying either their American dominions, or the Philippine islands, in the most effectual manner".³⁸

The fleet carrying the 750 convicts and 200 marines and their families who were to be the first settlers in the New South Wales colony sailed from Portsmouth under Commodore Arthur Phillip in May 1787. The fleet called at Rio de Janeiro during its voyage to Botany Bay to obtain essential supplies. This stay apparently re-awakened Phillip's regret at the opportunity lost by the failure of his 1783 expedition. From Rio de Janeiro, Phillip sent word to Sydney and to Shelburne (now Lord Lansdowne) in a letter to Nepean dated 2 September 1787:

You know how much I was interested in the intended expedition against Monte Vedio, and that it was said that the Spaniards had more troops than I supposed. The following account I have from a person who was there all the war and I am certain that the account is exact:

One Regiment under	700
Four Companies of Artillery	400
Dragoons	400
Two Battalions of Infantry	700

These were divided on the north and south shores, and in different towns. Monte Vedio would not have been defended, as half these troops could not have been drawn together. Of this you will be so good as to inform the Lords Sydney and Lansdowne; it will corroborate what I mentioned before I left town.³⁹

In sending this letter, Phillip may not have been merely sighing for past disappointments, but reminding his government patrons that the strategy behind the 1783 expedition would still be viable in the event of a renewal of hostilities between Britain and Spain. His recalling of discussion of the matter before he left London early in 1787 would indicate that Sydney was thinking about such an expedition at that time, if as seemed probable civil war in the Netherlands should have led to war with France and Spain.

37 Printed in Alan Frost, *Dreams of a Pacific Empire*, Sydney, Resolution Press, 1980.

38 *The History of New Holland*, London, Stockdale, 1787, p.16.

39 PRO, CO, 318/9, f.197; *Historical Records of New South Wales*, Vol.I, Pt.2, p.114. See also Alan Frost, *Arthur Phillip, His Voyaging*, Melbourne, OUP, 1987, p.116.

Following the arrival of the fleet at Port Jackson in January 1788, Phillip assumed his authority as first Governor of the colony and proclaimed British sovereignty over all of the eastern half of New Holland (Australia) and the islands of the South Pacific eastward of the meridian of 135° East of Greenwich, an extraordinary claim indicating the dimensions of Britain's imperial ambitions, which rivalled Spain's claim to an exclusive right to navigation in the Pacific.

On 23 December 1788, the Viceroy of Mexico, Manuel Antonio Flores, wrote to Antonio Valdés, Minister for the Marine and for the Indies, discussing the peril Spain's territories on the Pacific coast of North America would face in future years from encroachment by the newly independent United States. Meanwhile, there were more immediate concerns: "the Russian projects and those which the English may make from Botany Bay, which they have already colonized, menace us."⁴⁰

In March 1788, Flores had sent Captain Esteban José Martínez in command of the *Princesa* and *San Carlos* to investigate the presence of Russians and others on the North West American coast. On his return to Mexico, Martínez told Flores that he had obtained information from Russian fur traders while at Unalaska and Kodiak Islands in July that their government intended to send an expedition from the Baltic to occupy the port of Nootka Sound in 1789, and claim the whole North West American coast for Russia.⁴¹ This intelligence only confirmed the worst Spanish fears. Flores ordered Martínez north on a second voyage in February 1789 to forestall any such Russian attempt by occupying Nootka for Spain, and to enforce Spain's claim to the North West coast against all comers. Soon after he established himself at Nootka, Martínez arrested the *Argonaut*, an English trading vessel under the command of James Colnett, a British Navy Lieutenant in private employment, and her consorts, the *Princess Royal* and *Northwest American*, which arrived there in July 1789 to set up a fur trading factory for a consortium of English merchants. This action by Martínez began an eighteen month long dispute over conflicting claims to territorial and navigation rights in the Pacific, which brought Britain and Spain to the brink of war.

The Spanish seizure of Colnett's ships provoked the British Government to extend the protection of the British Navy to the North West fur trade. Home Office Under-Secretary Evan Nepean drafted a letter to the Admiralty in early February 1790, outlining the Government's response to the events at Nootka Sound, saying "His Majesty has judged it highly expedient that measures should instantly be taken for affording protection to such of His Subjects as may have already proceeded to that part of the American Continent".⁴² In the plans drawn up under Nepean's direction, the New South Wales settlement was assigned a role in the provision of this assistance to the North Pacific fur trade.⁴³ Instructions were drawn up for Governor Arthur Phillip at Port Jackson to supply a detachment of marines and convict workers — thirty persons altogether, with stores — to an expedition whose object would be to form a settlement on the North West coast, which would "lay the foundation of an establishment for the assistance of His

40 Archivo General de Indias, Seville, MS 90-3-18; see also Archivo Histórico Nacional, carta reservada, Estado 4289, A.T.; quoted in William Ray Manning, "The Nootka Sound Controversy", Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1904, Washington, 1905, reprinted New York, Argonaut Press, 1966, pp.302-3; also in Cook, p.130; see also Robert Greenhow, The History of Oregon and California..., 2nd. edn., Boston, 1845.

41 This was a reference to the proposed expedition under the command of Grigory I. Mulovsky, which in fact was prevented from being undertaken by the outbreak of war between Russia and Sweden (A.P. Sokolov, "Prigotovlenie krugosvetnoy ekspeditsii 1787 goda pod nachalstvom Muloskovo" [The Preparation of the 1787 round-the-world expedition commanded by Mulovsky], Zapiski Gidrogaficheskovo Departamenta Morekovo Ministerstva, part 6, 1848, pp.142-91, in A.L. Narochitskii, et al., Russkie ekspeditsii po izucheniui severnoi chasti Tikhogo okeana vo vtoroi polovine XVIII veka. Sbornik dokumentov [Russian expeditions to study the northern part of the Pacific ocean in the second half of the XVIII century. Collection of documents], Moscow, Nauka, 1989, Document no.75).

42 "Sketch of a Letter to the Admiralty", undated but early February 1790, HO 28/7, ff.48-56; cited in David Mackay, In the Wake of Cook: Exploration, Science & Empire, 1780-1801, Wellington (NZ), Victoria UP, 1985, p.89; also cited in Alan Frost, "Nootka Sound and the Beginnings of Britain's Imperialism of Free Trade", Robin Fisher and Hugh Johnson, (eds.) Maps to Metaphors: The Pacific World of George Vancouver, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1993, pp.112-16.

43 "Heads of Instructions", February 1790, HO 42/16, f.10; cited in Mackay, p.89

Majesty's subjects in the prosecution of the Fur trade from the North West Coast of America".⁴⁴ The proposed expedition was to consist of three ships, two of which, the *Gorgon* (44 guns) and *Discovery* (10 guns), were to go first to Port Jackson. The *Gorgon* was already preparing to go there with new troops and stores for the colony, and the *Discovery* was readying for a voyage of exploration to the South Atlantic. From Port Jackson, these two ships were to proceed to Hawaii, where they would rendezvous with a frigate sent from India, from whence all three would proceed under the command of the frigate captain to the American coast. The London newspaper *The Gazetteer* of 8 May 1790 carried an article which stated:

By the bill passed into law this Session, the Settlement of Botany Bay may be made useful in case of a rupture. The Governor is empowered to remit the remaining term of the sentence of such persons as shall behave well. Under this Act he may therefore embark a number of them on board King's ships, and make them act as soldiers on any adventure. We can foresee an occasion on which they might be most advantageously employed for their mother country. At the same time this gives these unhappy men a good incentive to behave well.⁴⁵

When the Nootka Sound crisis threatened to become open war from May 1790, the plan for wide-ranging attacks on Spanish America was revived. An article in *The Whitehall Evening Post* of 3-5 June 1790 declared that, "without the aid of France, the Spaniards could never sustain a conflict with Great Britain and Holland". The article briefly described the plan proposed by Fullarton during the American War and how the forces raised to carry it out were diverted to Johnstone's expedition against the Cape in 1782 in preference to Fullarton's original project "which, if it had been carried into execution, might have subverted the Spanish empire in the southern hemisphere. Of this, the Spaniards seem to be aware..." Spanish awareness was no doubt assisted by the *Post's* article, and by the publication in June 1790 of the second edition of Dalrymple's *Memoirs*. *The Gazetteer* declared on 16 June 1790: "If the dispute with Spain should terminate in a war, the nation will profit from the valuable information given by Sir John Dalrymple in the Appendix to his Memoirs".

Lt-General Sir Archibald Campbell, who had recently returned to Britain from the governorship of Madras in India, was appointed to overall command of operations against Spanish America, under the political direction of the Secretary of State, William Grenville. Campbell was assisted by William Dalrymple (now a Lt Col), who had served under him in Jamaica in 1782 and 1783 when Campbell had been Governor following Dalling, and by Home Riggs Popham, a Navy lieutenant retired on half pay who had been engaged in private trade in the Indian Ocean. Popham described his role in this episode in a "Secret Paper on South America" he wrote to the Home Secretary, Charles Yorke, on 26 November 1803:

The Continent of South America has naturally engaged the attention of this country in every probable rupture with Spain, and in the year 1790 it was so seriously taken up, that, if hostilities had commenced, I have little doubt but an armament of considerable magnitude would have sailed to that country: for Sir Archibald Campbell, who expected the command, consulted me on the occasion, particularly with respect to the co-operation from India, and all the previous measures necessary to be adopted, that no time might be lost when the enterprise was actually decided on.⁴⁶

Campbell set out his plan in a memorandum to Pitt written in July, 1790:

Spain is no where more vulnerable than in her Colonies abroad. The Phillipine Islands, Mexico, and South America afford to the British Nation, Objects of serious Importance for Military Enterprise. The Phillipine Islands are to be attacked with most Effect from the Presidency of Fort St. George [Madras] in the East Indies, Mexico and the Western Coast of South America from the Island of Jamaica in the West Indies. If the West Indian Army could be supported from the East Indies, across the Pacific Ocean, their Operations could not fail to meet with

44 Nepean to Phillip, March 1790 (draft), HO 201/1, ff.19-24; reproduced in Jonathan King, "In the Beginning..." The Story of the Creation of Australia, From the Original Writings, Melbourne, Macmillan, 1985, p. 18.

45 Referring to 30 Geo. III 47, "An act for enabling his Majesty to authorise his governor or lieutenant governor of such places beyond the seas, to which felons or other offenders may be transported, to remit the sentences of such offenders".

46 "Secret Paper on South America by Sir Home Popham to Mr. Secretary Yorke [Secretary for War and Colonies]", 26 November 1803, Correspondence and Memoirs of Lord Castlereagh, London, 1851, Vol. VII, p.288-93.

complete Success... the Fleet on the South Seas might be directed to rendezvous off Panama, about the Period the Jamaica Army might be thought to arrive at Chagré, as by that Means, they would co-operate with that Army, and their Appearance facilitate the Reduction of Panama. By this Cut across the Isthmus, Mexico would be separated from Peru, and as it often happens that the Natives of these Kingdoms are in a State of Rebellion, a force from Panama aided by a Squadron of Ships of War in the South Seas, would be enabled to give Encouragement to the Revolters, or engage their Aid in the Prosecution of any Attacks which may be thought advantageous or honourable for the British Nation. An Expedition against Buenos Ayres would in all Probability be directed with most Effect from Europe.⁴⁷

In a memorandum he drafted in May 1790, Lord Mulgrave, one of the Admiralty Lords, considered several alternative routes an expedition against Spanish America might take after Manila had been captured. He said that "the expedition might proceed South" from Manila, "touching at New Holland or New Zealand for Refreshments and crossing the Pacific Ocean in South latitudes by this Rout."⁴⁸

William Dalrymple confided to Pitt in a letter of 10 May 1790 that:

The Resources of Troops from India are Original Thoughts of Sir Archibald. I have been in India since Sir Archibald first mention'd it to me in Jamaica often thought of it and am clearly and Decidedly of his Opinion to Carry Troops from the East Indies to the South Sea... Bring Lord Cornwallis on to the South Sea in Command and he will take the Manilla's in his Way — A small Squadron should Double Cape Horn in the end of Novr with 1000 or 1500 Land Troops on Board and Assomée Them from all Quarters.⁴⁹

Alone, Spain could not match Britain's naval might, and Louis XVI was in 1790 in no position to offer effective assistance to his cousin Carlos IV. In the end, Britain and Spain decided it was not the time to go to war, and a convention was signed in Madrid on 28 October 1790 resolving the Nootka Sound dispute.⁵⁰

The precarious peace that had subsisted between Britain and France since 1783, finally came to an end in February 1793. Spain was dragged into the war on the side of France in late 1796, and the plan for an attack on Chile and Peru using Port Jackson as a base was at once revived. Command of the expedition was given to Major-General Sir James Craig, who had been involved in planning for the 1790 expedition. Captain John Hunter, who had succeeded Phillip as Governor at Port Jackson, was ordered to recruit extra troops for the New South Wales Corps, and to prepare provisions of wheat and flour (although, in a good example of the secrecy which always cloaked these plans, he was not told the reason for these preparations). The plan to be followed on this occasion was indicated by Under-Secretary for War and Colonies, William Huskisson, in a letter dated 21 January 1797, which he sent to Craig at Cape Town:

I enclose by Mr Dundas's desire for your confidential information a Copy of a letter which he has this day written to Lord Macartney [British Governor at newly-captured Cape Town]. It relates as you will perceive to an Expedition to which it appears your thoughts were first turned several years ago. The pace of the discussion with Spain in the Nootka business prevented our then striking those blows which contrary to the perfidious calculations which have led to the present unprovoked aggression, I hope we shall even at this period of the War have the means of directing with effect against their Empire in America. This you appear to have foreseen when you lately proposed to the Duke of York in a letter he communicated to Mr Dundas [Secretary of State for War and Colonies] the very plan of Operation it is intended to adopt, and to place under your direction and Command.

The Craig plan involved the expedition staging at "Botany Bay" (*i.e.* Port Jackson) drawing 500 recruits from the convicts and troops at that settlement:

In order to form an Expedition from the Cape for the Coast of South America it is proposed that the Garrison of that Settlement should furnish *two Battalions* of 800 rank & file each and three Troops of Cavalry of not less than 60 each... It is proposed that the Force from the Cape should be joined in its passage to the South Seas by 500

47 "Ideas regarding a War with Spain", PRO, Foreign Office 95/7/4: 501.

48 PRO, Pitt Papers, 30/8/360: 87-93.

49 PRO, Pitt Papers, 30/8/120: 72-3.

50 Published in *The Gazetteer*, 10 November 1790.

Men from Botany Bay, part to be recruited from the Convicts & the remainder from the Corps now there into which the former would be received... The Expedition to the Rio Plata will require three British regiments.⁵¹

As on previous occasions, events conspired to thwart the ambitions of the strategists. In early 1797, Britain's naval and military resources were stretched to the full by commitments in Haiti and the other West Indian islands, not to speak of the danger of invasion of Ireland and Britain, and a combination in February 1797 of a bank crisis and a French raid on Fishguard in Pembrokeshire sufficed to cause abandonment of the expedition.

In July 1798 Napoleon Bonaparte captured Alexandria in Egypt. In response to this event, Robert Saunders Dundas, secretary to his father, Secretary of State for War and Colonies Henry Dundas, proposed striking a blow against the Franco-Spanish alliance by making an attempt to detach Chile from the Spanish Empire. Pointing out the advantages of Port Jackson as a place of rendezvous where an expedition against Chile could assemble undetected by the Spaniards, Saunders Dundas said:

The adoption of this port as the point of reunion could give opportunity to take on forces from New South Wales, which would avoid the necessity of taking troops from India; even though the Bengal artillery and the Lascars would be of the highest utility in an Enterprise of this kind. If it is objected that the latter plan would augment considerably the extent of the voyage, it could be contested that in point of time there would be no comparable difference, because the winds from the West which blow regularly from New South Wales to the coasts of the Pacific Ocean would impel the proposed Expedition to its destination with much greater rapidity and certainty, which would compensate for the inconvenience to be feared from the increased distance.⁵²

This proposal was complemented by another from the leading figure in the Southern Whaling trade, Samuel Enderby, for an expedition against Chile and Peru, which he set out in a letter to Pitt dated 3 December 1799:

An Expedition into the Pacific Ocean by the Cape of Good Hope & New South Wales may sail in any one Month of the Year and may be so secretly conducted as to prevent almost a possibility of its being known or counteracted.... The Ships to sail singly from the Cape G. Hope (as for the East Indies) for Port Jackson in New South Wales making that the grand Rendezvous for the Expedition.... it is presum'd the New South Wales Corps might make part of the Troops, and as many Recruits might be procur'd from the Convicts as it would be prudent to trust.... Speaking sanguinely it appears impossible the Spaniards can have an Idea that such an expedition would take place by the Cape of Good Hope and the Ships appearing so unexpected on the Coast and the enemy so unprepared that it must insure Success.... The attacking or emancipating South America from Spain would deprive France of the Spanish Treasures, and it does not require any great Expence to give such an Expedition its full Success.⁵³

On 22 March 1801, Captain James Colnett, the same whose capture in July 1789 had provoked the Nootka Sound Crisis, wrote to Admiralty First Lord, Earl St Vincent, proposing "a plan for attacking the Southern settlements of the Spaniards by a Southern route with a great degree of secrecy and surprise." Colnett wrote:

altho to a Man not acquainted with *Geography and prevailing winds* it would appear a very circuitous route but your Lordship will see the facility plainly being well acquainted that the Westerly winds blow constantly from the Cape of good Hope to New Holland where first after leaving that Cape I would propose to touch on the Coast of New South Wales in order to refresh the Crew leave the Sick behind and take others in lieu — By this time the Soldiers would be enured to Climate & Sea and well calculated for any enterprise and with the prevailing and trade winds would be expeditiously carried to the Coast of Chili & Peru.⁵⁴

51 PRO, War Office, 1/178, ff.53-9; Historical Records of New South Wales, Vol.III, p.193.

52 Published in *Revista Chilena de Historia y Geografía*, Tomo LXIII, 4 Trim., 1929, pp.63-75.

53 Enderby to Pitt, 3 December 1799, PRO, Pitt Papers, 30/8/133: 39-41.

54 ADM 1/5121/22, folios 643-4; cited in Alan Frost, "The Spanish Yoke: British Schemes to Revolutionise Spanish America, 1739-1807", in Alan Frost and Jane Samson (eds.), *Pacific Empires: Essays in Honour of Glyndwr Williams*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1999, pp.33-52.

Colnett had met Arthur Phillip in Rio de Janeiro in February-March 1793, and may have discussed this plan with him then. Phillip was returning to England from his governorship of New South Wales, and Colnett had just completed a survey of the South East Pacific Ocean in command of HMS *Rattler*.⁵⁵

The British Government took no action on these proposals before peace negotiations with France brought hostilities to a halt in 1801.

In October 1804, hostilities having again broken out with France and Spain, Captain Sir Home Popham submitted to Pitt a memorandum on a revised and comprehensive version of the plan for attacks from the Atlantic and Pacific sides upon the Spanish empire in America. As well as his experience in planning the proposed expeditions under Sir Archibald Campbell in 1790, Popham had also been involved in planning the subsequent proposed expeditions in 1796 and 1797. His memorandum was prepared following an interview he had with Pitt and Dundas at Pitt's home. In it he outlined a strategy very similar to that proposed by Campbell in 1790:

The next point from Europe must certainly be Buenos Ayres, and to accomplish this object it will be necessary to have a force of three hundred men... Then with respect to the Pacifick Ocean, I consider two points of descent as sufficient, one however might suffice but if the other can be accomplished it will have great effect upon the people to the Southward of Buenos Ayres. I mean in speaking of this which is on the coast of Chili to propose Valpariso, and if the force for that object would either be concentrated at, or taken from, New South Wales, by new levies or otherwise, it would make this proposition perfect. The great force however for the Pacifick which I will propose to come from India and to consist of 4,000 Sepoys and a small proportion of Europeans should direct its course to Panama, which is fixed upon as the point of concentration for all our forces.⁵⁶

Shortly afterwards Pitt annotated a memorandum of 17 September 1804 which listed enemy concentrations around the globe, against "Valparayso on the Coast of Chili," using Popham's words, "Force concentrated by New Levies or otherwise at New South Wales".⁵⁷ In December, Popham was appointed to command of the *Diadem*, an appointment he took to be for the purpose of putting into execution the strategy set out in his memorandum of 14 October, although he received no official instructions to this effect.⁵⁸ In August 1805, he sailed as commodore of the squadron convoying Baird's troops in the expedition to capture Cape Town, without having clarified whether the Government expected him to subsequently capture Buenos Aires.

On 26 October 1804, William Jacob, a London merchant who had traded to South America and Fellow of the Royal Society, prepared for Pitt a memorandum on "Plans for occupying Spanish America, with Observations on the Character and Views of its Inhabitants". He advocated overthrowing Spanish rule, and erecting the several provinces into independent governments, allied to Great Britain. The naval and military forces necessary to effect these changes would be sent from British possessions in separate but related expeditions against the east and west coasts of Spanish America. An expedition from Madras, India, would be directed to capture Valdivia and the island of Chiloe, in Chile, and subsequently Callao and Lima, in Peru. The place of New South Wales in this expedition was explained:

Stores of every Kind might be sent to meet the Expedition, at Port Jackson, on New South Wales, where it is important the whole should rendezvous; by meeting there a short time, the Troops would be refreshed; and as the Weather is always fine, and the Wind favourable, they would arrive on the Coast of South America fresh and fit for immediate Action.⁵⁹

55 James Colnett, *A Voyage to the South Atlantic and Round Cape Horn into the Pacific Ocean*, London, 1798, pp.5-6.

56 "Memorandum by Capt. Sir Home Popham, 14 October 1804"; published in the *American Historical Review*, vol.VI, no.3, April 1901, pp.509-517, nb p.516.

57 Pitt, memorandum of 17 September 1804, PRO 30/8/196, f.88; quoted in Alan Frost *Convicts & Empire: A Naval Question, 1776-1811*, Melbourne, Oxford U.P., 1980, pp.171, 223.

58 "Trial of Sir Home Popham", *Annual Register for 1807*, p.392.

59 PRO, Pitt Papers, 30/8/345, ff.93-135.

In August 1806 the Government led by Lord Grenville, who had become Prime Minister following the death of Pitt in February 1806, received a memorial from John Hunter, Phillip's successor as Governor of New South Wales from 1795 to 1800, on the suitability of Port Jackson as a staging point for a squadron sailing against Chile and Peru. Echoing the words of James Matra's 1783 proposal for a colony in New South Wales, Hunter wrote:

From its situation on the Globe, we may see, by examining a general Chart of the world, the advantage of that Situation in a *Political Point of View*. It has generally happen'd when we have been involved in a war with France, that Spain and Holland have been dragg'd into hostility against us: The proximity of our Colony in that Part of the World to the Spanish Settlements on the coast of Chili and Peru, as well as those of the Dutch amongst the Molucca Islands, makes it an important Post, should it ever be found necessary to carry the war into those seas; for here you could rendezvous a small Military Force, for any occasional Service, with a convenient light Squadron for their conveyance to any Point they might be required at.⁶⁰

In October 1806, having received news of the capture of Buenos Aires by Popham and Beresford, Grenville sought the advice of Sir John Dalrymple regarding his plan for complementary assaults from the East and the West on Spanish America, and subsequently passed on Dalrymple's plans to General Sir Arthur Wellesley for evaluation and development.⁶¹ In a memorandum dated 20 November 1806, Wellesley wrote:

After the fullest consideration of the subject, it appears decided that the principal attack on New Spain must be made by one corps on its eastern coast [from Jamaica]... in order to reinforce and support this corps, which will have made its attack on New Spain, 3,000 sepoy and 500 Europeans are to be sent from Bengal in the month of October... This corps ought to arrive upon the western coast of New Spain in the month of February. It may be expected that they will be four months on their passage; and one more is allowed for stopping at places of refreshment. These should be, in the first instance, at Prince of Wales Island [Penang]... and in the second, at Botany Bay. There they ought to be encamped in a healthy situation... I cannot at present determine upon the landing place for this corps in New Spain... at all events it will be possible to communicate to them their ulterior orders in New Holland.⁶²

On 12 November 1806, Sir Joseph Banks received from Captain William Kent, Governor Hunter's nephew, a memorial he had drawn up, "Remarks on His Majesty's Settlement in New South Wales and on the Harbour of Port Jackson, as an eligible place from which a Squadron could sail against the Spaniards on the Coast of Chili and Peru". Kent wished Banks to draw it to the attention of the Secretary of State for War and Colonies. It set out the reasons Windham may have referred to in advising Murray to transport Craufurd's expedition to Chile by way of Cape Town and Port Jackson. Harking back to the expedition to the South Seas commanded by George Anson in 1740-1744, Kent wrote:

Port Jackson on the East side of New Holland... nearly opposite to Valparaiso on the West Coast of America, is admirably suited for sending forth a Squadron against the Spaniards on the Coast of Chili and Peru.— A Squadron sailing from England for that purpose, if they were fortunate in meeting with a fair Wind which carried them into the North East Trade, might be able to get to Port Jackson, by the Eastern Rout, in a little more than three Months.— There Water, Wood, Fruit, Vegetables, and fresh Provisions might be procured in great abundance and even Men, if they were wanted to augment the Crews, as Seamen are frequently left behind from Merchant Ships that have reason to visit that Port.— No Squadron has been upon the West Coast of America since Commodore Anson's... Had Commodore Anson gone the Eastern Route, where he would have met with constant fair Winds, although the distance is greater than that by the Westward, and although he would have had no such place to stop and refresh at as Port Jackson, there is little doubt he would have carried all his Squadron

60 John Hunter, "Memorial respecting New South Wales", August 1806, Alnwick Castle Library, Duke of Northumberland Papers, MS 45011; Mitchell Library, Bonwick Transcripts, Series II, Box 48, £5745:1.

61 Sir John Dalrymple to Lord Grenville, 20 October 1806, Huntington Library (San Marino, Calif), Stowe MSS, Admiralty Boxes 9 and 37; Charles F. Mullett, "British Schemes against Spanish America in 1806", *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol.27, no.2, May 1947, pp.269-78.

62 Supplementary Despatches and memoranda of Field Marshal Arthur Duke of Wellington, London, John Murray, 1858-72, Vol. VI, pp.45-7.

with him to the Coast of Peru, and might in that case have been able to fulfil the high expectation the Nation entertain'd of his Voyage.⁶³

Kent had originally submitted this memorial in 1803 to Philip King, Hunter's successor as Governor of New South Wales. King subsequently drew the idea to the attention of Secretary of State Lord Hobart in a despatch from Sydney dated 7 August 1803.⁶⁴ In May 1807, returning to England at the conclusion of his governorship, King stopped over at Rio de Janeiro where he learned of the expeditions to the Rio de la Plata. He stayed at Rio de Janeiro until August of that year and used his good offices to obtain supplies from Brazil for the British forces in the Rio de la Plata.⁶⁵ As he explained in a letter to the British ambassador in Lisbon written from Rio de Janeiro on 6 August 1807, his intervention in his official capacity was essential: "a vessell was sent here with a request from General Whitelocke to His Excellency, the Vice-Roy, who did not consider himself justifiable in allowing the Grain to be taken, as however certain it was that it was for the ultimate use of His Maj:^s Government at the River Plate, yet as it was to be acquired in the first Instance by means of private Commerce between the Merchant & the Captain of the Vessell: It became impossible for the Vice-Roy to accede as not consistent with his Instructions and Treaties". King's personal request to the Viceroy was successful because, as he explained: "On application from the Master, I applied to His Excellency on the immediate part of Government & offered to furnish the Cargo as a public affair and be answerable that it was deliver'd to General Whitelocke for the use of His Maj:^s Govt."⁶⁶ King had been at Rio de Janeiro as Phillip's lieutenant in 1782 and 1788, and seems to have benefited from Phillip's high standing with the Portuguese. More than Brazilian maize and flour for his troops were needed, however, for General Whitelocke to achieve success at the Rio de la Plata.

The principal cause of the failure of the British adventure in the Rio de la Plata in 1806-1807 was ascribed on all sides to the refusal of the Grenville Government to permit its generals to appear in South America as allies of the native independence movement. Windham's instructions to Craufurd directed him to employ all the means in his power, whether of authority or conciliation, "to prevent among the inhabitants a spirit of insurrection." He was "by no means to encourage any acts of insurrection or revolt, or any measures tending likely to any other change than that of placing the country under His Majesty's protection and government."⁶⁷ The same instructions were given to General Whitelocke when he was sent in February 1807 to take command of the combined British forces.

These instructions completely disregarded the advice Popham had sent back from Buenos Aires after its capture in July 1806: "The object of this expedition was considered by the natives to apply principally to their independence; by the blacks, to their total liberation: and if General Beresford had felt himself authorized, or justified in confirming either of these propositions, no exertions whatever would have been made to dispossess him of his conquest".⁶⁸ The truth of this was corroborated by General Auchmuty who, after he had captured Montevideo, was assured by the principal citizens that "if I would acknowledge their independence, and promise them the protection of the English government", Buenos Aires "would submit to me."⁶⁹

63 Mitchell Library (Sydney), Brabourne Papers, 30.19, enclosed with a letter to Sir Joseph Banks dated 5 November 1806. Kent had been commander of the colony's storeships Supply and Buffalo for twelve years.

64 Historical Records of New South Wales, Vol.V, p.199; Historical Records of Australia, Vol.IV, p.358.

65 Arcos to Anadia, 28 Junho e 13 Agosto de 1807, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro, Seção de História, Correspondência dos vice-reis, codice 68, vol. XXI, ff.184-9, 207-11; cited in Rudy Bauss, "The Critical Importance of Rio de Janeiro to British Interests", *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol.65, pt.3, December 1979, pp.159, 172.

66 King to British Minister at Lisbon, 6 August 1807, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro, Seção de História, Correspondência dos vice-reis, codice 68, vol. XXI, f.211.

67 Annual Register for 1807, p.215.

68 Popham, letter of 25 August 1806, in Annual Register for 1807, p.217.

69 Auchmuty to Windham, 6 March 1808, in Annual Register for 1807, p.218.

Gaining the support of the local populations had always been regarded as essential for success by those British strategists who advocated expeditions to Spanish America. Sir Archibald Campbell wrote in his memorandum to Pitt of 18 October 1790:

I beg Leave on this Occasion, to say, that by *Conquest* I mean not, the Reduction of those Kingdoms to the absolute Dominion of Great Britain; but that by assisting the Natives with a Military Force, they may be enabled to throw off the Spanish Yoke, and resume their ancient Government, Rights, Privileges and Religion. It is but reasonable to expect, that, exclusive of the Distress which Spain must experience from the Diminution of her Revenues in that Quarter of the World, the British may, for such an Act of Liberality to the oppressed Natives, secure to themselves a Preference in all Articles of Commerce from those extensive and opulent Kingdoms.⁷⁰

William Jacob had warned Pitt in his memorandum of 26 October 1804 that an attempt to conquer and reduce the South American provinces to the status of British possessions similar to Canada would fail, whereas a policy of erecting them into independent governments on the model of the United States of America would attract the support of all the local population except the Spanish officials.⁷¹ The fear of Jacobinism and democracy in London prevented the Grenville Government and its successor from adopting this bold approach. Lord Castlereagh became Secretary of State for War and Colonies in the Government of the Duke of Portland, which succeeded that of Lord Grenville in March 1807. In a memorandum for the Cabinet in which he discussed the policy to be adopted regarding South America, he wrote: "the most serious objections that have occurred to those who have considered the policy of countenancing separation [*ie*, independence] are the probability that any local government which might be established would become democratic and revolutionary".⁷² General Whitelocke, deprived by his Government's policy of being able to offer the only incentive which could have won over the Spanish Americans, found himself in the hopeless situation of confronting the united hostility of the people of the Rio de la Plata. The instructions he had been given by his Government, which condemned his expedition to failure, fully merited the severe criticism they received from Fortescue's pen.

Although the English invasions of 1806 and 1807 were a military disaster, the strategy upon which they were based did have two unintended but important consequences. First, the English invasions broke the tie between Spain and America, and precipitated the struggle for independence. Napoleon's usurpation of the Spanish Crown by installing his brother Joseph as King in April 1808 brought about an alliance between Britain and the legitimate Borbon Monarchy. Major-General Arthur Wellesley was directed in June 1808 to take the force he had already assembled in Ireland for a renewed assault on Spanish America to the Iberian Peninsula instead. The Peninsular War thenceforward absorbed all Britain's military resources, while on the other side of the Atlantic the breaking of the link with metropolitan authority which the English invasions of the Rio de la Plata in 1806 and 1807 had caused began a process of revolt which subsequently led through many years of struggle to the complete independence of America from Spain.

The second consequence of the strategy of attacking the Spanish empire was the founding of an English colony in New South Wales, which was at least in part due to the expected role the settlement would play in assisting expeditions against Spanish America. The settlement outlasted this short-lived consideration to become the metropolis of modern Australia.

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⁷⁰ Campbell to Pitt, 18 October 1790, PRO, FO 95/7/4: 481.

⁷¹ William Jacob, "Plans for occupying Spanish America, with Observations on the Character and Views of the Inhabitants", PRO, Pitt Papers, 30/8/345.

⁷² Cabinet Memorandum from Secretary of State for War and Colonies Lord Castlereagh, 1 May 1807, in Charles Vane (ed.), *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh*, London, Vol. VII, 1851, p.320.

Military Supervision of Convict Work Gangs. Part II
The British Garrison in Australia 1788-1841



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THE GREAT ROADS

Clem Sargent

The Great North Road

Although a settlement had been established at Newcastle by sea in 1810 and development had grown along the Hunter River to Wallis Plains (now Maitland) by 1818, the land barrier between the Hawkesbury and Hunter Rivers was not broken until 1820, when a party led by John Howe, Chief Constable at Windsor, reached the Hunter in the vicinity of Patricks Plains (now Singleton). Howe's route to the Hunter remained an undeveloped bush track for many years and although stock was moved to the north by this route, it was unsuitable for wheeled transport until increasing development of the Upper Hunter towards Muswellbrook and Scone brought a demand for better land communication between the region and Sydney. The task of finding a new road was allocated to Assistant Surveyor Finch and in September 1825 he completed the survey of a line of road from Baukham Hills to the Hawkesbury River at Lower Portland Head, then across the river through rough sandstone country to Wollombi.

The line of road began at Pye's Corner, the junction of the Windsor Road and the road to Castle Hill, in 1826, passed 'through the silent and thickly wooded forest of Dural'¹ to Maroota and then on to Lower Portland Head where Isaac Solomon had obtained a licence to establish an inn and in the next year a lease to run a ferry service across the river, and the location soon became known by its current name — Wiseman's Ferry. It is possible that soldiers of the Royal Staff Corps and the Veteran Coy were initially employed as supervisors of the road gangs but the Muster Roll entries of 'Det to Road Party' do not provide confirmation of this. Dumaresq wrote in his letter to *The Australian* that '... returning to the old system of prisoner overseers instead of privates of the Staff corps (sic) or Veterans has been attended with great success. ... An active and intelligent officer of the veterans' acted as a Justice of the Peace for the district and controlled the discipline of the road gangs.'

At the time of Dumaresq's journey the Veteran officer controlling work on the North Road was Lt Jonathan Warner who had been appointed Assistant Surveyor by Governor Darling in 1826, with an allowance for forage for two horses and an annual salary of £91-5-0, additional to his military pay, 'in immediate charge of Parties on the Northern Road leading to the Hunter's River'. Warner was also appointed a magistrate with the power to inflict a punishment of up to 50 lashes on miscreants who appeared before him. On 27 January 1827 he reported his arrival at Lower Portland Head, on the schooner *Australia*, to Colonial Secretary McLeay. Warner was accompanied by two soldiers, probably from the Veterans, who had been sworn in as constables, to assist him discharge his duties as magistrate. He asked McLeay for any specific instructions, for constables' staffs for his two constables and whether he needed a scourger. The infliction of lashes was carried out by a convict or ex-convict scourger, it was not the role of soldiers. Warner remained on the North Road until August 1828, when, on disbandment of the Veterans, he was replaced by Lt Percy Simpson.

Between 28 April and 5 May Lt Warner carried out a reconnaissance for a line of road from Wisemans to Wallis Plains (Maitland), leaving the previously surveyed line at Twelve Mile Hollow and striking out north-east. It is a matter for conjecture whether this was the route travelled in the opposite direction by Morisset of the 48th in 1823 in his ride from Newcastle to Windsor. Warner's report was forwarded by

¹ William Dumaresq, writing as XYZ in *The Australian*, 29 August 1827.

William Dumaesq to the Colonial Secretary. Dumaesq pointed out that a road to Wallis Plains would not service the settlers on the Upper Hunter – the main object of the North Road and no further action was taken.²

During the period of Warner's supervision the gangs had been accommodated in encampments of bark huts or the hide-covered tents introduced by Major Lockyer but in 1829 the first stockade complex for the use of road gangs was erected at Mt Victoria on the Great West Road.³ At this time, too, supervision of the road gangs had become the responsibility of the Surveyor General with his Assistant Surveyors and convict overseers in detailed control. (See Part I, p. 37) A camp was established at Wisemans on the escarpment above the descent to the river and the remains of stonework located there have been the subject of archaeological research.⁴

Ian Webb, in *Blood Sweat and Irons*, states that stockades were constructed on the river flat adjacent to the ferry and on Devine's Hill, on the northern ascent from the river, in September and November 1830. This coincides with the decision advised by the Colonial Secretary to the Surveyor General on 27 September 1830 that it had 'been determined to work the Iron Gangs at Lower Portland Roads under Military Guard' because of the high number of escapes from the convict gangs employed there.

The letter was accompanied with 'Military Arrangements':

The guard detachment was consist of one Officer, one Sergeant and 25 Rank and File, and an Assistant Surgeon,

A guard of a Corporal and six men was to be mounted each day,

One NCO and four steady soldiers were to be sworn in as Special Constables,

Authorised allowances were three shillings a day for the officer, five shillings for the Assistant Surgeon, who had 'medical charge of the Road parties'.⁵

The 'Arrangements' laid down detailed duties for the detachment in the management of the stockade and the convict gangs, including instructions for the lay-out of the stockade. It is believed that this was the lay-out adopted for all stockades including No 2 Stockade at Cox's River established in 1832, the plan of which will appear in a later Part.

The Monthly Returns (WO 17), unfortunately, do not give details of detachment strengths and locations before March 1831 when Ensign Finch, 17th Regiment, is shown at Wisemans with 26 Rank and File, one private of the Veterans and an Assistant Surgeon of the 57th Regiment. Finch was relieved by Ensign Henry Reynolds, 17th Regt, in May. He reported to the Brigade Major on 5 May, the escape of five prisoners, the sentry having secured 'Wm Jones who had got over the enclosure', and on 16 May the escape of a further three prisoners, not in irons and who had just been issued with their new clothing. Reynolds pointed out that he had only two sentries to guard 140 prisoners working over one mile of road.⁶ The Assistant Surgeon of the 57th does not appear in the roll of the Wisemans detachment from May, his regiment had embarked for India and he was not replaced.

In July the detachment of the 17th was relieved by a detachment of the 39th Regiment commanded by Lt Clarence Scarman, followed by Ensigns Steel and later Owen until February 1832 when Scarman returned to the command of the detachment. Scarman remained at Wisemans until May 1832 after which there are

2 Wm Dumaesq to Colonial Secretary McLeay, 13 May 1828, CSIL SR4/2011(2)

3 William Romaine Govett, *Sketches of New South Wales*, Melbourne, Gaston Renard, 1977, p.47.

4 Grace Karskens, *Four Essays about the Great North Road*, Kulnura, Wimbirna Workshop, 1996.

5 Ian Webb, *Blood Sweat And Irons*, Dharug & Lower Hawkesbury Historical Society, Wisemans Ferry, 1999, p. 15; Col Sec to SG, 27 Sep 1830, SRNSW microfilm 3015, f 77.

6 Ensign Henry Reynolds to Lt Col Snodgrass CB, Maj of Bde, 5 & 16 May 1831, SRNSW CSIL 4/2108.

no further entries in the Monthly Returns for Lower Portland Head, Wisemans having reverted in the Monthly Returns for 1832, to its old title.⁷

May 1832 had seen the completion of the Great North Road as far as Wollombi. The road and ironed gangs were redeployed to Emu (Emu Plains) and to Mount Victoria.⁸ It was a long march, especially for convicts in irons. They would have been accompanied on their march by guard detachments of the garrison regiments but no documentation confirming this has survived. It is another case of where the records of the Brigade Major's office would be of value.

The North Road did not become the artery for travel to the Hunter River settlements. The route from Wisemans to Wollombi was through sandstone scrub land, for most of its length devoid of stock food and water; it had no inns until Richard Wiseman's at Wollombi, and the introduction of a daily steamship service between Sydney to Morpeth, the limit of navigation on the Hunter, foreshadowed the run-down of the Great North Road. Surveyor General, Sir T L Mitchell summed up the situation:

The arrival of the first steamship 'Sophia Jane' about the time of its completion, and the length of the road over barren mountainous country for upwards of thirty miles, were discouragements which no engineering work could avoid.⁹

Little maintenance was carried out on the road and it was soon superseded by more suitable routes. The Great North Road from Wisemans Ferry to Wollombi is now only a bush walking track for most of its length.

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Amendments/Errata

Convict Work Gangs: The British Garrison in Australia 1788-1841 Military Supervision of Convict Work Gangs. Part I *Sabretache*, Vol XLIV No 1, March 2003, pp. 31-42

1. The plans of stockades mentioned on pages 38/39 were not shown due to constraints on space. It is planned that they appear in part III to be published later.
2. Page 38. Society member, Col Ralph Sutton, LVO has pointed out that George Barney did not serve at San Sebastian.
3. The capture of Guadeloupe took place in 1815, not 1814.

TCS.

⁷ Monthly Returns, WO17/2315.

⁸ SG to Col Sec, May 1832, SRNSW 4/2210.2

⁹ Sir T L Mitchell, 'Report upon the progress made in Roads and in the construction of Public Works in New South Wales from the year 1827 to June 1855' Wm Hansen, Sydney, 1856.