



What were Private William “Billy” Flack’s duties in Van Diemen’s Land in 1832-1833?

63rd Regiment of Foot

By Ted Flack. PhD



What were Private William “Billy” Flack’s duties when serving with the 63rd Regiment of Foot in Van Diemen’s Land?

Despite years of research into the life and times of my great, great grandfather, Captain William Flack (1810-1892), until recently I have been unable to find out about what he did in Van Diemen’s Land (the modern State of Tasmania in Australia) when his Regiment was posted there in 1828¹.

It is noted that on his discharge from the 63rd Regiment on 27 September 1852, it is recorded that he joined the 63rd Regiment on 19 February 1831 and subsequently spent 1 year and 11 months in Van Diemen’s Land and 13 years and six months in the “East Indies”, but we have not known what duties he might have had in Tasmania.

of 21 years that after making every Deduction required by Regulations, the SERVICE up to this day, which he is entitled to reckon, amounts to 21 years, 217 days, as shewn by the detailed Statement on the 2nd page; during which period, he served Abroad 15 5/12 years, viz.—
 at Van Diemens Land 7 1/12 years,
 in East Indies 13 6/12 years;

We know that his Discharge papers dated September 1844, record him as having served in Van Diemen’s Land from 29 March 1832 to 25 February 1834 and embarked at Hobart Town on 23rd December 1833 Landed at Madras 26 February 1834 and an unexplained date 28th August 1847 - probably the date of his departure from India (see below)

V. D. Land 29 March 1832 to 25 Feb'y 1834
 Embarked for N. S. Wales on the 23 Dec'r 1833
 Embarked at Hobart Town 23 Dec'r 1833
 Landed at Madras 26 Feb'y 1834
 28th Augt 1847
 Promoted to Colou. Surg. 4 May 1839
 " " Capt. Major 20 Sept. 1844

¹ Wyllie, H. C. (1923). *History of the Manchester Regiment (late the 63rd and 96th Foot)*. Forster Groom.p.195

The Regimental history records that in May 1828 the Regiment received a letter from Lord Hill, General Commanding-in-Chief, ordering the Regiment to proceed to New South Wales in detachments as guard aboard convict ships. The Regimental Headquarters left Portsmouth on 14 October 1829 in the ship *Catherine Steward Forbes* with 200 convicts on board. HQ arrived in Sydney on 18th February 1830 and after landing the convicts, arrived in Hobart on 22 March 1830. Several detachments of the 63rd had already arrived in Hobart and No.2 Company under Captain Frederick Irwin had arrived in Swan River settlement in June 1829.

While there are many references to the 63rd's tour of duty in Van Diemen's Land in published history of Tasmania, very little has been published about members of the Regiment except some of the more notable officers who have attracted the attention of historians such as Lieutenant-Colonel Frederick Irwin (1788-1860) the Officer Commanding No.2 Company posted to the Swan River Settlement (modern Perth, Western Australia), later to become the Governor of Western Australia and Lieutenant William Champ (1808-1892), one-time Officer Commanding the infamous Macquarie Island Penal Settlement and later, first Premier of Tasmania.

So, while holidaying in Tasmania in March 2020, we took the opportunity to explore the original records of the 63rd Regiment in Tasmanian Archives that are available on Microfiche at Hobart City Library.

The first task in the Library was to find a record of Billy Flack's arrival in Van Diemen's Land. A search of the Australian Joint Copying Project (AJCP) microfiche files for the period 1831 to 1834 revealed that Pte William Flack arrived in Hobart on 29th March 1832 and was subsequently posted to the Regimental Depot in Hobart during his first few months in Hobart from April-September 1832².

No.	Name	Rank	Date	Remarks
33	Flack	Pte	29/3/32	Arrived in Hobart
271	Flack	Pte	29/3/32	Arrived in Hobart
287	Flack	Pte	29/3/32	Arrived in Hobart
674	Flack	Pte	29/3/32	Arrived in Hobart
598	Flack	Pte	29/3/32	Arrived in Hobart
515	Flack	Pte	29/3/32	Arrived in Hobart
601	Flack	Pte	29/3/32	Arrived in Hobart

(Comment: It will be noted that there was also a Pte James Flack on the Muster Roll posted to Swan River (modern Perth, Western Australia) where No.2 Company of the 63rd Regiment was posted. Subsequent enquiries reveal that Pte James Flack does not appear to be related to William as Pte James was born in 1804 at Horningsheath, Suffolk, England to Nathaniel Flack and Elizabeth Watts.)

The Muster Roll for the 4th Quarter of 1832 records Pte William Flack as "On Guard" between October and December 1832. This suggests that he remained in Hobart, probably standing guard at the Barracks and on public buildings.

The available records indicate that the "Isabella" was a barque built in London in 1818. She was a wooden ship of 579 Tons on her 4th voyage to New South Wales. She carried

² Pay lists and muster rolls of the 63rd, War Office, Great Britain, 1829-1834 NAA: WO12. Pieces 7262-7265 [Microfiche files for the period 1829 to 1834]. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/version/173679152>

224 male convicts to Sydney and had no deaths en-route. She departed Plymouth on the 27th of November 1831 and arrived in Sydney on the 15th of March 1832. Master: Captain William Wiseman. Surgeon: Thomas Galloway³.



Various sources indicate that the *Isabella* had departed London on 5th November, Woolwich 17th November, and touched at Plymouth on 27th November 1831.

It seems clear that Pte William Flack did not travel with other members of 63rd Regiment as the records indicate that the guard on the *Isabella* consisted of 38 non-commissioned officers and privates of the 4th Regiment, 4 women and 9 children. The Officers were Captain William Clarke of 4th Regiment, Lieut. Hilton of the 39th Regiment and Ensign Charles Elton of 4th Regiment. It is therefore likely Pte William Flack was travelling as a reinforcement, rather than as a part of a platoon of the 63rd.

William Flack's voyage to Sydney was not without incident. The record indicates that a revolt by the seamen was put down during the voyage. An article appeared in the Australian Newspaper in Sydney on 20 April 1832 reporting the trial of the seamen accused of being involved in the revolt⁴ (see below).

³ Bateson, C. (1959). *The convict ships, 1787-1868* (1st ed). Glasgow : Brown, Son & Ferguson. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/version/32700622> and *Isabella* (1818 ship). (2019). In *Wikipedia*. [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Isabella_\(1818_ship\)&oldid=915921166](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Isabella_(1818_ship)&oldid=915921166)

⁴ Revolt on board the *Isabella* Prison Ship. (1832, April 20). *Australian* (Sydney, NSW : 1824 - 1848), 3.

It was subsequently reported in the press that when they were brought before Judge Dowling they were discharged after an admonition on the nature of their offence and the penalty they had incurred; they were ordered to enter into personal recognizance in the sum of £100 each to keep the peace for twelve months. They proceeded from the Court to the Secretary's Office to obtain their pardon.

Apparently, during the stay at Plymouth a conversation had been overheard amongst some of the convicts by a soldier on duty, to the effect that they would gladly avail themselves of any opportunity that might present itself to take possession of the ship. In consequence of this Thomas Galloway, the ship's surgeon, confined the convicts in double irons for a considerable period afterward.

Surgeon Thomas Galloway was about fifty-two years old at the time of this voyage. It was his second voyage as Surgeon-Superintendent on a convict ship, the first being on the *Persia* to Van Diemen's Land in 1830. Surgeon Galloway kept a detailed Medical Journal from 24th October 1831 to 30 March 1832 which included a four-page summary. He noted that some of the convicts were embarked four weeks prior to the vessel setting sail from Plymouth. During this time the surgeon thought that *the illnesses were chiefly such as might be expected from the change of habits and food, from a state of privation and labour to a full diet and idleness*. During the first part of the voyage the diseases were such as arise from sea sickness, however with a change in the weather after the Cape of Good Hope when dense fogs predominated from that time onwards, illnesses became more severe and even the most trifling diseases were difficult to cure. The men who had been held on the Captivity hulk made up the bulk of the men on the sick list as they had suffered during the past summer with a fever contracted there. He recorded that prisoners experienced various illnesses including "*Synochus, Rheumatismus, Pneumonia, Pleuritis, Ophthalmia, Podagra, Furniculus, Urticaria, Catarrhs, Dysenteria, Hemiplegia, Syphilis, Gonorrhoea, Icterus, Vulnus, Ambustus and 12 cases of Scorbutus*"⁵. The records indicate there were no deaths during the voyage.

So Billy Flack would have endured a difficult and dangerous voyage. The guards endured very similar cramped and unhealthy quarters to those of the prisoners. It is interesting to think that Pte Flack may have been one of those "military guard" who, according to the records"

*navigated [the Isabella] to port by the officers, carpenter, boatswain, joiner, eight seamen, and the apprentices, assisted by members of the military guard and occasionally by the convicts.*⁶

⁵ *Medical and surgical journal of the Isabella convict ship for between 24 October 1831* (ADM 101/36/4). (1831). The National Archives, Kew.

⁶ Bateson, C. (1959). *The convict ships, 1787-1868* (1st ed). Glasgow : Brown, Son & Ferguson.
<https://trove.nla.gov.au/version/32700622> p.217

REVOLT ON BOARD THE ISABELLA PRISON SHIP.

On Friday, 13th instant, (as announced in this paper of that day), a special commission or jury of seven military officers was convened in the Supreme Court House, criminal side, before Mr. Justice Dowling, for the trial of the thirteen seamen of the crew of the Isabella prison ship, charged under the stat. 11 and 12, William III, with a revolt on board that ship, on the 6th Feb. last, on the high seas, within the jurisdiction of a British Admiral, and about 350 leagues from the S. E. Coast of Madagascar. By a second count, the seamen were charged only with endeavouring to cause a revolt.

The names of the seamen were Jacob Anderson,

James Davis, Richard Ellis, Cornelius Noble, Thomas Fagan, James Hutton, Charles Stewart, Thomas Elian, Richard Franklin, John Griffith, William Langtree, Joseph Vaughan, Christopher Saunders, and John Payne.

Mr. Thierry and Mr. Williams conducted the case for the prosecution—and Mr. Rowe for the defence.

The circumstances of the case may be understood from the evidence of the master, Mr. Wiseman, who was examined by Mr. Williams.—I am master of the Isabella British convict ship; I am part owner of her; my partners are Patrick Chalmers, and James Wallace, British subjects; I embarked from London, and left Woolwich on the 17th Nov.; the crew consisted of forty-five in all; we brought 220 convicts, and 41 soldiers, including officers, 4 women and 3 children; we were bound to Sydney; I produce the ship's articles; I know the prisoners at the bar; they were all seamen on board the Isabella; they signed the ship's articles; to the best of my knowledge they are all natives of Britain; on the 6th of Feb. the ship was in lat. 41° 20' S. and about 25 East longitude, about 350 leagues from Madagascar; on that day, in consequence of a report brought by one of the mates to me, that Jacob Anderson refused to do his duty, I gave an order that he should be put on the poop, out of the way of the other seamen; I did not see him on the poop till about five in the afternoon; he was sent there as a prisoner; at this time the other seamen were on the quarter-deck, making use of very violent language, and saying

they would not work a stroke in the ship; Thomas Elian, to whom I spoke for some time, said they were "treated more like dogs than men, and they would do no duty unless allowed to go on as they pleased;" all the prisoners and several more of the crew were present then; after they went forward I ordered the top gallants to be clewed up; the men were making use of very violent language on the fore-castle, and saying we might steer and work the ship our-elves, meaning me and the mates; some of them said we could fire on them if we pleased, as they could stand shot; all the prisoners except Davis and Anderson were forward; those two were on the poop; John Payne had the wheel at that time; he left the wheel and went forward; there was little wind at the time, but it was cloudy, and threatened squalls in the evening, which was my reason for ordering the top-gallants to be clewed up; I saw Payne come down off the poop, and I saw the wheel without any one at it after he came down; I sent one of the officers for him, but he joined the other men, and did not come back; it would require at least thirty-six seamen to navigate the Isabella properly; in consequence of this disturbance, the prisoners and the other men were called aft to answer their names; they were individually asked if they would return to their duty, and each said he would not do any duty; soon afterwards they were put in irons, and sent below to their berths; before this I consulted with Captain Clark, the Surgeon Superintendent, and the first and second officers, on the propriety of putting them in irons; I recollect no complaints by the crew before Anderson was sent on the poop, except about a fortnight previous, about the provisions, which I found on looking into it, was unfounded; next morning nine of the men came and expressed a willingness to do their duty, but

and expressed a willingness to do their duty, but in the evening, Griffiths, who was one of the men, came forward, and said he would do no duty, and he was accordingly returned to his confinement; the prisoners were kept in irons till our arrival here; they were allowed to be on deck two hours every day; the ship was navigated to Sydney by the mates, boatswain, carpenter, joiner, five or six boys, the eight men who returned to duty, the soldiers, and in the day we used to be assisted by the convicts; we could not well navigate the ship without their assistance, while the prisoners used to be on deck; they had an opportunity of seeing me helping to work the ship, but they never offered to assist me.

This was the case for the prosecution.

Mr. Rowe, for the prisoners, took several objections to the information, contending that the facts proved in evidence did not bring the case within the statute.

Several witnesses were called for the defence.

The learned Judge said, the question for the jury was, "were they satisfied upon the whole of the evidence, that the prisoners at the bar combined together for the purpose of subverting the lawful authority of the master?" Before the prisoners could be brought within the scope of the information, the jury must be satisfied that they had combined together, and were acting in concert for the purpose of controlling the captain, and putting it out of his power to do his duty towards executing the trust committed to his charge. If they were so satisfied, a combination constituted a revolt within the meaning of the Act. Had the captain exceeded his authority?—and if not, what had been the conduct of the prisoners? Had they combined together for the purpose of controlling the captain, and preventing him from performing the duties imposed upon him? If so, his Honor held that, in law, such combination amounted to a revolt, and the prisoners might be convicted upon this information, if the jury believed the evidence.

The jury, after a few minutes, found all the prisoners guilty of revolt.

Since the Isabella arrived in Sydney on 15 March 1832 and there is no record of the Isabella sailing on to Hobart in the next few months after arrival her in Sydney, it must be assumed that Billy travelled from Sydney to Hobart by a local ship, arriving on 29th March 1832. The Muster Rolls indicate that it was not unusual for army personnel to move between Sydney and Hobart by local ships.

The following is a summary of the Muster Rolls records of Pte William Flack during the period 29 March 1832 to 31 Jan 1834:

Muster for Month Ending	Privates	Periods		Remarks, explanatory of reasons and duration of Absence, and Causes of broken Periods also specifying the precise dates of Inlistment of Recruits and the days on which each man ceased to be effective as belonging to the Corps	Effective and belonging to the Corps		Remarks, explanatory of reasons and duration of Absence, and Causes of broken Periods also specifying the precise dates of Inlistment of Recruits and the days on which each man ceased to be effective as belonging to the Corps	Effective and belonging to the Corps		Remarks, explanatory of reasons and duration of Absence, and Causes of broken Periods also specifying the precise dates of Inlistment of Recruits and the days on which each man ceased to be effective as belonging to the Corps
		From:	To:		From:	To:		From:	To:	
31 Mar 1832	Flack, William	28-Mar	31-Mar	Regimental Depot			Regimental Depot		29-Mar	Inbound from England
30 Jun 1832	Flack, William	1-Apr	30-Jun	Regimental Depot			Regimental Depot			Regimental Depot
30 Sep 1832	Flack, William	1-Jul	30-Sep	On Guard			On Guard			Hospital
31 Dec 1832	Flack, William	1-Oct	31-Dec	On Guard						
31 Mar 1833	Flack, William	1-Jan	31-Mar	On Guard						
30 Jun 1833	Flack, William	1-Apr	20-Jun	On Guard			Hospital 2 to 31 May			Guard
30 Sep 1833	Flack, William	1-Jul	30-Sep				Hospital to 10 June			
31 Dec 1833	Flack, William	1-Oct	31-Dec							Mounted Police
31 Jan 1834	Flack, William	1-Jan	31-Jan	On board the Isabella	1-Feb	28-Feb	On board the Isabella	1-Feb	28-Feb	Acting Corporal

The conclusion one must draw from the notes on the Muster Rolls about Billy's duties in Van Diemen's Land with the 63rd Regiment is that he spent most of his time on guard duties in and around Hobart. The two aspects of his posting in Hobart that are of interest are, first his relatively long, 12 day stay in Hospital at the end of May and beginning of June in 1833, and his role as a mounted policeman in the last few months of 1833.



This is the Military Hospital at Anglesea Barracks where Billy Flack would have been hospitalised in 1833.



This is the Soldiers' Barracks building where Pte Billy Flack would have been quartered.

It was built 1827 and designed by Major Richard Turton and Colonial Architect David Lamb, and amended by subsequent Colonial Architect John Lee Archer. The New Soldiers' Barracks mirrored the Old Soldiers' Barracks (now demolished) on the other side of the Parade Ground. The building was extensively updated in 1934.

The role of soldiers of the 63rd Regiment as "Mounted Police" in Van Diemen's Land in 1833 is not well documented, however we know that Governor Laughlan Macquarie had approved the use of serving military and retired military personnel as mounted police in 1825⁷. The formation of such a force had been accelerated by outbreaks of bushranging, escapes from both Macquarie Harbour and Port Arthur penal settlements and the outbreak of violence between settlers and aboriginals in the period⁸.

It seems likely that during his posting in Hobart, he would have had the opportunity to attend evening classes run for soldiers by the Regimental School Master, Daniel Shaw, for we know that when he signed on in the Army in February 1831 he signed the form with a "X" indicating that he was unable to write his own name. It seems highly likely that to be employed as a Mounted Policeman and later promoted to Corporal, he would, by the end of 1833, have acquired basic reading and writing skills.

After four years in Van Diemen's Land, the Regiment was ordered to leave for Madras in India. For Pte William Flack it had been a relatively short posting of 21 months from April 1832 to December 1833, but during his posting he had done well. He had arrived as a brand-new recruit and he leaves as an Acting Corporal with good experience in regimental duties and well thought of by his superiors.

⁷ O'Sullivan, J. (1978). *Mounted police in N.S.W.* Adelaide : Rigby.
<https://trove.nla.gov.au/version/45253509>

⁸West, J. (1852). *The history of Tasmania*. Launceston, Tasmania: Henry Dowling.
<https://trove.nla.gov.au/version/26105711>

The Muster Roll for the 1st Quarter of 1834 records Acting Corporal William Flack as "Outward Isabella" indicating that William had left Hobart on the barque "Isabella" with the first Division of the Regiment bound for Madras, India.

221	Subalterns & Am.	"	"	In board Lord Lyndoch	"	"	Lucan River	"	"	Guard
537	Non-coms Private	"	"	John Smith	"	"	In board Isabella	"	"	Acting Corporal Guard
694	Private James	"	"	Belmont the Isabella	"	"	In board the Isabella	"	"	Acting Corporal
710	Private William	"	"	In board Lord Lyndoch	"	"	In board Isabella	"	"	
538	Non-com Private	"	"	In board Isabella	"	"	(D)°	"	(D)°	
513	Privately & Am.	"	"	(D)°	"	"	(D)°	"	(D)°	

