

### 3.2 My selection...our arrival at Westernport

Some months before our arrival at Westernport on the *Dragon*, accompanied by *H.M.S. Fly*, I was employed as a general hand on a Sydney Newspaper.

I was working away steadily, selecting the alphabetic characters, and laying them out on a tray, to copy what was written in lead pencil on the sheet of paper.

"Mr. John Batman, who had captured Mathew Brady the bushranger, near Launceston , in Van Diemens land , and who was subsequently hanged in May , is involved in a.. etc. etc."

After I had completed this selection, I was to work on "Gas lighting has been installed by shopkeeper J..T. .Wilson of Pitt Street...."

I was loudly interrupted. "Benjamin, come into my office."

It was Mr. Robert Howe, the newspaper owner.

"Benjamin this is Captain Wright, of the 3rd Buffs regiment."

"Sir." I immediately stood stiffly to attention, as my Father had taught me. The military officer was very tall and in full dress uniform, standing in Mr. Robert's office. I had seen him arrive before with 2 soldiers in attendance, and who were waiting outside the front door of this Printing House.

"Has John packed that special trunk with writing papers, Indian ink, quills, pencils, sealing wax and ribbons."

"I believe so Sir."

"Good. Now Captain Wright wishes you to write something down for him. Use that pencil and paper on my desk."

I settled at the desk and looked expectantly at the Captain.

He began to recite. " To all concerned, on November the 9th 1826, the Government navy ship *HMS Fly* and bark *Dragon* will depart for Westernport, at the commencement of the ebb tide. Captain Wright 3rd Buffs regiment Commandant of the expedition."

"Let me see what you wrote! Hmm, your writing is very legible, and the spelling accurate.

"What are your teeth like?"

"Very good Sir, I have them all."

"How are you physically?"

Mr. Robert then spoke up. "I can vouch that he is physically very good Captain. He has lived in the servant's quarters, with another boy and two older men for some time now, and has never appeared ill from anything. He would be a good acquisition."

"Look boy, I am in desperate need of a personal messenger to accompany me on my expedition to form a Military Post and Settlement at Westernport. Do you know where that is?"

"Yessir." I walked over to a large map Mr. Robert had hanging on a wall. "There it is."

"Good. Normally I would have had an assigned junior soldier, but the arrest yesterday of Private Sudds and Thompson has put the Sydney garrison under suspicion of mutiny, and I do not have enough people in my own regiment. Mr. Howe told me your Father is a soldier and you grew up in the Military barracks here in Sydney. If you come with me you may not be free to return to Sydney for some years."

I turned to Mr. Robert. "What shall I do Sir?"

" I believe you should go. It will present a good opportunity for you."

"In that case Captain Wright Sir, I will go with you."

"Good. Mr. Howe, please make arrangements so that my trunk of writing supplies accompanies the young boy, and he presents himself on board the Dragon this afternoon.. I will inform them to expect him. Also please make sure he has his best clothes with him, and smart looking other clothes and boots. He must look presentable as my messenger."

"That I will Sir."

"Benjamin, you will find me a hard taskmaster, but fair. Always be honest with me, and obey my instructions completely. Other people senior to you, will give you instructions from time to time that you must carry out. They will be aware of your primary duty to me, and they will answer to me if their instructions compromise your service to me. Clear?"



**Contemporary Officers Uniforms. Impractical for Australia?**

I was in a state of great excitement. Mr. Robert came out to give me instructions, after Captain Wright had left.

"Well Benjamin, have you packed your clothes into the canvass bag I gave you? Good, now put it in the barrow, with Captain Wrights trunk. The barrow boy will accompany you to the ship. Remember Captain Wright expects you to look as smart as a soldier."

I placed my bag of clothes, that also contained a drinking mug, plate and a knife, as well as some pencils a small amount of paper sheets, a small book that I had been reading and a empty lantern into the barrow

"Now look here. I have written a short note to your Father explaining the circumstances. On the way to the *Dragon*, take it to the Sergeant in charge of the Army Barracks, and ask him to ensure it gets to your Father where he is serving. Good luck boy, and here is four pennies from me as a present."

It was only a short way down George Street to Barrack Street, where the army Barracks were located. I had lived in the Barracks with my Father and Mother for a long time. I knew the streets very well.

I was born on Norfolk Island in 1812, and this is the year of 1826.

When the very last convicts, free settlers, and soldiers left the Island on the Governor's orders, we did not go to Van Diemens Land to settle like the others before us, but we had to come here to Sydney. My Father's regiment was to move on to India, but he did not want to go, so he was allowed to join the Army Veterans Corps. The corps was located at the Barracks.



### **The Military Barracks in Sydney Town.**

Two years ago, the Governor dismantled the Corps, so my Father had to find other guard duty type work, which he did working for a settler in the Hunter Valley. He moved there with my Mother. Because I had been shown how to write and add up a little, my father managed to get me an apprenticeship with Mr. Robert Howe, in his Printing House.

The Printing House also sold various types of paper, Indian Ink and other writing supplies to the public. It had been started by his Father Mr. George Howe, who had died awhile ago.

I was to start in the making of Indian Ink. Mixing all the carbon, and other things with water, and storing it in big glass jars. I would be given food twice a day, and my clothes would be replaced when needed. I would not be given a wage until I was 18 years old. But I was to be tutored in English writing and expression, as well as elementary sums, by Mr. George Terry Howe, Mr. Robert's half brother.

Mr. Terry was a very thoughtful, patient and kind man. He usually prompted me to excel, and always pointed out why an error in not understanding what was written or in sums could cause horrible results when used.

As the barrow boy and I walked towards the Cove, I felt quite strange.

I grew up, seeing and hearing orders being given, military parades, discipline, punishments and army food. There were a few other kids there, and we roamed about the Barracks and local streets, as we grew up.

But it did seem strange, knowing that all the shops and people and streets that I was familiar with, would all be left behind when I went on board the supply brig *Dragon*. I have never been away from Sydney. What would it be like living in the bush?

Anyway it was now time to board the *Dragon*.

I was dressed in my best clothes. A coat with a waistcoat and shirt underneath . Long trousers tucked into calf length boots, and my hat on. It was a hot sweltering day, and before long the sweat was soaking my back and dripping down my face.

A little way down the street, I stopped outside Mrs. Mitchell's military shop to speak to my friend Rosemary, but as I looked in the window I could see she was busy serving a large aggressive looking woman. So I just knocked on the window and waved at her. She waved back but kept on working. Oh well!

Getting closer to the quay I could see the two masts of the bark towering over the buildings. I wouldn't miss the prison nearly at the quay. From advantage points on the rocks it was possible to see into the prison yard. Lots of people used to go there to look over the walls and see whippings or hangings.

We entered the wharf area by going down a small tunnel between buildings. Near the gangway of the ship, the barrow boy tipped the cart up. The trunk and my bag fell out, then he just cleared off without a word.

I was surrounded by activity, and noise. I had witnessed ships departures before but this was different, it was the first time I was also going with the ship.

There were piles of cargo, tubs boxes. Sheep, and some pigs were tied up to some bollards parts and of the buildings, making a racket. Groups of men were being shouted at and being ordered around. Lifting and carrying things from stacks towards the gang plank. Some were stacking things in a pile. A large net full of things was attached to the end of a boom that was being lifted in the air, and then swung sideways onto the ship's deck. Men were leaning over the ships side waving their arms and shouting. Whistles were being blown. Soldiers were mixed with seamen, and ordinary people.

Suddenly, small groups of convicts arrived, shuffling, chained together. Each group had two soldiers guarding them one in front the other at the end. They slowly made their way to the gangplank. Prodded up it, and onto the deck. I could see them being pushed down a small hatchway in the forward part of the deck.

"Hey you, what do you want," a loud voiced belligerent seaman shouted down to me over the ships rail.

"I am Captain Wright's messenger."

"Stay there. I'll send down two seamen."

Just then the darkening grey skies let loose a tropical down pour of rain. It just pelted down for about five minutes. I couldn't go anywhere neither could anyone else, it would be impossible to shelter anywhere. People just slowly got on with what they were doing. Just as the rain stopped two seamen arrived and took hold of the Captain's trunk. I followed them up the gangplank.

On the deck. "I'm the bosun.' The belligerent man loudly addressed me. "Tell me again who you are and what you are doing here."

"Its all right bosun," a young man had walked up to us. "He can follow me. Have the men take Captain Wright's trunk to the officers quarters. " Follow me," he gestured..

It turned out he was a young officer on the ship, and knew that I was expected.

Down some steps, around a corner, and into a largish room.

Small curtains of canvass hung from the ceiling of the deck making several smallish tents in the room, on either side of a long narrow corridor leading to another set of steps. The corridor also had a long narrow bench, with small stools tucked under it. Inside the tents, some hammocks were hanging from single hooks.. I banged my head on the ceiling.

The young officer laughed and said, "That will teach you to keep your head down."

He then entered a tent.

"Here this is yours. You are sharing with Collman, Lt. Burchell's clerk, and Maher the convict overseer. Both of those men have served in the Navy, so look out!"

With that he showed me how to hang my hammock so that I could sleep in it. He also told me to put my bag in it so that it took up no deck room. He grinned when he showed me where the slop or dunny bucket was kept.

"Look lad when the bucket reaches this level, whoever uses it last, has to take it on deck and empty it over the side. Dip it into the sea again to get some water to rinse your hands."



It was stifling already below decks. However he gestured me to follow him. We went up in deck and walked briskly towards the stern of the ship.

"Here is Captain Wright's messenger Sir," he saluted and spoke formally to an officer.

"Take him to Officers Quarters, and inform Captain Wright."

"You!" he glared at me. "Stay out of everyone's way when you are on deck. And don't come on deck just to loaf around. We are always busy."

"That man must be important," I said to the young officer..

"He is the First Lieutenant. He runs the ship for the Captain. Stay out of his way!"

We were stopped from entering the officers quarters by a soldier who stood guarding the doorway. The young officer told me to wait while he went inside and spoke to Captain Wright about me.

When he returned he signaled me to follow him. Inside we went past the door ways of very small cabins, and through another doorway into a large room with several windows on either side. Inside it sitting at a large table was Captain Wright and several other men.

"Benjamin these gentlemen are the Captain of the *Dragon*, Lt. Burchell, and Mr. Rosier our supplies superintendent. I don't require you at the moment. Go with that officer and look over the whole ship so that you are familiar with it when I send you on messages. I wish you to be aware of who Captain Hovell is, and also the surgeon and convict overseer. Whenever you pass through a guard you must say that you are my messenger. Whenever you are in these quarters you must respect the officer present. Be back outside this room in one hour. Knock on the door and announce yourself. Now go."

Now that we are sailing up this western entrance to Westernport, it is quite calm. I feel a lot better. I will be so glad to get of this horrible ship. The ship rolls in a terrifying manner in all type of seas. We had to wait 2 days sailing up and down outside the entrance to Westernport waiting for the *Fly* to arrive in case the French were there.

On the day of our departure from Sydney cove. The weather looked ominous. The ships boats towed us out into the middle of the harbor where we picked up some wind and were able to sail down the harbor. The *Fly* went in front, and we were followed by another ship the *Amity*. I heard from my officer friend that the *Amity* had on board soldiers, and convicts who were going to make a settlement, just like ours, at King George's Sound that was nearly at Cape Leeuwin, the furthestmost part to the west of this country.

On the way down the coast, towards Point Hicks we sailed into a bay called Twofold where Captain Wright and Captain Hovell went ashore with some men. They returned with many rolls of grasses for Captain Hovell's horses. Talk about horses and trouble. The morning we left Sydney, Captain Hovell's four horses were slung aboard, using a boom, with rope and tackle. Every horse went berserk in the air. Kicking and carrying on. But when their feet touched the deck they reared up and started pig rooting something awful. I just hid away from it all.

The ship also stopped at a place called Sealers Cove just before we rounded Wilsons Promontory.

I practically slept outside Captain Wright's cabin door on a small mat. He was always sending me to summon someone to his cabin.

It took 28 days to get here. What a voyage. Sea sickness, awful smells, horrible food, salty drinking water, and chucking the dunny bucket over the side. Yuk.

