

The Eureka Disturbances

—29—Ship Gloucester, 591 tons, J Hail from London, sailed the 30th February, via Cork, with troops. Cabin passengers—Capt. J W Hutchins, Lieutenant H. Cole, Ensign J L Wilkie, W D Dick, M.D. Steerage—102 rank and file of the 12th regiment, 18 women, and 6 children under 14.

The 1st Battalion of the 12th Regiment's involvement in Australasia commenced in 1854, when one Company sailed from Cork on the transport ship *Gloucester* on 20 January 1854, for Van Dieman's Land (Tasmania). The Company arrived in Hobart on 29 May 1854 under the command of Captain W J Hutchins, Lieutenant H Cole, Ensign J L Wilkie, the Surgeon W D Dick and 102 troops.

On 1 July 1854, Headquarters and three Companies under the command of Major Kempt embarked on the *Camperdown* for Australia, arriving at Melbourne on 18 October 1854. On 28 July 1854, two further Companies accompanied by Captain Atkinson, left Cork aboard the *Empress Eugenie*, arriving at Melbourne on 6 November 1854.

Arrival of the 12th Regiment—The troops brought by the *Camperdown* are composed of 10 officers, 17 sergeants, 6 drummers, 10 corporals, and 285 privates 12th Regiment; also 39 women and 37 children. They are all in good health.

The Company in Hobart arrived in Melbourne on 13 August on *Iron Tasmania*. Captain Hutchins removed to Castlemaine and Sandhurst, and on the arrival of HQ at Melbourne in October, two Companies were quickly despatched to the

goldfields of Ballarat where they joined the 40th Regiment's efforts in managing the growing unrest by the miners.

November 3.—*Empress Eugenie*, 653 tons, W. H. Mattress, from Cork 30th July, transport No. 104. Passengers—cabin: Lieut. Le Wise, Admiralty Agent, Capt Atkinson, commanding officer, Capt Vereker, Acting Paymaster, Lieut. J. R. Palmer, M. C. Saunders, Assistant-Surgeon Rogers, W. H. Paul, H. L. Williams, C. M. Harward, Mrs. J. R. Palmer, and Mrs. Vereker; ten sergeants, one hundred and sixty-seven rank and file, twenty-five women, and thirty-four children.

Brief Introduction and Timetable

If the earth of Ballarat produced gold for the miners, the miners in turn provided gold for the fledgling Victorian government. The men in government comprised those nominated by the governor and others elected by wealthy squatters. The men who contributed £1 10s per month to the government coffers (the licenced diggers) were not represented in Parliament at all. Gold Commissioner's were appointed to oversee the collection of the tax and they in turn recruited many unsuitable types to act as police troopers to check licences ('licence hunts') and deal with the non-payers. Sir Charles Hotham was appointed Lieutenant Governor of Victoria in June 1854. From the outset, he was a 'hands on' administrator and seemed to devote his energy particularly to matters concerning the goldfields and was determined to enforce the collection of licence payments. Ballarat had a high crime rate, much drunkenness and a significantly corrupt officialdom. The scene was set for trouble.

September

- Twice-weekly licence searches were ordered.
- Frank Carey, an American, was imprisoned for 'sly grog' selling - rumoured to be a frame-up by the unpopular Police Sergeant-Major Robert Milne. Carey was later released from prison after intervention by the American Consul.

October

- A miner, James Scobie, was murdered near the *Eureka Hotel* owned by James Francis Bentley. Despite evidence implicating Bentley, a coroner's verdict of murder by persons unknown was brought down.
- The disabled servant of the Catholic Priest was unfairly charged with assault and fined £5.
- Bentley discharged by a judicial enquiry over his involvement with Scobie's death; Police Magistrate John D'Ewes (Dewes) suspected of collusion.
- Mass meeting by about 10,000 to urge another investigation into Scobie's murder. Civil disorder followed including the burning of Bentley's *Eureka Hotel*.
- Two men arrested for the destruction of the hotel and bailed by their colleagues; further mass meetings at Bakery Hill making it necessary for police and military to be 'on alert' for trouble.

November

- A Riot Enquiry was established to look into the Scobie incident and actions of the government Camp officials. Magistrate D'Ewes and Sergeant-Major Milne were dismissed and Bentley and two others found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to three years with hard labour.
- The Ballarat Reform League's Manifesto published - political and taxation reforms were identified. Three men convicted for the destruction of the *Eureka Hotel*. Despite the Jury's recommendation for mercy, they were given gaol terms. The Reform League's representatives met with Hotham to unsuccessfully negotiate the release of the prisoners.
- Amid rumours that the Camp was in danger of attack, reinforcements of police and a detachment of the 12th Regiment marched into Ballarat (the 40th was already a presence in the town). A group of diggers attacked the soldiers as they passed through the Eureka diggings, shooting a drummer boy in the leg.
- A further public meeting at Bakery Hill - the Reform League's Committee divided between using moral force or physical force to reach their goals.
- Another 'licence hunt' ordered by Commissioner Rede. About 1000 diggers with their leaders marched with the *Southern Cross* flag to the Eureka diggings and began construction of a stockade.

December

- At 3:30 am on Sunday 3 December, men of the 12th and 40th British Regiments of Foot and police set off to attack the stockade. One soldier was killed and out of the 15 wounded, two later died. Seventeen miners were killed and out of 21 wounded, nine later died. Over 100 people were arrested but charges were dismissed against all but 13 who were sent to trial. Hotham proclaimed Martial Law in Ballarat.



Eureka Stockade Riot 1854 [J B Henderson]



Swearing Allegiance to the Southern Cross
[Charles Doudiet]

Aftermath of Eureka

In the days and weeks that followed the rebellion, there was a groundswell of public indignation in Melbourne as well as in Ballarat against what was seen as a brutal over-reaction in a situation essentially brought about by the actions of Commission and Government officials. When thirteen of the imprisoned stockaders were tried for treason in Melbourne early in 1855, all were acquitted to great public acclaim. The promised commission of enquiry into the administration of the goldfields eventuated, and was scathing in its criticism of the handling of the affair.

The Miner's Licence was replaced by an export duty on gold and a Miner's Right which cost a small annual fee. A system of mining wardens replaced the gold commissioners, and police numbers were cut drastically. After the establishment of the Legislative Assembly in 1856, the rebel leader Peter Lalor represented Ballarat in the Legislative Council. The effect Eureka had on mining laws, of equality within society, the legislative administration and the influence upon subsequent generations of Australians has been profound [Ken Larbalestier p.41].

Eureka's Impact on 12th Regiment

The impact on the Regiment was subtle. Fifty-six soldiers deserted in the pay quarter January to March 1855 from all stations. There were nine casualties, three dying from wounds.

By the end of December, the complement of troops and support staff from the 12th Regiment in Victoria amounted to six Companies, totalling 519 Redcoats excluding Staff Officers and Clerks. Unsurprisingly there were three Companies in Melbourne, two in Ballarat and one split between Castlemaine and Sandhurst.

Seven men stationed in Ballarat during the Eureka affair were part of the 12th Regiment's detachment who later discharged from the Army and settled in Western Australia: **Privates Bryan, Hogan, Keen, McComish, Miner, Newell and Read**. It is not known if any of them were in the field at Eureka; none was wounded.



Sources:

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