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21st Regiment (Royal North British Fusiliers) 1833-1840

This dataset generates a biographical profile of each member of the 21st regiment recorded on regimental muster books and pay lists as serving in Australia 1833-1840, mainly in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) and Western Australia. The records are held by the UK National Archives, Kew, London (ref: TNA WO12/3802-3809). They were microfilmed by the National Library of Australia's Australian Joint Copying Project and are now available for online viewing on the Trove www.trove.nla.gov.au under the 'Diaries, letters, archives' tab. The records, some faded and difficult to read on the microfilm version, were transcribed for BDA by Keith A Johnson AM and processed by BDA staff and volunteers, including John Ross. Most are quarterly returns. The men are divided into separate lists according to their rank and are listed in each return in the same order except when they were promoted or demoted, in which case they were added to their new rank list. The movement of men sometimes caused the clerks to make mistakes in their compilation of these records and there is a risk of confusion with common names. The dataset records by name 850 individuals who came to Australia with the regiment and a total of 1,024 entries including additional persons mentioned.

Background

The 21st Regiment of Foot was an infantry regiment Royal North British Fusiliers commanded by Colonel James Ochoncar Forbes, 17th Lord Forbes (1765–1843), a Scottish aristocrat who headed the regiment but did not travel to Australia. News reached the colonies in early 1833 that a decision had been made to send the 21st to Australia to relieve the 63rd. Following standard practice, the arrival and departure of the incoming and outgoing regiments was phased over several years.

The regiment had served in the Mediterranean in the latter stages of the Napoleonic Wars and in the War of 1812 against the United States had taken part in the capture of Washington DC.

The regiment was stationed in the Caribbean from 1819 to 1827 and in Ireland 1829-1831 before returning to England.

Posting in Australia

One of the first batches of officers and men led by Captain Picton Beet and Surgeon Edward Pilkington arrived with Pilkington's wife and six children and six soldiers' wives and seven of their children on board reached Hobart in the *Enchantress* in mid-1833.

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The regiment served in both Van Diemens Land and the new Swan River settlement at Perth WA. In Western Australia they were involved in frontier conflict with the Noongar Aboriginal People.

The regiment was ordered for transfer to India in 1839 with the last contingent sailing from Hobart in March 1840.

SOURCES

Sources: published books and articles

John Sweetman, Military Historical Society of WA, *The military establishment and penal settlement at King George Sound (Frederickstown), 25th December 1826-19th March 1831*.

Carlisle, WA : Hesperian Press, 1989

Erskine Shackson Whitely and Clara Grace Selina Whitely (edited by Keith J. Bostock), *The military establishment in Western Australia 1829-1863*, Carlisle, WA : Hesperian Press, 2010.

Sources: other (online)

Genuki: 'Outline History - 21st Regiment of Foot'

<https://www.genuki.org.uk/big/sct/AYR/Military/21st>

Redcoat Settlers in Western Australia 1826-1869

<https://redcoat-settlerswa.com/redcoat-index/redcoats-who-died-in-service/>

R. H. W. Reece, 'Yagan (1795–1833)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University

<https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/yagan-2826/text36984>

Tarwonga Inn WA, Statement of significance [describing connections of 21st Regiment soldiers to the Battle of Pinjarra].

<http://inherit.stateheritage.wa.gov.au/Public/Inventory/PrintSingleRecord/7db2911a-c58f-430d-9916-4fedab3f1e05>

Sources: newspapers

21st under orders to relieve the 63rd in Van Diemen's Land, *The Colonist and Van Diemen's Land Commercial and Agricultural Advertiser* (Hobart) 4 Jan 1833:3.

'THE MILITARY FORCE. — THE detachment of the 21st Regiment, R. S. F. arrived on Saturday to proceed (as we announced in our last,) to proceed to Swan River, to relieve the detachment of the 63rd Regiment at that station. We understand it is intended in future to reduce the Military force here, by the abstraction of two companies of the regiment stationed here for Swan River duty. Again and again we repeat, that Britain will reduce its expenditure to the lowest possible limit.'

BDA Source Description Pages

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The Austral-Asiatic Review (Hobart, Tas) 23 Jul 1833: 3. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article232475422>

'Arrived on Wednesday evening the ship *Enchantress*, 401 tons, Capt. Canney, from Portsmouth 13th April, with 199 male convicts, Surgeon Superintendent Dr. Osburne, R. N. The guard consists of 29 rank and file of the 21st regiment, under the command of Capt. Picton Beete, -also Dr. Pilkington, Surgeon of the regiment, Mrs. Pilkington and 6 children - 6 wives of the soldiers and 7 children'. *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 15 Aug 1833: 3 <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article2213429>

IT WILL be seen by reference to a Proclamation published in this day's Gazette, that in consequence of the continued indisposition of Captain Daniell, the next Senior officer in command, Captain Beete, has assumed the reins of Government. Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal 17 May 1834: 286.

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article641504>

Died at Perth, on Friday, the 7th instant, aged 43, Captain Daniell, of H. M. 21st Regiment, R. N. B. Fusiliers. The memory of the deceased is held in the highest esteem by all classes of our little society, for his many acts of friendship, kindness and benevolence. The body was interred at four o'clock this afternoon, (8th August,) but without the customary honors, the small force at present at head-quarters not admitting of this ceremonial. All the available force was ordered out on the occasion, and several friends from Fremantle and the banks of the Swan joined one of the largest and most respectable processions we have witnessed. The information to the officers of the Civil department respecting the hour at which the funeral was to take place, was notified as follows: —

Captain DANIELL, of His Majesty's 21st Regiment, senior Member of the Councils of this Colony, having departed this life, it is proposed that his funeral should take place to-morrow afternoon at four o'clock ; and His Excellency the Governor, being desirous to show every mark of attention to his memory, requests that the Members of the Civil Establishment will attend at the above-mentioned hour, to accompany his remains to the grave. Captain Daniell obtained his commission in 1814. He signalized himself in many actions during the period of his life, and on his person bore the honorable marks of an active participation in the achievement of the victories gained in the Peninsula, and in other countries. Captain Beete, of H. M. 21st Regiment, will succeed to the command of the forces stationed in this colony.

Launceston Advertiser (Tas) 22 Oct 1835: 3.

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article84777644>

'They have as little idea of a future state of rewards and punishments as the result of their conduct in a prior existence. They believe that the spirits, or "goor-doo-mit," of deceased persons pass, immediately after death, through the bosom of the sea to some unknown and distant land, which becomes thenceforth (as they believed before their intercourse with our settlers) their eternal residence. But in this latter particular the arrival among them of the whites has led to a total change of creed. For they very soon recognised among their new visitors many of their deceased relatives and

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friends—a delusion which exists to this day as strongly as ever. They confidently recognise several hundreds of the Colonists by their countenances, voices, and scars of former wounds. They are quite positive that the re-embodied spirits of Yagan, and Heegan, who was shot along with him, are already returned in the forms of two soldiers of the 21st Regiment. The obstinacy with which they persist in this conviction, that the whites are all incarnations of the spirits of departed ancestors or friends, is so great, that notwithstanding the great confidence they usually place in the Interpreter, he has never been able to persuade them of the contrary—at least the old persons; for the younger persons begin to have their faith shaken on this point. The name which they invariably apply to the whites, when talking of the latter among themselves, is "Djanga" or "the dead."

"MANNERS AND HABITS OF THE ABORIGINES OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA,
FROM INFORMATION COLLECTED BY MR. F. ARMSTRONG, INTERPRETER."

The Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal 29 Oct 1836: 789.

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article640230>

'21st Regiment.-On Wednesday last, the 28th August, marched from Chatham Barracks 80 men belonging to the 2nd regiment, 28 men belonging to the 14th, and 50 men belonging to the 21st regiment, to Gravesend, where they embarked to join their regiments in India..... 21st Regiment.--Captain L'Estrange will shortly embark for Bengal in charge of a large draft. The regiment is exceedingly weak, having left a large number of men in Van Diemen's Land. Second Lieutenant Holland embarked on the 3d September in the Exmouth, under Major J. Picton Beete, nephew of the late Sir Thomas Picton.-Naval and Military Gazette.'

Hobart Town Courier and Van Diemen's Land Gazette 17 Jan 1840: 2.

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article8748155>

'EMBARKATION OF THE 21st REGIMENT R.S.F.

(From Murray's Review.)

On Thursday morning the detachment of the 21st Regiment under the command of Captain Mackay embarked on board the *Blake* for India. The officers of the 51st K.O.L.I. entertained the officers of the 21st at breakfast a la fourchette, champagne being the predominant beverage, after which, about eight o'clock the detachment fell in for embarkation, not a man absent. With the fine band of the 21st, and Col. Elliott at their head, they proceeded (the band playing the old Fuzileer March, The British Grenadiers), to the wharf, where boats were ready to convey them to the ship, and the embarkation was effected in the most perfect order. A very large concourse of people attended, by whom these gallant soldiers were saluted frequently with loud cheers particularly upon the departure of each boat, and when the last left the shore, the officers of the 51st gave their friends three hearty cheers, which were returned in the most cordial manner. We have sincere pleasure in making public the following very handsome Garrison Order, issued by Lieutenant-Colonel Elliott commanding here, on Thursday last, upon the embarkation of the detachment of the 21st Fusileers.

Garrison Order, No. 125.

Brigade Major's Office,

Hobart, March 12, 1840.

The last detachment of the 21st Fusileers having this day embarked to join the headquarters of their regiment, in India, the Lieutenant Colonel in Command of the

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Forces cannot withhold the expression of his full approbation of the excellent order and soldier-like manner in which this detachment embarked, and which he considers alike creditable to officers, non-commissioned officers, and men ; nor can the Lieutenant Colonel omit to express his perfect approval of the good conduct and discipline maintained by this detachment, since the sailing of their headquarters, about the beginning of March last year, from which it may be clearly observed, that those valuable requisites of good order and regularity, in quarters, are not less sacred with the 21st Fusileers than are the other high and universally acknowledged qualities of the British soldier. The Lieutenant Colonel wishes this detachment a pleasant and speedy passage to join their comrades in India.

By Command, J. Butler, R.N.'

Cornwall Chronicle (Launceston, Tas) 21 Mar 1840: 2. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article66019678>

Information Page written by Michael Flynn 2021.

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