
The taking of Colbee and Bennalong

John Hunter's account:

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One of which struck the Hatt of one of the Seamen, & as no fire Arm had appear'd, the Natives shew'd themselves to the Number of between twenty & thirty; The Midshipman & Boats Crew return'd to the Boat and brought up a Musquet loaded with Ball, which the Natives observ'd, & all but two disappear'd, the Ball was fir'd at them, but whether with or without Effect we know not, they also disappear'd immediately. These Hostile appearances, I think may have been the Effect of their Success in having lately Murder'd some of our people, for as we have had Several such Accidents here, we have had an opportunity of remarking, that they have generally shewn immediately after them, a more then ordinary degree of Hostility -

The want of one of the people of this Country, who from a habit of living amongst us, might have been the Means of preventing much of this Hostile disposition in them towards us, is much to be lamented. If poor Ara-ba-noo had liv'd, He wou'd by this time have acquir'd enough of our Language to have understood whatever we wish'd him to communicate to his Countrymen, He cou'd have made them perfectly understand that we wish'd to live with them on the most kindly footing, and that we wish'd to promote as much as might be in our power, their Comfort & happiness. The two Children mention'd formerly, and who are very happy amongst us, are yet too Young to be of use in reconciling the Natives to us, they now understand almost everything we say, & can make themselves very well understood; But the Governor is desirous of having a Man or two in our possession to whom we might teach enough of our Language without the danger of losing any part of their own, to render them usefull to their Countrymen; it has therefore for some time past been in agitation to endeavour by force to secure one or two.

For this purpose on the 25:th of Nov.r last Lieut. Bradley with some other officers and a party, were sent down the Harbour in an Arm'd Boat -

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they went to the North part of the Harb.r where upon one of the Sandy Beaches they Observ'd two Native men Walking; they immediately form'd a Scheme to intice them to a conversation, for that purpose a few large fish were held up when they were call'd to, which had the desir'd Effect, the Men with much Confidence came forward un Arm'd & with much Chearfulness receiv'd the fish & held a Conversation with those who presented them;

At this time there were about five of our people upon the Beach, & the Boat laying afloat with her stern close to the shore & the people laying on their Oars, Mr. Bradley who was in the Stern of the Boat seeing the Opportunity good, gave the Signal for Securing them, and in a Moment their Heels were knock'd up and they were tumbled into the Boat, follow'd by those who

Secur'd them and the Boat pull'd immediately off - they Call'd out to their friends the Moment they were taken taken hold of, but altho' a considerable Number appear'd in the Skirt of the Wood, seeing Arms in the hands of those in the Boat who stood up, they did not venture an Attack - The Men were lashd to the thwarts of the Boat on first being taken into her, but after having got to such a distance from the Shore as to prevent the possibility of an escape, their Hands were loos'd & they were secur'd only by one leg; untill they were thus much liberated their terror was considerable - As soon as they were landed in Sydney Cove, they were immediately taken up to the Governors House where they were very kindly treated, But to prevent any attempt to escape being at all probable they each had an Iron Shackle put on one of their Legs, to which a peice of Rope was Splic'd, a Man was order'd for Each, who was to be answerable for their Security; wherever they went this Man accompany'd, holding one End of the Rope - When these two Strangers landed in Sydney Cove, Many people prompted by Curiosity, came to see them, amongst that Number were the

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the Native Girl and Boy, Whose Names I think when Speaking of them, I have never yet Mention'd, the Girl is call'd A-ba-roo & the Boy Nan-bar-ry, or Bal-der-ry - the Moment they saw the Men, they with raptures of Joy call'd them both by their Names they also knew the Children, & it is not improbable, that their very Comfortable appearance after having liv'd so long amongst us, might in some degree calm that perturbation of mind which we wou'd naturally beleive might attend them in such a State of Captivity, for it shou'd be recollected, that not one of those Natives whom we have had amongst us, have ever return'd to inform their freinds what kind of treatment they had Mett with from us, it is therefore not to be Wonderd at, if they suppos'd such as fell into our hands might have been put to death by some of us; the two Old men who pick'd up the Small Pox when A-ba-roo & Nan-ber-ry were found & whom we believd to be the Fathers of the children - died very soon - Poor

Poor Ara-ba-noo who was at liberty to go where he pleas'd some time before he died, was so well reconcild to us that he never shew'd the smallest inclination to go from us, unfortunately did not survive the Small Pox, and the Girl & Boy are now so accustom'd to our Manner of living, that it is not probable they wou'd at all relish that of their own Country - We soon discover'd upon the Arrival of these two Strangers whom the Children call'd by Name, that one was a Cheif or distinguishd person amongst those of the tribe of Ca-di-gal his Name was Co-al-by - He was a Man of about 35 years of Age the other was about 25 years old and was Call'd by several different Names Ba-na-long, Vogle-troo-ye or Vo-la-ra-very, the first we thought his proper Name the others we understood from himself were Names by which some of his particular connections were call'd & which he had upon their death taken up, this Man was a very good looking Young fellow, of a pleasant lively disposition, the presence of Co-al-by seem'd to be a

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a Check upon the Chearfull temper of Ba-na-long which inclin'd us to think that he paid a kind of difference to him, he was always very Silent in his Company; seventeen days after these people were taken, they appear'd so well Satisfied, that their keepers began to be less apprehensive of their attempting to make their escape, which they did not fail to Notice, and had no doubt laid a plan to avail themselves of for they are very far from being destitute of Observation and Cunning- One Evening when it was pretty dark, their keepers were sitting within the door of their House Eating their supper, Ba-na-long was within also, & employ'd in the same manner - Co-al-by was at the door sitting Just on the outside and had with him something for his supper which he pretended to be employ'd about, the end of his Rope was in the hand of his keeper within; whilst those on the inside were thus amus'd He drew the splice of his Rope from the Shackle & in a Moment was over the paling of the Yard & out of sight, an immediate Search was made but but without effect, We saw him no more, however we have heard since that he Joined his freinds again & will no doubt be carefull how he Confides here after in us, His freinds wou'd no doubt be something surpris'd to see him so well Cloathd for he carried off his whole Wardrobe - I do suppose it wou'd cost him some trouble to get the Shackle from his Leg which was rivetted on - the other Man has been much more Chearful since Co-al-bys absence, which seems to Confirm our Conjecture, & the Childrens account, that He was a Man more distinguished in the Tribe to which he belong'd than Ba-na-long was -

In the Month of January 1790, in every Company the conversation turn'd now upon the long expected arrival from England. We were & have been for some time past, in daily Expectation of a Supply of Provision; our Stores here are now in a very exhausted State, much more so then we ever expected ...

William Bradley's account of capturing Collbee and Bennelong

William Bradley served in the Royal Navy for 42 years. He sailed with the First Fleet in May 1787 following his appointment to First Lieutenant on board HMS Sirius in October 1786.

Bradley's journal records his impressions of the colony and reflects his particular interest in Aboriginal people and natural history. After arriving at Port Jackson on 26 January 1788, he was immediately deployed to assist John Hunter on a series of surveys of Sydney Harbour. Bradleys Point on the northern harbour shore was named for him. From October to May 1789 he sailed with Hunter to the Cape of Good Hope, via New Zealand and Cape Horn, to procure provisions for the settlement. In November 1789, to his displeasure and distaste, he was one of the party ordered by Governor Arthur Phillip to capture two Aborigines, Colebee and Bennelong, with the intention of learning about their customs and language.

Bradley sailed to Norfolk Island in March 1790. When the Sirius wrecked on arrival, on 19 March, he was forced to remain on the island for 11 months. He undertook a survey of the island during this period before

returning to Port Jackson on the Supply.

In March 1791 Bradley returned to England on board the Dutch chartered ship Waaksamheid, sailing via the Philipines. In England he was one of several officers, including Hunter, court martialled over the loss of the Sirius. All were honourably acquitted. Following Governor Phillip's request, Bradley was promoted to the rank of Master and Commander, in July 1792. Special reference was made of his survey work on Norfolk Island.

Transcript

1789 November.

the shore, four Musquet balls were fired before the Natives retreated, their spears passed over & in the boat, one struck in her & broke, very luckily they all passed clear of the people in the boat. Another boat was also attacked this day, laying at a Grapnel off a point of the No.Arm, several spears were thrown, on which the people moved farther off; A great number of Natives then appear'd, the Women came close to the rocks & used every wanton lure to entice our people to land, when the Women came forward a party of Men were observed to walk away, no doubt to be ready for an attack if our people had been so improvident as to land, this artifice having been practised by them before, the people were well aware of it.

Wednesday.25th: Governor Phillip judging it necessary that a Native should be taken by force, (no endeavor to persuade them to come among us having succeeded) I was order'd on this service, having the Master, two Petty Officers & a Boats Crew with me in one of the Governors boats: As we went down the Harbour we got some fish from the boats that lay off the No.Arm fishing & proceeded up the Arm in which we saw a great number of Natives on both sides & several landed on the beach at the No.Cove hauling their canoes up after them; As we got near the upper part of the No.Cove, we held two

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large fish up to them & had the good luck to draw two of them away from a very large party by this bait, these People came around the rocks where they left their spears & met us on the beach near the boat & at a distance from their Companions sufficient to promise success without losing any lives, they eagerly took the fish, four of the boats crew were kept in the boat which was winded & back'd close to the beach where the tow Natives & the rest of our People were, they were dancing together when the Signal was given by me and the two poor devils were seiz'd & handed into the boat in an instant; The Natives who were very numerous all round us, on seeing us seize those two, immediately advanced with their Spears & Clubs, but we were too quick for them, being out of reach before they got to that part of the beach where the boat lay, they were entering on the beach just as every body was in the boat & as she did not take the ground we pulled immediately out without having occasion to fire a Musquet; The noise of the Men, Crying & screaming of the Women & Children together with the situation of the two miserable wretches in our possession was really a most distressing scene; they were much terrified, one of them particularly so, the

other frequently called out to those on shore apparently very much enraged with them, they followed the boat on both sides as far as the points of the Cove & then

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Returned to the beach, we saw them take up the two fish which their two unfortunate friends dropt on being seiz'd; On our landing at Sydney Cove we were met by Nanbarry, the Native boy who was much pleas'd & called them by name Colbey & Bennalon, Colbey we have frequently heard spoken of by the Boy as a great Warrior & a leading Man among them; they were taken to the Governors House where they were soon met by Abooroo, the Native Girl she called them by name the same as the boy had done & was quite frantic with Joy; they were assured by these Children that they would be well treated thereafter allowed to return to their friends, but all that could be said or done was not sufficient to remove the pang which they naturally felt at being torn away from their Friends; or to reconcile them to their situation;

It gave me great satisfaction to find by the Children that neither of them had Wife or Family who would feel their loss, or to be distress'd by their being taken away, it was by far the most unpleasant service I ever was order'd to Execute. These People were shaved, wash'd & cloathed; an Iron shackle was put on one leg with a rope made fast to it & a Convict charged with each of them, they were very sullen & sulky, continued so several days, yet it did not by any means affect their appetite if we may judge from the quantity they now eat, which is beyond every thing incredible (12 lb of fish does but little towards satisfying

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them for one meal). They made several attempts to get away by gnawing the Rope in the night, but being unacquainted with the securities on doors & windows; they might have as well remained fast, when their keepers awaked they found them groping about the room to find an opening by which they might escape.

1789 December:

Saturday.12th: Notwithstanding the two Natives had got themselves loose several times & were prevented from escaping, Colbey this evening got away by the very same means which had before been detected, the Man who had charge of him was severely punish'd for his neglect, & the Man who had charge of Benallon was now chain by the wrist, the other end being fasten'd to the shackle on Benallon's leg instead of a rope which was before used: Benallon was nearly loose when the other was miss'd & in a minute more would have been after him, he was much alarmed, no doubt expecting punishment or to be put to death: in the course of two or three days he became quite composed, & seem reconciled better to his situation than before; He came on board the Sirius without the smallest apprehensions for his safety; He looked with attention at every part of the Ship & expressed much astonishment particularly at the Cables.