

**‘Branded D on The Left Side’: A Study of Former
Soldiers and Marines Transported to Van Diemen’s Land: 1804-
1854.**

Phillip J. Hilton
B. A. (Hons) Dip. Ed.

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I confirm that this thesis is entirely my own work and contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written, by any other person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis.

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Abstract

In 1838 Sir George Arthur admitted that the criminal status of a court-martialled soldier was problematic as a soldier was actually transported for a class of offences (such as striking a noncommissioned officer) for which a citizen would incur a trifling penalty. This observation was pertinent. Transportation needs to be understood in relation to other coercive institutions, including both slavery and military service. A small number of convicts had experienced multiple forms of coercion. Three African soldiers, for example were court-martialled and transported from the Caribbean by the West India Regiments. All had quintessential British names but bore country marks on their faces suggesting that they had been born in Africa. While a small number of former convicts had experience of slavery, the number who had served before the colours was substantially larger. Despite this, most convict historians have shunned soldiers. Robson, for example claimed that 'only a handful of men were transported by courts-martial.' Apart from several thousand who were transported to New South Wales and Western Australia, over 3,000 former soldiers were shipped to Van Diemen's Land alone.

Transported soldiers occupy an almost unique position in convict historiography. Apart from former slaves, soldiers were the most substantial convict sub-group to have experienced a coercive disciplinary regime comparable with the convict system. Emerging from this coercive disciplinary regime transported soldiers carried permanent visual reminders of their confrontations with state power. Furthermore, this occurred during a period generally regarded as an era of penal reform. Soldiers' bodies represent this transitional discourse on the changing nature of ritualised state violence. Their experiences are illustrated upon their bodies, perhaps to a greater extent than other convict sub-groups. Hundreds had already been flogged and their bodies carried 'marks of punishment'.

This thesis will provide a brief contextual analysis of the two systems of convict labour management, assignment and probation, which operated in Van Diemen's Land. It will also detail how former soldiers were assimilated within those systems. One of the principal themes to emerge from this research was how extensively the

system used former soldiers in helping to control the broader convict body by exploiting their most valuable commodity, their military experience, in their employment as police and overseers. Commissioner John Thomas Bigge had urged that the fruits of convict labour be assiduously manipulated. He demanded that transportation had to become a more terrifying deterrent in order to dissuade poor British people from believing that exile in New South Wales was no real punishment at all. Many settlers were overly ambitious and their exaggerated expectations often impacted negatively on assigned workers. Skill was a critical determinant of convict experience and, accordingly, behaviour was an important contingency in determining a convict's progress or lack thereof. As convicts in Van Diemen's Land, many former soldiers were relatively unskilled as a result they were disproportionately punished in the chain gangs, penal stations and on the gallows.

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