

(Continuing from the "Saga of Moorabbin").

Back in England, the British Admiralty, already tired of the warfaring Napoleon, received from Governor King the despatch telling of the presence of French ships along the far south coast of New South Wales, and at the same time requesting that an expedition be sent to form a British settlement in the vicinity of the two bays. The Admiralty, seeing urgency in the matter, quickly agreed to send a large group of people to take over the area in question, and in a matter of weeks a force of 50 marines, 307 convicts and 15 free settlers was leaving Spithead.

The Lieutenant-Governor of the proposed Port Phillip Settlement was to be Colonel David Collins of the Royal Marines, whose experience under the command of Governor Phillip in the first landing and foundation of Australia in Sydney Cove was expected to be of some great value to him. The area which was to come under his control would be the whole of Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) as well as the yet undetermined territory adjacent to Port Phillip Bay. His control over the latter, as it turned out, was to last for only ten short weeks, which was long enough to suggest that Collins had not learned all that he might have from his earlier visit to Australia.

Leaving England on 29th April, 1803, with Merchant Ship "Ocean" and man-o-war "Calcutta" at his service, Collins reached Port Phillip Bay (aboard the second named) on 9th October of the same year. Several days were spent in selecting a site on which to establish the settlement. The colonel, while unable to make up his mind, did not travel far from the beach where they first landed, and after his short land survey returned to the vessels in Sullivan's Bay, Sorrento, and gave orders to unload the ships' cargoes at this spot. He then went about organizing his settlement within that vicinity.

Study of the general behaviour and habits of the Australian aborigines was unheard of as far as most of our early pioneers were concerned, and Collins was no exception. Lack of such a study might well be blamed for the expedition's failure, which had its beginning on the very first day of the attempted settlement. It came about during the unloading of provisions, when a small group of natives appeared on a hill not far above the landing place. From that day onwards Collins moved about with the constant fear of attack nagging at his mind. In their own shy way the Aborigines were watching the landing party through the high grass in the hope of not being seen.