

An account of the Army exploits of Edward Hector MacKay 1st
(Generally referred to as his Diary)

This is a re-type of a transcript obtained from the Stott Family in New Zealand. The original transcript was in the possession of Barbara Lewis nee Stott, the Grand-Daughter of Annie Stott nee McKay, one of Edward Hector's children. Apparently Barbara obtained it from one of the McKay emigrants descendants in Australia. How it arrived in Australia from England we may never know.

I have reproduced this exactly as originally typed:

- Gaps in the text and illegible words are shown as: {----}.
- He was over enthusiastic with his use of initial capital letters.
- Spelling errors are indicated thus: [sic]
- His grammar leaves a lot to be desired
- Some of his phrases are archaic.
- Corrections have been added in the text where necessary for clarity and enclosed in [Square Brackets].

On several occasions he indicates that it was written 50+ years after the events, which implies it was probably written circa 1910, long after he had left the Army and was living in Greenwich.

In the first paragraph he makes reference to page 8, that and the fact there is no clear beginning and end, suggests that this is only a portion of the original account. According to Barbara Lewis, the 'Diary' was rescued from a fire, hence the missing pages.

Reference is made to his Father having sent him a watch 'a few days before starting'. Assuming that he meant a few days before enlistment, we can deduce from this that his Father was still alive in 1855. He also refers to a Brother but unfortunately did not name him. I have done some research and have managed to find the Baptism in 1833 and the Death in 1866 of an Alexander John MacKay in Middlesex who parents were recorded as John and Harriet MacKay. This would fit very well but unfortunately the Father's Trade in 1833 was recorded as a Porter, whereas Edward Hector's Father was a Soldier also and was not discharged until 1837.

The reference to his Brother implies that there was a disagreement in the family and that he, his Brother, was responsible for Edward Hector being driven away from home and enlisting in the Army. He said that he regretted his actions and offered to buy Edward Hector out of the Army. Edward Hector apparently replied that he had made his bed and would lie upon it. I doubt that we will ever know what the upset was about. However, the fact that his Father had sent him a watch, does suggest that John MacKay was not involved.

He mentions two ships in this account, the S.S. Cleopatra and the Lord Raglan. I have found a drawing of the Cleopatra showing that it was built at the time that steam turbines were coming into use. It was a 3-masted sailing ship with 1 funnel as seen below. It was later reported that the Cleopatra was lost off the Irish coast whilst transporting more troops to the Crimea. I have been unable to find an illustration of the Lord Raglan, but Edward Hector described it as a fully-rigged sailing ship.



The Transcript:

Ancient diary of forebear.

At the close of page 8, I mention there were no married {----} in my early days of soldiering. If the {----} of a room was married he had one of the corners of the room with Rugs hung up as {----}. After we were all arrived we soon found our way to the canteen to get some extra food, for the walk of 22 Irish miles had done for us 2 things, make us very hungrey [sic] and tired and such as took the new boots on starting they were in a sorry plight with foot-sore. The next 3 months was taken up with hard drilling and getting us ready to go in a craft to the Crimea. In due course the word was passed that a draft for the Crimea was to be formed. All were on the tip-toe of expectation of hope that they would be included in the number suffice it to say in due course 150 lads were paraded to get our kits for ship, and the old Brown Bess Rifle was exchanged for the Enfield. I can well remember with what light hearts we all answered the Roll Call to march the 22 miles back to Cork, for to take ships at Queenstown [Cobh]. We were put on board S.S. Cleopatra, and in the Bow of the ship were 4 live Bullocks kept in {----} by poles lashed across the deck. The Captain came off to the ship in his Gig and the passing officer left the ship in his boat. Then the Anchor was weighed. How eager were we all even to lend our hand to get the ship away, little knowing and caring less, what was before us. We had not fairly lost sight of the Harbour when the Steamer began to pitch and roll so much that the 4 bullocks broke loose and all tumbled (poor things) down the fore-hold breaking some of their limbs and the gangway ladders in their fall.

The Gig which brought the Captains on board had been hauled up under the Storm but was not lashed so that the Sea soon claimed that as a small tribute. We had on the deck 2 Guns in the fore-part of the Ship and they not being made fast by rushing from one side of the deck to the other made holes in the Bulwarks and overboard they went, not to shoot the fishes but to sink to the bottom of the deep. The Troops one and all were terribly sea-sick, so much that we lay in our hammocks for 3 days as the weather was awfully rough in the Bay of Biscay.

The Ship rolled so heavily in the Bay that one of the Fire Bars was shifted out of place. The Engineer when he was told of it remarked we shall not want it for a purpose. Now sailors as a rule are nothing if they are not superstitious and bad swimmers. The Engineer's remarks about requiring the bar for another purpose came

true for the violence of the Gale caused the death of one of our Officers. And he was sewn up in a Blanket and the Fire Bar was placed with him when his body was committed to the Deep. It was my first experience of seeing a Body Buried at Sea. While the Captain was reading the Burial Service we all had to look out we were not washed off our feet. This we did by holding on to some rope on the sail. We arrived at Gibraltar in a sorry plight not anything like so gay as when we left Fermay [sic – should read Fermoy] to march to Cork for the Ship. After taking Some Coal we started for Malta. The weather during that journey was so fine and in the meantime we were busy in cleaning the Ship and ourselves. Truly part of the 106 Psalm was most applicable to us for we saw the wonders of the Deep and did stagger like Drunken men. But thanks be unto God he did deliver us out of the sea trouble. Steamboats 55 years past were not so well placed as they are in these days. Having arrived at Malta we were put ashore at a place named Fort Manorl [sic – should read Fort Manoel]. There we had some very good times with plenty of drill and preparation for going forward to the Crimea. While at Malta I received a letter from my Brother telling me that it was reported that the S.S. Cleopatra with troops for the Crimea was lost as her Boat had been picked up on the Irish coast. This is the boat that the Captain of the Ship came on board with and had not been made secure was washed away, he also regretting {----} that as he {----} by his actions I had been driven away from home offered to buy me out. But having made up my mind to go to the Crimea and to travel I replied that I had made my Bed so I would lay upon it be it rough or smooth.

Shortly after a large Draft was put on board ship for Balaclava, passing on the way Constantinople, {----} and through the {----} in the Black Sea. As you may suppose we were all on the look-out for the Harbour of Balaclava as it is so situated that it cannot be seen till you find yourself entering. Our Captain had been in before so well knew the way. The weather was extremely cold so much so that Icicles hung about the Ship's bottom. Having landed, everything looked cold and cheerless and coming as we did from Warmer climes we felt the cold very much.

Our party been part of a Scotch [sic] regiment had to march up to a place called {----} where the Highland Brigade under Sir Colin Campbell were quartered in huts and tents. Then the roll was called and the Regiment standing looking at the newcomers. They the Regiment did not look like Soldiers as they were all clothed in Furs with long Jack Boots on and hairy caps on. When my name was called a fine tall Man by name John McKay came and claimed me as a comrade and took me to his Tent and soon warmed me with hot coffee and food. The Tent was on the ground but the ground inside was taken out a foot-deep and at the back was a passage for the smoke from the wood that was burning to keep the Tent warm. I was put into one of the Huts and the Fires(wood) had to be kept burning all night and day. 2 men been told off to keep the Fires going lest one should fall asleep and we who were sleeping in the Tent would be frozen. Our chief duties was to go to a place called Hamish Bay about 5 miles away and fetch wood for the Camp Fires. Every man had to bring as much as he could carry if the Non Com saw a man with what he thought a small lot he was made to get more so that when the Regiment started back to Camp they had a good lot which would last the Regiment for about 2 days. The Fires in the Huts had to be kept burning all night lest the severe frost and cold would have frozen the men in their blankets. 2 men were told off every night in every hut to keep the fires burning. During this time the Armistice was on so that our Sentries used to fraternize

with the Russian Sentries. When peace was signed which it was during April 1856 there was a very great rejoicing all over the Crimea. Bon fires were lit and it would seem as if everyone had gone frantic with joy at the knowledge that the war (terrible thing) was over. Shortly after this the Whole Army on the Crimea was ordered to parade on the Plains of Balaclava to do Honour to a Lady, Miss Florence Nightingale. She was if ever there was an Angel in human form. her Angelic care for the Sick and wounded regardless of country or creed. All, all were her loving care. It is not too much to say that no Woman was ever more loved by the Whole Army (English, French, Turks and Sardinians) than she was, and it has pleased the Lord to spare her even up to he present time. Shortly after this the Army began to move off for home and right glad we all were. The destination was Malta. I having been there before, somewhat knew my way about the place and I thought and still think that it is the nicest place that ever I was in, but then I have not been everywhere.

At Malta we had a very disagreeable surprise for we all thought and expected that after our turn of rough life in the Crimea and the voyage to Malta that we should have gone into barracks somewhere on the Island, but no, we were put under Canvas and such a horrible place for fleas and vermin. It was thought by many that the Regiment would have mutinied for the hard living and hard lying made many men discontented. It was while we were under Canvas that I was for the first time made prisoner for late-falling in for Parade at 5am. I was only 2 yards from the place but I was not near enough for the Sergent [sic] so that I was much off. The 3 days confined-to-camp did not do me any harm for it rather did me good for never since that time (now over 50 years) have I ever been late for Duty.

While under Canvas we made the Best of it and amused ourselves as best we could of an evening some danced and some sang. Some held prayer meetings having entered myself as a Protestant when I joined. On Sundays I went with others to the Church or rather Drum-head Church what was done by the {----}. Troops After Church Service is scarce worth knowing. Some held prayer meetings and some gambled, anything to beguile the long hours away. We stayed about 11 months (this time) at Malta. I having been on the Island before knew my way around the Town. This is the place that Napoleon when on his way to Mosco [sic] with half a million of Troops sacked and devastated the place so much so that it will (I may say) never be effaced from the memories of the Maltese. As an instance of his diabolical act let me tell you of one that he committed but wither by the Order of Providence or no it mattered little to us. There is as you may have heard at Malta a Church R.C. as is nearly every place of worship on the Island. But St. Johns of Malta for Grandeur both inside and outside is only surpassed by St. Peters of Rome. In this Church there was prior to Napoleon's visit Golden Altar Rails and pailings all solid Gold. There is no question but that the builders of the place strove all they knew to emulate Solomon who built the Temple of Jerusalem. In both cases they were built and furnished on the grandest scale. Here I must skip a little aside and mention the vast difference there is in the Building and furnishings of the House of God in these latter days. Do not think by my remarks that I am praising one set of Buildings and disparaging another. My intention is that anything that is done for God should be of the Best. What do we find in these later days. Why poverty in all and every place of Worship. Any worldly or Godless man having money will lend it to any community to build a place of Worship for then knowing that by doing so his ill-gotten (perhaps) money is safely invested as he seldom if ever gets the principle back. But the interest it gets

and that satisfies him, and the worshippers ever after saddled with a debt (small or great) whereas they are like what is mentioned in Scripture began to build before they had counted the cost. Alexander the Coppersmith is the greatest enemy to all the places of worship (may I say the World). They forget if they ever knew that the Silver and the Gold is mine with the Lord.

Here let me revert back to my account of St. John's of Malta. Now Napoleon's thirst for filthy lucre and his vast Army thirsting for lust devastated the Island and St. John's in particular. For he stripped the Holy Palace of all its Gold and other things that were very dear to the worshippers and put them on board one of his ships intending to put them in some Church of France, but the Lord willed it otherwise for the Ship sank in the harbour of Malta and to this day they have never been able to recover them. His troops played havoc with the Island, so much so, that I (the Town) is in mourning to this day for his diabolical acts. The custom of the Women to this day is to wear no hats or bonnets. Only a black mantella [sic] over their heads, and you may distinguish Married from Single by the way they wear it (the mantella [sic]). The Golden Gates having been stolen, they are replaced by Silver ones which I have seen and touched to satisfy my may I say curiosity – Speaking from Memory I should say the Altar Rail is not much less than 100 feet from side to side if it is not more, but try and imagine what it must have cost , and put up (to use a phrase) a fence 100 feet about the height of a table. Why the Silver ones must have cost a vast sum. The Maltese are a people extremely religious. R.C. In fact Bells are sounding somewhere night and day. On one occasion I was out walking for my own pleasure when I got into a street, which was fairly full of people so I stayed to see what it all meant. The crowd became very large both behind me and in front, which compelled me to stand still close to the door of a church. The head of the procession was a representation of the {----} carrying our Saviour from the Cross. It was on the {----} scale. When it entered the Church the Crowd followed it in and wither I liked it or no, I was compelled to go with the crowd, being literally forced in, I need scarcely say {----}. The Church was most elaborate inside. There were on [no?] seats. All stood up and the marble floor was laid thick with olive leaves. The grand Organ boomed forth at a given part and all the crowd instinctively dropped on their knees. Now I was not a R.C. but I been clothed all in White Tunic trousers cap and shoes was most conspicuous, so my good sense told me that if I went to Rome I must do as the Romans do, so I knelt down, I must confess an ignorant worshipper amongst them. In due course we all left the Church and you will laugh when I tell you that I never could get the stain of the olive leaves out of my trousers. Wash them as often as I would, for the place being so hot I sweated all the same for having all light (white) clothes on me. The Regiment stayed in Malta about 11 months. Thence we went on to Gibraltar.

A most remarkable place, so strongly fortified and duty was so strict. A man was not allowed to swim out from the shore more than 100 yards else he was liable to be shot by the Sentries. To visit my ship in the Harbour meant geeting [sic] a pass signed and countersigned by more than one.

There was a Convict Barracks here, and every day (Sunday excepted) a troop of our men were told off to Guard them for the Day. They were marched by their warders to the Edge of the Rock and their workings were below. To get below there was a long rope ladder, and 25 of our men went down first, waiting at the Bottom. The 25 at the

Top would as the Convicts were going down toss their rifles very slowly so that they one and all would see what we meant. If any tried to escape or any became troublesome. We all had passed by, the last 25 went down and stayed sauntering about all the day till 3 pm when they (The Convicts) returned to their quarters, and since we were not so hard-hearted or tried to treat the unfortunate creatures with unkindness or incivility we more or less of us used to lay bits of tobacco on the ground in their Way and they very many of them quite understood the meaning of it and looked thanks if not spoken.

In my last I was treating upon Convict Life in Gibraltar. There are other things of note there. All Sentries are loaded with Ball Cartridges (except the Barrack Guard) and they are empowered to do their duty under any and every circumstance. Even the Food that is supplied to the Troops (Salt) is 7 years old and water is kept in the Rock in case of any emergency and at one end of the Rock there is a slow match always kept burning so that the Sentry on Guard could and if ordered in the event of an invasion, to blow up the connections between the Rock and the outer country. The Gates at this part of the Rock are shut at sunset and will not open to anyone during the night till sunrise in the Morning. I myself have seen the Governor of the Rock coming towards the Gates with his Staff and galloping for all they were worth, but the Gun having fired they were forced to return and take up their quarters were they came from. No person is allowed to be out and about the streets after 12 pm without the Sentry stopping them and requiring to see their permit and if they cannot shew one they are made prisoners and sent into the Guard Room. On one occasion a I saw a man who tried to run away from the Sentry shot dead by the Sentry. Of course you will say that he should not have tried to run away. I merely mention the fact to show you how strict and stern was the duty in the Rock. Even the fresh meat that came (alive) for the Troops was not fed with anything so that we seldom had much fat meat only Salt Pork which was 7 years old. The Rock was peopled chiefly by Spaniards with a mixture of Moors from Morocco.

There came a rumour that the Regiment was going to China so that to make room for the Relieving Regiment we were ordered under Canvas on the Neutral Ground, that is just outside the Gates. There was a line of our Sentries and a line of Spanish Sentries with about 300 hundred yards space between. This space was the Happy Hunting Ground for Smugglers. Sometimes they were caught by us and sometimes by the Spaniards. If caught by us they were kept in the Guard Tent till the Gate was open then taken before the Magistrate and after paying the fine (and the confiscation of their goods if unable to pay) were released. On one occasion we had 10 of them under Guard, and several of the Guard, I among them, thought we might help ourselves to some of their Goods, which we did. But as in all cases ill-gotten gains are generally a loss, so it moved with us. Some of our Guard came off Guard with the stuff in their knapsacks. Others transferred what they had to Comrades who hid it up for them. What was our surprise when we paraded for dismissal off Guard to have to show our Kits, and 14 of our men who had the stuff in their Knapsacks (a Corporal amongst them) were made prisoners while the Tents and Barracks were searched for the remainder of the stuff. Some they found, some they never found, but the prisoners one and all of them (Corporal included) got 14 days Cells. Another little episode in my life is the following.

I was always from a Child very fond of the water, that is to say if there was any water near I must either be paddling [sic] or swimming, for I could swim from an early age (but I will tell you of my swimming exploits later on). There was just outside the Gate an oyster-bed belonging to one of the Regiments of the Rock and the practice of the Guard at night-time was to have a feed of oysters, so it came my turn to be on Guard and it was known that I could swim, so I was expected to go oyster-fishing. In order to do so I had to strip off and dive down for them and put them in a wooden Coal Box which would float close to me. Having got sufficient I would come ashore with my cargo and we one and all used to have a good feast of Oysters (Officers as well) but in order to cover up our ill-gotten gains, the shells had to be disposed of, so they were taken in the Box into deep water and upset overboard. How long that practice had been carried on it is difficult for me to say. We did hear that the regular oyster fishers brought up more shells than oysters.

News came that we were to go to China (Hong Kong) therefore to make room for the Regiment that was coming from England. It was necessary for us to go into camp. So there were 40 men picked and who had been in the Crimea to go to the camping ground and pitch tents for the Whole of the Regiment. We went (I among them) and pitched all the tents for the men. I said to the Sergeant [sic] Why the Major's Tent is not pitched. Oh he said, you pitch it. His (the Mayor's) Servant is a prisoner in the Guard Tent, he having got drunk. I had just finished the Tent when the Regiment marched in, and the Major came over to the Tent and seeing (me) a Stranger there inquired where his servant was. On being told he was in the Guard Tent he was furious but did not swear for he was a thorough Gentleman, a Frenchman by name Gere. He said Lyons (his servant) should not be his servant any longer, and he sent me for the Colour Sargent [sic] and told him to strike me off duty as he intended me to be his servant for the Future. So I set to work to get him something.

In due course we were all very busy preparing for to go on board ship. The Major having travelled a very great deal told me that I might bring anything I liked into his cabin except eatables so as my kit went along with his I said so. Finally we marched to take ship, the Lord Raglan. She was a full-rigged sailing ship. A few days before starting my Father sent me a silver watch. It was the first I ever had. When all were aboard, the Anchor was weighed and the tug took hold of her to tow her through the Gulf of Gibraltar and the wind was very fresh. We nearly upset the Tug in casting-off the Towline. One day I was below looking over my things and I took the watch which I had done up in a paper-parcel and laid it beside me. While doing so I heard someone calling me and saying that the Major wanted me at his Cabin. I scraped my things up, putting them in my bag. I omitted to put the parcel I and ran oo [sic] the Major. I went back to finish doing my bag, when lo and behold you, I could not find the watch. Someone in the meantime had seen the parcel on the Deck and took it and kept it, for I never more saw the Watch. I reported my loss to the Chief-Officer of the Ship. He said a ship was funny place to lose anything. As there was no possible chance of searching the Ship and there were over a 100 people so I gave it up for lost which it was. You may some idea of the life on Ship, but our life was much varied not by change of scenery, but by passing events on board, for in a ship that had over 100 Souls, not counting the crew which numbered from the Captain to the Cabin Boy 101, we had not been out 2 days when a stowaway was found. He was a fine jolly lad. There was no means of putting him ashore as we were not timed to stop anywhere till we got to the end of the voyage, Hong Kong, which took us 110 days.

Oh, what days, full of interest, Joy and Sorrow. The Soldiers chiefly played cards except a chosen few who held a prayer-meeting every evening when the Weather on Deck would permit. If not on deck it was held below. There was no room on the upper deck for games, such as they now play on the Liners. The Officers did a good deal of shooting at Birds as they flew over the Ship and at Bottles swinging from the Yard Arms. Sunday we had Church Parade on deck if the Weather permitted. If not the service was held below. It was only a Church of England service, sometimes taken by the Captain of the Ship and sometimes by our Colonel.

You will understand me when I say there is very much more of a chequered life in a large Sailing Ship on a Long voyage than there is on a Liner. There are Calms and the Storms. The Crossing of the Line which we did twice on our way across this side of the Cape of Good Hope, and on the other Side of the Hope Crossing the Line on a Sailing Ship with passengers or Troops was a very different affair 50 years past to what it is now and I don't suppose much notice taken of it on a Liner. Some of the Scenes on a Sailing Ship are if nothing else most laughable. Here is me, on the deck we had 4 tubs and each of these tubs 4 men or women could sit comfortably in while someone put the hose of clear salt-water over them. If men, by men. If women by a woman. On one occasion while crossing the Line these tubs were filled full of Water. While Neptune was supposed to come up over the Bows of the Ship, the Sailors were operating on our Stowaway, and I say it to their credit not one of them ever accused of hurting the lad in any way. The sight was most amazing, but our Sargent-Mayor [sic] was a fussy sort of a man and could not see through the joke. He was standing close to one of the tubs and telling the Sailors that if they hurt the lad he would go to the Captain and report them, so this one who was standing on the forecastle over the Tub jumped clean into the Tub causing the water to spray over, thoroughly soaking the Sargent-Major [sic], at the same time telling him to go and shew himself to the Captain, and if he did not laugh as they would. Us all who stood around laughed heartily.

While on the voyage, we sighted a large Whale in the distance and several Sharks. We had on board a Bullock, thin from long confinement and no nice meadow to feed upon, and not by any means fat. It was killed to furnish the Cabin Table. About the time he was killed several Sharks were hovering around the ship and one of the Men was washing his canteen when a lurch of the Ship caused him to let it fall overboard. He very naturally believed he would see it no more. At the same time the offal of the bullock was cast overboard, when a shark was seen following in the wake of the Ship. All on board were delighted to hear that it was intended to try and catch the Shark.

So our Chief-Officer went into the Chains of the Ship with harpoon and line and a large bit of Pork was thrown overboard with a line attached so as to coax the Shark alongside the Ship which it did all of a Sudden.

Mr. Williams struck him with the harpoon and away he went with harpoon and line, but he was slowly drawn back and finally brought alongside, he having lost so much blood was powerless to escape. So one of the seamen went down with a rope and snared him to the rail and he was lifted inboard. The Carpenter with his axx [sic] cut off the tail as that was troublesome to any and all who stood near. Then the Butcher

came and opened ~~and~~ him and out of his belly was taken the Bullock's tail and the canteen which our man had dropped overboard.

I may tell you that that canteen became a treasure of the Owner. Soon after, another Shark was seen, but as in the meantime we had buried a Child the Captain would not suffer it to be brought on board as it was feared that the Child might be seen again and no one wanted to see that, not even its parents. The sight would have been too painful.

On another occasion one of our seamen went down to the Mastigale and hooked a very large Fish called by the sailors a Bushey. I am not prepared to say whether the name is right or wrong, but this I do know, it was very nice when cooked, tasting like veal.

I at the time working as a sailor (although a soldier) lived as the sailors lived, either for good or bad.

Another pleasing little episode used to take place nearly every day. All the children in the Ship (and we had several of them) were formed up in line on the Quarter-Deck and the Chief-Officer (Mr. Williams) who was very fond of little children as all Sailors and Soldiers are, when he came from the Cabin after dinner put all the desert [sic] which was left on the table in his pocket and gave some ~~each~~ to each of the children. If he saw a child, boy or girl, who he thought was cantakrous [sic], that is to say would push another boy or girl out of the way, he Mr. Wms would take the quid of tobacco out of his mouth (for nearly all sailors chew tobacco) and put it in the mouth of the naughty boy or girl.

With what eagerness the Sailings of the Ship was scanned by one and all of us – the shortest distance travelled in one day was 14 miles and the longest was over 100, but after many, many weary days and sleepless nights arcing the Wind of Storms we were cheered by the news that we were in China Waters having been at sea for 110 days from Gibraltar to Hong Kong. The sight of strange-looking craft told us that we were in the vicinity of China land.

A Signal from our Ship was made to one of the Sailing Junks which answered by putting a Small Boat overboard and we saw a Man move away in the Junk paddling his way to our Ship. All eyes were turned on the Stranger as he came alongside and means were made for him to come aboard.

It was the first Chinaman that very many of us had ever seen. He walked on to the Quarter-Deck and made signs to our Captain for he could not say much in English and the Captain could say nothing in Chinese. He was the Pilot we all believed but he sat on his haunches and said nothing to anyone nor anyone to him. Our Captain who was a Scotchman [sic] and one that was not to be played with went up to the Chinaman and in a loud and angry voice said Are You The Pilot? He nodded Yes. Then Said the Captain Up & Do Your Duty or leave my ship at once.

End of transcript.