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Letter of the Secretary of the Interior, communicating, in compliance with a resolution of the Senate of December 18, 1868, information in relation to the character of the Indians killed or captured by United States troops under the command of General George A. Custer

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LETTER
OF THE
SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR,
COMMUNICATING,

In compliance with a resolution of the Senate of December 18, 1868, information in relation to the character of the Indians killed or captured by United States troops under the command of General George A. Custer.

FEBRUARY 1, 1869.—Referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs and ordered to be printed.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
Washington, D. C., January 30, 1869.

SIR: I have the honor to acknowledge Senate resolution of December 18, 1868, "That the Secretary of the Interior be requested to send to the Senate any information in the possession of the department in relation to the hostile or peaceful character of the Indians recently killed or captured by the United States troops under the command of General George A. Custer, and to inform the Senate whether said Indians were, at the time of said conflict, residing on the reservation assigned them under treaty stipulations; and if so, whether they had taken up said residence in pursuance of instructions emanating from the Department of the Interior;" and, in reply thereto, I herewith enclose a copy of a letter from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, dated the 29th instant, with accompanying papers therein referred to, which contain all the information in possession of this department called for by said resolution.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

O. H. BROWNING, *Secretary.*

Hon. B. F. WADE,
President pro tempore United States Senate.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
OFFICE OF INDIAN AFFAIRS,
Washington, D. C., January 29, 1869.

SIR: Referring to Senate resolutions of the 18th of December last, referred to this office from your department on the following day, requesting you to send to the Senate any information in the possession of your department in relation to the hostile or peaceful character of the Indians recently killed or captured by the United States troops under the command of General Custer, and whether said Indians were at the time of said conflict residing on the reservation assigned them under treaty stipulations; and if so, whether they had taken up said residence in pursuance of instructions from the Department of the Interior, I desire to say

that as there were no officers of this bureau present at the "battle of the Washita," nothing definite respecting that affair was known to this office at the time said resolution was received by me. Hence the delay in complying with the instructions contained in the reference, from your department, of said resolution.

I now enclose, herewith, a copy of a letter from late Agent Wynkoop, dated the 26th instant, giving all the information he has received relative to said "battle," and enclosing a letter (copy herewith) from Mr. James S. Morrison, who was formerly in his employ.

These papers, with those transmitted to your department with office report of the 5th instant, in response to Senate resolution of the 14th ultimo, give all the information this office has respecting the "battle of the Washita." I herewith return said Senate resolution.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

N. G. TAYLOR, *Commissioner.*

Hon. O. H. BROWNING,
Secretary of the Interior.

FORT DODGE, KANSAS, *December 14, 1868.*

DEAR COLONEL: I arrived at this place yesterday, all right. J. L. Bey accompanied me. He has recovered entirely from the slight indisposition he was laboring under when you left him in Topeka. He has obtained a situation under Major Inman, who has got in to-day from the south.

John Smith, John Poysall and Jack Fitzpatrick have got in to-day. John S. was not in the fight, but John P. and Jack were. They all agree in stating that the official reports of the fight were very much exaggerated; that there was not over 20 bucks killed; the rest, about 40, were women and children. The prisoners have got in to-day. They consist of 53 women and children. One boy is an Arapaho, the rest are all Cheyennes. Mrs. Crocker is among them; she is badly wounded. She says that her child is killed. The women say that Black Kettle was killed.

The prisoners will be taken to Fort Riley; it is probable that I will be sent in charge of them. Generals Sheridan and Custer have started on a new expedition. The officers say that he is going direct to Fort Cobb, swearing vengeance on Indians and Indian agents indiscriminately. When John's wife heard of the fight, she tried to kill herself, first with a knife and next with strychnine, but Dr. Forward saved her from the effects of it. John starts for Larned to-night.

John S. sends his respects to you, and requests that you will attend to the business that he intrusted to you; or if it is impossible for you to do so, that you will turn over the power of attorney to General Sanborn to attend to it for him. Gus is here and sends his respects to you. He got into trouble, and will be ordered away from Fort Larned. He is in his old business now. If you return again to Indian affairs, please to let me know if you can do anything for me. I should like very much to be with you again. There is no difficulty in obtaining employment here. I have half a dozen offers, and do not know which to accept, but would leave everything to be with you.

The carrier is about to start, so good-bye until we meet again, which will be some time.

Very respectfully,

J. S. MORRISON.

PHILADELPHIA, *January 26, 1869.*

SIR: In reply to your request to be furnished with all the information I have received relative to the battle of the Washita, I have the honor to state that all the information I have in regard to that affair has been gleaned from the public reports of the same, and in two letters I have received from Mr. James S. Morrison, who was formerly in the employ of my agency; one of his letters I herewith enclose, the other is in possession of Colonel L. T. Tappan, of the Indian peace commission.

I am perfectly satisfied, however, that the position of Black Kettle and his immediate relations at the time of the attack upon their village was not a hostile one. I know that Black Kettle had proceeded to the point at which he was killed with the understanding that it was the locality where all those Indians who were friendly disposed should assemble; I know that such information had been conveyed to Black Kettle as the orders of the military authorities, and that he was also instructed that Fort Cobb was the point that the friendly Indians would receive subsistence at; and it is admitted by General Hazen, who is stationed at Fort Cobb, that Black Kettle had been to his headquarters a few days previous to his death. In regard to the charge that Black Kettle engaged in the depredations committed on the Saline river during the summer of 1868, I know the same to be utterly false, as Black Kettle at the time was camped near my agency on the Pawnee Fork. The said depredations were undoubtedly committed by a party of Cheyenne Indians, but that same party proceeded with the Sioux Indians north from that point, and up to the time of Black Kettle's death had not returned to the Arkansas river. There have been Indians deserving of punishment, but unfortunately they have not been those who received it at the hands of the troops at the battle of the Washita. Black Kettle's village at the time of the attack upon it was situated upwards of 150 miles from any travelled road, in the heart of the Indian country. The military reports state that the ground was covered with snow and the weather intensely cold. It is well known that the major portion of the village consisted of women and children, and yet the military reports are that they were engaged in hostilities, and excuse the attack for the reason that evidence was found in the camp that the said Indians were engaged in hostilities. How did they know that those evidences existed previous to the attack? Mr. Morrison states that there are 40 *women and children killed*. That fact needs no comment; it speaks for itself. I do not know whether the government desires to look at this office in a *humane* light or not, and if it only desires to know whether it was right or wrong to attack the village referred to, I must emphatically pronounce it wrong and disgraceful.

With much respect, your obedient servant,

E. WYNKOOP,

Late United States Indian Agent.

Hon. N. G. TAYLOR,
Commissioner of Indian Affairs.