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Alleged shelling of Alaskan villages. Letter from the Secretary of the Treasury, in response to a resolution of the House of Representatives relative to the alleged shelling of two villages in Alaska by the revenue cutter Corwin.

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ALLEGED SHELLING OF ALASKAN VILLAGES.

L E T T E R

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY,

IN RESPONSE TO

A resolution of the House of Representatives, relative to the alleged shelling of two villages in Alaska by the revenue cutter Corwin.

DECEMBER 6, 1882.—Referred to the Committee on the Territories and ordered to be printed.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT,
December 5, 1882.

SIR: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of House resolution dated the 4th instant, stating that it is publicly reported that the revenue cutter Corwin has recently shelled two villages in Alaska, and requesting the Secretary of the Treasury to report to the House whether the statement be true, and if true, the circumstances which called for this procedure and the orders under which the commander of the Corwin acted, and all correspondence in relation thereto.

In reply, I transmit herewith a copy of the official report of Lieutenant Healy, commander of the Corwin, received at the department three or four days ago, in which a statement is given of the firing done by the Corwin, and the circumstances which led to it. From this it appears that the action of the cutter was taken in concert with the commander of the United States ship of war Adams, to whom application had been made by white citizens for protection against Indians who were in a state of tumult.

This department was in possession of only meager telegraphic information concerning the affair until the receipt, very recently, of Lieutenant Healy's report. No further facts than those contained in the inclosed extract are at present known to the department.

Lieutenant Healy was acting under no other orders than the general orders of the department, copies of which are inclosed herewith.

A more particular inquiry into the affair will be made, and the result communicated to Congress.

Very respectfully,

CHAS. J. FOLGER,
Secretary.

Hon. J. W. KEIFER,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT, OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY,
Washington, D. C., April 13, 1882.

SIR: Referring to department letter of yesterday, directing you to proceed with the revenue steamer Corwin, under your command, to Alaska, on special duty in connection with the seal fisheries, you are hereby clothed with full power to enforce the law contained in the provisions of section 1956 of the United States Revised Statutes, and directed to seize all vessels, and arrest and deliver to the proper authorities any or all persons whom you may detect violating the law referred to, after due notice shall have been given.

You will also seize any liquors or arms attempted to be introduced into the country without proper permit, under the provisions of section 1955 of the Revised Statutes and the proclamation of the President dated February 4, 1870.

A copy of said proclamation is inclosed.

Very respectfully,

CHAS. J. FOLGER,
Secretary.

Lieut. M. A. HEALY,
Commanding Revenue Steamer Corwin, San Francisco, Cal.

[Extract.]

UNITED STATES REVENUE MARINE,
UNITED STATES REVENUE STEAMER CORWIN,
San Francisco, Cal., November 20, 1882.

SIR: * * * We left Juneau City on the 20th, and touching again at Killisnoo, arrived at Sitka on the 21st.

During the afternoon of the 23d the superintendent of the fishing station at Killisnoo reached Sitka with his family, with the following report, and requesting protection from the United States steamer Adams: On the 22d of October, while the company's whaling-boat was fishing in Hootsnoo Lagoon, one of the bombs used in whaling accidentally exploded, killing one of the native crew, who happened to hold the rank of medicine man or shaman among the tribe. For this man the natives demanded two hundred blankets, at the same time seizing the whaling-boats with their equipments, and holding two of the white men prisoners until the amount should be paid. In case the demand was not met by the company, the natives threatened to burn the company's store and buildings, destroy the boats, and put to death the white prisoners.

Acting upon this information, Capt. E. C. Merriman, of the Adams, placed on board the company's steamer Favorite some marines, and, as the Adams was thought too large for the work, the Corwin was tendered, and Captain Merriman, together with the collector of customs, proceeded upon the Corwin to the scene of the disturbance.

Remaining at Lindenber Harbor that night, we reached Killisnoo early on the morning of the 25th. The following morning we proceeded to Hootsnoo Lagoon, and came to anchor off the Indian village located there.

Immediately we anchored the white men were released, some of the ringleading Indians captured, and the release of the property effected. In addition to this, as a punishment and as a guarantee for future good behavior, Captain Merriman demanded twice the number of blankets demanded by the Indians, and threatened, in case of refusal, to destroy their canoes and villages. Refusing to pay the amount and remaining defiant, their canoes, to the number of forty, were taken and destroyed, after having selected those which belonged to the Indians who had remained friendly to the white men. Remaining unsubdued, their summer camp at this place was burned. Weighing anchor we steamed out of the lagoon, and at two o'clock hove to off the village of Hootsnoo and proceeded to shell the town. After shelling the village the marines were landed under cover of the guns, and they, setting fire to the houses, destroyed the entire village, with the exception of the friendly Indians.

After the boats returned we steamed down to Killisnoo, and, remaining there during the night, reached Sitka the following afternoon, with twenty-two seamen of the Adams, whom we had received on board for transportation. * * *

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

M. A. HEALY,
First Lieutenant, U. S. R. M., Commanding.

Hon. CHARLES J. FOLGER,
Secretary of the Treasury, Washington, D. C.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT,
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY,
Washington, D. C., April 12, 1882.

SIR: The department having determined to dispatch the revenue steamer *Corwin*, under your command, to cruise in the waters of Alaska for the enforcement of the provisions of law and protection of the interests of the government on the seal islands and the sea-otter hunting-grounds, and of Alaska generally, you are directed to take on board that vessel, without delay, sufficient supplies of provisions for a six months' cruise, and such quantities of fuel and water as can be conveniently stored on board, and leave San Francisco with your command not later than the 25th instant for the waters named, and make the best of your way to the places hereinafter designated.

You will touch at Nanaimo, British Columbia, and take on board all the coal that the *Corwin* can carry consistently with safety, bills for which, properly certified, you will transmit to the department. You will also touch at Fort Wrangel and Sitka, and leave at those places the copies of printed orders relating to the protection of the government interests in those waters, which will be furnished you.

From the last-named port you will proceed direct to Kodiak, and thence to Unalaska, touching at Ounga and Belkosi en route, and posting at each of these places copies of the order mentioned above. At Sitka you will take on such quantities of coal as you may require from the coal in store at that place belonging to the Navy Department, authority having been obtained from the Secretary of the Navy to use the same for revenue vessels. You will keep an accurate account of the amount of said coal received on board, and upon your return to San Francisco will certify the same to the department.

Having supplied the *Corwin* with coal, you will cruise actively with said vessel amongst the Aleutian Islands and in Norton and Kotzebue Sounds, going as far as Point Barrow, if found practicable, until the 20th of October next; and will strictly enforce the instructions contained in the printed orders and the letter of authority referred to above. To this end you will visit Saint Paul and Saint George at least twice during the season, and cover in your cruising the sea-otter hunting-grounds from Kodiak to Unalaska, leaving an officer and two seamen on Otter Island during the sealing season to prevent the killing of seals on that island; and you will, in the course of the season, make one cruise to the westward, if practicable, as far as Atton, and touch at the principal otter hunting stations between that island and Unalaska. You are authorized to ship two additional seamen for duty on the *Corwin* during the cruise, and to employ a surgeon and pilot for the vessel, at a compensation not to exceed \$150 per month for the first-named, and \$125 per month for the latter, without rations. You will submit to the department the names of the persons so employed.

In carrying out the instructions sent you herewith, you will cruise the *Corwin* under canvas to assist steam whenever practicable, and with a free or fair wind of any force will uncouple the propeller and depend altogether upon sails.

Very respectfully,

CHARLES J. FOLGER,
Secretary.

Lieut. M. A. HEALY,
Commanding Revenue Steamer Corwin, San Francisco, Cal.