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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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AFFAIRS IN ALASKA.

LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY,

TRANSMITTING

A communication relative to the condition of affairs in Alaska.

JANUARY 10, 1883.—Referred to the Committee on Territories and ordered to be printed.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT,
January 8, 1883.

SIR: Referring to the department's letters to you of the 5th and 20th ultimo, forwarding reports of the commanding officer of the United States revenue cutter Corwin, in relation to affairs in Alaska, I now have the honor to inclose herewith, at the suggestion of the Secretary of the Navy, as a proper accompaniment of the documents referred to, a copy of a dispatch (No. 4), dated the 28th of October last, from Commander E. C. Merriman, commanding the U. S. S. Adams, relating to the condition of affairs in Alaska and the suppression of the importation of liquor, &c., into that Territory.

Very respectfully,

CHARLES J. FOLGER,
Secretary.

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

U. S. S. ADAMS, 3D RATE,
Sitka, Alaska, October 28, 1882.

SIR: I have the honor to report that on Monday, the 23d instant, Mr. J. M. Vanderbilt, the agent of the Northwest Trading Company at Kilisnoo, came over here on his steamer, the Favorite, and reported the following:

The day previous, while his fishermen were in the act of discharging a bomb at a whale, the bomb accidentally exploded, killing a medicine-man Indian instantly. The Indians at once seized the small steamer and two large fishing-boats and all the seines and two white men, and declared that they would kill the white men and destroy the fishing steamer and boats unless paid two hundred blankets. They attempted to take the tug Favorite, but she fortunately had enough fuel on board to steam away. He also reported that unless the Indians were paid two hundred blankets they intended to fight.

I at once organized an expedition of fifty men and twenty marines, all under the charge of Lieut. C. W. Bartlett, U. S. Navy, of this ship. I had previously sent the

steam launch, Ensign H. Taylor in charge, with Cadet Midshipmen Croven and Kase, to survey in Neoski Strait. I directed Lieutenant Bartlett to pick up this launch and take this party with him. The Favorite took Lieutenant Bartlett's party on board, and they got away at 3 a. m. The revenue cutter Corwin, Lieut. M. A. Healy commanding, was coaling here at the time. As soon as Captain Healy heard of the trouble he at once offered the services of the Corwin, and placed her at my disposal. I at once accepted it, and proceeded in her at 7 a. m. on the following morning. We overtook the Favorite and steam launch at 11 a. m., when the Corwin, at Captain Healy's suggestion, took both vessels in tow. The weather proving boisterous, I did not think it advisable to cross Chatham Strait with the launch, and so anchored for the night in Lichtenberg Harbor, near the eastern entrance of Peril Straits. The next morning at daylight we got under way and went to Keteosoh Harbor to see if the Indians had molested the stores, of the merchants. I found them all absent, and that none of the Indians were allowed to work, and that they still held possession of the white men, the steamer, and the boats. We immediately steamed around to the lagoon where the property and the people were detained. I held a powwow with the Indians, Lieutenant Bartlett and Ensign Taylor in the mean time collecting all the canoes they could find. The Indians demanded two hundred blankets in payment for the accidental death of the medicine-man. For instance, if our surgeon attended a sick man, and he died, they would demand pay. If a boat capsized and drowned an Indian, they make the man who originally directed the boat to be built pay for the man if they can get him, otherwise the present owner has to suffer. I had explained to them on my previous visit the fallacy of any claim when the death was purely accidental. I ascertained that they had attempted to destroy the boats, and that they were only waiting for another white man to put two to death. One of the men captured had but one eye, and they wanted a whole one, or one with two eyes. I told them I demanded a fine of four hundred blankets, or double what they tried to get, and gave them twenty-four hours to bring them in. They said they would do so, but went to the village of Angoon, drew their canoes up in the woods, took their winter food and blankets and their women and children with them, and sent me word that they would not furnish the blankets; that if we attempted to land they would fire on us, and would defend the town if we attempted to burn it. I then sent the chiefs to tell them if they did not furnish the blankets I would destroy their canoes and shell the town. When the time was up, after ascertaining without their knowledge that their women and children were in the woods, I proceeded to the village, after capturing two of the leaders. As soon as the village was in range, the Corwin opened fire, and the Favorite following, opened fire with the howitzer, she having previously destroyed the canoes and the principal houses in the lagoon. I purposely spared some houses, although apparently accidentally, sufficient to house the Indians for the winter. After shelling the town for a time, Lieutenant Bartlett landed his force in the Corwin's boats and our whale boat, and fired the village, sparing five additional houses. Captain Healy and his boats, and Lieutenants Doly, Lentz, and Reynolds, and some men to land our men, and his officers and men, Lieutenant Bartlett says, were of great assistance to him. After burning the town I directed the Indians to come to the trading post, where I would talk to them. A crowd came about 8 p. m., with the chief Kenalkos and Loginon Jake. I told them in substance what I had said before, that while the government felt friendly to them and wanted them to till the soil and fish and hunt, and would protect them in pursuing their peaceful avocations, it would put down with a rigorous hand any attempt to seize and injure white men or their property, or to distill rum. They replied that they would never attempt anything of the kind again; that the old men and chiefs had tried to restrain the young men, but were unable to do so; that as a lesson to the young men and squaws they were glad I had burned the village. To those who had rendered service to the whites by protecting them I gave small presents. To one old medicine-man and a herculean squaw, who had quietly brought their guns to the white men's cabins and declared their intention of defending them and the property of the trading company, I gave letters, with large seals attached, recounting their services. I am told they think more of these than anything else, as it gives them much importance in the tribes. Lieutenant Bartlett returns to Kilisloo to-morrow with a detachment of twenty-five men, and will remain during the fishing season, or about three weeks. I have directed Lieutenant Bartlett to proceed to the village of Neltuskin, about 14 miles below Kilisloo, and raid the village for distilleries, as they are making large quantities of koo-che-roo there. I have further directed him to call the headmen and as many of the tribe as possible together, and tell them that they must look upon the man-of-war as their best friend if they behave themselves, and to assure them of our protection and care; but that they must not make rum or interfere with the white men fishing, as they have threatened to cut the seines if any fishing is done there except by themselves; but I do not apprehend any difficulty whatever.

I accepted Captain Healy's offer of the Corwin for two reasons; one, that it was reported that the Adams could not enter the lagoon, and the other that the show of

force would have a good effect. He was of the greatest service in many ways. It would be a great gratification to me and a deserved compliment to a worthy and faithful officer if the Navy Department would take notice of his services through the Treasury Department. I have been greatly impressed with the judgment and tact with which Lieutenant Bartlett carried out the orders I gave him. The men were packed closely on the Favorite, and were necessarily uncomfortable, but they showed no discontent whatever. Captain Healy brought back about thirty on the Corwin. I inclose the different orders of Lieutenant Bartlett, marked A, B, and C.

I would again most urgently ask if I cannot be authorized to stop the sale of liquor, including beer, in the Territory, and if sections 2139 and 2148 of the Revised Statutes of the United States are applicable here, as being Indian country. If by President's order or otherwise the sale of liquor and beer can be stopped there will be no trouble in the country. Section 2140 of the Revised Statutes states that "if any * * * commanding officer of a military post has reason to suspect or is informed that any white person * * * has introduced any spirituous liquor or wine in the Indian country in violation of law, such * * * commanding officer may cause the places of deposit of such person to be searched * * *. It shall moreover be the duty of any person in the service of the United States, or of any Indian to take and *destroy* any ardent spirits or wine found in the Indian country, except such as may be introduced by the War Department. In all cases arising under this and the preceding section Indians shall be competent witnesses." Now is not the fact that they sell liquor openly in their saloons sufficient to induce a commanding officer "to suspect" that they have introduced it? It is natural for me to hesitate to enter the premises of a citizen and destroy his goods, and although the law might seem to allow it I should prefer an order. To stop the sale of liquor, without including beer, however, is simply farcical, for alcohol is easily introduced into beer in sufficient quantities to intoxicate. If the sale of liquor and beer can be stopped there will be no trouble in the country, and if I can be authorized to search for and destroy both, either by law or President's order, or declaring temporarily martial law, I will in a few days make a bottle of whisky in Alaska as rare as fresh water in the desert of Sahara. Until this is done there will be trouble constantly recurring, and these rascals who sell the whisky and beer are the very first to yelp for assistance when drunken riots occur. I respectfully request a telegraphic reply in relation to the liquor and beer. A telegram as late as December 2 will catch the mail steamer at Nanimo, B. C. The health of the officers and crew is most excellent. The weather is abominable. There is some scarlet fever on shore, and many old chronic cases of sickness, the result of the uncleanly habits of life of the Indian. Surgeon J. D. Ayers, as well as Assistant Surgeon L. W. Curtis, have been unremitting night and day in their care of and attention to the sick.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

E. C. MERRIMAN,

Commander United States Navy, Commanding, Senior Officer Present.

Commodore JOHN G. WALKER, U. S. N.,
*Acting Secretary of the Navy,
Navy Department, Washington, D. C.*

A.

U. S. S. ADAMS, 3D RATE,
Sitka, Alaska, October 23, 1882.

SIR: Proceed with the designated force in the Northwest Trading Company's steamer Favorite to Kiliskoo. On your way pick up the surveying party now in or about Whilstone Narrows under the command of Ensign Taylor, and direct Ensign Taylor to report to you for orders. You will take his launch and whaleboat in tow and with the whole party report to me at Kiliskoo. Use your discretion and do not cross the straits should the weather be too inclement for the launch. If blowing, leave the cutter for me to pick up. Get off about 1.30 a. m. to-morrow. I will follow at 5 a. m. in the revenue cutter Corwin, and should overhaul your party somewhere in Lost Straits.

Very respectfully,

E. C. MERRIMAN,
Commander, Commanding.

Lieut. C. W. BARTLETT, U. S. N.,
Commanding Expedition to Kenasnoe Rapids.

B.

U. S. REVENUE CUTTER CORWIN,

October 26, 1882.

SIR: Proceed up the lagoon behind the Indian village of Angoon, and upon your arrival with the Favorite and Jamestown rescue the employés of the Northwest Trading Company, now held by the Indians, their steam launch and such property as the Indians have belonging to this company. They will at first probably attempt to take charge of the Favorite, thinking only the employés are on board. Treat the Indians kindly if they show a peaceful disposition. With the Corwin I shall proceed off the town. Should the Indians show fight attack them vigorously, blow three long blasts of the whistle of both steamers, and fire *two* guns; one gun I shall look at simply as a show of force from you. Should the Indians be on *our* side of the town a *second* gun from the Corwin will denote that we will attack. In the first case we will come to your support, in the second you will come to ours. Get possession of every canoe you can, and get all the Indians to come to the white settlement possible. The cause of the outbreak is the accidental killing of an Indian by the premature explosion of a whaling bomb. They demand two hundred blankets as damages. On the contrary, I propose to fine them four hundred, or double what their claim may be. In case of refusal I have determined to burn their village and destroy their canoes and fishing tackle. Remember in the *first place* to free their white prisoners, and secondly the property. Should the Indians forcibly resist after knowing your intentions, do not hesitate; open fire at once, and I will immediately come to your support in the Corwin. Use all diplomacy possible first, however. I rely on your discretion, and wish you a most successful trip.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

E. C. MERRIMAN,
Commander United States Navy,
Commanding United States Steamer Adams.

Lieut. C. W. BARTLETT, U. S. N.,
Commanding Expedition to Kenasnow Rapids.

C.

U. S. S. ADAMS, 3D RATE,

Sitka, Alaska, October 29, 1882.

SIR: You will proceed in the Northwest Trading Company's steamer Favorite to Kiliskoo as soon as she is ready, taking with you the designated force of twenty-five men and Assistant Surgeon L. W. Curtis, taking with you rations for one month. You will take with you arms and accouterments for the men and the howitzer. You will drill the men at small arms and the howitzer as much as possible. The first whale-boat will also be sent with you. You will in every way possible endeavor to bring about a friendly feeling on the part of the Indians, and as far as possible among themselves, and encourage their sending their boys over here to school. At a time when the Favorite can be spared, I desire you to go to the village of Neltuskin, fourteen miles below Kiliskoo, and raid the village for Hoo-che-noo. Destroy all their liquors and distilleries, and should you discover one in the act of distilling bring him and the witnesses along, and I will send him to Portland for trial. As they may not understand properly the cause of our burning Angoon, you will explain it to them and make them feel that the government is friendly to them, but will put down quickly any attempt at making or selling liquor, or any disturbance. You will also do everything in your power to induce them to send their children to school. Should you find the Indians quiet, and no necessity of your remaining, you will take the first opportunity to return to the Adams, but in no case will you remain away long enough to endanger your getting out of rations. In the event of your being obliged to resort to extreme measures you must use your judgment, and as I rely on your discretion I will assume the responsibility of any measure you may see proper to take. Wishing you a pleasant trip, I am,

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

E. C. MERRIMAN,
Commander United States Navy, Commanding,
Senior Officer Present.

Lieut. C. W. BARTLETT, U. S. N.