

October 1866

Draft Letter from George Kennan to Col. Charles Bulkley, September-October 1866

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Summary:

In this draft letter, George Kennan the elder writes to his superior in the Russian-American Telegraph Expedition, Col. Charles Bulkley, to complain that promised supply ships never arrived due to logistical mistakes.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Transcript - English

Ghijiga North Eastern Siberia
September [] October [] 1866
Col. Chas. S Bulkley
Engineer in Chief

Sir [Editor's note: space left blank in the original] Maj Abasa left this port Sept 19/ Oct 1 on the Russ. Gov Steamer Saghalin for Okhotsk. [Editor's note: space left blank] In the his absence of Major Abasa I have the honor to report that the Company's barque "Palmetto" arrived at Ghijiga on the 8th/20th of September after a passage of 112 days from San Francisco. Owing to her draught of water she was unable to enter the river but as she broke her best bower anchor a few days after her arrival it was considered unsafe to let her lie outside and she was accordingly run in as far as possible grounding on a bar at the mouth of the river where she now lies. By persevering effort we have succeeded in discharging nearly all of her cargo but as it could be landed only in the lighter and small boats at high tide and at night it has been a work of the greatest difficulty. The "Palmetto" has been considerably injured by pounding against the bottom in a southerly gate while she was lying on the bar but she has been pronounced by competent authority to be seaworthy and will sail from this port with the next high tide about October 5th/17th. I hope by that time to discharge all of her except sixty or seventy tons of coal which she will carry back to Petropavlovski as ballast. The Ghijiga River has closed with ice to within three miles of its mouth and the large quantities of floating ice between the vessel and shore will make it impossible to discharge the coal and replace it with ballast in time to send her to sea with the next tide. Her anchor has been replaced by a new one of equal weight obtained from the Russian Government Steamer "Saghalin" and such other additions and repairs made to her equipments as the resources of the country would allow. It is difficult while the vessel is lying here aground to determine the extent of the injuries she has sustained and whether it will be possible for her to return this fall to San Francisco or not. Major Abasa desired me therefore to leave it to the judgment of her officers to be decided after ascertaining how she behaves in a heavy sea. Should her officers after leaving here consider her safe to go to San Francisco this fall she will do so: if not she will winter in Petropavlovski. I enclose a copy of my letter on the subject to Mr Peirce, upon the subject.

The Company's barque "Onward" has not yet arrived and the lateness of the season makes it extremely improbable that she will do so although we know nothing of her whereabouts or the disposition which has been made of her passengers and cargo. She cannot possibly enter this port now Mr Peirce writes by the "Palmetto" that in case the "Onward" arrives at Petropavlovski too late you have authorized him to stop her there, but Major Abasa has received no notification from you of that arrangement and Mr Peirce does not inform him what disposition you wished made of the vessel in such an emergency. Under these circumstances Major Abasa was at a loss what dispositions to make. Thinking however that the "Onward" has probably reached Petropavlovski he left with me an order to be sent to Petropavlovski by the "Palmetto" directing the "Onward" to discharge there her passengers and cargo and return immediately in ballast to San Francisco. A copy of the order is enclosed. His intention in so doing was to have the "Onward" or some vessel of equal capacity and light draught come to Petropavlovski early next spring with coal, or stores to have her there discharge the coal, or stores and taking on board the cargo and passengers landed there this fall, sail direct for Ghijiga. A good vessel arriving at Petropavlovski early in May would have plenty of time to bring one cargo to Ghijiga and to return and bring the other during the summer. If the "Onward" does not arrive at Petropavlovski at all of course this order will be of no avail- but in any case you will know what has become of her and what arrangements to make for the transportation to Ghijiga next year of her cargo wherever it may be.

Major Abasa goes on left this place September 19th Oct 1st on the Russian Government Steamer "Saghalin" for from Okhotsk and to Yakutsk for the purpose of hiring where he goes to obtain laborers and purchasing horses for next summer's

work. I regret that he had no opportunity of writing you himself before leaving but I have endeavored to express to you accurately his wishes and intentions with regard to our vessels. He will probably return in January He will intends to write you fully via St Petersburg on his arrival at Okhotsk. I forward here with receipts for the cargo of the "Palmetto" and landing certificates for the goods in bond.

I am with much respect and esteem

Your ob[edien]t s[er]v[an]t

Geo Kennan