

HEAD QUARTERS  
District Norfolk and Portsmouth,  
Norfolk, Va., May 7<sup>th</sup> 1864.

To The Hon D.W. Gooch  
Chairman Committee  
On Conduct of the War

Sir

Having been at my  
own request relieved from duty as Military Governor of  
Louisiana, and ordered to report for duty to the Commanding  
General of the Army, I left New Orleans in the evening  
of the sixth of April, as a passenger on the "Olive Branch",  
a New Orleans, and St Louis passenger steamer, not in  
the service of the Government, but loaded with male and  
female passengers, and cargo of private parties.

The Steamer was unarmed, and had no troops, and  
no muskets for protection against guerrillas, when landing  
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The Boat stopped at Vicksburg,  
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MMN # 76599

Date: May 7, 1864

Description: George F. Shepley wrote to Daniel W. Gooch in response to charges he had failed to act in defense of Fort Pillow.

She was about leaving, I found that a Detachment of a portion of the Men, of the two (2) Batteries, {One Ohio and One Missouri}, belonging to the 17<sup>th</sup> Army Corps, with the Horses, Guns, Caissons, wagons, tents, and baggage of the two Batteries, had been put on board with orders, as I afterward learned on inquiry, to report to Gen'l Braymore, at Cairo.

The Horses occupied all the available space fore and aft, on the sides of the boilers, and Machinery, which were on deck.

The guns, caissons, baggage wagons, Hospital wagons, tents, garrison, and Camp equipage, were piled up together on the bow, leaving only space for the gang plank.

The men had no small arms, so that when the boat landed, as happened in one instance, at a wood yard, where guerillas had just passed, the pickets thrown out to prevent surprise, were necessarily unarmed.

As the boat was approaching, and before it was in sight of Fort Pillow, some females

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As the boat was approaching, and before it was in sight of Fort Pillow, some females

hailed it from the shore, and said that rebels had attacked Fort Pillow, and captured two (2) boats on the river, and would take us if we went in. The Captain of the "Olive Branch", said they had probably taken the "Mollie Able", which was due there about that time from St Louis.

He turned his boat, saying, he would go back to Memphis.

I objected to going back, stopped the boat below the next point, hailed another smaller steamer without passengers, which I saw approaching, and ordered it along side.

I ordered the Captain of this boat to cast off the coal barges he had in tow, and take me on board, with a section of a Battery, to go to Fort Pillow. While he was trying to disencumber his boat of the coal barges, another boat, better for the purpose, the "Cheek" hove in sight.

Finding I could get her ready quicker, than the other, I had her brought along side, and went

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Aboard myself, with Cap't Thornton of my Staff,  
and Cap't Williams, the ranking Officer of the  
Batteries

Before we could get the guns on board, a  
Steamer with Troops hove in sight, coming down  
the river from Fort Pillow.

We could not distinguish  
at first, whether they were Union, or Rebel, Soldiers.  
I asked Cap't Pegram of the "Olive Branch" if  
the story of the women turned out to be true, and  
the rebels had the Steamer, could his boat sink her.

Cap't Pegram replied, "yes, my boat can run right  
over her". I ordered him to swing out into the stream,  
to be ready for her.

When she approached, we saw United  
States Infantry soldiers on board, that had just passed  
the Fort. She kept on going rapidly down with the  
current, only hailing the "Olive Branch", "all right up there,  
you can go by, the gunboat is laying off the Fort"  
This Steamer was the "Liberty".

We then proceeded up the

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We then proceeded up the

river in the Olive Branch. Near Fort Pillow  
some stragglers, or guerillas, fired from the shore  
with musketry, aiming at the Pilot House.

I was then in the Pilot House, and as we kept  
on, I observed that one of the two other boats, I  
have mentioned, which followed us at some distance,  
was compelled to put back.

The "Olive Branch" kept on  
to report to the gunboat in the Station.

An Officer came off from the gunboat in a  
small boat, and said he did not want any boat to  
stop, ordered us to go on to Cairo, and tell Cap't  
— to send him immediately, four hundred (400)  
rounds of ammunition.

There was no firing at the  
Fort at this time. The Union Flag was flying,  
and after we had passed the Fort, we could see a  
"Flag of Truce" outside the fortification.

No signal of any kind, was made to the boats  
from the Fort, or from the shore.

No intimations were given  
us from the Gunboats, which had a right to order  
a Steamer of this description, other than the order  
to proceed to Cairo, to send down the ammunition.

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No signal of any kind, was made to the boat,  
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us from the Gunboats, which had a right to order  
a Steamer of this description, other than the order  
to proceed to Cairo, to send the ammunition.

From the facts that the "Liberty" had just passed down the river from the Fort with troops on board, from her hailing us to go by and continuing her course down the river without stopping, that no signal was made from the "Olive Branch" from the Fort or the shore, and no attack was being made on the Fort at the time, that the Officer of the gunboat said he did not wish any boats to stop, and ordered the Captain of the "Olive Branch" to go on and have ammunition sent down to him by first boat, I concluded, and now consider that the Captain of the "Olive Branch" was not only justified in going on, but bound to proceed.

The "Olive Branch" was incapable of rendering any assistance, being entirely defenseless. If any guns could have been placed in position on the boat, they could not have been elevated to reach sharp shooters, on the high, steep, bluff outside the Fort.

A very few sharp shooters from the shore near the Fort could have prevented any landing, and have taken the boat.

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We supposed the object of the "Rebels" was, rather

to seize a boat to effect a crossing into Arkansas, than to capture the Fort, as we had no means of knowing, or suspecting, that so strong a position as Fort Pillow, had not been properly garrisoned for defence, when it was in constant communication with General Hurlburt at Memphis.

The "Olive Branch" had just left Memphis, General Hurlburt's Head Quarters, where it had been during the previous night.

If it had not been for the appearance of the "Liberty" on the small Steamer, I should have attempted a landing at Fort Pillow from the gunboat, or the shore, I should have landed personally from the "Olive Branch".

The order given to the contrary prevented it.

Coming from New Orleans, and having no knowledge of affairs in that Military District, I could not presume that a Fort with uninterrupted water communication, above and below, could possibly be without a garrison, strong enough to hold it for a few hours.

I write hastily, and omit from want of time to state subsequent occurrences at Fort Columbus and Cairo, except to say that at Fort Columbus, in front of which Buford was then demanding a

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Surrender I stopped, started to ride out to the lines, met Col Lawrence the Commanding Officer coming in from the front to his Head Quarters. Offered to remain with the men ~~on board~~.

Col Lawrence said he was in good condition to stand any attack, could communicate with General Brayman, had already taken Four Hundred (400) Infantry, and One (1) Battery from the "L. M Kennett", which had just preceded us, and left Six Hundred (600) Men and another or other Batteries on board, which he did not need. He declined the proffered assistance as not needed, and immediately on arrival at Cairo, I reported all the information in my possession to General Brayman in command, who was about leaving for Columbus.

Capt Thornton 12<sup>th</sup> Maine Volunteers, a gallant officer distinguished for his bravery at Ponchitoula, where he was wounded, and left in the hands of the enemy, was on board the "Olive Branch", and will take this communication to the Committee.

I respectfully ask that he may

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