Letter and copies of letters between Hall, Dr. Bone and Lieutenant Colonel Winchester, the officer commanding the troops at St. Vincent, re an outbreak of yellow fever among the troops of the 92nd Highland Regiment on St. Vincent

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Correspondence with the Military authorities at St Vincent during the prevalence of yellow Fever in the 92nd Highlanders in 1841

J. Hall L.S.

No. 1.

(2pp.)

BCO2/1

St Vincent
25 December 1841

Sir

By the arrival of the Shamrock to day I find that the Head quarters of the 92d Highlanders are proceed to Barbados on the 1st proximo, & be relieved by those of the 33d; and as I understand Lt Col Winchester intends to dispatch Lt Trinity the Dept Adjutant in the schooner ~~Dart~~ Flying Fish, ~~tomorrow~~ to make certain representations to the General I think it right that you should be made au fait as to what has occurred here ~~since~~ I had the honor of addressing you on the 2d Inst: and I am ~~sorry~~ to say ~~that~~ ~~the~~ the information I have to give ~~is to the~~ you is that a severe fever of a very malignant nature made its appearance here on the night of the 11th: since which period 58 cases of fever have been admitted into Hospital, and seven, including one of Spasmodic Cholera, have proved fatal -

Rattray's case that I reported to you on the 2d Inst: will, I have no doubt, have

Dr Rose
Inspector General of Hospitals
Barbados

have prepared you in some measure for this information, and I feel obliged to you for the suggestions contained in your reply of the 7th which perfectly coincide with my view of the treatment of the Fevers of this climate, and the system had been adopted by Surgeon Palmer at my suggestion.

Our success may not appear very great but from the severe nature of the cases which have come under treatment both Mr Palmer and myself are satisfied with the result as compared with our former experience of this description of disease under other modes of treatment

As the fever cases were on the increase in Barracks and the disease seemed to be gaining virulence as it extended I considered it advisable to recommend the Encampment of the garrison on an eligible piece of ground called Lamonds' pasture about a mile to the N. E. of the Fort where the 70th were Encamped with so much advantage

two

two years ago; and I hope the measure will meet with your approbation and support when it is brought under the notice of the Lieutenant General Commanding.

I annex copies of my letters
* A. B. & C. of the 14. 16. & 21st to Lieut. Col. Winchester on the subject, for your information, and I have much satisfaction in being able to add that the removal of the new pour Barracks has been attended with the best effects altho' the weather has been wet and stormy, and everything seemed to be adverse to the measure -

On the 16th, as you will see by my letter, I wrote to Lt Col. Winchester recommending the encampment of the garrison, and on the 17th part of the tents were on the ground and a party of 12 men was sent out to pitch them - On the night of the 17th it rained heavily, and blew quite a gale.

the

the 18th was a close wet day, and at night it rained heavily again: the morning of the 19th was showery, but, notwithstanding, a party was sent out to pitch the remainder of the tents and in the afternoon 47 of the Grenadier Co., and the Band, which had been quartered in the lower flat of the Barracks, and had suffered most, were sent out to Camp; and the next day the remainder of the garrison followed.

The weather still continues showery and at night there is generally heavy rain, which renders the ground wet, and muddy ~~although~~ but as the site of the Camp is on a dry knoll a few hours sun soon remedies the evil.

It is fortunate Lt Col Winchester entered so readily, and so cordially into the measure of encamping the garrison as it has had the effect of stopping the plague amongst his brave fellows. Had the men remained in their quarters at Fort Charlotte, the disease, since confident, would have attacked the whole of them;

for

for every soul that remained behind has been seized by it -

Lieut. Col. Winchester not only entered readily and cordially into the measure of evacuating the garrison, but by exposing himself in the wet, and personally superintending and urging on the proceedings in Camp he materially expedited the business - none of the men had ever been under Canvas before and on the morning of the 17th the Col himself was absolutely compelled to assist in pitching the first tent - Since then he has been unwearied in his exertions in getting their sleeping platforms erected, & now the men begin to feel themselves more at home in their new domicile.

We have been as economical as possible in our proceedings. The ground was kindly, and handsomely granted by the proprietor free of all charge - The President permitted Bamboos to be cut in the Botanic garden for tent poles, which were wanting,

and

and the branches formed the platforms for the men to sleep on so that the actual charge to the public will be very trifling indeed. not that I think expense ought to be considered where men's lives are concerned, but it is always desirable where economy can be combined with efficiency.

I have not been able to meet with colored nurses for the Hospital, and the severity of the cases has been such that we have been compelled to employ an additional number of orderlies to sit up with them, and I hope you will allow us to charge pay for rather more than the Hospital Regulations permit under ordinary circumstances.

There is no use in expatiating, as I dare say your own experience will have often enough shown you, one man to keep steady watch over sick men for a whole night. If you want your directions attended to, and the sick properly cared for you must have him relieved every three or four hours in order

that

that he may obtain rest and be fit for his duty the following day -

I have the honor to be
Sir
Your most obedient
Humble Servant
John Hale
Staff Surgeon

Sunday 26 Decr Lt Col Winchester has changed his mind about the necessity of despatching Dr Hewitt in chaise before - I shall therefore send this by any opportunity that may offer

Monday 27 Decr Some difficulty having been made about the accommodation of the 33rd on their arrival I addressed the following communication to Lt Col Winchester commanding the garrison here -

St Vincent 27 Decr 1841

No 2

Sir
When the Commander of the forces decided on a change of quarters between the 33d & 92d Regts he could not have been aware that the garrison here was under Canvass on account of Sickness; and

and as I fear there will not be sufficient time to get the Barracks Whitewashed and purified before the arrival of the 37th Regiment you will be pleased to ask Dr Stewart's kind permission for them to occupy the Camp for a short time until the Barracks can be put in proper order to receive them.

I have the honor to be

Lt Col. Winchester

John Stark
Staff Surgeon

No 6

No 3 BC02/2

St Vincent
27 Decr 1841

Sir

I have the honor to enclose a return of Barrack Bedding which belonged to the men who have been admitted into Hospital with Yellow fever, and requires to be Washed and purified –

In the removal of this bedding I would recommend that a party of Black Troops should be employed in place of the men of the 92nd Highlanders

They also are with be pleased to give instructions to the acting Barrack Master to cause the said Bedding from the Hospital to be washed with Soap and hot water, and I think it would be advisable to have the hair of the Mattresses, on which men have died of fever, baked, or, if that cannot be carried into effect, washed and exposed to the Sun & air for some time before it is re-made up into Mattresses, so as to prevent any risk to those who may occupy them hereafter

I have the honor to be &c &c

J Hally

Lt Col Winchester Actg
92nd Highlanders
Commanding the Troops
at St Vincent

No 4

*: Some of those huts formerly occupied in this way might be appropriated to the purpose

St Vincent
27 December 1841

Sir

In the distribution of Barrack accommodation it appears to me that the Black Troops at old Woman's point have more than double the space allotted to them that the white Troops have in Fort Charlotte, and as I think after what has recently occurred there it would not be desirable to crowd them so much again. I beg leave to submit for your consideration the propriety of carrying Barrack accommodation to the provided at old woman's point for the white Troops as without that some difficulty may be experienced at first in putting up the 33rd though they arrive strong and without any sick. *

The Hut Barracks at old Woman's point were built for the accommodation of 176 men and I believe the detachment of the 1st W.I. consists of only 75 - 15 of whom I see by the General Orders are directed to hold themselves in readiness to proceed to Demerara -

I have the honor to be
Sir
Your most obedient
Humble Servant
J H

Lt Col. Wemyss
92d Highlanders
Comdg S Troops
St Vincent

No. 5

answer to letter No. 2

Fort Charlotte, BCO2/3
St. Vincent 28th Octr. 1841.

Sir

I am directed by Lieutenant Colonel Winchester Re. H. Commanding the Troops, to acknowledge the receipt of your Letter of yesterday's date, stating that as H. is Excellency the Lieutenant General Commanding could not, when he directed a change of Quarters between the 33d Regiment and the 92nd Highlrs, have been aware that the latter Corps was under Canvass on account of Sickness, and also that you feared the Barracks could not be purified before the Arrival of the 33d Regiment for their reception, and requesting that the Lieutenant Colonel would be pleased to solicit permission for that Regiment to occupy the Camp on Lonan's Ridge.

In reply I have it in Command to express the Lieutenant Colonel's regret, that while the reasons expressed in your Letter existed, you should have stated to him on Sunday that there was no Medical reason to render it necessary that H. is Excellency should be made acquainted with the state of the Garrison, which statement prevented the Lieutenant Colonel from dispatching an Officer for that purpose to H. ead Quarters, when (in all probability) the Lieutenant General would

Staff Surgeon S. Hall
Principal Medical Officer
at Saint Vincent

would have been at this moment in possession of every particular relating to the sickness of the Garrison, and could have made what arrangements he thought proper;- I have it however in Command to say that the Lieut. Colonel Commanding considering that it might be detrimental to Her Majesty's service, if no arrangement was made previous to the arrival of the 33rd Regiment, he will have a Communication with Mr. Hunt for the purpose of obtaining for that Corps the same favor he has so kindly granted to the 92nd Highlanders.

I have the honor to be
Sir
Your most obedient
Humble Servant

[illegible] Lieut.
Fort Adjutant

No. 6

Answer to letter No. 5

St. Vincent
28 December 1841

Sir,

In reply to your communication of this date in which you state that you have it in command to express the Lt. Colonel's regret that which the reasons expressed in my letter existed should have stated to him on Sunday that there was no medical reason to render it necessary that His Excellency should be made acquainted with the state of the garrison, and which statement prevented the Lt. Col. from dispatching an officer for that purpose to Head quarters when in all probability the Lt. General would have been at this time in possession of every particular relating to the sickness of the garrison and could have made any arrangements he thought proper -

I have the honor to repeat what I then stated, that, with the disease arrested in Camp, and 42 out of 48 fever cases in Hospital Convalescent ~~in Hospital~~, as the weekly sick state shewed, I did not consider myself warranted in giving any medical reason to the Lt Col Commanding that would authorize him in incurring the heavy charge of giving a repeal to dispatch your express to Barbados

Besides

Lt. Kirby
1st W. India Regt
Post Adjutant

Besides when I gave that opinion I thought, as a matter of course, arrangements would be made by the proper authorities for the 33rd to occupy the Encampment until the Barracks could be purified; & I was not a little surprised I must say when I was informed by the Lt Col on the 20th and yesterday morn.g that if the 33rd were to occupy the Encampment "I had better make an application to Hd Qrs that for it." which was the cause of my letter of yesterday to the Lt Col Commanding to which you have done me the honor to reply –

On the 21st I had the honor to represent to the Lt Col Comd.g the necessity of immediately getting the Barracks whitewashed and purified: and when I found yesterday that neither the dirty Bedding had been removed out of the Store rooms, nor any progress made in whitewashing or purifying the others I was compelled to express my fears, from the dilatory manner in which things had proceeded that they would not be completed in time for the reception of the 33d

I have the honor to be

Sir &c

J. Sparkes

No. 7

Answer to letter No. 4

Fort Charlotte St. Vincent
27th Decr. 1841

Sir,

I am directed by Lt. Col. Winchester Commdg the Troops to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of this days date relative to the Black Troops at Old Womans Point, having more Barrack accommodation than the proportion they are entitled to comparatively with the White Troops in the Barracks at the Citadel –

In reply, I have it in command to say that the Barracks at Old Womans Point, are not in charge of the Barrack Master at all, they were originally built by the Colony and as neither the Honble Board of Ordnance, or the Colony would give any thing towards repairing them, they fell into ruin and the greater parts were completely without walls, they were put into their present state by the men now occupying them at their own expence and by their own manual labour, and therefore the Lt. Col. Comdg does not consider that he would be justified in issuing an order such as you require but at the same time I am directed to say that every accommodation will be given in case of emergency and that the Officer in Command of the 1st West India Regt and in charge of the Dr. Mr. Genls Department, will do his utmost to assist you in whatever you may consider beneficial to the health and comfort of the Troops –

I have the honor to be
Sir
Your Most obt. Servant
[illegible] Lieut
Fort Adjt

Doctor Hall
Staff Surgeon
St. Vincent

The Officer in Command of the 1st W. I. Regt. who is hereby directed to take the necessary steps for the comfort of the men under his command.
[illegible]

(Continuation of letter No 1)

The Hut Barracks at old Woman's point were built by the Colony in 1833 & 4, and kept in repair so long as they were occupied by white troops, but, I believe, as Mr Mently says, no grants have been made of late, and the men occupying them have occasionally made repairs. But as the greater part of the Wattle and plaster bears the impress of its original formation, except the expense and manual labor bestowed on the Huts by the Black Troops has neither been very great nor onerous -

The question, however, is not one of compelling soldiers to rent, or repair Barracks at their own expense which is not usual in the British Service: but how far these huts can be made available at present for the relief of the crowded, and ill ventilated Barracks rooms at the Citadel; & as I see by Dr Chwatt's reports, who was the Staff Surgeon here when they were occupied by the wing of a White Regiment, that they were miserably healthy I think the subject is worthy of some further consideration.

The three windward huts pointed out in my letter to the Dr Genl Commanding here are in tolerable repair - one is occupied as a Canteen - one as a Sergeants quarter, and the third as a Barrack for men, and might be appropriated for the accommodation of White Troops without any inconvenience to the Blacks, or infringement of their rights of property which their Commander, under the sanction of the Dr Genl Commanding, claims for them.

I think, and I offer my opinion without wishing to give offence to any one, if these hut Barracks were put in repair, which would cost a mere trifle, and others of the same kind were erected on Dorchester Hill, where there are tents already, there would be no occasion for the showy, and expensive Iron Barrack which it is in contemplation to rent, at an expense of £13,000, at old Women's point.

Had there been Hut Barracks on Dorchester Hill how easy would it have been to have moved the farrier of Fort Charlotte into them when the sickness appeared there - And as Dorchester Hill bears the character of being one of the healthiest military stations in the West Indies it is to be regretted that the Barracks which were blown down by the Hurricane of 1832 have never been replaced -

Dec 24 - Things are going on well. We have but one man since the 26 and admitted two into Hospital, one a Convalescent from Johns Town point, and the other a man of regular habits from camp who owned that he went to bed sober the night he was attacked, and what was more strange, he had, he thought; but when he awoke he found the rain had beat under the tent and wet his blanket and he felt chilly -

The schooner Dart, Hear, starts for Barbados tomorrow and I avail myself of her departure to send this long letter hoping that what we have done will meet with your approbation and support, and apologizing for the trouble this lengthened correspondence will give you

I have the honor to be &c &c

J. Hale S.S.

Dr Bone &c &c

No 8.

BC02/5

In answer to letter No 3

Fort Charlotte, St. Vincent
27th December 1841

Sir

I am directed by Saint Col. Winchester K.H. Comdg the Troops to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of this days date, relative to having the bedding belonging to men of the 92nd Highlanders, who have been admitted into Hospital with Yellow Fever washed and purified and stating that you enclosed a Return of such Bedding, I have it in command to say that as no such Return has been received by the St. Col. Commanding, it is impossible that an order ~~for~~ such as you require can be issued

I have it further in command to say that immediate measures shall be taken to have your recommendation relative to the Bedding sent from the Hospital carried into effect —

I have the honor to be
Sir
Your most obedient
Humble Servant
[illegible] Leech
Lt Adjt

Doctor Hall
Staff Surgeon
St Vincent

Memo: This is a very strange communication as I explained to Mr G
Winchester when I met him on the road this morn: that I had not
been able to get the return gaberdine bedding from either the Quarter
master or his Sergeant, but as he was riding in to the Fort, I sent to
camp if he would allow me to send quite him the letter
I had written on the subject and the return could be got
when he went to the Fort ~~and that~~ which would
expedite matters. I particularly told him the
letter did not contain the return gaberdine
which makes this letter still more strange
if it has been written by his order
J Shaw

29 dec: This day I
the conversation I
him my letter, an
from: Henty th
the conversat
his hurry
he said
Satyr

recalled to Lt Col. Winchester's recollection
d with him on the road when I gave
d told him of the sharp answer I had received
e Post Adjutant. - He said he perfectly recollected
ou now that it was recalled to his recollection, but in
behalf forgotten it at the time: but that it should
find fortheith. and a punition order was issued on the
t punishing the dirty bedding that afternoon

No 9

St Vincent
2 Jan^y - 1842

Sir

In my communication begun by the 'Dart' on the 29th I omitted to include the following letter which I addressed to the Lt Col Commanding the garrison on the subject of marking the fence Beds -

The smartness of the Post Adjutant's letter I dare say will make you smile, and if I were to enter into all the particulars of this little comedy it would make you laugh outright - suffice it to say the necessary garrison order for the preservation of the duty Beds was issued on the 29th - and I need only add, to put you completely behind the scenes that the 92d had hunted that there was no chance of their being disturbed before the End of March if even then: and the Post Adjutant seemed to bear me a grudge for presuming to have an opinion of my own which deprived him in some measure of the honor & éclat of being sent Envoy Extraordinary to Head quarters -

I have the honor &c

J Hale
S.S.

Lt Bone
Inspector Genl of Mts &c
Barbados

A. BC02/6

Copy

St. Vincent
14 December 1841

Sir

I am sorry to have to report to you that several cases of Fever of a very serious nature have been admitted into Hospital within the last two or three days; and as some cases in Town, in newly arrived Europeans, have informed by Dr. Melville, a civil practitioner of this place, have terminated in Black vomit, I think it my duty to request you will be pleased to give directions that the Camp Equipage in Store may be examined, and put in a State of Efficiency; as, should the disease extend much, or be attended with great mortality, it may be considered necessary to resort to the salutary measure of encamping the garrison for a short period.

I have the honor to be
Sir
Your most obedient
Humble Servant
John Hale
Staff Surgeon

To
Lieut. Col. Winchester K.H.
92d Highlanders
Commanding the Troops
at St. Vincent

Copy

B.

St. Vincent
16 December 1841

Sir,

Referring to my communication of the 14 Inst., regarding Camp Equipage, I have now the honor to acquaint you that 18 cases of Fever have been admitted into Hospital since that period, and 1 has proved fatal. The disease seems to be on the increase, and appears to have gained malignancy by its spread; I beg leave, therefore strongly to recommend the propriety of removing the men with as little delay as possible from the immediate sphere of its action, and encamping them on some eligible spot until its Epidemic influence shall have ceased.

Should the measure meet with your sanction I would recommend Lomond's pasture, the ground where the 70th were encamped, two years ago, with so much benefit, under similar circumstances; and as I have had the honor of visiting the place in your Company twice since the disease made its appearance in the garrison, there is no occasion for me to dwell here on its local advantages.

It will be necessary to have the sleeping places raised from the ground, and I think the plan proposed by you of having Wattled hurdles raised on short posts combines the advantages of economy, and utility, and nothing, in my opinion can be better. I have the honor to be &c - &c - &c

John Stark
Staff Surgeon

To
Lieut. Col. Winchester Actg.
92d Highlanders
Commanding the Troops
at St. Vincent

6 BCO2/7

St Vincent
21 December 1841

Sir

As the Barracks are now Empty, in consequence of the encampment of the garrison on account of Sickness, I consider this a fitting occasion to bring under your notice the defective state of ventilation of the men's rooms and to urge the necessity of having the windows fitted with Jalousies in place of the present wooden shutters.

I have already made a representation of this defect to the Inspector General of Hospitals at Barbados, as I mentioned to you on a former occasion, and he has brought the subject under the notice of the Lieut General Commanding; but I think if you would favor us with your support in again bringing it under the notice of the authorities we might get this grievous defect remedied — a defect so monstrous that no one who had not witnessed it would ~~scarcely~~ credit the fact. Conceive 16 or 18 men, for I believe the number of companies has generally averaged that since you have been quartered here, shut upon a room without any proper means of ventilation, the entire space of air of which is fit only for the supply of ten or twelve and you may picture to yourself the mischief that is likely to ensue — In a crowded room no one can sleep nearer an open door or window without imminent risk of his life, and, as self preservation is the first law of nature, they are all carefully closed by the men who sleep near them when they go to bed.

In Barrack rooms and all other buildings calculated for the accommodation of numbers this very essential point ought always to be placed beyond the control of the inmates

Lieut Col Winchester K.C.B.
92d Highlanders
Commanding the Troops
St Vincent.

A healthy man, every one knows, consumes about 666 cubic feet of atmospheric air in 24 hours, and if deprived of this quantity or compelled to breathe part of that which has already been vitiated by previous respiration it injures his health, and is apt to produce fever of an aggravated form - In the process of respiration about 4 per cent of Carbonic acid gas is formed, and when the air contains 6 per cent of that gas it acts as a deadly poison on the human frame.

I wish also to bring under your notice the number of prisoners that has been admitted into Hospital with Fever and Dysentery from the gaol of Kingstown, and to point out the want there is of proper solitary cells in Fort Charlotte for the punishment of delinquents.

The gaol of Kingstown is situated in a very unhealthy part of the town near to the swampy ground of Kingstown Park Estate, and in the autumn Fevers and Dysenteries are almost always prevalent in it. Indeed so notorious is the fact, that, I understand, the President administering the government has remitted, on that account, the punishment of nearly all the prisoners who were confined there for the last of may last -

The two cells at the Fort which have been fitted up in the Bomb proof on the north face of the Citadel are so damp and badly ventilated, that, I am told, they were abandoned on account of their insalubrity.

Cells

Cells for solitary confinement in this climate ought to be dry and well ventilated and if built at the Port they should be so placed as to have the full benefit of the sea breeze -

I have written to Barbados for the necessary materials to fumigate the Barracks with, but in the mean time it would be advisable to have them whitewashed and well cleaned; and all the bedsteads cleaned and put out in the sun -

I take this opportunity of again bringing under notice the want of a dead house at the Hospital. The only place there is for depositing the corpses until they are buried is a low kind of cellar under the floor of the wards of the Hospital. This place is too dark & confined to make the post mortem examinations enjoined by the regulations of the Service, and if it were otherwise there is neither a table nor any other convenience requisite for the due performance of the duty - This duty which is always a disagreeable, and a dangerous one becomes one of extreme peril, under the best of circumstances, when a pestilential disease like that which is at present raging in the garrison prevails, and it cannot be expected that the lives of Medical Officers, which, it is to be hoped, are considered of some little value to the community they live in, should be wantonly jeopardied for the sake of a few dollars; and after all I question very much whether there has been any saving to the public

in

in so long neglecting to build a proper dead house; for on reference to the records I find that during the Epidemic of 1839 the Surgeon of the 70th Regt got ill, and one Staff assistant Surgeon died, and it was found necessary to employ a civil practitioner whose pay would have built twenty dozen dead houses.

It is probable other causes may have contributed to the sickness and death of the Army Medical men at St Vincent in 1839; but as free post mortem examinations were made at the commencement of the Epidemic I have no doubt a good deal may fairly be ascribed to that source

I have the honor &c &c &c

John Stark
Surgeon

21st December 1841

Letter of Dr. J. Stark to Genl. Kinchington Governing the Barrack & Hospital at St Vincent