

# **“The Christmas Bombardment” Part 1 & Part 2**

## **Episode Transcript**

*Transcript released Dec 19, 2021. To listen to this episode and learn more, visit us online at [wrangellhistoryunlocked.com/bombardment](http://wrangellhistoryunlocked.com/bombardment)*

## **Introduction**

In 1940, William Tamaree, a Tlingit elder, sat down with the publisher of the Wrangell Sentinel to tell a story from his boyhood.

When Tamaree was six years old, the US Army fired cannons on his village, kicked off by a drunken party on Christmas Day 1869. He revealed a new version of the story, that unraveled a massive coverup and days of violence. Tamaree’s story forces us to rethink what we know about the event known as The Bombardment of Wrangel.

In today’s episode, we’ll set the stage, by looking at the events leading up to Christmas Day, 1869. In Part I, We’ll shine a light on the key players, who become the important figures in the story. In Part II, we’ll explore the fallout in the days, months, and years that followed.

Today’s episode of Wrangell History Unlocked is The Christmas Bombardment.

*# Carol of the Bells*

# — PART 1 — Ch 1. Memory

The most well-known firsthand accounts of the bombardment were written by Fort Wrangel's three commissioned officers. Without the benefit of the Tlingit perspective, the officers' stories have gone down in history, repeated verbatim over the years.

By January 1870, a few newspapers along the west coast reported on the bombardment. They cribbed details from the officer's reports, but they occasionally included facts from other sources, such as the people who came south aboard steamships carrying the latest news from Alaska.

William Tamaree's story in the Wrangell Sentinel in 1940 challenged everything. He also recorded a cassette tape telling the story on another occasion. Together, they comprise the only known eyewitness accounts of the bombardment from the Tlingit side.

In 2012, the bombardment story got a major update, in the form of a study entitled "The Bombardment of Kaach.xan.a'kw," by Dr. Zachary Jones, as part of a grant from the National Park Service to document American battlefields. The study pulls together the Tamaree stories into one place, along with analysis of the Tlingit system of laws and justice. It is a source of authority on the bombardment that can be used as a launchpad to further research.

By putting Tamaree, the officers, and the newspapers' version of events against each other, we can attempt to sift the fact from the fiction.

But first, to truly understand the events of Christmas Day 1869, we need to look at the months, and years, leading up to it. And we'll start our story five years before, in the middle of the Civil War, with the man responsible for the bombardment: 1st Lieutenant William Borrowe. For with William Borrowe, things were not always as they seemed.

*# In the Bleak Midwinter*

# Ch 2. William Borrowe

## A. Abraham Lincoln

It was October, 1864, and Abraham Lincoln had enough on his plate. The Civil War was halfway into its fourth year. On his desk, sat a request for a presidential pardon from Captain William Borrowe.

According to one biography, William Borrowe “was 5 feet, 11 inches tall with a florid complexion, brown eyes and auburn hair.”<sup>1</sup>

The Army had changed William Borrowe’s life. Just a few years before, President Lincoln appealed to the American public for volunteers to fight for the Union. William Borrowe, a 25 year old New York City stock broker, answered the call. He entered service on November 15, 1861 as a 2nd Lieutenant.<sup>2</sup> On August 1, 1863, he was promoted to 1st Lieutenant.<sup>3</sup> As part of the 2nd Artillery, he oversaw the Army’s biggest guns on the field of battle, machines that took crews to drag into position and operate. William Borrowe was involved in some of the war’s bloodiest conflicts, including the single deadliest battle of war, Antietam. His superior officers commended him on his ability to lead artillery units.

In 1864, William Borrowe was court-martialed and convicted on two counts: forgery and making false muster. Borrowe wrote to Abraham Lincoln and begged for “a final decision... and that redress be granted me.” Lincoln, who famously loved granting pardons, passed. Lincoln wrote in terse reply, “I decline to make any further order in this case. A. Lincoln.”<sup>4</sup>

Failing to secure Lincoln’s pardon, the Army dismissed William Borrowe from service on March 8, 1865. Exactly one month later, the Civil War was over. The Army still needed men, and President Johnson reinstated William

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<sup>1</sup> Encyclopedia of Frontier Biography A-F By Dan L. Thrapp · 1991, p. 140-1.

<sup>2</sup> Official Army Register for January 1870. p. 63.

<sup>3</sup> An Artilleryman's War Gus Dey and the 2nd United States Artillery. p. 164

<sup>4</sup> The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln. “To Joseph Holt.” p. 32.

Borrowe into the 2nd Artillery as a First Lieutenant on July 26, 1865<sup>5</sup> and sent Borrowe, and his wife, Mary, to Oregon Territory.

## C. Out West

Out west, Borrowe arrived to find a region inflamed by skirmishes between Native American tribes and new White settlers. This conflict came to be known as the Snake War, a series of guerrilla battles reaching into Oregon, Idaho, California, and Nevada. Borrowe devised a plan to fight one tribe by recruiting members of a warring tribe to hunt them down, promising them pay and a share of the spoils. Borrowe was clear: take no prisoners.

Borrowe's lieutenant, Dr. William McKay, kept a diary of the winter of 1866 to 1867. In meticulous detail, Dr. McKay accounts for every Native man, woman, and child killed under his direction by his scouts. This was a mission of extermination. The first group caught by McKay's scouts were given away by "signs of one footprint, on the light snow of today's print."<sup>6</sup>

In July 1867, Borrowe was transferred north, to Camp Steele in the San Juan Islands of Washington Territory. His arrival made a strong impression on the wife of Major Allen. Mary Julia Tysen Allen wrote a letter to her sister in March 1868 about William Borrowe and his wife:

I am afraid if I say anything about them I shall say too much; however, whatever I do say remember is to be repeated to no one. When we started from Baltimore on the steamer, some of the older officers of the Regiment came to the Major and told him there were some officers on board that he would not want to know or have me know their wives. One of them was Lieutenant Borrowe's wife, who has three children. Well, of course, I did not become acquainted.

Mrs. Borrowe is a fine looking and elegantly dressed person. She leaves her husband and goes to Victoria and makes a stay at the Hotel three weeks at a time. They seem to have plenty of money and make a great dash where ever they go. He was dismissed from the army once but was reappointed, and I heard an officer say the other

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<sup>5</sup> The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln. "To Joseph Holt." p. 32.

<sup>6</sup> William McKay's Journal, 1866-67: Indian Scouts, Part 1. pOregon Historical Quarterly. Summer 1978. p. 149.

day they would subscribe to the Regiment a thousand dollars to present him if he would resign. He is a most elegant lieutenant; and if you were in his presence five minutes and did not know the man, he would make you believe black was white. But enough of him. But remember do not hint a word of this, for really I should not like to get his ill will.<sup>7</sup>

## **D. Alaska**

In September 1868, William Borrowe and the rest of Battery I were ordered to report to General Jeff C. Davis, in charge of Alaska, based out of Sitka. General Davis sent the battery to Fort Wrangel in early October 1868, to relieve the command that first arrived, pitched tents, and began construction.

The year earlier, after Russia sold its assets in Alaska, the U.S. Army selected six sites to establish forts. At the time Fort Wrangel was selected, the location had almost no White people. The Russians had abandoned their fort decades before. The Cassiar Gold Rush in 1861 was played out, bringing few miners. What endured in the site was Kaach.xan.a'kw, a Tlingit village, in Tlingit country, of over 500 people. The village wrapped along the coastline, clusters of houses arranged by clan, all the way out to a point that stuck out in the sea, serving as a natural breakwater.

The United States Army learned from the mistakes of the Russians. In 1834, the Russians built Redoubt Saint Dionysius on a small peninsula inside the harbor. The elevation was low, and seawater occasionally found its way in. And within a decade, the fort was surrounded by Tlingit clan houses. When disputes over trade turned into attacks, the fort was vulnerable in all directions.

The United States did not build on the same spot. Instead, the Army selected a spot some 500 yards north of the nearest clan house, on a hill sloping down the coast. The plans called for twelve buildings, protected

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<sup>7</sup> The Letters of Mary Julia Tysen Allen, Letter One. Washington Territory. San Juan Island. March 2, 1868.

by a ten foot wall, taking up just over one acre. The skyline of the fort was clearly visible from the village, from the chimney stacks of the officer's quarters to the two-story hospital building atop the hill.

Battery I arrived with 49 enlisted men and five commissioned officers. Among the commissioned officers, There was Captain and Brevet Lieutenant Colonel, Thomas Grey. His next in command was 1st Lieutenant William Borrowe, followed by 1st Lieutenant Melville Loucks, and 2nd Lieutenant E. Richmond. Dr. A. H. Cochrane, in charge of the hospital department, served as the final commissioned officer.

Battery I inherited a fort in a state of semi-completion. To complete the work, Captain Grey hired 20 Native laborers, paying them as high as a dollar a day and one meal ration.

Battery I also inherited a prisoner. Private Benjamin Harnish arrived in Fort Wrangel in August 1868 and was arrested for desertion just before Battery I arrived. Harnish sat in confinement inside Fort Wrangel, waiting for his trial. One year later, he would still be in confinement, waiting.

Fort Wrangel soon lost two of its five commissioned officers, who would not be replaced. In the first two months of 1869, the Army transferred Lieutenant Richmond, and Captain Grey became sick and was sent away for medical care, never to return.

With Captain Grey's departure, William Borrowe was in charge of Fort Wrangel. William Borrowe ascended to the command of Fort Wrangel at the same exact time as the US Army was bombarding the nearby Alaskan village of Kake.

William Borrowe appointed Melville Loucks as his second in command. The two men were close in age. Melville Loucks was 28, while William Borrowe was 33.

## E. Melville Loucks

Melville Loucks joined West Point Academy in July 1860. One year later, the Civil War broke out. When he graduated in 1864, he was ranked 22nd in his class of 27 graduates<sup>8</sup> and was made a 2nd Lieutenant in the 2nd Artillery, eventually becoming a 1st Lieutenant in February 1865.<sup>9</sup>

In Alaska, Melville Loucks acquired a number of Tlingit artifacts. Two pieces acquired by Loucks in Kaach.xan.a'kw survive to this day. One is a Tlingit rattle, inside of which Loucks carved, "Made By the Alasky Indians — Brought by MR Loucks First Lieutenant Officer." The rattle is round with a carved face, a handle, and was likely made for a shaman's use decades before Loucks came to Alaska. The other item is a small, ornately carved tobacco pipe, not longer than seven inches, in the form of a man fighting off a bear using a paddle. The user inhaled smoke from the bear's behind.<sup>10</sup>

In his first month in charge, Borrowe let the 20 Native men employed as laborers at the fort go. He brought them back in April and May, for a little less pay, but ended that, too. First-hand accounts report that the Tlingit were eager for work, and this loss of income may have been felt harshly.

In August 1869, William Henry Seward made his triumphant first voyage to Alaska. Seward survived an assassin's knife the same night Abraham Lincoln was shot. Lincoln died, but Seward lived to negotiate the Treaty of Session, purchasing Russia's assets in Alaska. When Seward came to Fort Wrangel, William Borrowe personally gave Seward an inspection of not just the garrison, but the area outside the walls, as well. Seward and some of the officers present went up the Stikine River to the Canadian border.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Twelfth Annual Reunion of the Associates of the Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy, at West Point, New York. June 9, 1881. p. 109.

<sup>9</sup> Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y. nos. 2001-3384

<sup>10</sup> Bonhams (archived pages).

<sup>11</sup> Seward at Washington, as Senator and Secretary of State A Memoir of His Life, with Selections from His Letters, Volume 2. p. 433.

Seward saw Fort Wrangel under the watchful gaze of William Borrowe. If trouble lurked under the surface, Seward may not have seen it.

But another man would. A month later, a man sent by President Grant would pay a visit to not only Fort Wrangel, but Kaach.xan.a'kw to get the whole story. And the story he found would shock him.

*# Greensleeves*



# Ch 3. Vincent Colyer

## A. The Artist

When Vincent Colyer visited in Fort Wrangel, he pulled out his art supplies and drew the place. He drew the skyline of Fort Wrangel against a setting sun, and a peaceful scene of the bustling village with placid waters. He went inside clan houses, too, to draw scenes of life in a Tlingit home. These were scenes he would take back to Washington, D.C.

## B. Indian Commission

Vincent Colyer, 44 years old, was sent to explore Alaska at the request President Ulysses Grant. Grant formed the Board of Indian Commissioners to advise him on Native American policy. Vincent Colyer was selected secretary of the board, and was sent to Alaska in 1869 to investigate and report back on Alaska's indigenous population.

Colyer had a reputation for fearlessness. He was a lifelong, devout Quaker. After witnessing the brutality of the First Battle of Bull Run, he founded a Christian missionary group to stand on the edges of battlefields to provide soldiers with medical supplies, religious materials, recreation, and other comforts. In 1863, he recruited and trained a regiment of African-American soldiers for the Union Army.

After the Civil War, Vincent Colyer, and his parchment and pen, were sent out West to investigate and report back. Colyer met Native Americans for the first time, and saw the humanity in them. He did not see enemies, he saw future converts to Christianity and American society. Colyer was an ardent assimilationist, who thought the only path forward for Native Americans was to become more like White people, and he was an early voice in support of the reservation system, which he felt was the only response to the rapid encroachment of Native lands by White settlers.

## C. To Alaska

Vincent Colyer came through Fort Wrangel on his inspection of Alaska in October 1869. As he did with all the forts he visited in Alaska, he called for a dinner with the chiefs of the local tribe, the fort's officers, and all their wives. No record of the dinner exists, other than to suggest it meant Borrowe and Chief Shakes were at least acquainted, if not more. According to one rumor, Chief Shakes secretly fed information to Borrowe about troubles in the village.<sup>12</sup>

Colyer asked the people who moved to Alaska to write him letters, telling him what they had learned about Alaska's Native people and culture. He would include whole copies of these first-hand accounts in his report.

Colyer door-to-door in the village, taking a census. He counted 32 homes, for a total of 508 people: 183 women, 159 men, 89 girls, and 77 boys. Every house at least one child, and seven houses at 10 or more children. The average house at 16 residents, and there were nine houses with 20 or more people.

While Colyer was taking this census, he heard some shouting, then saw a man with a bloody, beaten face walking by him. He approached the man, saw he was Tlingit, and asked what happened. The story shocked him.

...Leon Smith, assisted by two half-drunken discharged soldiers, assaulted an Indian who was passing in front of his store. Mr. Smith, ex-confederate officer, said that he was under the impression (mistaken, as he afterward admitted) that the Indian had struck his little boy, and he only shook the Indian. The drunken soldiers standing by then, of their own accord, (unsolicited, Mr. Smith says, by him,) seized the Indian, brutally beat him, and stamped upon him.

I immediately went to the post and suggested to the commandant [William Borrowe] that he should have the drunken soldiers arrested and retained for trial. He sent a lieutenant [Melville Loucks], with two or three men, "to quell the disturbance," the Indians meanwhile having become excited, and to "use his own discretion about arresting the men." Lieutenant Loucks returned soon after without

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<sup>12</sup> Report of the Board of Indian Commission. Appendix B 3. Letter from W. Wall. p. 116.

the drunken soldiers, and gave as his reason that “the Indian struck Mr. Smith’s boy,” which, as I have said, was disproved.

The drunken men belonged to a party of over one hundred discharged soldiers who had come down on our steamer from Sitka, and were on their way to San Francisco. Some of them had been drummed out of the service for robbing the Greek church at Sitka, and for other crimes. I had informed the commandant of their character the morning after our vessel arrived, and suggested to him the propriety of preventing any of them from landing and going to the Indian village. He replied that he had no authority to prevent any one from landing. I was surprised at this, as I supposed Alaska was an Indian territory, and that the military had supreme control.

The day after the assault upon the Indian, the commandant came on board the Newbern and asked very kindly my opinion about the propriety of attempting to arrest two drunken soldiers, but as there were over one hundred soldiers on board, and the affair had occurred at near twilight, so that it would be impossible to recognize the men, the impracticability of doing this at that late hour was apparent.

Colyer came to observe, but he found himself getting involved. He took the beaten man’s side, and pressed Borrowe to act. Borrowe, and Loucks, reacted ambivalently. It happened again when he caught alcohol being unloaded into Fort Wrangel.

A quantity of porter and light wines, ten barrels of ale, and five barrels of distilled spirits, (whisky, brandy, &c.,) were hoisted up from the hold of the Newbern, marked for Leon Smith, post trader at Wrangel. As I had called the attention of the revenue officers to the violation of President Johnson’s order in landing the liquors at Tongas, the officer commanding the post at Wrangel [William Borrowe] asked me my opinion of the business. I called his attention to the word of the papers permitting the shipment of the liquors from San Francisco. It was the same as at Tongass—for the “use of officers at the post.” The captain read this, reflected a moment, and then said that he would not permit it to land. The beer and porter was landed and taken into Leon Smith’s store, and the whisky, brandy, rum, &c., was carried up to Sitka.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Colyer Report, “Liquors Brought to Wrangel.”

At the time, a barrel was 48 gallons. Colyer caught Borrowe in the act. The shipments were loaded in San Francisco, and got around the prohibition on alcohol by using an exemption, for the enjoyment officers at the post. But this alcohol was to be delivered to Leon Smith, who ran a store and a bowling alley. Colyer exposed the flimsy exemption, and forced Borrowe's hand, sending the liquor on to Sitka.

Vincent Colyer collected his stories, and illustrations, and sailed home, the month-long voyage back east. Through the winter, he compiled his notes, wrote his reports, and transcribed the letters he received throughout Alaska, especially Fort Wrangel.

As he put the finishing touches on his report, he received the first word of the bombardment of Kaach.xan.a'kw. He looked to his papers, now recognizing he had collected evidence that would foreshadow the dark days that would unfold beginning Christmas Night, 1869.

*# O Christmas Tree*

# Ch 4. December 25

## A. The Party

William Tamaree and the newspapers agree: there was a big party inside Fort Wrangel on Christmas Day, the Tlingit were invited, and alcohol was served. All of this was completely against Army regulation, a gross misuse of power and privilege. None of the officers—Borrowe, Loucks, or Dr. Kirke—say anything about a party.

But the evidence suggests it happens. The newspapers had the scoop. The San Francisco Chronicle wrote:

Early on the morning of Christmas Day the Indians, all prepared for merry-making, left their settlements and repaired in swarms to the garrison. Here the soldiers had made ample preparations for their entertainment, and the whole day was a continued round of pleasure and festivities... Liquors were freely circulated.

California's Daily Alta said

on the night of Christmas a ball was given by the men of the garrison to which the Indians were invited as lookers-on.

Victoria B.C.'s Daily Colonist said,

The whole of the population, Indians included, appear to have been observing the time-honored custom of keeping Christmas Day and some appear to have been making too free use of the intoxicating cup.

The most detailed description of the party on Christmas night came from William Tamaree. In the Wrangell Sentinel in 1940, he described how the party happened:

On Christmas Eve, the Captain of the fort sends word to all the chiefs of the Indian villages: "Tonight is Christmas Eve. It is time to be happy. You come up to the fort and be happy and have a good time." The Indians say to one another: "What is that for, Christmas Eve?" Our interpreter does not know. The Indians do not know. They have never heard of Christmas. They don't know, then, about Christ being

born. They just know the white chief of the soldiers say it is a time to be happy.

Night time comes. It is cold. The wind blows. Raining. Snowing. The Indians go up the beach to the fort. Inside the Captain's house, everything is warm. Lights: Music. The soldiers are playing a violin and accordion.

Tamaree is likely right about the musicians. Two enlisted men in the fort held the job of Musician.

Tamaree continues:

When you come in the door of the Captain's house there is a big stair going up to a wide hall. At the bottom of the stair are two doors opening to rooms off the entry hall. In one of these rooms is the Captain's wife. She does not come to the party upstairs. She stays in the room. The Indians go upstairs.

There is only one building in Fort Wrangel that matches this description, and it is not the Captain's house. That building was two stories, but far too small, with a footprint around 500 square feet, and an upstairs loft with a narrow ceiling — not enough space for a violin, accordion, partygoers, and a dancefloor.

The one building that matches Tamaree's description is the Hospital Building. It was two stories tall, around 47 feet long, and 33.5 feet wide, for a total footprint around 1600 square feet. The 8-foot wide porch upstairs added another 376 square feet to the party, and offered a beautiful view of Zimovia Strait.

The interior design of the Hospital Building is somewhat of a mystery, but it may have emulated the design of the hospital in Sitka. A surgeon, John Brooke, described Sitka's hospital as a two-story building with a double-door in the front that opens to a hallway with several private rooms, and a staircase, leading up to a wide open space.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Chills and Fever, by Robert Fortune. p. 141-2.

There are big consequences of the party being held at the Hospital Building, and not the officer's quarters. First, it suggests the grand scale of the party. This was a big building, with a large gathering space, and anterooms. Second, this implicates the post surgeon, Henry Kirke. The commander had absolute power everywhere, but one place: the Hospital Department, under the charge of Henry Kirke. Whether he allowed his building to be used for the party willingly, or reluctantly, he would be culpable in anything that happened. And things would happen.

## **B. Dancing**

Back to William Tamaree:

Among the Indians are two brothers named Isteen and Shawaan. They are nephews of Towatt, one of the chiefs of the Indian village. They have their wives. Isteen's wife is Aglan. She is from the south. At Victoria she has seen white people. She knows white mens' dances and has on a dress like white ladies wear. It is wide with hoops and when the other Indians see her their eyes pop for they have never seen such a dress. Aglan, too, she knows how to do the white man's quadrille which she learned at the fort in Victoria...

The quadrille was a very popular, highly formal style of ballroom dance. Four couples stood in four corners, perfectly upright, and made graceful passes through the middle of the dance floor, linking arms, performing curtsies and bows, spinning partners into the arms of another. Back to Tamaree:

Kchok-een; she is the other brother's wife, Shawaan's wife. She is a pretty Indian girl with rosy cheeks but she wears only Indian clothes, moccasins, and has a blanket around her. She does not know how to dance like this Aglan.

The Indians sit on benches around the wall of the big hall. The soldiers pass plates of sandwiches and much wine. Wine? The Indians do not know what is wine. Pretty soon everybody's head is going 'round. Indians' and soldiers'. Pretty soon the Captain comes and say

to Aglan, "We dance?" Aglan then dances with the white Captain and all the Indians sit surprised to see Aglan dancing so nice with the white chief. Then another soldier asks Kchok-een to dance. Kchok-een does not know how to dance like Aglan but she gets up and tries. Soon, everyone around is laughing at Kchok-een trying to dance like Aglan. All the white chiefs are laughing. laughing.

This is the moment that sparks the conflict that will last for days. It begins with Kchok-een on the dance floor, being humiliated. Says Tamaree:

Kchok-een's husband sees his wife and everybody laughing at her and he gets very mad. He is much ashamed that everybody should laugh at his wife. He steps on the dance floor and pulls her away from the white soldier and throws her down the stairs. Kchok-een rolls over and over to the bottom of the stairs. She screams.

Then, down below, the Captain's wife, who is in this room at the bottom of the stairs, hears Kchok-een scream. She rushes out into the hall and quick, picks up Kchok-een and takes her into the room.

The Captain's wife in Tamaree's story is Angelina Muller, the London-born wife of Sergeant and Quartermaster Jacob Muller. She had two small boys, Jacob and George Oscar, the latter born in Fort Wrangel in January. She worked with her hands, washing Fort Wrangel's dirty laundry as the post laundress.

Kchok-een and Angelina Muller were from opposite sides of the world. They led different lives, spoke different languages, and came from different cultures, but in Fort Wrangel, they lived with the same threat: men. Angelina Muller went out of her way to protect Kchok-een, and it would cost her. Said Tamaree:

But, before she can close the door, Shawaan, who is a big, strong fellow, comes down the stairs. He wants his wife. He wants to send her home so she cannot be laughed at anymore. He pulls at the door. It comes open a little way and the Captain's wife puts her hand against Shawaan's face to shove him back and Shawaan bites off her finger.



The Daily Colonist agrees with Tamaree: Angelina Muller was trying to protect Aglan from her husband, and a physical fight ensued, in which Shawaan bit off one of Angelina Muller's fingers.

Commander William Borrowe's written report begins with him learning of the finger bite. He estimates it was 11:10PM. Said Borrowe:

Shawaan, he having while in her house, just outside of the stockade, and in the act of shaking hands with her, bitten off the third finger of her right hand between the first and second joints, her husband, quartermaster sergeant of this battery, and a citizen, named Campbell, being present at the time.

Borrowe mentions nothing about a party or how Shawaan and Angelina Muller came to be in the same place at such a late hour. He also places the assault outside his garrison walls.

Newspapers would pick up Borrowe's claim that the finger bite happened in the act of shaking hands, like a chivalrous hand-kiss. Given the tremendous amount of pressure required to remove a human finger using teeth alone, Tamaree's version, which describes Angelina Muller pushing her weight, momentum, and force into Shawaan's face, is a more plausible scenario than a cordial hand-kiss turned into a surprise attack.

## **C. Execution or Escape?**

The sequence Tamaree describes next is highly consequential, and it directly challenges the official reports of Borrowe and Loucks. Tamaree says:

Now the Captain's wife screams all the soldiers from above rush down the stairs. There is the Captain's wife, holding her hand and the blood is pouring down her arm. The Captain steps forward. He is very mad. He tells the soldiers to shoot Shawaan down. Isteen tries to save his brother and the soldiers shoot both the brothers down. Shawaan falls, shot through the heart, and the other brother, shot through the arm.

Tamaree says Shawaan and Isteen were shot by soldiers, inside the fort, at the party, under orders from the Captain. Since he uses "the Captain" to

mean any number of officers—Borrowe, Loucks, even Jacob Muller—it's unclear who gave the order.

In contrast to Tamaree's version, the officer reports and the newspapers say nothing about a shooting inside Fort Wrangel. Instead, they say everyone—including Shawaan—fled after the finger bite, returning on foot to the village.

## **D. Excursion to the Village**

At this juncture, Tamaree and the officer's stories get even farther apart, but they share one critical fact: a detachment of soldiers, lead by Loucks, visited the village late Christmas night.

This is where Melville Loucks, Borrowe's second-in-command, begins his written report. He says word of the finger bite spread through the garrison at 12:00AM. Says Loucks:

I proceeded to her quarters to verify the report, and there saw that the third finger of her right hand had been bitten or torn off by an Indian named Shawaan, as all present stated. I returned for my saber and belt, reported to the commanding officer...

Borrowe reported what he told Loucks:

I immediately sent Lieutenant Loucks with a detachment of twenty men to take him, with instructions to bring him in, if possible, without bloodshed, and only to use their arms in case of resistance or in self-defense.

Loucks reports carrying out the order:

...[I] then set off for the Indian village with a detachment of twenty men to arrest the Indian Shawaan. Having arrived in that portion of the village nearest to the garrison, I intended to enter Towatt's house, expecting to find there the Indian I wanted. Before entering Towatt's house, I met an Indian in a red cap and shirt, named Scudtdoo, who, upon being asked to do so, told me that Shawaan had left Towatt's house and gone to another near by, which he pointed out to me.

Scutdoo would play a critical role in the story, later that night. Here, Loucks credits Scutdoo steering him away from Towatt's house, toward the house where Shawaan might be found.

Loucks continues:

I entered the house with twelve men, leaving the remainder to guard the entrance outside. Shawaan was sitting down near the fire opposite the entrance, with nothing on but pants. The position of the detachment in the house formed in single rank along the nearest side of the quadrangular space, with instructions to fire whenever I should give the signal. With Shawaan there were Isteen, his brother, Shawaan's wife, an old woman who was sitting up, and perhaps a few others sleeping in different parts of the house.

Loucks' description is similar to that of a firing squad: twelve armed men, spaced out in a line, aiming for the same man. The soldiers had their backs against the wall of the clan house, along the side with the centered entrance. There may have been six or so soldiers on each side of the door.

Loucks says he walked out in front of his men to engage with Shawaan.

Said Loucks:

I tapped Shawaan on the shoulder, saying that I wanted him to come with me. He arose from his sitting posture and said he would put on his vest; after that he wished to get his coat. Feeling convinced that this was merely to gain time, that he wished to trifle with me, I began to be more urgent. Shawaan appeared less and less inclined to come away with me, and in this, the latter part of the parley, he became impudent and menacing in raising his hands as if to strike me.

The Daily Colonist and the SF Bulletin echoed Loucks' report here. The Daily Colonist wrote, "the Indian refused to surrender himself to them, and his 'tillicums' appear also to have resisted the soldiers."

Loucks continues:

I admonished him against such actions, and tried my utmost to avoid extreme measures in arresting him. About this time, Isteen, probably

apprehending danger to his brother Shawaan, rushed forward in front of the detachment, extending his arms theatrically and exclaiming, as I supposed under the circumstances, "Shoot; kill me; I am not afraid." Shawaan seeing this, also rushed upon the detachment, endeavoring to snatch a musket away from one of the men on the right of the detachment.

For the soldiers to be spaced evenly along the wall, they would have been 2-3 feet apart, wielding muskets almost 5 feet long. Packed closely together, with their backs against the wall, these twelve soldiers would have crowded each other, making maneuvers difficult. Somehow, in the chaos, these soldiers kept an eye on Loucks, as well as Shawaan and Isteen. What happened next would have far-ranging consequences. Said Loucks,

Still wishing to avoid loss of life if possible, I tried to give him two or three saber cuts over the head to stun without killing him. In doing this I had given the preconcerted signal (by raising my hand) to fire.

I should judge about six or eight shots were fired during the melee, and only ceasing by the Indian Shawaan falling at the feet of the detachment dead.

The Daily Colonist wrote, "A skirmish ensued, which ended in the Indian being shot, dead, and one or two others badly wounded by the soldiers." Similarly, the Daily Alta wrote, In the execution of this order the Indians assaulted the guard, who, being placed on the defensive, fired, killing Shawaan and dangerously wounding his brother Isteen." The SF Bulletin says the order to shoot was deliberate, writing,

The alarm was rapidly spread throughout the Indian camp. Lieutenant Loucks, finding himself about to be overpowered, ordered his men to seize Shawaan, who, with his friends, resisted. No alternative was left but to give the order to fire on them. Shawaan was killed and his brother wounded.

In the Post Return filed for December 1869, William Borrowe tersely noted, "An Indian killed and one wounded in attempting to resist the U.S. authority for this unrest."

Loucks continues:

Isteen and the others running to their holes everything became quiet. I then directed the detachment not to renew the firing until further orders. I had Isteen pulled out and discovered he was bleeding profusely from a wound in his right arm near the shoulder. Two handkerchiefs were tied around his arm above the wound to check the bleeding. My first thought was to arrest him also, for interference, but afterward considering that he was intoxicated, and that his interference was to protect his brother Shawaan, who, in my opinion, was in the same condition of intoxication, I concluded that he had been sufficiently punished and directed that he be carried over to the hospital for treatment, and that the dead Indian should be carried over to the guard-house. While preparing to carry over the two Indians, a tumult of challenging by the guard outside the house, and Indians shouting to their friends, began.

Here, Loucks describes unrest from the neighboring homes of the village. He describes an encounter with Towatt:

Leaving First Sergeant Dean to superintend preparations for the transportation of the Indians, I went outside and found three, near the door, the sub chief, Towatt, who, I suppose, did the shouting, and was the cause of the challenging. At that time I could not see whether Towatt was armed or not, although the men said he had a knife, and to beware of him. I told him (Towatt) that I had finished my business, and that I was about to return with the men. I told him that if he wished to say anything to the soldier Ty-ee, he could do so in the morning. With that I gently led him toward the house and advised him to go to bed. That was the last I saw of Towatt that night. The two Indians were accordingly brought over and the result reported to the commanding officer.

While Tamaree offers a completely different story about how Shawaan and Isteen were shot, he does include a story about a posse of soldiers visiting Towatt's house late Christmas night. According to Tamaree:

Later that night soldiers come to Towatt's house. Towatt, then, has a house near where the sawmill is now. The soldiers say to Towatt. "Towatt, you want to fight? We have killed your nephews: Are the Indians going to fight?" But Towatt sits very still. He says nothing.

The soldiers go home. Tramp. tramp. They march down the beach back to the fort.

In both Loucks and Tamaree's versions, Towatt is standing in front of his house, when he faces down a soldiers of the United States Army. There is no record of what Towatt said, if anything, but the soldiers do quite a bit of talking. At the end of the encounter, both Tamaree and Loucks say the soldiers returned to the fort.

Loucks says he and his soldiers returned to Fort Wrangel with the body of Shawaan and the badly injured Isteen. The Daily Alta adds, "They were both brought into the garrison—Shawaan's dead body being placed in the guardhouse and Isteen taken to the hospital for surgical treatment." It is unclear why Shawaan, a dead man, would need to be removed from his own home to be placed in the guardhouse. In the end, in both Tamaree and the officer's stories, the dead body of Shawaan, and the mortally wounded Isteen, are inside the walls of Fort Wrangel late on Christmas night.

Borrowe and Loucks tell divergent stories at this point. Safely back inside the walls of Fort Wrangel, Melville Loucks says,

I dismissed the detachment, and supposing no further disturbance would occur, was sitting in the post surgeon's quarters...

But Borrowe writes:

Apprehending trouble, I had turned out the entire force under my command, and as soon as firing was heard at the ranch I immediately sent a detachment of ten men as far as the store of the post trader, some three hundred yards from the garrison, with instructions to act in concert with Lieutenant Loucks's party, should they require assistance. A picket guard was stationed around the camp, and everything placed in a condition of defense.

Borrowe went high alert, while Loucks was standing down. Loucks immediately went to the private quarters of post surgeon Henry Kirke, where they could speak candidly about the problem on their hands.

## E. Scutdoo Begins

What they couldn't know, was that their problem was about to get much bigger. For in the village, Scutdoo was being roused with terrible news, that would set off an equal reaction under Tlingit law. According to Tamaree:

Not far from Towatt lives the brothers' father, Scutdoo. He is asleep while his sons have been killed. But, his wife, when she hears of it, wakes him. She shakes his shoulder and says, "Scutdoo, the white soldiers have killed your sons. Wake up, your sons are dead. What are you going to do?"

Scutdoo gets up. He dresses. He puts on his red war jacket. I remember it well. I have seen it many times. It is all red and has pockets around the bottom for shells for his Hudson Bay gun. Scutdoo gets his Hudson Bay gun and starts for the fort. He walks along the beach and it is still cold and windy, half raining, half snowing. He walks, walks.

Scutdoo set out to avenge Shawaan's death, by killing a white man. Any white man would do. And that is where Leon Smith would play his role in the story.

*# It Came Upon a Midnight Clear*

# Ch 5. Leon Smith

## A. Battle of Galveston

On Christmas Day, 1862, the Union Army moved 250 infantrymen into a garrison on Galveston Island, Texas. This was the Union's first foothold in Texas since the Civil War began, and it was in these precarious, low-level, sandy barrier islands, just off the coast of Texas, in the Gulf of Mexico. Union warships roamed the harbor.

Confederate General John Magruber hatched an attack on the Union garrison by land and sea. From land, the Confederates positioned heavy artillery, hidden inside buildings. A cadre of volunteers waited to rush the island, using ladders to get across like a drawbridge. From sea, a small fleet of Confederate vessels planned to enter the harbor under the darkness and fog of night, to fend off the Union navy. Leon Smith, a well-known steamship captain, was made commodore of the fleet.

The attack began New Years Even, 1862. The plan did not go off as expected.

The Confederate ships were spotted early, and fled when a Union watchman set off a flare. The artillery on land didn't know this, and commenced blasting the Union garrison as planned, causing damage but little loss of life. The Confederate volunteers who intended to storm Galveston Island with ladders gave up, when their ladders proved too short. Amid the fallout, with no ships to challenge them, the Union navy arrived and began blasting the city.

All of a sudden, came the Confederate ships Neptune and Bayou City. Leon Smith sailed aboard the Bayou City. The ship made a pass at ramming the USS Harriet Lane, a sleek, powerful vessel laden with heavy artillery. The Bayou City delivered only a glancing blow, with minimal damage to either ship. Next, the CSS Neptune attempted to ram the USS Harriet Lane, delivering only minimal damage, but sustaining a canon shot that caused the Neptune to begin sinking. The Bayou City made a second



pass at ramming the Harriet Lane, and this time, it succeeded in jamming its bow into the Harriet Lane's wheelhouse — effectively disabling the ship. The Confederates dropped a plank and stormed the deck of the Harriet Lane, seizing the prize Union ship and cargo for the Confederacy. The battle ceased. Under a white flag, Leon Smith paddled a boat to parley with the Union officers. He asked them to surrender all their ships. Instead, the Union accepted the loss of the Harriet Lane and fled. It was last time the Union occupied Texas in the Civil War.

Magruder recommended to his superiors that Leon Smith be made Captain of the Harriet Lane.<sup>15</sup> The story of the capture of the Harriet Lane became a huge story in the North and South. Leon Smith's name gained a reputation.

## **B. North To Alaska**

After the Civil War, reports say Leon Smith and Magruder fled to Mexico to avoid arrest. They split up, and Leon Smith hid out in Galveston, Texas, laying low to avoid arrest. So long has his fame followed him, he would never be safe in the South or the North.<sup>16</sup> He set his eyes on a fresh start, in the North, the far north: Alaska.

His first attempt at getting into business in Alaska ended in disaster. In November 1868, a cargo schooner carrying thousands of dollars worth of his merchandise wrecked off Vancouver Island. Wrote Smith, "I consider my loss no less than \$20,000, although my goods are insured. I have lost my winter's prospects. My baggage is all lost. I shall sail for Fort Wrangel and see how things look. Truly yours, Leon Smith."<sup>17</sup>

Leon Smith, his wife, Mary, and their son, Leon B., made it to Fort Wrangel on March 1, 1869. Leon Smith found his match with a business partner named William King Lear.

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<sup>15</sup> The War of the Rebellion A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies 1886

<sup>16</sup> Flake's\_Bulletin\_1870-01-29

<sup>17</sup> Daily Alta California, Volume 20, Number 6845, 13 December 1868

## C. Smith & Lear

William King Lear was a 36 year old, an ex-Army officer and former merchant of the Frazier River Gold Rush. When that dried up, he moved into Alaska, arriving at Fort Wrangel in September 1868, finding work as a post-sutler.

Smith & Lear owned two log buildings along the beach, about 300 yards south of Fort Wrangel. This was the beginning of the future downtown Wrangell, on either side of Lynch Street today. The taller building served as a general store, while the longer building was home to a bowling alley. While Smith & Lear were certainly post sutlers, in that they sold to the men and families of Fort Wrangel, they also traded with Alaska Natives, who far outnumbered the White population, at least 5:1.

In a letter, Leon Smith offered his opinion of the Tlingit he came to know at Fort Wrangel. Smith was positively effusive:

I have found them to be quiet, and seem well disposed toward the whites... They take up salmon, fish oil, blankets, domestics, red cloth, beads, molasses, flour, and in fact every other article suitable for Indian trade... The Stick tribe is a very honest tribe, and partial to the whites.<sup>18</sup>

In Tamaree's tape recording, he describes why Leon Smith liked the Tlingit so much:

He sells food. He bought skins/furs. A noble heavysset man of the earth is what they called him. He liked/loved the Tlingit people for the sales he made to them. The white man marketed to the Tlingit people. This is the way this man is, he loves Tlingit people. Regardless of how things were, he loved them for money.

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<sup>18</sup> Colyer Report, p. 14-15.

## D. Scutdoo Shoots Smith

Late on Christmas night, well after the party had ended, and after Melville Loucks' detachment returned from their trip to the village, Leon Smith stood in front of his store. It was a half-moon night, and the moon was still low on the horizon. In the tape recording, Tamaree describes what Scutdoo saw:

Behold! He looked at him nearby. He was pacing back and forth on his front porch, aimlessly. With his whistling, he knew how to whistle. What was he doing?

In the 1940 Sentinel version, Tamaree describes the moment like this:

Scutdoo walks, walks. Pretty soon he comes to Smith's trading post. He sees Smith-walking across his porch. Well, here is a white man. Indian's law says when one of their men is killed by another tribe, the other tribe must pay with the life of one of their men. White men have killed Scutdoo's sons. Here is a white man.

Tamaree describes how Scutdoo raised his Hudson Baby gun, which was loaded with shot, the kind used for hunting ducks. He pointed at Smith, and shot him.

He fell on the houses front porch. He shot him right in the stomach It made a sound of crackling. He repeated the name Aankáawu kutlé to himself.

In the Sentinel, Tamaree said, "As soon as he has killed Smith, Scutdoo becomes afraid. Quick, he runs through the storm into the woods behind Wrangell to hide." In his tape recording, he elaborated:

It was not until after the killing of the white man that he became conscious [of what he did]. Fear came upon him. This is the way it always is, it is when a man is killed that fear comes upon the one [who killed a person.] He ran off into the forest.

The San Francisco Chronicle, which published a version of events that put Leon Smith as the central figure of the story, said:

Captain Smith stepped outdoors, but had no sooner crossed the threshold than he fell back, wounded in several places by the shot of the enemy.

Years later, Smith's son Leon B. Smith would write his father was shot in an "Indian ambush."

According to William Borrowe, he learned of the shots this way:

About 1 o'clock a.m. of the morning of December 26, 1869, the sergeant of the guard reported several shots in the direction of the store, and in a few minutes word was brought to me that Mr. Leon Smith, partner of the post trader, W. K. Lear, had been shot near the door of the store.

There are typos in the official reports, and one of them is to turn 1am into 10am in Borrowe's account. Based on the context, it's clear Borrowe is not talking about 10am. Borrowe is talking about the middle of the night.

The shot that hit Smith was audible from Fort Wrangel, a distance Borrowe estimates was only 300 yards. At the time of the shot, Loucks states he was:

sitting in post surgeon's quarters, when, about an hour or thereabouts after my return, a shot was heard from the direction of the store of the post trader. Taking with me Private Magee I ran down there, and while on the way Private Magee drew my attention to an object lying on the ground near the plank walk running between the store and the garrison. Upon examination it proved to be Mr. Leon Smith... Mr. Smith was lying on his breast upon a low stump alongside of the plank walk, with arms extended and a revolving pistol fallen from the grasp of the right hand. I first supposed him dead, but by placing him in a more comfortable position and speaking to him, he groaned merely.

I then sent to the garrison for a stretcher and men. At about this time Gleason and Henderson came up. In order to preserve the body from attempted mutilation, the three present posted themselves near by to look out for Indians in ambush. After a few moments I went up

in front of the store, and told those inside to bring out a blanket with which to carry Mr. Smith to the hospital.

Loucks does not indicate who is inside of Smith's store. Could it be Smith's wife and young son? Could it be William King Lear? Whoever it was, they were likely hiding, having just heard the shot that struck Leon Smith.

Loucks continues:

This done, I posted three men, who had been previously sent to defend the store, behind obstacles in front of it. After having remained with the pickets a short time in order to understand the condition of things around the store, and to observe any movements in the village, I returned to the garrison to inquire into the circumstances of the shooting of Mr. Smith, and to receive orders in the case.

In 1953, Tamaree corroborated Loucks story here. He recalled soldiers walking from the store, carrying Smith back to the fort, and posting a guard.

The celebration of Christmas Day in Fort Wrangel had turned into bloodshed. Angelina Muller nursed a stump where her finger had been, while Leon Smith and Isteen fought for their lives, bleeding out from gunshot wounds. And the dead body of Shawaan lay inside the walls of Fort Wrangel.

This was just the beginning. For the next day would bring even greater destruction, the likes of which no man or woman in Kaach.xan.ak'w had ever seen. Through the darkness of night, both sides prepared for the day ahead.

## *# Carol of the Bells*

Wrangell History Unlocked is produced by Ronan Rooney. Music from today's episode was performed by Mary Rooney.

## — PART 2 —

Today's episode of Wrangell History Unlocked is The Christmas Bombardment, Part 2.

### Ch 6. December 26

#### A. Reprise

December 26, 1869 was one of the shortest days of the year in Fort Wrangel, with less than seven hours of daylight. The earliest morning light began trickling into the sky around 6:00am, increasing until sunrise at 8:24.

Christmas Day had turned into a bloody fiasco. There was Angelina Muller, the post laundress, who now nursed the bloody stump where her right middle finger had been. Inside the guardhouse lay the body of Shawaan, the Tlingit man who bit off her finger, and was then shot dead. His brother, Isteen, still lived, but was badly wounded by a gunshot to his arm.

In front of Smith and Lear's general store, a bloodstain on the boardwalk was all that remained of Leon Smith's last stand. Leon Smith was still alive, but barely. He lay in the Hospital Building inside Fort Wrangel, slowly bleeding from the seventeen places he was struck by Scutdoo's shot. Post surgeon Harry Kirke dressed Smith's wounds, and hoped for the best.

Through the night, under the cover of trees, snow, and darkness, Smith's assailant, Scutdoo, hid in the woods. Scutdoo was Shawaan's father, and shot Smith in keeping with the tradition of Tlingit law, which held that since a Tlingit man had been killed by White men, then a White man should be killed to atone for it. After shooting Smith, Scutdoo fled into the woods outside the village

William Tamaree's tape-recorded story described the mystery surrounding the location of Scutdoo. Said Tamaree:

Where is he? His wife also did not see him. She only heard her husband killed someone. There was nowhere on the land that they could find him.

## **B. First Message Attempt**

William Borrowe wanted the man who shot Smith, and would settle for nothing less.

Before the sun rose, Borrowe crafted his demands for the village: turn over Scutdoo by noon, or the Army would fire on the village with canons. Fort Wrangel possessed two 12-pound mountain howitzers, and a 6 pound field gun. These were the familiar weapons of the Civil War, supported by two big wheels, powerful, but mobile.

To capture a single individual, Borrowe was willing to kill everyone in the village. Rosita Worl, of the Sealaska Heritage Institute, commented on this disparity of American justice in the frontier:

In American society, laws are developed around individuals, except as it applied to Indian people. When Indian-White conflicts occurred, the government tended to hold entire Indian tribes or the village as the responsible. The government imposed sanctions or punishment upon the entire tribe or the village.<sup>19</sup>

To his terms, Borrowe added he was also willing to meet with the chiefs of the village. Before the day was over, Borrowe would make three separate attempts to convey his demand to the Tlingit village leaders, each time unsuccessfully.

Borrowe's first attempt to deliver this message was at daybreak, through an anonymous Native woman, whom Borrowe trusted implicitly. Said Borrowe:

This message I had sent to each of the chiefs by an Indian woman before Lieutenant Loucks left the post, and I am confident that it was delivered.

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<sup>19</sup> Dr. Rosita Worl. "Tlingit Law, American Justice, and the Destruction of Tlingit Villages." Around minute 7. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpUqm\\_8eXd4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpUqm_8eXd4)

The Daily Alta suggests this woman was responsible for identifying Smith's shooter as Scutdoo.

### **C. Second Message Attempt**

Borrowe's second attempt to communicate his ultimatum to the Tlingit chiefs fell to his second-in-command, 1st Lieutenant Melville Loucks. Said Borrowe:

...At daylight in the morning I sent Lieutenant Loucks again to the ranch with a detachment under a flag of truce, with instructions to see the chief of the tribe, Shakes, and demand of him the murderer, the Indians to turn the man over to him there, or failing in that, I gave them until 12 o'clock that day to bring him in, notifying them that if at that hour the man Scutdoo whom I knew to be in the ranch, was not in my custody, I should open fire upon them from the garrison.

This was Loucks' second trip to the village in less than twelve hours. Said Loucks:

I proceeded with a detachment of twenty men under a flag of truce to the Indian village, to demand that the chiefs should come over to the garrison to settle the difficulty by giving up the murderer of Mr. Smith, at or before 12 o'clock p.m. that day; or, failing in this, that the commanding officer would open fire upon the Indian village at the expiration of the time allowed in which the surrender of the murderer was to have been made.

Loucks then mentions he spotted Scutdoo about a hundred yards away from the village, while Tamaree says Scutdoo was hiding at this time. Loucks says he did not pursue Scutdoo, given the flag of truce and lack of positive identification.

For the second time in the past twelve hours, Loucks was back in front of Towatt's home. This time, Loucks used a translator, a man named William Wall, who had been around the Tlingit almost three years. Dr. David Douglas Robertson, a linguist, suggests William Wall was "more likely a



Chinook [jargon] speaker than skilled in Tlingit, a notoriously difficult language for strangers.”<sup>20</sup> Chinook jargon was a language hobbled together from Pacific Northwest Indigenous cultures, useful for trade.

According to Loucks, the exchange began like this:

I there met Towatt in his war paint and fighting costume, and communicated to him the demands of the commanding officer. Towatt refused both the interview and the surrender of the murderer. He stated twice that if fire was opened upon the village he would die in his house.

I explained to them all that the commanding officer was not angry with all of them, only with the murderer of Mr. Smith, and that if the murderer was surrendered friendship and good feeling would return; and still earnestly wishing and endeavoring to avoid the necessity of opening fire, I proposed even that the commanding officer might meet the chiefs half way between the garrison and the village, all parties to the interview without an armed escort.

Towatt refused the demands and the modifications which I did assume to make in order to discover the least desire on their part to avoid trouble. Towatt was stiff.

The members of his tribe were continually assembling, armed with Hudson Bay muskets, iron spears, pistols, &c., and more than half surrounding me at different times during the interview, in their eagerness and, judging from the aspect of affairs generally, evidently determined to have revenge for the killing of one and wounding of another Indian the night before.

I insisted and repeated to Towatt that by having the interview everything could be satisfactorily arranged; but all this to no purpose.

After a talk of an hour or so with Towatt and his friends, including also Mo-naw-is-ty, and many of his friends who were within hearing, Shakes at the head of his own tribe came over and took part in the interview.

Chief Shakes V, Kawishte, had dealt with more White men than any other Tlingit leader, save the tribes of Sitka. He is credited with relocating the clan from the south end of Wrangell Island, a place called Katsitlan, to the

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<sup>20</sup> <https://chinookjargon.com/2020/07/17/1870-bombardment-of-wrangel/>

north end of the island, in order to trade with Hudson Bay Company. Two decades later, when Buck Choquette married Shakes' daughter, Georgiana, Shakes agreed for Buck to be shown where he might find gold up the Stikine River, kicking off the town's first gold rush. Chief Shakes V lived through changes brought by epidemic disease, alcohol, technology, and now, Melville Loucks. Said Loucks:

His manner as he approached was quite self-important. His friends, like Towatt, were, with few exceptions, armed with flint-lock muskets, with thumb and finger ready to cock their pieces and open fire in grand style.

With Shakes's friends, added to those already on the grounds, about one-half of the [men] of the Stakeen tribe were assembled, I then informed Shakes of the demands of the commanding officer, but with no more success than with Towatt, with the addition, however, that if the commanding officer wished to see him, he (the commanding officer) could come over to the village to do so.

Loucks estimates one half of the men of the tribe surrounded him. Based on Vincent Colyer's census, that's about 80 men. Colyer also estimated that only half of the men were in a condition to bear arms. This suggests Loucks was surrounded by every able-bodied man in the village. Loucks continues:

I told them all again that their village would be destroyed like the Kaik village last winter, and that wherever American steamer found them the same thing would be done again.

The bombardment of Kake happened earlier that year. After the Kake people fled their village, the Army bombed the village from the sea, then came ashore, and burned it to the ground. They forced villagers into the elements in winter to fend for themselves. Here, Fort Wrangel threatened to do the same thing, only it wouldn't end with the village being destroy — the villagers would be hunted.

Then, without any sense of irony, Loucks asks the crowd if anyone had seen a missing corporal. Said Loucks:

I also made inquiries in reference to Corporal Northrop... who, it was supposed, had been in the village the night previous, and not been

seen since that night. All said that he had gone; some said over to the garrison in a canoe, and other said he was drunk in the bushes.

The answer may have insulted Loucks. He returned to his threats:

I explained to them until I was tired of it, that the commanding officer only wished a friendly interview, and that it was but one Indian he wanted, the murderer of Mr. Smith.

Shakes indicated that he had no more to say, and believing myself that the whole matter had been fully explained to them all, nothing remained but to return to make my report of the result.

The Indians, so far from acceding to the demands in the beginning of the interview, became more and more stubborn as their numbers increased, and instead of facilitating a peaceful settlement of the difficulties, it seemed to me more probable they might have been increased by an accident even.

I consider that under the circumstances everything possible was done to effect a peaceful settlement, and nothing remained but to execute the threat attached or included in the demand.

Loucks returned to Fort Wrangel with his men, except the absent Corporal Northrup, and made a report to William Borrowe. This ends Melville Loucks' written report. In all, it covers about twelve hours, beginning with the finger bite, ending here.

Borrowe commended his second officer for his "promptness and decision in carrying out the instructions given him entitle him to the greatest praise."

But it's not clear that Melville Loucks improved the situation. As the officer in charge, he bore the responsibility for the botched arrest of Shawaan, as much as his story attempted to remove responsibility from any one individual. And even Loucks acknowledged his second visit to the village may have made things worse. He could not even secure an interview with the chiefs, even after threatening to destroy their village. It was cold rebuke.

## C. Third Message Attempt

The Tamaree tape recording includes a third, and final, attempt by William Borrowe to communicate with the leaders of Kaach.xan.ak'w. It does not appear in the officers' reports, but it is mentioned in the Daily Alta, which wrote,

Another effort was made by Lieutenant Borrowe to prevent hostilities by sending over a friendly Indian, but without success.

Tamaree described the friendly Indian:

The salmon cannery, it was big and long. There was a man named Kaacheinee that lived there... who understood the English language and came from Canada.

Kaacheinee serves as go-between for several rounds of conversation, walking about three-quarters of a mile each way, between the fort and Shakes house. Said Tamaree:

He was called. "Go to Shakes," he was told. "Say to Shakes to send his partner to me." This man that murdered, is dealt with.

Kaacheinee walked back. He told the high ranking officer what Shakes said.

"Could you go to him [Shakes] and ask him what he thinks of the one taken down by the name of Aankáawu kutlé, the man who gave them food?"

Aankáawu kutlé was a reference to Leon Smith. When Kaacheinee presented this question to Chief Shakes, Tamaree says the chief responded:

"This does not have anything to do with me. "There is no former in-law here. This does not have anything to do with me."

Borrowe's three attempts at communicating his demands with the Tlingit leaders had failed. The chiefs snubbed his offer to meet, and defied his ultimatum. Borrowe was convinced the chiefs knew where Scutdoo was. According to Tamaree, Scutdoo was hiding at this time, placing the chiefs in an impossible situation. Perhaps Borrowe thought his extreme threat would prove leverage, to bring the chiefs to the table. If so, it had failed.

Tamaree's narrative tells what happened next:

This is when the news came. Shakes' house will be shot and Scutdoo's house also. It will be shot and it will be blown up it is said. This is when they ran... This point, the one Shakes sits on. This point they ran on the other side.

From the fort, William Borrowe and his men could see the people fleeing. He interpreted it as sign of aggression, writing:

At 12 o'clock no signs were made of any disposition on the part of the Indians to comply with my orders; but their intentions to fight were made evident by the numerous persons engaged in carrying their goods to what they considered places of safety.

## **D. The Firing Begins**

William Borrowe's 12:30 deadline came, and went, in silence. Until 2pm, when the Army commenced the cannon fire.

Tamaree and Borrowe agree: the first house to be shot was the house where Scutdoo lived. With each blast, the sound would have bounced off the water, echoing down the channel, rumbling like thunder. In a Naanyaa.aayí clan house on Shakes Island, a young Matilda Paul, a future leader, lay face down on the ground as the cannonballs flew overhead. She was only six years old.<sup>21</sup> In his study of the bombardment, Dr. Zachary Jones estimates that the army fired an artillery round every ten minutes.<sup>22</sup>

## **E. The Tlingit Fire Back**

The villagers possessed no heavy artillery to match the Army. Instead, they launched a guerrilla campaign. Fort Wrangel sat along the coast, at the base of Mount Dewey. At only 400-500 feet high, is more hill than mountain, covered with trees and brush. From the summit, you could look down into the walls of the garrison.

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<sup>21</sup> 2015 NPS Battlefield Report Final Approved Submission, P. 39.

<sup>22</sup> 2015 NPS Battlefield Report Final Approved Submission, P. 45.

Tlingit fighters positioned themselves among the thick forestation of Mount Dewey and opened fire on the fort. Wrote William Borrowe:

Later in the day fire was opened on the gun detachments from the hills in rear of and commanding the post, but fortunately without effect. This was replied to from the upper windows of the hospital, and, in connection with a few rounds of canister in that direction, soon drove them away.

Canister was a mainstay of the Civil War battlefield. Up to this point, Borrowe used solid shot, a molded ball of metal. It could punch a hole in a building, or could hit the ground just before a target, spraying deadly fragments into the air. Canister shot was a container of small pieces, such as ball bearings or—in desperate times—pieces of scrap metal. When fired, the canister disintegrated, spraying high velocity fragments across a wide area. Here, under attack from targets he could not see, William Borrowe deployed canister shot into the woods of Mount Dewey. After two rounds, the firing from Mount Dewey stopped.

The fort continued to bombard the village. Tamaree described the reaction in the Tlingit village like this:

That which is grieved, cried over sounded over the land. The house was ripped apart when the cannon hit the house. After that our leader of the community, Shakes was bombarded. Shakes house was fired on and it was missed because as the cannon ball was going through the air it cooled and fell off to the side. At this time the Lingit people were in great fear! This rain never stopped or slowed down.

The sun began setting at 3:19pm, getting fully dark at 5:42pm. William Borrowe wrote:

Firing was kept up on their part all of the afternoon, and a slow fire from the 6-pounder gun on the village was maintained until dark.

## F. A Secret Meeting

According to Tamaree, William Borrowe did get his requested interview, but it came after dusk. While Borrowe says nothing about it, two newspapers, the Daily Colonist and the San Francisco Chronicle, mention this evening rendezvous. The Colonist wrote, "towards evening one of the chiefs approached the garrison bearing a flag of truce. The firing was suspended."

Tamaree described what lead up to this encounter:

Now, Chief Shakes, who is the head chief, says, "Towatt, we are going to the fort. We will talk to the white chief. The soldiers have killed two of our men. We have killed one of theirs. We will take one soldier and we will kill him and then everything will be even." Shakes was plenty mad. Shakes is all dressed up like the soldiers. He has a uniform with gold bunches on his shoulders and he has a long sword at his side. He has another soldier suit so he makes Towatt put it on and they go to the fort. They march along the beach up to the fort. The gates are closed but they tell the sentry they want to see his chief. The Captain says, "Let them come in."

With only Towatt as witness, Chief Shakes V and William Borrowe faced each other. William Borrowe would never write about this encounter. Said Tamaree:

In the Captain's office the Captain says for them to sit down but Shakes says, "No." The Captain then says, "What do you want, Shakes?" Shakes says, "One man. Your man who killed my friend, Chuwan, and then I will give you Scutdoo who killed Smith."

Chief Shakes offered a shrewd bargain. Shakes was willing to turn over Scutdoo, on one condition: Shakes wants the man who killed Shawaan. It is unclear if Chief Shakes knew exactly who killed Shawaan. But, according to Tamaree, Borrowe's reaction is nothing less than astonishing:

The Captain says nothing. He sits and thinks. After a while he says, "Shakes, wait awhile. Our law says we must have the man who killed Smith, but you go home. I will think it over." Shakes and Towatt go home then.

According to Tamaree, William Borrowe seriously considered the request. If the man responsible for Shawaan's death was Melville Loucks, then Borrowe may have considered the problems such an exchange could solve.

For the rest of the night, Fort Wrangel's canons lay quiet. Somewhere in the hills around the village, Scutdoo hid. He contemplated how much longer he could hide, and how much more his village could take.

*# O Little Town of Bethlehem*



# Ch 7. December 27

## A. Two Stories

Tamaree and Borrowe tell two very different stories of Monday, December 27. But at the end of the day, they both arrive at the same outcome.

## B. Borrowe's Story

Borrowe's story starts first, at daybreak. Said Borrowe:

...They opened on the garrison from the ranch with musketry, which was immediately replied to, and seeing that they were determined not only to resist, but had become the assailants, I resolved to shell them, but having only solid shot for the 6-pounder, and the distance being too great for canister, I still continued the fire from that gun with shot and from the mountain howitzer with shell. The practice was excellent...

The use of shells was an escalation in Borrowe's arsenal. A shell was basically a flying bomb. A gunner lit a separate fuse inside the shell, the cannon fired, and—timed correctly—the shell exploded at the target.

Wrote Borrowe:

...and after four shells had been fired, two bursting immediately in front of the houses, and two solid shots just through the house of the principal chief, Shakes, a flag of truce was seen approaching the post, and firing on my part ceased. The flag of truce bore a message from Shakes that he and the other chiefs wished to talk with me, and I replied that I would talk with them in the garrison; but that the murderer must be brought in, for without him "talk was useless." Soon after, the chiefs were seen coming over, and a party behind them with the murderer, who was easily recognized by his dress. Just as they were leaving the ranch a scuffle, evidently prearranged, took place, and the prisoner escaped and was seen making for the bush, no attempt to re-arrest him being made. The chiefs on their arrival at the garrison were received by myself and the other officers, and a conference ensued. They were then informed that until "the murderer was brought in no terms would be extended to them; that on that basis alone I would treat."

The next bit of Borrowe's story does not appear in either of Tamaree's stories, even though it involves Tlingit people. Borrowe arranges a compromise with the village leadership, one that even Borrowe describes as taking hostages. Said Borrowe:

Finding me determined to have the man at all hazards, they then asked what time would be given, and stated that as a proof of their good intentions they would surrender to me the mother of the murderer. I informed them that they must, as they proposed, bring me the hostage at once, and in addition, the sub-chief of the tribe to which the murderer belonged, the head chief being absent up the Stickine River; and that, if the murderer himself was not in my possession by six o'clock the following evening, I would open on them and destroy the entire ranch, together with its occupants. This closed the conference, and during the afternoon of the same day the woman and the sub-chief were brought in and placed in confinement.

While no other source mentions these hostages, The Daily Alta newspaper did write about a conference between Borrowe and the Tlingit chiefs, saying:

...and after some conference, finding the commanding officer was determined to have the murderer, faithfully promised that if they did not, fire would be reopened the next morning, and the ranch destroyed.

## **C. Tamaree's Story**

Tamaree's story of December 27 does not include anything about a daybreak skirmish, a failed surrender, or an exchange of hostages.

Tamaree starts the day of December 27 with a furious Chief Shakes, angry that William Borrowe has not given him an answer to his offer of exchange. Said Tamaree:

The next day comes and the Captain has said nothing. Then Shakes gets mad again. He is very mad. He goes to Towatt's house. This time he does not go in. He just kicks the door open and says, "Towatt, come! We will go take a soldier and kill him. Are you going to do nothing?" But Towatt, who is a very smart and peaceful man, says to Shakes, "Brother, our Chief, let them go. They are a big dog. We are

only a little dog. If we take a soldier and kill him, they will kill all the Wrangell people. Let them go, my brother.” Shakes gets more mad. He slams the door. “You coward,” he says. Shakes wants to fight the soldiers.

Tamaree then tells the story of the last journey of Scutdoo, who comes down from the woods, ready to surrender, and says a long farewell, through the village. In the 1940 Sentinel story, Tamaree said:

That day Scutdoo comes down out of the woods. For two nights he has been hiding. Nothing to eat. Nothing to keep him warm. He has heard the guns of the fort firing on the Indian village. He is going to give himself up. He goes around to different houses of the villages. He says to his friends, “Let us smoke. I am going to die. I am going to give myself up to the soldiers.” He goes to his brother-in-law Shustak’s house and he says, “Let us eat our last meal together. I want to eat here before I die.”

Shustak’s Point in the end of the peninsula that juts out in front of Wrangell, because that’s where Shustak lived. Scutdoo started at one end of the village, closest to the fort, and walked along the bay, taking him further from the fort, out to Shustak’s house. Along the way, he witnessed the devastation brought by the cannons. According to Tamaree, Scutdoo said:

“I went back. “I went through K’atxaanx things were coming undone. “I wondered if this would lead to a mistake, I was troubled in spirit.”

This is where a young William Tamaree and Scutdoo crossed paths.

I really ran fast to my grandfather’s place... The man that killed someone will be coming here. prepare the boat! Fishing! His father-in-law they put a box down (for him). He walked in with his gun. “Already, and for the final time I have come to you anyway! For you to see me. I will be transported to the other side. I don’t want the community to be punished because of me. Truly I am, placing this on my self.”

Scutdoo knew he would die. He knew the only thing that could save the village, and everyone’s lives, was if he turned himself in. Scutdoo planned

to surrender himself to save the village. But first, he would have his last meal.

When he was finished, he boarded a canoe, handed over his gun, and took the voyage across the mouth of the harbor, from Shustak's Point to Fort Wrangel.

## **D. Scutdoo Surrenders**

This is where Tamaree, Borrowe, and the newspaper agree: Scutdoo turned himself in after dark on December 27. Tamaree describes an officer watching Scutdoo with a telescope. Said Tamaree:

He saw them... He then saw a canoe. He recognized it clearly. When the canoe came ashore he gave one instruction regarding the door. The door swung open only one way. Scutdoo is walking right there. An ancient name of the past was his name. He reached out and took his hand. He was being taken to... He was immediately led to the jail. It's a fort! It's a fort! He was locked up. [The people] were weeping/crying. This is the way of the Tlingít. His family was feeling horrific about him. A high loud groan/cry... Leg/foot shackles were placed on him.

There would be no more shots in the conflict. The firing was over. But William Borrowe was not done. In the late night hours, with his prisoner secured, William Borrowe issued order number 76: the court-martial trial of Scutdoo for the murder of Leon Smith.

*# Silent Night*

# Ch 8. Justice

## A. The Trial of Scutdoo

William Borrowe appointed four White men to the jury: himself, 1st Lieutenant Melville Loucks, post-surgeon Henry Kirke, and—the only civilian on the jury—William King Lear, the business partner of the late Leon Smith.

Borrowe ensured his trial, and punishment, would have an audience. On December 28, Borrowe had the five chiefs of the village attend the trial. He said:

It is then announced that it is the will of the officers and citizens present during the trial that the prisoner, the Indian Scutdoo, at mid-day December 29, 1869, shall be hanged by the neck until dead, in the presence of the troops, citizens, and the five Stikine chiefs and that he should remain hanging until nightfall, when his friends could remove the body.

The jury found Scutdoo guilty. Before he left his trial, Borrowe reports that Scutdoo accepted his fate. Said Borrowe:

The prisoner, upon hearing this, replied, very well; that he had killed a tyhee, and not a common man; that he would see Mr. Smith in the other world, and, as it were, explain to him how it all happened; that he did not intend to kill Mr. Leon Smith, particularly; had it been any one else it would have been all the same.

On December 29, four days after the Christmas party that sparked it all, Fort Wrangel hosted Alaska's first execution by the United States. Tamaree says:

In the fort yard the soldiers have built a gallows. As soon as they have Scutdoo, the Captain sends word to the Indian villages. He invites all the people to come and see how they hang a man.

In his tape recording, William Tamaree describes how the Tlingit village reacted in this time:

The story was told within the community. Scutdoo will be hung on a tree is what was being said. Maybe I will not watch it, see it... It was being built... There was a very high porch. It was finished the next morning for his punishment. People were weeping over Shx'át.oo. When the time came it was morning. Ok. He was told. He saw it. His rain was over there.

In the 1940 Wrangell Sentinel, Tamaree describes how the execution of Scutdoo unfolded, with a last-ditch attempt to give him a chance to escape:

Scutdoo is a composer. He sends word for his mother to bring him his dancing hat so he can sing and dance once more before he dies. His mother brings the hat. She is crying. She has put a knife in his dancing hat hoping that her son can kill the men who want to kill him. But when the soldiers give Scutdoo his dancing hat the knife is gone. Scutdoo puts on his dancing hat and he dances and sings a song he has composed. As soon as he is finished he gives his mother his dancing hat.

Tamaree tape:

He is walking, slowly walking. He went to the side. He walked right to the stairway... There was no footing there. This is the song he always used. He danced to this. He walked up to the scaffold. Only the hang man was there. He had a black knife. The high officer spoke asking. Will you not speak? What should I say? I killed him, I killed him... For killing my son.

Wrangell Sentinel:

He turns and walks stiff and straight up the steps to the platform where the soldiers were waiting. The soldiers start to put a cloth over Scutdoo's face. They have the rope ready. But Scutdoo will not have a cloth put over his head. He tears the cloth away, the soldiers put the rope around his neck. Everything is quiet except for Scutdoo's mother. She is crying and Indians stand around in the rain looking very sad. Scutdoo is their brother.

The following piece of information about Scutdoo's execution appeared nowhere in the official reports. But it is contained in the Daily Colonist and San Francisco Bulletin. According to the Tamaree tape:

As a cloth bag was being placed over his head. He beat the man backward with his hand. He jumped into the eye of the noose with his head.

The San Francisco Bulletin described it like this:

When the noose was placed around his neck he asked if all was ready, and receiving an affirmative answer, jumped from the scaffold before the drop fell.

Borrowe says the execution "passed off without accident," while Tamaree's tape says Scutdoo struggled for maybe an hour.

Per Borrowe's orders, Scutdoo's body remained hanging from the gallows until sunset, around three hours after the execution began. Said Tamaree:

At this time he was taken down. His father stepped out from the people. "I do not want my son to be laying here. "It is ok for me to make his coffin for him." It was so. They called for the opposite moiety as they are called. Raven and Wolf we are. He called for the Wolf [clan].

According to the Daily Alta, at this point, the Army also turned over the body of Shawaan to the Tlingit village.

There is a component of the trial and execution that Borrowe, Tamaree, and the newspapers agree on: the execution was intended to send a message. Said the Daily Alta,

The Indians are now quiet, and thoroughly understand that they must be governed by the military that protects them.

Said William Tamaree on tape:

"May they all come here for sure." The commander of the army was saying this in the house. When they see how Shx'át oo died. The Tlingit people will not do this again. The way a white man kills

people. This is the way they treated people. This is what was being said [by the commanding officer].

In a coda to this written report, Borrowe made his message clear:

In conclusion, I can only say that, though regretting that extreme measures had to be resorted to, yet under the circumstances I consider nothing else would have accomplished the object in view -- that of bringing Mr. Smith's murderer to justice, and reducing the Indians to a state of subjection to the United States authority. Everything is now quiet, and I have no reason to anticipate any future trouble; yet my vigilance is not remitted, nor will it be, as I have no confidence in any promises made by Indians. They have shown their hostile feelings in this instance, and it is only through fear and the knowledge that any crime committed by them will meet with prompt punishment, that will keep them in proper subjection.

Borrowe's execution of Scutdoo had the opposite effect. Decades later, when the Wrangel Sentinel published William Tamaree's story, it did it under the headline, "Scutdoo Hero in Native Version of 1869 Battle."

The last sentence of Borrowe's report reveals Borrowe's great wish:

I would also request that the thirty-pound Parrot gun asked for in my last requisition may be sent to me at as early a date as practicable, for, had that gun been in position, I think two percussion shells would have brought the Indians to terms.

Antietam was the bloodiest day of the Civil War, and it didn't even have a 30 pound Parrot gun. This was a huge weapon, that you might find on a warship, drastically bigger than anything inside Fort Wrangel.

## **B. Arrests of Miners**

William Borrowe needed someone to blame for furnishing alcohol to the Indians. Stanley Ray Remsberg, writing in The United States Administration of Alaska, tells what happened next:

...Borrowe punished two prospectors named John Cassin and James Hollywood, and Frederick Stahl, a discharged soldier, who had



supplied the drink to the Indians. He held them ultimately responsible for the deaths and believed that “the full penalty of the law should be meted out to them.” Borrowe arrested all three on December 28, confining as well three native witnesses against them.<sup>23</sup>

A report on prisoners in Alaska identified these inmates,

“The liquor procured by Indians from these men was in all probability the immediate cause of recent difficulties at Fort Wrangel, which resulted in the killing of one white man and two Indians, and the wounding of others.”<sup>24</sup>

## C. Submit Reports

All that was left was for Borrowe, Loucks, and Kirke to submit their final reports. Loucks wrote 1,930 words, covering only the twelve hours from the finger biting incident up to the moment the bombardment began. Borrowe wrote less, only 1,748 words to describe the events of the several days. Post-surgeon Henry Kirke’s report, was only 56 words. Alaska Historian Bob DeArmond would later call this “a masterpiece of brevity.”<sup>25</sup>

Wrote Dr. Kirke:

I have the honor to report as the result of the late Indian trouble:

One white man, Mr. Leon Smith, killed.

One Indian killed.

One white woman, company laundress, finger bitten off.

One Indian severely wounded, by gun-shot fracture of the right humerus.

One Indian hung.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

H. M. KIRKE

Kirke’s report told no lies, but it failed to tell the truth. He let Borrowe and Loucks’s go unchallenged.

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<sup>23</sup> The United States Administration of Alaska: The Army Phase, 1867-1877. By Stanley Ray Remsburg. pp. 334-5.

<sup>24</sup> Congressional Serial Set, Issue 1425

<sup>25</sup> A Northern Notebook, by Bob DeArmond. Fairbanks News-Miner. Tuesday, April 10, 1951. p 2.

## D. Cover Up

Just after the new year, General Davis received the reports of the three commissioned officers from Fort Wrangel. He acted quickly. On January 5, General Davis relieved Henry Kirke as post surgeon. When Kirke's replacement arrived in Fort Wrangel on January 10, Kirke received instructions to leave Alaska, and report to headquarters in San Francisco. Henry Kirke kept his career, but never came to Alaska again.

January 10 was also a big day for Benjamin Harnish, the prisoner inherited sixteen months before, when Battery I assumed the fort. Harnish languished sixteen months in confinement, awaiting his trial for desertion. He was likely confined in the guardhouse — where bodies were taken, Scutdoo spent his last night, and other events played out. On January 10, 1870, Benjamin Harnish was restored to duty, without a trial, and then discharged. The desertion charges simply disappeared. He was free to go, no questions asked.

General Davis wrote that he visited Fort Wrangel, called a meeting of the principal chiefs of the tribe, and found their version of events agreed in “all essential points” with the officer's reports. General Davis included a line in his report, that Scutdoo “was more or less under the influence of liquor,” a statement not supported by either Borrowe or Loucks's reports. Newspapers would report it as fact.

In Washington, D.C., the Secretary of War received the written reports, along with General Davis' glowing endorsement of his officers conduct. Already, newspapers along the west coast published accounts of the bombardment. Alaska was shrouded in mystery. The public was hungry to know more about the village in this place the newspapers called Wrangel. And Vincent Colyer was ready, with stories to tell.

*# Greensleeves*

# Ch 9. Fallout

## A. Newspaper Stories

One of the first newspapers to report on the bombardment was Victoria, British Columbia's Daily Colonist. The story moved down the coast, showing up in California before the end of January. Notices of Leon Smith's death appeared in papers in the South and the North.

On February 19, 1870, Harper's magazine ran a full page of Vincent Colyer's watercolors of Fort Wrangel and Kaach.xan.a'kw, alongside a stern rebuke of William Borrowe, stating:

The villagers, Mr. Colyer thinks, will now be afraid to occupy their houses again for the winter, and will be greater sufferers by this act of the commandant.

The inhabitants were quiet, honest, and well-disposed toward the whites, and it is very much to be regretted that the commandant of the post should not have been more judicious in his treatment of them.<sup>26</sup>

## B. Congress Wants Answers

In March, the United States Senate passed a resolution asking the Secretary of War to investigate the event being called The Bombardment of Wrangel.

Who could write such a report? Who had information about the Indian village? Who had even seen the place?

Vincent Colyer accepted the job, with one month to do it. It took one month just to travel to Alaska, putting it out of reach. Tragically, this means Colyer's report included no interviews with Tlingit witnesses to the bombardment. Instead, Colyer combined the officers reports with what he collected in Fort Wrangel just two months before the bombardment.

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<sup>26</sup> Harpers magazine, Feb 19, 1870. p. 125-6.

## C. The Colyer Report

By the middle of April 1870, Congress had The Colyer Report. And it was brutal.

In his introduction, Vincent Colyer laid the blame squarely at the feet of the US Army.

The military reports show that this bombardment was the result of a wanton and unjustifiable killing of an Indian named Shawaan by Lieutenant Loucks, the second officer in command of the post.

This Indian, who was intoxicated, had severely bitten a woman's finger. The arrest of such a man as this is any day affected by two or three ordinary policemen in our cities with perfect ease and quietness.

Colyer did not challenge the facts in the officers' reports. Instead, he reached into his trove of information collected in Fort Wrangel, to address the abuses he personally witnessed.

Colyer told the story of catching hundreds of gallons of distilled spirits coming into Fort Wrangel, marked for the officers' use, and how William Borrowe only acted because Colyer pressed him. Colyer also told about encountering the Tlingit man, badly beaten in front of Leon Smith's store, and Borrowe and Loucks' ambivalent reaction. Colyer held nothing back, writing:

Nowhere else that I have visited is the absolute uselessness of soldiers so apparent as in Alaska... The soldiers will have whisky, and the Indians are equally fond of it. The free use of this by both soldiers and Indians, together with the other debaucheries between them, rapidly demoralize both.

Colyer published a letter from William Duncan, the missionary founder of Metlakatla. In polite but clear language, Duncan let loose:

The blood of poor Captain Smith, lately shot at Fort Wrangel, lies, I am sorry to say, at the door of the military authority there, while both Indian and soldier are reciprocating their vices, and both being plunged into utter ruin. The accounts I have received from time to

time of the conduct of the soldiers in the Indian camps of the coast of Alaska are truly shocking.

Vincent Colyer published a letter from Harry G. Williams, who visited Fort Wrangel about the same time as Colyer, and who got to know post surgeon Henry Kirke. In private quarters, Kirke regaled Williams with stories about the ill treatment of Natives by the Army: the alcohol, venereal disease, and disrespect. Kirke described how some Natives would “sometimes sacrifice nearly everything in their possession” to acquire liquor. The rattle and pipe obtained by Melville Loucks may have fit this pattern, for Loucks had no attachment to the sacred significance of either object, and he may have looked upon them as objects of value or curiosity.

According to Williams, Henry Kirke knew exactly who was to blame:

I regret to say that men cannot be blamed for following examples set by their superiors, the consequences of which is, the Indian women become mere concubines, at the will of those whose duty it is to try and elevate and not degrade them. These women are never known to seek any such degrading intercourse, but permit it merely for the pecuniary gain it affords them. Justice, honor, and manhood point the finger of scorn, and cry shame to such men with virtuous, noble wives and children, even to stoop to such acts!<sup>27</sup>

Kirke is clearly alluding to William Borrowe. Melville Loucks was a bachelor, William Borrowe had a wife and children. In private, Kirke talked frankly about the Army’s treatment of the Natives. In his report, Kirke revealed nothing.

The prize piece of Colyer’s research may have been a letter from the late Leon Smith, written just weeks before he was shot by Scutdoo. Smith admitted he knew nothing about any other tribe of Indians in Alaska, but this tribe around Fort Wrangel was “quiet, and well disposed to the whites.” He listed several of the items he traded that were popular with the local Natives, mentioning molasses. Everyone knew molasses was popular

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<sup>27</sup> Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners, p. 112-113.

for making distilled spirits. Every story Colyer had about Leon Smith involved alcohol, in some way. Leon Smith's voice from the grave added another testament to Colyer's report.

Colyer included letters from several others, all echoing the same point: the Tlingit are smart, industrious, and eager to trade. If there was trouble, it did not start with them.

## **E. Fort Wrangel Abandoned**

Published in April 1870, the Colyer Report exposed the Army's roughshod management of Alaska, its indulgence and vice, and its morally corruptive effect. Newspapers published complete tracts, including Colyer's blame of the commanders in Fort Wrangel for the entire bombardment.

One month later, the Army ordered William Borrowe to report to Sitka, where he stayed for two months, leaving Melville Loucks in charge of Fort Wrangel. When Melville Loucks became ill in July, Borrowe returned on July 14 to reassume command. Melville Loucks was sent to San Francisco, never to return to Fort Wrangel again.

Then, in August 1870, the Army made it official: Battery I was ordered to vacate Fort Wrangel, and report to Sitka. No replacements would be coming.

On September 27, 1870, Battery I cleared out its shelves, tents, stores, and ordinance. The group boarded the steamer Newbern, and set course for Sitka. The Army was done with Fort Wrangel.

## **F. Discharged**

And the Army was also done with William Borrowe and Melville Loucks. Loucks was honorably discharged on December 10, 1870, using a new rule that allowed the Army to discharge officers against their will. He was 29.

Borrowe's discharge came a few weeks later, on January 2, 1871, just days after the one-year anniversary of the bombardment. There would be no presidential reprieve this time. He was out for good.<sup>28</sup> He was 34.

The Army's experiment in Fort Wrangel had been costly, cumbersome, and—in the end—unnecessary.

## *# In the Bleak Midwinter*

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<sup>28</sup> War Department, Adjutant General's Office, Jan 2 1871, General Order 1.

# Ch 10. Epilogue

## A. Angelina Muller

Angelina Muller survived the loss of her finger. She had more children, including one born in Sitka in 1872. The genealogical record is scarce, but it suggests she passed away in 1881 at the age of 40.

## A. Arrested Men

Frederick Stahl, John Cassin, and James Hollywood—the men charged with supplying the alcohol that was the “immediate cause” of all the troubles—were let go. Stahl was let go quickly, but Cassin and Hollywood waited months for their trial, eventually securing a deal to get out on April 1, 1870, so long as they agreed to leave Alaska forever. William Borrowe personally ensured they left on the southbound mail steamer.<sup>29</sup>

## B. William King Lear

William King Lear went on to become one of Wrangell’s pioneer legends. When the Army left Fort Wrangel, it placed William King Lear in charge as caretaker. One year later, King Lear purchased the fort for \$600, the sole bidder. He turned the Hospital Building into a dancehall. When the Army returned a few years later, it reclaimed the fort over King Lear’s protests. And when the Army left again, it retired King Lear’s dancehall for good, and handed the building over to Amanda McFarland, the Presbyterian missionary, to run a boarding house and school for young Native girls. King Lear lived in Fort Wrangel long enough to see it incorporate as the City of Wrangell in 1903. He died in 1915 at the age of 83.

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<sup>29</sup> From The United States Administration of Alaska by Stanley Ray Remsberg



## C. Melville Loucks

In 1881, West Point published a roll of its alumni. It wrote, Melville R. Loucks, class of 1864, “history since 1870 unknown.”<sup>30</sup> After he was forced out of the Army in December 1870, Melville Loucks returned to Martinsburg, New York, his hometown. He died two years later, in 1872, a few days before his 31st birthday.

In recent times, the Tlingit rattle he acquired sold at auction for \$48,800. The Tlingit pipe he acquired is appraised between \$60,000 and \$90,000. Both items are listed by Bonhams auction house as “property of various owners.”

## D. William Borrowe

After the Army discharged William Borrowe, he moved his family to California, where he went by the name Captain Borrowe.

By 1874, he worked in Los Angeles as a ticket agent for the Pacific Mail Steamship Company. In June, he was fired, arrested, and charged with six counts of embezzlement.<sup>31</sup> The prosecution ultimately abandoned the case.<sup>32</sup> Borrowe was a free man, but out of a job.<sup>33</sup>

He got into roadwork, bidding on city contracts for street repair work. He once lodged a protest when he lost a bid to a man who accidentally bid on the job and won.<sup>34</sup> Another man accused Borrowe of performing “improper work on grading.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Twelfth Annual Reunion of the Associates of the Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy, at West Point, New York. June 9, 1881. p. 109.

<sup>31</sup> The San Francisco Examiner (San Francisco, California) · 2 Jun 1874, Tue · Page 3

<sup>32</sup> Los Angeles Herald (Los Angeles, California) · 26 Jun 1874, Fri · Page 2

<sup>33</sup> Los Angeles Evening Express (Los Angeles, California) · 30 Jun 1874, Tue · Page 1

<sup>34</sup> Los Angeles Herald (Los Angeles, California) · 18 Dec 1874, Fri · Page 3

<sup>35</sup> Los Angeles Herald (Los Angeles, California) · 12 Mar 1875, Fri · Page 3

By the end of 1874, he was hired as an agent of the Commercial Insurance Company.<sup>36</sup> But by 1878, things started to come apart. Borrowe and his wife were sued, and in August 1878, a judge ordered their two plots of land in Santa Monica, and the buildings thereon, to be seized and sold at auction.<sup>37</sup> The next month, a notice appeared in the newspapers, disavowing Borrowe as an insurance agent:

The public is hereby notified that William Borrowe, better known as Captain Borrowe, has no authority to solicit insurance, take application for renewals, make collections, receipt for premiums or perform any other business for the... Companies... for which I am Agent: and any business done by him in relation to said Companies will be repudiated by me. Edward Leake. Los Angeles.<sup>38</sup>

Around the end of the century, Borrowe found appointments to boards<sup>39</sup> of several organizations, including a church.<sup>40</sup> But it did not last. On September 17, 1901, the San Francisco Examiner published the headline: Borrowe's Borrow Ends in Sorrow. It read:

William Borrowe... was arrested yesterday on a charge of obtaining money under false pretenses made by the Bank of California... Borrowe obtained money from the bank during the past year on four notes aggregating \$3,600, and gave as security credits with large corporations and firms, which he said had been approved by various concerns. The bank readily loaned him the money, as he was well known... When the notes matured Borrowe failed to meet them and the bank attempted to recover on the collateral. It is alleged as the basis of the warrant that all accounts were spurious and that the names signed to them were either fictitious or forgeries... He would not discuss his dealings with the bank.<sup>41</sup>

In 1908, William Borrowe passed away at the age of 73 in San Francisco.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Los Angeles Evening Express (Los Angeles, California) · 7 Nov 1874, Sat · Page 3

<sup>37</sup> Los Angeles Herald (Los Angeles, California) · 27 Aug 1878, Tue · Page 4

<sup>38</sup> Los Angeles Evening Express (Los Angeles, California) · 28 Oct 1878, Mon · Page 2

<sup>39</sup> The Record-Union (Sacramento, California) · 1 Apr 1891, Wed · Page 3

<sup>40</sup> The San Francisco Call (San Francisco, California) · 20 Feb 1895, Wed · Page 10

<sup>41</sup> The San Francisco Examiner (San Francisco, California) · 17 Sep 1901, Tue · Page 7

<sup>42</sup> The Californian (Salinas, California) · 23 Nov 1908, Mon · Page 4

His life was a litany of crimes of broken trust: forgery, embezzlement, and fraud. In Fort Wrangel, he brought together the two things in his life that had earned him accolades: his mastery of artillery, and his ruthlessness with Native Americans. And it was his undoing.

## **E. Chief Shakes V**

Chief Shakes V, Kaawishte, lived another eight years after the bombardment. He had seen more drastic change to the Tlingit world than any of the men to be called Chief Shakes. He negotiated with the Russians, the British, Americans, and more. When he died, he was photographed lying in state, wearing his clan symbols, surrounded by his artifacts of cultural patrimony. His gravesite in Wrangell sits prominently on a hill overlooking Wrangell Harbor, directly east of Shake's Island.

## **F. William Tamaree**

William Tamaree lived out his years in the town that had been his boyhood home. He married Tillie Paul-Tamaree, who was also in the village during the bombardment. Tillie's grown sons, William and Lewis, were active in the Alaska Native Brotherhood, and Tamaree often lent his clan knowledge in support of Alaska Native ancestral claims. William Tamaree passed away in 1956.

## **G. General's speech**

In February 2020, Air Force Lt. General Thomas A. Bussiere, head of the Alaskan Command, met with Alaska Native leaders to discuss the legacy of the bombardments, including Kake and Angoon. Said General Bussiere:

If not now, when? And if not us, who? The relationship between the Alaska Native community and the Department of Defense is strong,

and it has been strong for decades. I think just out of mutual respect and honoring of their traditions. I think it's worth the efforts.<sup>43</sup>

## *# Carol of the Bells*

Wrangell History Unlocked is produced by Ronan Rooney. Music from today's episode was performed by Mary Rooney.

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<sup>43</sup> Setting it right: Military could apologize for bombarding Alaska Native villages, by Ben Hohenstatt. Feb 10, 2020. <https://www.juneauempire.com/news/setting-it-right-military-could-apologize-for-bombarding-alaska-native-villages/>