

Letter to John Washington, 31 January 1862

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)

[0001]

H. M. S. Pioneer, R Zambesi

31st January 1862

Dear Captain Washington

This morning H. M. S.
Gorgon hove in sight off East
Luabo with a brig in tow having
the portable steamer & M^{rs} L. on
board. We go out to her tomorrow
morning. Captain Wilson came
in over a very rough bar on
account of seeing us here while
we had come only to wood,
there being but little to be had at
Kongone. Rae came with him
He has the tools you mention
for roadmaking which are
amply sufficient, and 3 casks
of ale for which accept my
best thanks

I am very much distressed
to find by your letter of August
that you have been led to believe
that the naval officer selected
by you for the Pioneer "returned
without any reason". I
refrained from giving you

[0002]

anything derogatory, and left him
to "give his own explanation"
but rubbed out the words now
underlined at his suggestion
as likely to convey the idea that
anything like a quarrel between
him & me had occurred, but
I never anticipated that there
would be no reason alledged
to you. I expected that he would

put the reason in the most
favourable light for himself
and was quite willing that
it should be so. He claimed
to be set over D^r Kirk &
had not a syllable to support
his claim. D^r K. offered
assurances that no interference
would take place on his
part in the management
of the ship while I was alive
nor after my decease until
the pleasure of the Foreign
Office should be known
but "Oh dear no he would
not play second fiddle to anyone"

[0003]

D^r K. could not reasonably be
placed under May without an
order to that effect, so it became
a simple question of justice &
fair play. As far as I was
concerned it was Kirk and
knowledge of the country - people
and languages - or May without
knowledge of either, but a
verbal assertion of appointment
to a naval position in the Expedition
which has no existence. He
could not manage a wooding
party of natives, so I had to do
all that, leaving May to sit on
his easy chair. His eye was
not accustomed to river
work, though he promised to
become expert, so I had to pilot
him or see the ship run
aground perpetually in the
Rovuma - and all the claims
referred to a time when I
should have "kicked the bucket"
not over seemly from a
weak dawdling whose chances

[0004]

of life were certainly inferior to
mine. I have never had a serious
illness since my return - Had
marched on foot to Sesheke &
never spared myself - And as this

was the man of whom you told
me in London that "should any
one set up his back as May had done in the Niger I would
be justified in landing him on
the first island" I thought it was
best to keep Kirk & let him go
his way quietly. I respectfully
maintain that in so doing I was
guilty of no disregard to your
feelings, and I very earnestly
beg a reconsideration of your
sentence against against me. I entreat
you not to throw us overboard
though it is a fact that civil
& naval officers never will
get on well together. Continue
your kindness and if life is
granted me I shall be no
discredit to you. I write this in
a hurry feeling very sorry that
my conduct which I still think good
has been disapproved D. Livingstone