

# Letter to John Washington

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[0001]

H. M. S. Pioneer, R Zambesi

31<sup>st</sup> 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<sup>rs</sup> 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

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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  
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<sup>r</sup> Kirk &  
had not a syllable to support  
his claim. D<sup>r</sup> 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" .

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D<sup>r</sup> 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

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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