

COL. MCKAY TO COL. McDONALL.

(War-1812.)

PRAIRIE DU CHIEN

FORT MCKAY July 27th 1814—

*Lt. Col. R. McDonall, Commanding Michilimackinac and its Dependencies &c. &c.**

SIR,

I have the honor to communicate to you that I arrived here the 17th inst at 12 o'clock, my force amounting to 650 men of which 120 were Michigan Fencibles, Canadian Volunteers & Officers of the indian department the remainder indians who proved to be perfectly useless—I found that the Enemy had a small fort situated on a height immediately behind the Village with two Block Houses perfectly safe from Indians and that they had six pieces cannon and Sixty or Seventy effective men, officers included—That lying at anchor in the middle of the Mississippi immediately in front of the Fort was a very large Gun Boat, called "Governor Clark, Gun Boat No. 1." She mounts 14 pieces Cannon some six, three and a number of Cohorns manned with 70 or 80 men with musquets and measures 70 feet keel, this floating Block House is so constructed that she can be rowed in any direction the men on board being perfectly safe from small arms while they can use their own to the greatest advantage, she goes remarkably fast particularly down the current being rowed by 32 Oars—

At half past 12 o'clock I sent Capt. Anderson with a Flag of Truce to invite them to surrender which they refused, my intention was not to have made an attack till next morning at day light, but it being impossible to control the Indians I ordered our Gun to play upon the Gun Boat which she did with a surprizing good effect for in the course of three hours the time the action lasted she fired 86 rounds, two thirds of which went into "Governor Clarke," they kept up a constant fire on us both from the Boat and Fort, we were about an hour between two fires having run our Gun up within musquet shott of the Fort, from whence we beat the Boat out of her station she cut her cable and run down the Current and sheltered under an Island—We were obliged to desist it being impossible with our little Barges to attempt to board her and our only Gun in pursuit of her would have exposed our whole camp to the Enemy she therefore made her escape.

* I immediately sent off a canoe with three men, an Ioway that came from McKinac with me & two of six Sauks that joined me in the fox river, I gave

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them four Kegs Gun Powder and ordered them to pass the Gun Boat and get as soon as possible to the Rapids at the Rock River, where it is generally believed the Gun Boat will run aground, and have all the Sauks assembled to annoy the men and prevent their disembarking to get firewood &c. The next morning I dispatched two boats under Capt. Grignon with an officer and twenty six men to go in pursuit of her and observe her motions. They fell in with her the day after leaving this but having only small arms could do her no injury—Capt Grignon summoned her to surrender to no purpose, he however followed her up till within a league of the Rapids, when they met another of the Enemy's Gun Boats, tho' smaller arranged in the same manner as the "Governor Clark," the wind favouring her she made after our Boats but could not overtake them, she in a short time threw her anchor & Capt. Grignon very improperly made the best of his way here since when I have had no news from there, notwithstanding I have dispatched canoes almost daily ever since.**

On the nineteenth finding there were only six rounds round shott remaining including three of the Enemys we had picked up, the day was employed making lead bullets for the Gun and throwing up two Breastworks one within 700 yards and the other within 450 yards of the Fort, at six in the evening everything being prepared I marched to the first breastwork, from whence I intended to throw in the six remaining rounds, iron ball, red hot into the Fort in order to set it on fire, the only apparent resource, at the moment the first Ball was about being put into the Cannon, a white flag was put out at the Fort and immediately an officer came down with a note and surrendered. It being now too late I deferred making them deliver up their arms in form till next morning but immediately placed a strong guard in the Fort and took possession of the artillery. From the time of our landing till they surrendered the Indians kept up a constant but perfectly useless fire upon the Fort, the distances from where they fired was too great to do execution even had the Enemy been exposed to view.

I am happy to inform that notwithstanding every man in the Michigan Fencibles, Canadian Volunteers and officers in the indian department behaved as well as I could possibly wish tho' in the midst of a hot fire not a man was even wounded except three Indians that is one Puant, one Follesavoine and one Scioux all severely but not dangerously. * I beg you will excuse my not having it in my power to give you a full account of the things taken in the Fort, for a man having to do with Indians in my present situation is more tormented than if in the infernal regions.** One Lieut

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U. S. Regt, 1 Militia Capt, 1 Militia Lieut, 3 Serjeants, 3 Corporals, 2 Musicians, 53 Privates, 1 Commissary, 1 Interpreter have been made prisoners 1 Iron Six Pounder mounted on Garrison Carriage 1 Iron Three Pounder on Field Carriage, 3 Swivels, 61 Stands Arms, 4 Swords, 1 Field Carriage for Six Pounder and a good deal of ammunition, 28 Barrels Pork and 46 Barrels Flour, these are the principal articles found in the Fort when surrendered.

I will now take the liberty to request your particular attention to Captns. Rolette & Anderson the former for his activity in many instances but particularly during the action, the action having commenced unexpectedly he run down from the upper end of the village with his Compy. thro' the heat of the fire, to receive orders & before & since in being instrumental in preserving the citizens being quite ruined by pillaging Indians, and the latter for his unwearied attention in keeping everything in order during the rout and his activity in following up the cannon during the action and assisting in transporting the ammunition. Lieut. Porlier of Capt. Anderson's Compy. Lieuts Graham & Bribois of the Indian Department, Capt. Dease of the Prairie du Chien Militia & Lieut Powell of the Green Bay, all acted with that courage and activity so becoming Canadian Militia or Volunteers, the interpreters also behaved well but particularly Mr. St. Germain from the Sault Ste Marie and Mr. Rainville, Sioux interpreter, they absolutely prevented their Indians committing any outrages in the plundering way. Commissary Honoir who acted Lieut in Capt. Rolette's Compy, whose singular activity in saving and keeping an exact account of provisions surprised me and without which we must unavoidably have lost much of that essential article. The Michigan Fencibles who manned the Gun behaved with great courage, coolness and regularity. As to the Serjt of Artillery too much cannot be said for him for the fate of the day and our successes are to be attributed in a great measure to his courage and well managed firing.

* I am sorry to be under the necessity of reproaching some of the Indians but Puants particularly for shameful depredations committed during the action on the 17th and since. Many of them (Puants) in place of meeting the enemy, immediately on their arrival run off to the farms killed the Inhabitants and Cattle and pillaged their Houses even to the covering off their Beds & leaving many without a second shirt to put on their backs. Even in the village they did the same outrages, breaking to pieces what they could not carry away, this prevented the Militia joining me absolutely required to keep guard over their Houses.

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The Sioux, Soteaux, Court Orielles and Part of the Follesavoines tho' perfectly useless obeyed my orders pretty well, but the Puants behaved in a most villainous manner, and was I permitted to decide their fate they should never receive a shilling's worth of presents from Government on the contrary I would cut them off to a man, they despise the idea of receiving orders from an officer that does not hold a Blanket in one hand & a piece of Pork in the other to pay them to listen to what he may have to say. Audaciously saying they are under no obligations to us but they have themselves preserved the Country. The moment they have finished pillaging and got their share of the prize they marched off except about ten men who are this instant in the act of cutting up the green wheat which if they do not desist I shall be compelled to confine them to the fort not only for the good of the citizens but for our own safety as provisions will be very scarce till after Harvest.**

Since the surrender of the Fort and the departure of the Puants the Inhabitants have all come forward and taken the oath of allegiance and are now doing duty on,patrole or otherwise as required.

*As to going down the Mississippi and returning by way of Chicago as was originally intended is now rendered impracticable for the present—No dependence whatever to be placed in the indians except the Sioux the others having abandoned me immediately on the receipt of their share of the prize, my trifling force of battalions cannot warrant anything Honorable** by making that tour.

I beg leave to remark that in case the intention is to retain this place a reinforcement of Fifty regular Troops would be necessary a quantity of ammunition for the Guns & Pork for their provisions—Flour can be procured here in a month and a half from this**

My reason for making this *remark is that my decided opinion is that from this to the fall an attack** may undoubtedly be looked for from below and if four or five of these floating Block Houses come *up armed as Governor Clark was our present force is certainly not equal to prevent these repulsing us unless more particularly favoured by providence than before**

As soon as I can get certain information of the Enemies situation & if I find they are fortifying themselves any where from *this to Fort Madison I will go down & try & dislodge them, But if I am well convinced there is no danger by leaving this, I will as soon as such news may be ascertained return to McKinac But not otherwise.

It was with much difficulty I preserved the prisoners from the Puants, but

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having made use of supplications then threats & at length they became less violent and at last by keeping a strong guard over them, the Indians went off doing them no injury.**

My intention was to have kept the prisoners here till I got certain information from* below & if the Enemy came here and fired a single shott to have sacrificed them to the Indians. But I am sorry that circumstances oblige me absolutely to send them to St Louis—by keeping them here any longer would cut me short of provisions, and as to sending them to McKinac, a sufficient force to guard them would leave me quite destitute of resources in case of an attempt from below the Enemy to recover the Post—I have therefore determined to send them off tomorrow morning & let them take their risk under a small guard.**

The Enemy had three men wounded in the Fort two severely but not dangerously, & *the other slightly** and report says five men were killed and 10 wounded in the Gun Boat but I should have expected more from the *more surely must have been killed and wounded from the great** number of men on board and the number of shotts that went into her. *I take the liberty to refer you to Robert Dickson Esqr. for his opinion respecting my Information of the Puants.

Report says that about 400 Cavalry are about this time to leave St Louis for here, if so they will give us our hands full.

I send this by *Indians express to the Green Bay from whence I have directed Mr. Porlier to send off a canoe to McKinac. I adopt this method being the shortest rout, from here by land the Indians will reach the Bay in four days & four from that to McKinac, which is the shortest passage that can possibly be expected.**

My force here at present amounts to about 300 that is 200 Michigan Volunteers & Militia, & 100 Sioux Sautaux Court Oreilles & Puants

I have the honor to be

Sir

Your most obedient humble Servant

WM. MCKAY

Lt. Col. comg.

[C 685-p 7.]

Supplement.

A few Sauks have arrived from the Rapids at the Rock River with two Canadians & bring the following information. On the 21st instant six American Barges three of which were armed were coming up & camped in

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the Rapids *that night**; that in the course of the night the party of Indians having the four Kegs gun Powder I sent from this on the 17th reached them. The Barges being camped at short distances from each other they on the 23d early in the morning attacked the lower, they killed about one hundred persons took five pieces Cannon burnt the Barge and the other Barges seeing this Disaster and knowing there were British Troops here run off. This is perhaps one of the most brilliant actions fought, by indians only since the commencement of the war. I think now there is little danger here for the present, but I have not the smallest doubt but an attempt will be made either this fall or early in the Spring. I will send off tomorrow for the cannon the size cannot be properly ascertained but from the description the indians give they are 2-3 Pounders & 3 Mortars. The Sauks, Renards & Kickapous were engaged in this action, they lost two men & one woman killed—to *give an idea how desperate the indians were, the women, even, jumping on board with their Hoes &c, some breaking heads & others breaking Casks, some trying to cut holes in her bottom to sink her, and others setting fire to her decks.** As one of the Barges was making from *Shore the Ioway that came from McKinac with me jumped on her deck & with his Hatchet cut a hole & fired his gun among the Americans in the Boat— then plunged into the River & made** his escape ashore.

Those indians came here for a supply of ammunition. I send them off to-morrow morning with ten Kegs Gun Powder and a few presents of goods &c.

It is very fortunate that I received your reinforcement of Gun Powder at the Bay, the demand for that article has been very great, as also for tobacco but both are nearly out now. I shall now go to work & have the fort &c put in as good repair as circumstances will admit.

I was taken very ill last evening with a swelling on the right side of the Head, and has kept me in a violent fever since. I believe it is what is generally called in Canada *the Mumps*.

I have the honor to be

Your very obedient & Humble Servant

WM. MCKAY

Lt. Col. comg.

Fort McKay 29th July 1814

Lt. Col. McDonall.

[C 685-p 15.]

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[NOTE—From the numerous crossings on the manuscript it is inferred that probably the foregoing was the original draft instead of the completed document finally forwarded to headquarters. Ed.]