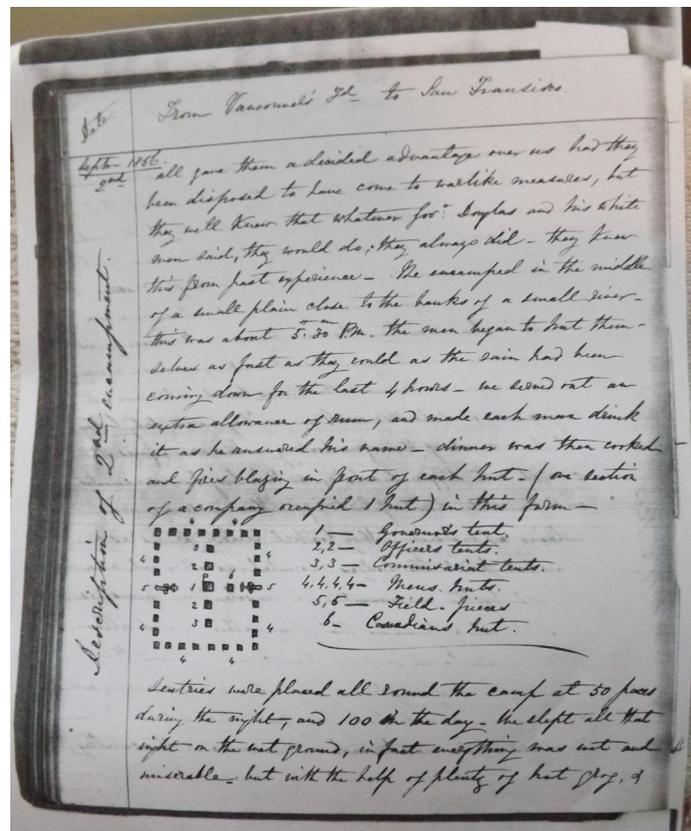


The Diary of Lieutenant George Palmer RN



In a preface to extracts from his grandfather's diary, in 2000 Colonel Palmer wrote:

"My grandfather was born in 1829 and entered the Royal Navy in 1845, rising to the rank of Rear Admiral. He was serving in HMS President, flagship of the Pacific Fleet, in August 1854 when the Anglo-French fleet attacked the Russian base at Petropaulovsk on the Kamchatka Peninsula. He was wounded in that attack.

In September 1855 he transferred to HMS Monarch (84 guns), Captain George Patey, and bearing the flag of Rear Admiral Henry William Bruce, Commander-in-Chief on the Pacific Station. On 9th May 1856 Monarch sailed from the Fleet's main base at Valparaiso and, after spending some time at Callao and the Sandwich Islands, dropped anchor in Esquimalt harbour, Vancouver Island on 11th August 1856."

Colonel Palmer provided the then Editor of the Quarterdeck with photocopies of pages from the original diary which related to HMS Trincomalee, together with a transcription in hard copy form. The following are extracts from Lieutenant George Palmer's diary in 1856:

“12 Aug. Party on shore, cutting wood. At 4pm arrived HMS Trincomalee from the Sandwich Islands.

13 Aug. Shifted topmasts. Although we did it in slow time, were very little over 2 hours.

15 Aug. Discharged 2 Marines to the ‘Trincomalee’ for passage to England.

19 Aug. Vancouver’s Island appears in the same rude state as it was two years ago – no wonder, as long as the Hudson’s Bay Company have the grant of the Island.

20-28 Aug. Beautiful weather – on the 26th dressed ship and fired a royal salute in honour of HRH Prince Albert’s birthday. Employed painting and watering. Parties on shore cutting down trees etc..

29 Aug. The ‘Otter’, a steamer belonging to the Hudson Bay Company, came round to Esquimalt. Supplied her with water butts. She is to tow the ‘Trincomalee’ round to Cowichan Bay.

30 Aug. 8am. Embarked on board the Hudson’s Bay Company’s steamer ‘Otter’, with two companies of Bluejackets – the Marines embarking on board the ‘Trincomalee’. The following is the list of the officers, seamen and marines who formed the expedition:

Comd Connolly, commanding the expedition – Lts Scott, Palmer & Miller and Messrs Evans and Price, commanding companies of bluejackets, 60 men each with 4 bearers to each company, the latter carry the mess kettles etc.

Lt Haverfield, commanding detachment of marines

Lts McMeekan, Clendon and Arbuckle, each in command of companies

Lt Scott RN taking charge of the 2 field pieces

The mates, midshipmen and non-commissioned officers, each with their respective companies.

The whole formed a detachment of 423 officers and men.

The little ‘Otter’, under command of Capt Mowett H.B.C. towed the Trincomalee in first rate style, averaging 5 knots per hour. We passed numerous islands, well-wooded and where deer were plentiful and, after steering through a narrow passage, anchored at 6pm at the head of Cowichan Bay. Directly we anchored the Indians came alongside in their canoes and professed great friendship. They well knew the object of the expedition as the Governor had sent word a fortnight previous that he was coming to take the assassin of an English settler.

31 Aug. As soon as it was high water (1pm) the whole force landed, each man carrying a blanket, rolled up and slung across his shoulders and a tin pannikin to his waist-belt. The Governor had landed with his Canadian guard (13 men) in order to reconnoitre and pick out a suitable place for debarkation. After pulling into the mouth of the river, which was rather shallow in some parts and very tortuous, we landed and marched the men up to a

hill where the Governor had pitched his tent – the 2 field pieces between the seamen and marines. After a little trouble and labour in getting the latter customers up, we encamped very snugly. This hill commanded the whole country within gunshot. The men were ordered to clear away the bush that was rather too thick to be comfortable on the right, which they did very smartly and everyone was hutted in good style, the camp kettles boiling and sentries placed in about two hours from our landing (4.30pm).

I was on guard the first night and visited the chain of sentries every hour. Kept a sharp lookout for any lurking Indians. About 2 o'clock in the middle watch I heard a sentry challenge on the right and, no answer being returned, I ran towards him. No answer being returned to his second challenge, I asked him if he saw anything and he said he saw something moving about near the bush. I turned the guard out and brought them down to the spot. By this time the Governor, Captain C and several of the officers and men had come down as they all slept with one eye open. We were on the point of firing into what I supposed to be an Indian covered with a blanket creeping along on all fours, when somebody cried out that it was a white dog! Lo and behold it was; this was our first adventure.

1 Sep. The Reveille was sounded at 4.30am and it began to drizzle but cleared up in about an hour. A section from each company went down to the river which ran at the foot of the hill to bathe and bring up water for breakfast. Their being relieved by others, the whole force was ready for inspection, arms clean etc., and on parade by 8.30am. However smoking black pipes appeared to be the order of the day as, soon after parade, the rain came down. As everyone was hutted, we smoked, told stories and sang songs till many of us fancied ourselves in the Crimea and carousing after a battle. The Governor had in the meantime sent a friendly message to the chiefs of the village in which the murderer resided and an answer or deputation could not be expected until the next day.

2 Sep. Two of the chiefs came to have a 'talk' with the Governor. They said they could not give the man up and the Governor must go and take him. They said that he was a bad man but had some friends, however they would do all in their power to keep on friendly terms with us, etc., etc..

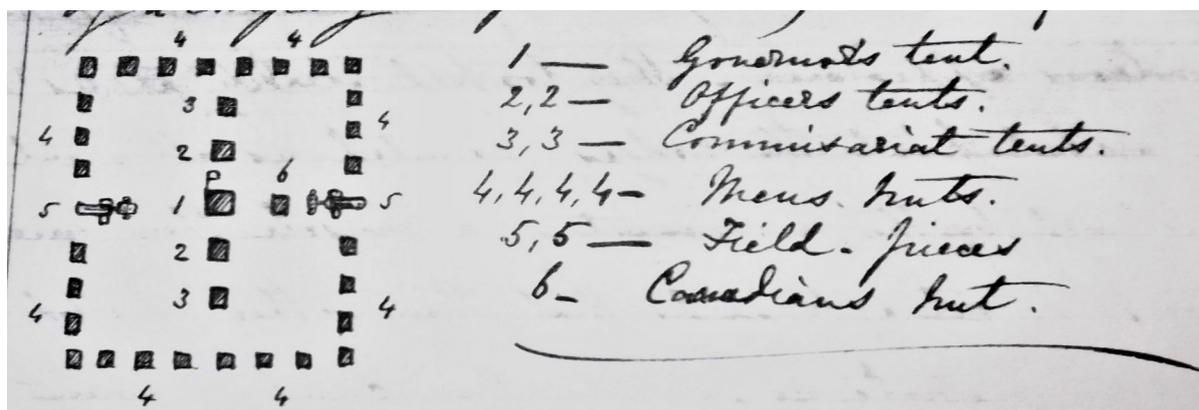
At 9 am we made ready for the march and left the encampment, crossing the river in 7 or 8 small canoes. The 2 field pieces were dismantled and conveyed by water the whole way to our second encampment. The first mile was without any path and amongst long grass about 7 feet high. However the advanced guard, composed of a Lt of Marines and 30 men, cleared away all obstacles with the assistance of the Canadians and our own pioneers.

In about an hour we got into what they called a track, but nobody but Indians could attempt to get through the trunks of trees, the bushes, etc. that thickly beset this same track. However we managed to jam through them and, after crossing the river at two different bends, we found ourselves in comparatively clear country. The rain began to fall heavily and everyone was wet through to the skin.

We passed an Indian village about 3pm – all the braves turned out, armed with long guns (flint locks) and knives. They were a dirty looking lot, but most of them fine looking, active men, faces all covered with different colours and their long hair, ornamented with the white down of birds, gave them a savage and hideous appearance. They looked steadily at us as we marched past the lodges, counted us all, but never betrayed by the movement of a

muscle their uneasiness. We found out afterwards that they rather regretted allowing us to penetrate so far into their country when they might, had they been so pleased, have caused us serious annoyance as our road was so bad, our field pieces worse than useless on the march, and our ignorance of the country, combined with our limited experience of bush fighting, all gave them a decided advantage over us had they been disposed to have come to warlike measures, but they well knew that whatever Governor Douglas and his white men said, they would do, they always did – they knew this from past experience -.

We encamped in the middle of a small plain close to the banks of a small river, this was about 5.30pm. The men began to hut themselves as best as they could as the rain had been coming down for the last 4 hours – we served out an extra allowance of rum, and made each man drink it as he answered his name – dinner was then cooked and fires blazing in front of each hut (One section of a company occupied 1 hut) in this form:



Sentries were placed all round the camp at 50 paces during the night, and 100 in the day. We slept all that night on the wet ground, in fact everything was wet and miserable, but with the help of plenty of hot grog, and tobacco we slept tolerably well. [...] We fancied ourselves nearer than ever to the Crimea that night.

3 Sep. The next morning was drier; showers every now and then. About 10am, there was a report that the murderer was in the village we had passed yesterday evening, about a mile from the camp. At 2 pm, all the Indians were seen advancing towards the camp, with their war paint on, and making a hideous low, yelling,"

At this point the diary has the entry: FOR THE REST SEE PRIVATE JOURNAL.

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