

NEW REVENUE STEAMER.

L E T T E R

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY,

TRANSMITTING

Recommendations for a new revenue steamer.

JANUARY 18, 1884.—Referred to the Committee on Commerce and ordered to be printed.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT,
January 16, 1884.

SIR: I have the honor to transmit herewith a copy of a letter from Capt. M. A. Healy, commander of the revenue steamer Corwin, upon the subject of making provision for a new revenue steamer for duty in Alaskan waters.

Captain Healy presents urgent reasons for providing the vessel recommended, prominent among which are the following:

1. The insufficiency of the present vessel—the steamer Corwin—in coal-carrying capacity for the long distances comprised in the cruising grounds, it appearing that, with the bunkers full of coal and a deck-load in sacks, she is able to make the runs direct from point to point only, and is frequently compelled to omit a part of her work to return to the coal depot for fuel.

2. The need of more commodious quarters for officers and men than the present vessel affords, the relief work in Alaska frequently requiring that the vessel bring away the people of stranded or ice-crushed whalers or other shipwrecked persons. The letter shows that within the last four years more than 150 distressed mariners have been brought away from the Arctic by the revenue vessel.

3. The necessity of a greater spread of canvas than is possible on the Corwin, to render the vessel able, independent of her steam machinery, to weather the tempestuous seas of that region; for in those remote waters were the machinery to break down repairs would be impossible.

It appears by the letter that the distance from San Francisco to Ounalaska (the only coaling station in the Alaskan region) is 2,100 miles; that thence to Attou, the westernmost island of the Aleutian chain, is 850 miles, making a distance of 1,700 miles to go and return; that from Ounalaska to Saint Michael's is 900 miles; and from Saint Michael's to

Point Barrow, the most northerly part of Alaska, is 1,500 miles. Although the vessel cruises as much as practicable under canvas in order to save coal, it is necessary to depend entirely on coal in her movements amongst numerous islands, fields of ice, and treacherous currents of the northern waters.

The fact that no vessels of the revenue marine have ever met with serious accident in this rigorous Arctic cruising is attributed to the good judgment and excellent professional skill possessed by their commanders; but, with the vessels now available for this work, it is hardly to be expected that such immunity from accident will continue.

The Treasury Department, with the revenue vessels, is required to look after a variety of Government interests in the vast territorial possession of the country, embracing the extensive seal-fisheries, from which a large revenue is derived, and other valuable fur-bearing interests, the only means of subsistence to the natives; the protection of our northwestern whaling fleet; the maintenance of peace and good order amongst the natives; the extension of mail facilities to the people resident there; besides the prevention of smuggling, and the suppression of illicit trade in breech-loading arms and rum prohibited by law. In truth, whatever government exists over more than nine tenths of this great territory is enforced by the Treasury Department through the annual visitation of the revenue-marine vessels.

The growing importance of this country will demand better facilities in the future than have been available in the past. This subject has been twice brought to the attention of Congress in the Finance Report, (See page 34, 1881, and page 59, 1883.)

I deem the matter of such urgency as to impel me to recommend that the sum of \$175,000 be immediately appropriated for the construction of a new steamer to perform the new duties indicated above. This sum is believed the proper amount to furnish a vessel of suitable dimensions for the work required.

A reason which makes immediate provision for this vessel more imperative is the present condition of the *Corwin*, as indicated by the reports made upon that vessel. With such-considerable repairs as will be put upon her the current season, it is deemed that she will not be able to make a cruise after the one of 1884 without general and extensive repairs to the hull, and new boilers. At such time the Department would have no vessel to detail for this important service should Congress fail to provide for the new one.

Very respectfully,

CHAS. J. FOLGER,
Secretary.

Hon. JOHN G. CARLISLE,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

UNITED STATES REVENUE MARINE,
REVENUE STEAMER CORWIN,
San Francisco, November 23, 1883.

SIR: In submitting specifications for repairs to the revenue steamer *Corwin*, I would respectfully state that they are made as nearly specific as practicable. The repairs asked for will put the vessel in as good a condition for the coming season as she can be made without going to a great expense.

I would here most respectfully, yet earnestly, add my recommendation to those of many previous commanders, that a larger vessel be constructed for service in Alaskan waters.

That the *Corwin* is entirely too small a vessel for the services required of her on her annual cruises north has been repeatedly represented to the Department; yet she is the best adapted of all the vessels in the service for the work. The *Corwin* measures but 227 tons burden, stowing only 65 tons of coal in her bunkers; and to enable her to reach the first coaling station, which is 2,100 miles from San Francisco, she is obliged to carry a deck-load of coal of 35 or 40 tons, leaving not a foot of clear deck space. This, together with six months' provisions for her crew, and other outfits, puts the vessel so low in the water as to render all idea of comfort, either fore or aft, an absurdity, and the vessel in anything but a safe, sea-going trim from the time she leaves San Francisco until her return. She may be said to be literally under water, being so deeply laden that in ordinary weather she throws spray from stem to stern; and when it is taken into consideration that rain falls in those latitudes about twenty-five days in each month, and that high winds prevail the greater portion of the time, the dangers and discomforts in a vessel of the *Corwin's* dimensions can be imagined, not to mention the dangers with which she is threatened when beset by the ice. I believe the *Corwin* to have as good a record as any other Government vessel afloat, and built as strong as wood and iron can make her, but being overtaxed, as she annually is, I must attribute her escape from serious mishaps or loss to a special protection of Providence.

It must be obvious to the Department that the utility of a vessel carrying the limited amount of coal the *Corwin* does must be seriously hampered when it is considered that Ounalaska is the only coaling station in Alaskan waters, and that is 2,100 miles from San Francisco, 1,100 miles from Sitka, 600 miles from Kodiak, 850 miles from Attou, 900 miles from Saint Michael's, and 1,500 miles from Point Barrow.

All of these points bear in different directions from Ounalaska, and to go and return, as we are obliged to do, for the purpose of coaling, makes the distances to be traversed double those given above. It must be seen that after making the points named there is but little margin left on coal to cruise about the thousand and one islands and settlements that intervene.

Moreover, the *Corwin* has not sufficient accommodations for the officers assigned to her, one being obliged to swing in a cot during the cruise. We are often called upon to take distressed seamen on board; a very small addition to our crew so crowds the men's quarters as to make both rescued and rescuers very uncomfortable. During the past four years the *Corwin* has brought down from the north upwards of 150 distressed seamen and miners.

The severity of the weather and dangers to navigation in the northern latitudes may be imagined when I inform the Department that there are about forty-five vessels of all kinds cruising in the Arctic every summer, and there is an average of four wrecks a year. Three have been lost this year, and a like number were wrecked last year.

That a vessel is indispensable in Alaskan waters, both for the enforcement of law and to assist distressed shipping, cannot be disputed, and I feel assured that the Department, understanding the difficulties and dangers of the station, will provide a suitable vessel. For the safety and comfort of those placed on this service, and the better performance of duty, I would most respectfully ask that a vessel be built sufficiently large to stow a reasonable amount of coal to give the officers

and crew more comfortable quarters, and to spread a much larger area of canvas. I would also urge the necessity of having the vessel completed, if Congress makes the required appropriation, in time for duty in the spring of 1885, as the Corwin will hardly be in condition to make a cruise in the Arctic that year.

I am, very respectfully,

M. A. HEALY,
Captain, United States Revenue Marine.

Hon. CHARLES J. FOLGER,
Secretary of the Treasury, Washington, D. C.

○