

1814, April 16

Reporting on escape of four prisoners from Newcastle; sending returns; re urgent requirements (Reel 6044; 4/1729 pp.372-4)

Newcastle 16th April 1814

Sir

I beg leave to state for the information of His Excellency the Governor that the undermentioned prisoners Edward Scarr, Joseph Burridge, Herbert Styles and John Price all of whom are sailors effected their escape from this Settlement on the night of the 7th Inst. about 11 O'clock with a strong ebb tide and breeze from the NW, in the Sloop Speedwell, The following Stratagem I have since learnt they adopted to effect their object. I had sent the Launch in the morning up the river to bring down a load of posts and railing in returning she grounded on a flat about half a mile from the camp as the night appeared very boisterous and fearing she might receive some damage I directed the camp overseer to go with four steady men at high water to get her off who sent the abovementioned people they cut the launch adrift and went alongside the sloop under pretence of having been sent by me to borrow a grapple to assist in getting her off the Master contrary to the port regulations allowed them to come on board as appears by the inclosed deposition they knocked him down and secured the other one of the sloops crew having slept on shore also contrary to port orders.

They took possession of the vessel without creating alarm on shore and immediately got her underweigh(sic)

The Military patrol(sic) seeing her under sail gave the [] to the night constable who thought it was a vessel coming in and call'd the pilot and the Camp overseer who reported the circumstance to me. I proceeded directly to the beach found it to be the Sloop Speedwell and should have been able to have retaken her had their been a boat on the settlement seaworthy.

I however sent a boat belonging to W [] Evans the only one on the beach with a party of Soldiers and the pilot to attempt it but she being small and in a leaky shatter'd state the party were nearly swamped before they could reach the shore. I also beg leave to call His Excellency's attention to the want of Ammunition for the two six pounders there not being a single round for them on the post. Even after the return of the boat had I ammunition I might have disabled her as she appeared to be than within shot. I Trust His Excellency will see the necessity of furnishing the Settlement with boats otherwise the vessels can never be secure; After the runaway's got clear of the land they gave the master and one seaman a boat belonging to the schooner Governor Hunter who was then riding at anchor in Hunter's River within hail of the sloop when taken. They reached the Settlement the 8th Inst. about 7 [], the Masters report of the sloop is that she was in a very unfit state for Sea being leaky not quarter ballast, no fuel and little water in hopes necessity would oblige them to put in on the north side. I dispatched a party along that coast they returned on the 12th Inst. – but with no intelligence but they wreck of her boat; Theirs little doubt they must have all perish'd the weather being very bad, one of the Soldiers being unable to proceed on his return got spear'd and

stripped by the Natives of his clothes arms and ammunition, From circumstances I have since learnt I have reason to suspect that the Camp Overseer Thomas Lawson was accessory to their escape but have not yet been able to get sufficient information to convict him. I have dismissed him from the situation and turned him into the working gang for even allowing him to be innocent of their design he should have gone with them himself agreeable to my directions

Inclosed you have the following Returns &c, &c

Viz

Statement of the Settlement

Bill of lading

Monthly Labor

Requisition for Stores

Deposition

Returns of Government stock

do „ of Prisoners Received

do „ of do „ Rum

do „ of do „ Sentence expired

I have also to remark that the Government Labor is much obstructed for the want of carts the Wheelwright is a very old man only fit to keep them in repair,

The Blacksmiths original sentence is expired it is impossible to carey(sic) on the work of this settlement without one, also a hailer is much wanting

I have the Honor
to be

Sir

Your Obed.- Serv.

T. Thompson Com.

Mr Secy. Campbell
&c, &c, &c