

The Royal Navy and the Comox Settlement

By Allan Pritchard

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The varied, sometimes unexpected and surprising roles the Victorian Royal Navy played in establishing and fostering European settlement on Vancouver Island are revealed nowhere more fully than in the history of Comox. The agricultural settlement at Comox, together with another at Cowichan, was founded in 1862 by the colonial government of Vancouver Island in order to expand European settlement of the island, which then extended little beyond the Victoria area and the small coal mining village of Nanaimo, and to provide livelihood for unemployed miners in the aftermath of the Cariboo gold rush. The extensive naval involvement at Comox arose from the facts that the tiny governmental establishment of Vancouver Island, which was still a separate colony from mainland British Columbia, had few resources of its own to draw upon, and that Comox, even more than Cowichan, was isolated, nearly 150 miles north of Victoria, separated even from Nanaimo by seventy-five miles of impenetrable forest. It is characteristic of the history of this settlement that the earliest record of its beginning is to be found in the logbook of a naval ship, and that the first accounts of its early development are provided by the letters of a naval officer.

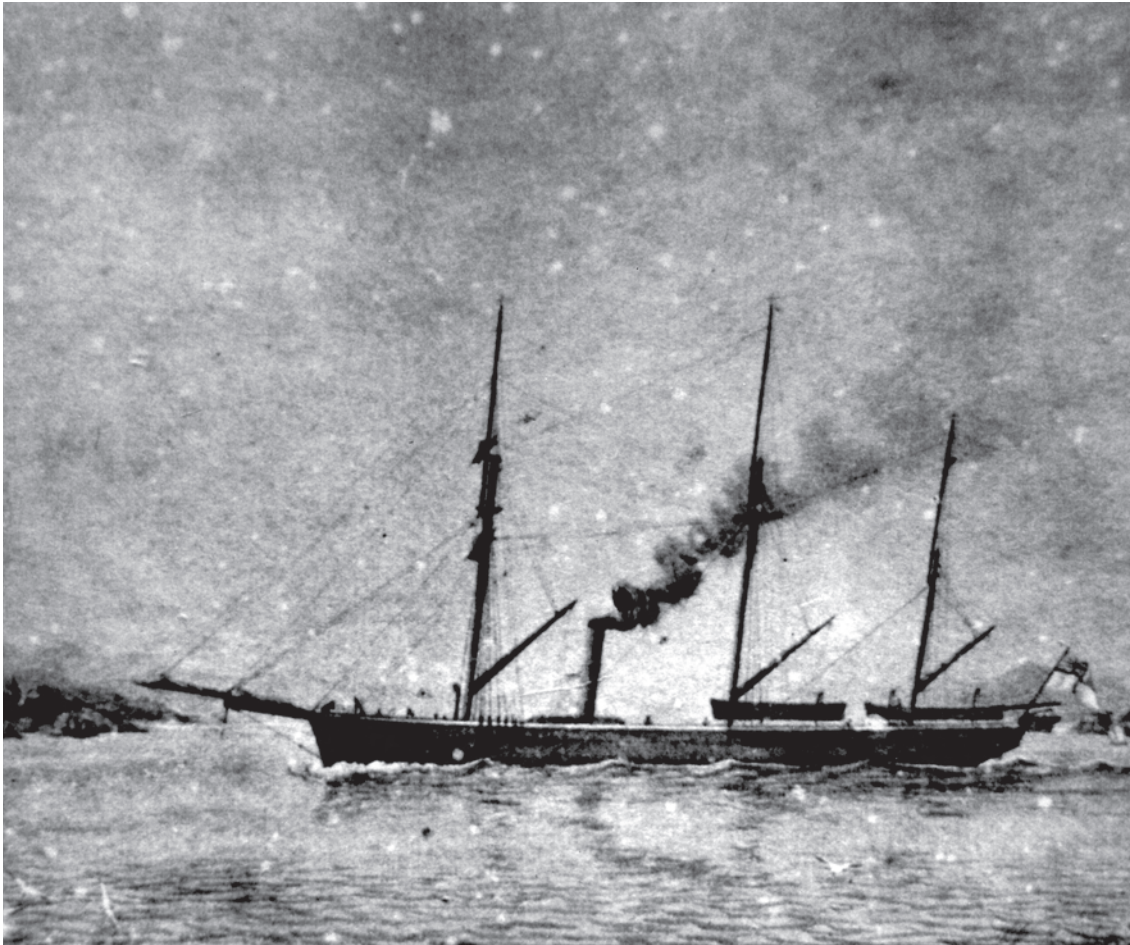
The navy initially prepared the way for the Comox settlement by coastal exploration three years before its foundation. The first very brief European inspections of the area had been made by J.W. McKay of the Hudson's Bay Company post at Nanaimo in October 1852 and James Douglas in August 1853, in order to investigate reports of a deposit of coal. They noted the agricultural potential of the area but no further exploration was made until the Comox district was included in the navy's coastal survey conducted by Captain George Richards in the autumn of 1859 and the spring of 1860. This not only provided for the first time an accurate chart of Comox Bay and the adjacent coastline but resulted in Lieutenant R.C. Mayne's report of his exploration of the Comox Valley in April 1860, when he went up the Courtenay River in a canoe with Natives. In this first at all detailed description of the area, Mayne drew special attention to the open "prairies" of rich soil, "perfectly clear land ready for the plough", and concluded that the district was "a most desirable place for a settlement".¹

Mayne reported that the Comox Natives recognized that white settlers would soon be arriving in their area, which because of its remoteness and lack of attraction for fur traders and gold diggers

had previously escaped European colonial intrusion. The scarcity of good agricultural land on Vancouver Island, especially of land clear of the heavy timber that covered most of the coastal area, ensured that settlement by Europeans would not be much longer delayed. Although Mayne learned that the Natives valued the land highly at Comox for the abundance of berries as well as game and other resources, in the eyes of Europeans it was open for settlement because it was not being cultivated in any way they could recognize. The first prospective settlers, a small group from the Nanaimo coal mines, pre-empted land at Comox in June 1862, but then withdrew, with one exception, George Mitchell, because of lack of access to markets. During this summer the colonial government, prompted by Attorney-General G.H. Cary, publicized plans for officially sponsored settlements at Comox and Cowichan in newspapers and meetings in Victoria. A series of new Comox pre-emptions were registered at the beginning of September, and at the beginning of the next month the navy transported the first group of permanent European settlers to Comox.

The direct naval involvement in the Comox settlement began with Governor Douglas' letter of July 31 to the navy's commander-in-chief for the Pacific Station, Rear-Admiral Sir Thomas Maitland, requesting that a gunboat might accompany some settlers "about to form a settlement near the Courtenay River in the Comox Country". Maitland responded favourably, and the gunboat HMS *Grappler* under the command of Lieutenant Edmund Hope Verney carried the first group of some thirty-five settlers to Comox on October 1-2. The voyage, which brought such great and sudden change to the Comox district, is recorded in the ship's logbook preserved among the Admiralty records in the British National Archives. According to the log, the *Grappler* in Victoria harbour received the settlers for Comox with others for Cowichan early in the morning of October 1, and sailed at 9. After discharging settlers at Cowichan at 2:15 in the afternoon, it anchored for the night at 5:50 near Dodds Narrows south of Nanaimo. It sailed at 6 the next morning, passed Nanaimo at 7, and at 3:50: "Anchored at Mouth of Courtney [sic] River", and then "Disembarked Settlers".²

Both the seamen and the commander of the *Grappler* were well aware that in the foundation of the Comox settlement they were being called upon to undertake tasks outside normal naval duties. The *Victoria Colonist* reported that the seamen complained



that they had not been given extra pay for their labour in transporting and landing the settlers and their possessions. Lieutenant Verney undertook the work of establishing the settlement more enthusiastically, but in letters he termed the Vancouver Island colony “a very curious place” and described the peculiar mixture of responsibilities and tasks he had been given there in a way that made his politically experienced father, a long-serving British Member of Parliament, caution his relatively youthful son about the need for discretion: “because many of your duties appear to be more connected with the Colony than with the Navy”. On one occasion Lieutenant Verney appears to have been reproved by a superior officer for making an improper naval intervention in colonial affairs by criticizing the Vancouver Island government for failing to keep promises to pay Cowichan Natives for the land it took from them, but such cautions and reprimands did not discourage him from interesting and involving himself in the Comox settlement.³

As well as commanding the ship that brought the settlers, Verney performed the historically valuable service of providing the earliest reports of the first days of the Comox settlement, in letters to his father and stepmother in England, Sir Harry Verney and Parthenope, Lady Verney. On October 11 he wrote to his stepmother about the voyage that brought the settlers, and stated that when he returned a few days later he found them “in ecstasies with the country”. On November 1 he wrote his father a fuller report as a result of another trip to Comox on October 28-30. He described canoeing up the river and visiting about twenty settlers busy building their log houses. He predicted a fine future for the settlement, stating that although he had often heard of the fertility of the “Komox country” it exceeded his expectations, and writing enthusiastically about the beauty of the scenery, the large stretches of open land, the great trees of the forest, and the abundance of game.⁴

On this last visit Verney brought with him

NOTES

1. I have given a fuller account of early naval exploration of the Comox area in the article, “What is in a Name? Captain Courtenay and Vancouver Island Exploration”, *British Columbia Historical News*, vol. 37 (2004), no. 4, 3-7, continued in the renamed journal, *British Columbia History*, vol. 38 (2005), no. 1, 35. My transcript of much of R.C. Mayne’s report, 19 April, 1860, from the British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA), F1217, is printed in D.E. Isenor, W.N. McInnis, E.G. Stephens and D.E. Watson, *Land of Plenty, A History of the Comox District* (Campbell River: Ptarmigan press, 1987), 57.

2. Correspondence between Douglas and Maitland, 31 July-4 Aug., 1862, Maitland’s Pacific Station Journal, Public Record Office (hereafter PRO), National Archives, Kew, England, ADM 50/311. Log of HMS *Grappler*, PRO, ADM 53/8158.

3. Complaint of *Grappler*’s seamen, *Colonist*, 25 Oct., 1862. Letters of Sir Harry Verney to Edmund, 13 Feb., 1863, and Edmund to Sir Harry, 22 Sept., 1862, *Vancouver Island Letters of Edmund Hope Verney, 1862-65*, ed. A. Pritchard (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996) (cited below as Verney, *Letters*), 31, 91. See also the Introduction, 42.

4. Verney, *Letters*, 93-94, 99-100.

5. Hills, Diary, 29-30 Oct., 1862, Provincial Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, BCA, microfilm A796. Hills to Sir Harry Verney, 30 Oct., 1862, Claydon House Trust, Claydon House, Buckinghamshire, England.

HMS Grappler 1862. Photograph of an otherwise unknown painting in one of Lieut. E.H. Verney’s albums. Claydon House Trust.

6. Verney, *Letters*, 133-34, 137.

7. Verney, *Letters*, 56-57n., 154.

8. Spencer to Douglas, 13 April, 1863, BCA, Colonial Correspondence, F1226. Log of HMS *Forward*, PRO, ADM 53/8028. Produce at Comox at such an early date as April 1863 was probably provided by George Mitchell, the only one of the prospective settlers of June 1862 to remain at Comox.

9. In 1864 Robert Brown estimated that there were about 76 Natives at Comox, including 50 'Comoncs' and 10 'Puntledge', in his "Journal of the Vancouver Island Exploring Expedition", BCA, Add MS 794, vol. 4, 159 (omitted in John Hayman's 1989 edition of this journal). For complaints from settlers about the government's failure to pay Natives for land taken from them, and about the inactivity of the gunboats, see the letters signed C.R.B. and Beta in the *Colonist*, 18 Feb., 1864. Morton Jones to Governor Arthur Kennedy, 5 April, 1865, BCA, Colonial Correspondence, F1208.14, and Franklyn to Colonial Secretary, 1 May, 1865, F593.18.

10. For a contemporary estimate of the devastating impact of the 'whisky traders' on the Native population, see David Higgins, "The Passing of a Race", reprinted in *Tales of a Pioneer Journalist* (Surrey, B.C.: Heritage House, 1996), 124. Cf. Pidcock, "Adventures in Vancouver Island", BCA, Add MS 728, vol. 4a, 82.

11. Pike to J.W.S. Spencer, 4 April, 1863, enclosing F.O. Simpson to Pike, 3 April, BCA, Colonial Correspondence, F1210.5a.



Lieutenant Edmund Hope Verney, about 1860.
BC Archives photo 22-95061

to Comox on the *Grappler* George Hills, the Anglican Bishop of Columbia, and so while we owe directly to Verney the first account of the new settlement, we owe indirectly to him and the navy also the record of its beginning that appears in Hills' diary. Probably the fact that Hills was related to Verney, as the cousin of Verney's father, enabled him to reach the Comox settlement as quickly as he did, and thus provide descriptions of his visits to settlers working on their houses and Natives engaged in fishing, and to corroborate Verney's view of the excellence of the land and the promising future of the settlement. Before departing on October 30 Hills held divine service for the settlers, and in a letter to Sir Harry Verney written the same day at Deep Bay on the return voyage to Victoria he commended Lieutenant Verney for addressing the settlers at the end of his service to offer them all the assistance in his power.⁵

Verney's continued interest in the Comox settlement appears in letters to his father in the spring of 1863. He returned to Comox in late April and reported that during an afternoon spent visiting settlers he found the settlement much advanced: land was being ploughed, and gardens cultivated, "and I had a glass of rich and delicious new milk". He came back on May 15, bringing as his guests Mr. and Mrs. Nicol from the Nanaimo coal mines, and went up the river in a canoe and again visited settlers in their houses. He carried with him "juvenile works in verse and prose for distribution among the youthful population", and conducted divine service for the settlers.⁶

Other letters and a diary he kept in shorthand show that from time to time Verney gave passage on the *Grappler* both to the families of settlers and to clergy going to perform services at Comox. According to his diary on September 15, 1863 he brought to Comox two daughters of the Robb family, which had pre-empted land that is now the centre of the Comox townsite, and on October 2 he brought an Anglican clergyman from Victoria, Rev. R.J. Dundas, whom he joined with a congregation of ten at the Robbs' house. His helpfulness was not confined to the Anglican clergy, for he mentions in a letter on July 25, 1863 giving passage to Comox some time previously to Rev. Ebenezer Robson, the Methodist minister from Nanaimo.⁷

Other services performed by the navy for the Comox settlement in its first spring included bringing seed for the crops and providing a market for the produce. On April 13, 1863 the senior officer at

Esquimalt, Captain J.W.S. Spencer, wrote in response to a request from Governor Douglas that the navy would gladly accord any accommodation it could for carrying the settlers' seeds, "but it must always be borne in mind that Gun Boats are not the most convenient vessels for carrying either passengers, or articles liable to injury from wet or damp, having no further storage than their upper deck, exposed both to rain and sea" – reservations that may suggest some surprise at the peculiar demands being made upon the navy by the Comox settlement. In Victoria the *Colonist* on June 9 described the growth of the settlers' crops, but the log of the gunboat HMS *Forward*, sister ship of the *Grappler*, reveals that a sale of farm produce had already been made, probably the first record of any sale from the new agricultural settlement. An entry in the ship's log at Comox on April 29 reads: "Rec^d on board 84 lbs of Fresh Beef and 42 lbs of Vegetables purchased of one of the settlers". This initiates a pattern of sales important for the future of Comox, where the navy later became a valuable market for farmers, especially after the establishment of a naval rifle range on Comox Spit in the 1890s. Meanwhile during the earlier period before regular coastal shipping was established the navy sometimes helped Comox farmers convey their produce to the larger markets. The *Colonist* reported on February 22, 1867 that when the gunboat *Sparrowhawk* overtook a Comox farmer en route by canoe to Victoria with a half ton of ham and bacon it gave him passage as far as Nanaimo.⁸

While the navy was called upon to undertake various roles outside normal naval duties it seems never to have been seriously required to protect the settlers against the Natives of the Comox area, although settlers occasionally complained that the gunboats did not come as often as had initially been promised or do much to ensure their security. The settlers, arriving in the aftermath of the devastating smallpox epidemic, found only a small remnant of the original Natives of the area, the Pentlatch, whose numbers had earlier been much reduced by intertribal warfare, after which they were partly replaced by the tribe named Comox (K'omoks), who had been driven south during the 1840s by the more powerful Lekwiltok from their old territory around Campbell River and Cape Mudge. The settlers seem to have regarded both these groups at Comox as friendly rather than feeling threatened by them, even though Natives, left with small reserves, often complained they had not been paid for the land taken from them

12. Verney's two commissions as justice of the peace are preserved in his family's archive at Claydon House, Buckinghamshire. Extensive documents relating to the seizing of the *Shark* and Hart's conviction and temporary imprisonment are in BCA, Colonial Correspondence, F593.44, F594.10, and F597.3. See Hills, Diary, 21 Nov., 1865. Richard Mackie has shown that Hart's liquor trade became linked with violence and death among white settlers, in *The Wilderness Profound: Victorian Life on the Gulf of Georgia* (Victoria: Sono Nis, 1995), 78-79.

13. Mayne, *Four years in British Columbia and Vancouver Island* (London: John Murray, 1862), 246. Pidcock, "Adventures", 78-79.

14. Verney to Commander E. Hardinge, 28 Nov., 1863, BCA, Colonial Correspondence, F1208.5. Douglas to Hardinge, 22 Dec., 1863, BCA, D/A/10 G79, vol. 3. Lascelles to Hardinge and Morton Jones, 13 Jan., 28 Feb., and 26 March, 1864, F1208.6-7, F1208.10, F1208.13. Morton Jones to Kennedy, 5-10 April, 1865, F1208.14. Franklyn to Colonial Secretary, 1 May, 1865, F593.18.

15. Franklyn to Colonial Secretary, 18 Oct., 1865, with depositions by Cave and Native constable and Kennedy's response, BCA, Colonial Correspondence, F600.6.

16. Franklyn to Colonial Secretary, 4 Nov., 1865, BCA, F600.6.

17. Denman, report to Kennedy, 14 Nov., 1865, BCA, F600.6, and Report of Proceedings to Secretary of Admiralty, 27 Nov., 1865, PRO, ADM 1/5924. Logs of *Sutlej*, *Sparrowhawk*, *Clio*, and *Forward*, PRO, ADM 53/8838, 9255, 9147, 9449.

18. Denman to Kennedy, 14 Nov., 1865, BCA, F600.6.

19. *Ibid.*

20. "Alleged Disturbances at Comox", *Colonist*, 18 Dec., 1865, p.3.

21. Porcher, *A Tour of Duty in the Pacific Northwest*. E.A. Porcher and H.M.S. Sparrowhawk, 1865-68, ed. Dwight L. Smith (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2000), 40-41.

22. Kennedy's memo approving Denman's recommendation is dated 15 Nov., 1865, BCA, Colonial Correspondence, F867.13. In the aftermath, the missionary some settlers blamed for precipitating the crisis, Cave Brown Cave, soon went elsewhere when Bishop Hills accepted his decision that he was not the right man for Comox (Hills, Diary, 21 Nov., 1865).

– complaints that settlers (who viewed this as the responsibility of the colonial government) recognized to be entirely justified. In late April 1863 when alarm had been caused on the coast by murders in the Gulf Islands, at Governor Douglas' request the gunboats *Forward* and *Grappler* made a brief visit to Comox to reassure the settlers but there was no sign of any threat. In April 1865 when Commander Theodore Morton Jones visited Comox in HMS *Cameleon* he optimistically reported that the Natives welcomed the presence of the settlers. A month later the Nanaimo magistrate, W.H. Franklyn, reported after one of his periodic visits to the settlement that the Comox chief, Wacas, had "a very good character among the settlers". There were two causes, however, which involved the navy in policing duties from time to time at Comox: first, to protect the Natives from illegal 'whisky traders', and second to deal with problems arising from large-scale seasonal incursions of Lekwiltok from Cape Mudge.⁹

The navy's attempt to suppress the illegal liquor traffic at Comox as elsewhere on the coast proved frustrating because of the difficulty of obtaining evidence and convictions. The prohibition of the sale of liquor to Natives was both paternalistic and discriminatory but was intended to protect from unscrupulous traders a people in whose culture alcohol had been unknown. Some contemporary estimates suggest the liquor traffic was second only to the smallpox epidemic as cause of the decline of the Native population on the coast. At Comox in the 1860s there are reports of large amounts of liquor, which included deadly concoctions, being brought to the Native villages by schooner and canoe from Victoria and elsewhere, and early settlers like R.H. Pidcock described the harm to the Natives that resulted.¹⁰

The whisky sellers naturally took good care to conceal their illicit activities from the authorities, but in 1863 the accident of a shipwreck brought some of these activities to light. In late March the schooner *Explorer* ran aground on the north coast of Hornby Island. Commander John Pike of HMS *Devastation*, which happened then to be at Nanaimo, sent some of his men to investigate. They reported that the *Explorer* had carried a large cargo of liquor, for which it lacked the proper papers. The captain, Moses Phillips, stated he planned to establish a store at Comox with his partner, John Hart, before continuing further north. Witnesses testified that they heard Phillips and Hart discussing plans to trade liquor for furs with



Natives.¹¹

Hart's store was subsequently established adjacent to the reserve at Comox, and became the source of many problems, sometimes prompting naval investigation and action. In connection with such activities Lieutenant Verney held commissions as justice of the peace, signed by James Douglas, for both colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia. In November 1863 Verney returning from a northern voyage in the *Grappler*, during which he

"A chief of the Euclataw Tribe. V.I." A photograph with this inscription in Lieut. E.H. Verney's hand enclosed by him in a letter of March 1865. Claydon House Trust

took action against liquor sellers at Metlakatla and Kitimat, seized the schooner *Shark*, which had recently landed liquor at Hart's. In December of the next year Hart was sentenced in a Nanaimo court to a year in prison, in lieu of a fine, for having liquor landed within a prohibited distance from a reserve. After he had been in prison a few weeks in Victoria, however, Arthur Kennedy, who had replaced Douglas as Governor of Vancouver island, ordered him released upon payment of costs, following the presentation of a petition, as advised by the attorney-general. Hart with a partner then resumed business for several years at Comox, where Bishop Hills in his diary in November 1865 described their establishment as "productive of vast evil" among settlers, but the agricultural settlers do not appear to have been implicated in the illicit traffic that was the concern of the navy.¹²

The illegal liquor trade at Comox received attention from authorities in high quarters, as is shown in various naval and colonial documents, the latter in some cases annotated in the handwriting of Governor Kennedy himself. The records leave a strong sense of the futility of attempts at suppression, in view of the facts that willing victims, justly resentful of a highly discriminatory law, usually refused to provide evidence, and that the traders in a lucrative occupation often could easily afford to pay fines and obtain the assistance of some of the colony's best lawyers.

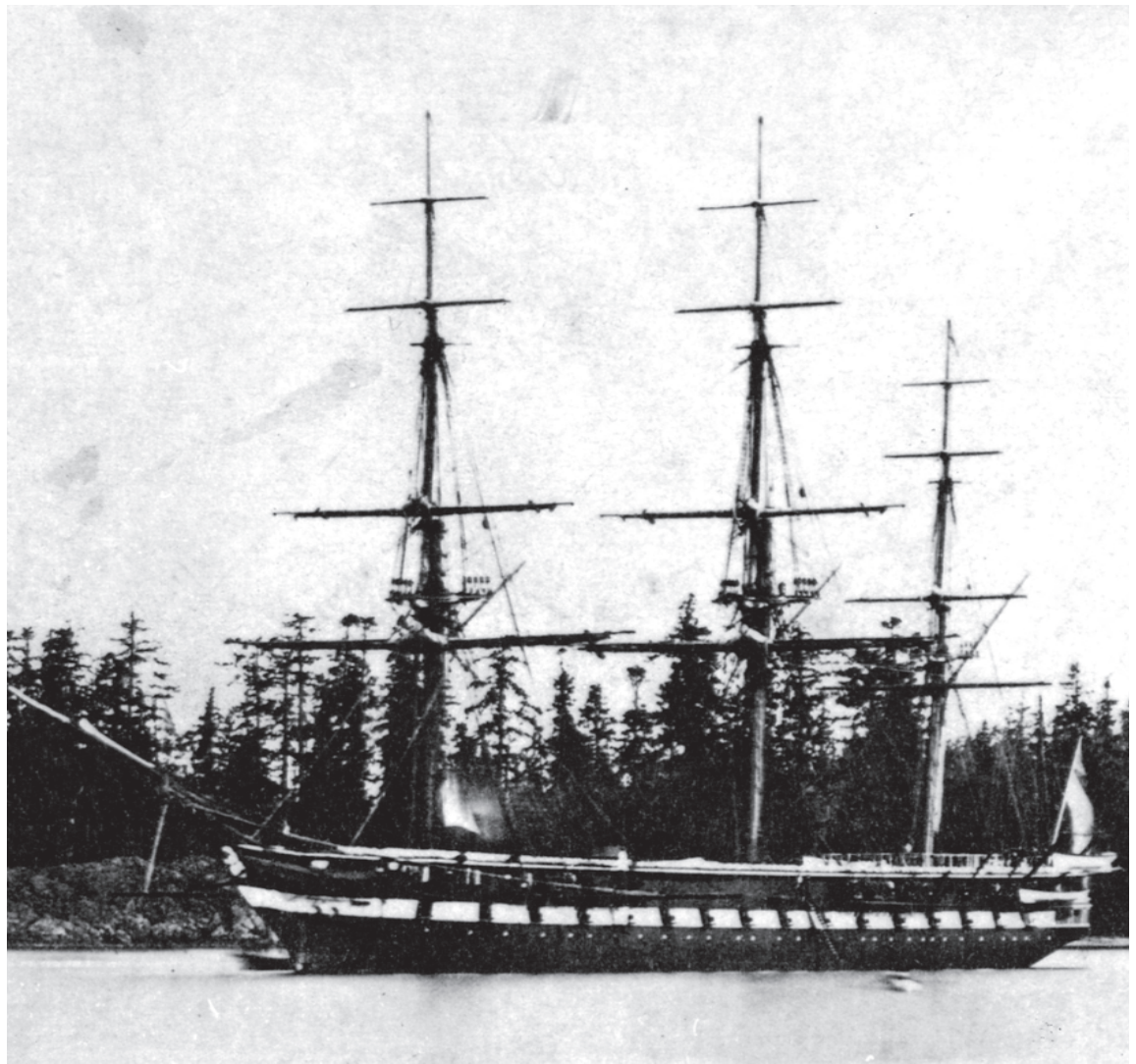
More frequently than the liquor traffic, however, it was the incursions of the Lekwiltok, Kwakwaka'wakw from Cape Mudge, generally known to the settlers and others at the time as 'Euclataws' or 'Yacultas' that brought the navy to Comox. This tribe was accustomed to make extended visits to Comox during certain fishing seasons on the rivers, coming down the coast in great numbers in a large armada of canoes, bringing the planks of their houses with them. They were a vigorous and bold tribe, who in the past had a reputation for aggressive and 'piratical' behaviour. Mayne in 1862 observed that they were the only tribe on the coast to resist the gunboats. At Comox, while some settlers admired them – Pidcock described them as "a fine lot of fellows", others alleged they came to steal the farmers' potatoes. The complaint about theft of potatoes was a serious matter since this was a specially important crop for many of the farmers. It resulted in a number of visits by gunboats to Comox in the years 1863-65, and at the end of the last year brought to Comox the

largest naval force that ever appeared there in the early years of the settlement.¹³

The problems began in the autumn of 1863 following the settlers' first potato harvest. On November 25 when Verney in the *Grappler* visited Comox en route back from Metlakatla, he reported that the farmers complained of Euclataws stealing potatoes, and that their presence was desired neither by the Comox Natives nor by the settlers. In late December and early January 1863-64 at Governor Douglas' request Lieutenant Horace Lascelles in HMS *Forward* spent two weeks at Comox. He reported that the settlers wanted the Euclataws ordered back to Cape Mudge, but that they had been better behaved since the recent visit of the *Grappler*, and he did not feel justified in doing this. In response to a petition of settlers to the colonial government, however, he made two further visits in February and March, and then ordered the Euclataws to return to their own country. He reported that they took down their houses without any trouble. The next year in early April 1865 the senior officer at Esquimalt, Commander Theodore Morton Jones, came to Comox in the larger, more heavily armed vessel, HMS *Cameleon*, and once more ordered the Euclataws back to Cape Mudge; he reported that they promised to obey. Later that month, Lascelles called at Comox in the *Forward*, with W.H. Franklyn, the magistrate from Nanaimo, to confirm that they had departed. In the autumn of that year, however, an apparent crisis developed, which proved to be exaggerated but sheds interesting light on the early history of the agricultural settlement, and the relations between Natives and settlers.¹⁴

The crisis of October-November 1865 began with the arrival in Nanaimo of the Anglican lay missionary catechist from Comox, Jordayne Cave Brown Cave, accompanied by one of the Native constables recently appointed at Comox by Franklyn. On October 18 they made depositions to Franklyn that about 150 Euclataws had recently arrived at Comox and camped two miles up the river, beyond reach of the gunboats. The constable deposed that they had come to steal the white men's potatoes, and to take revenge upon the Comox Natives for the deaths of five of their tribe from drinking whisky at Comox on a previous occasion. Cave stated that when he went to the Euclataws at their camp on the river the chief, Claylik, said that the *Forward* had already driven them away two or three times, and that they would kill any man who now tried to put them off the land. In a scene the missionary seems to have viewed with

HMS *Sutlej*.
BC Archives photo F-06988.



special indignation, "He then held open his blanket & danced on the beach in a defiant manner".¹⁵

Upon receiving these depositions from Franklyn, Governor Kennedy instructed him to proceed to Comox in the *Forward* and order the Euclataws to depart. When he arrived at Comox in the gunboat on October 31 Franklyn sent Police Sergeant Blake up the river to summon the Euclataws down to the ship. Claylik and others then came down in a large canoe; Franklyn addressed them through an interpreter, reproving them for repeatedly disobeying the governor's instruction, and ordering them away from Comox. They said they had come only to fish for salmon that did not come to their own area so soon, and that they needed more time to dry the fish they had caught. At first they promised to comply with

the order, but Franklyn learned they did not actually intend to leave, and that they said they despised the 'tennas' (little) gunboat. He reported on November 4 that he remained at Comox awaiting the arrival of a larger force.¹⁶

The navy responded with all available force. The commander-in-chief of the Pacific Station, Rear-Admiral Joseph Denman, decided, as he later stated, that he should visit in person "a place where so many ineffectual remonstrances had been made". He arrived in Comox Bay on November 7 in his flagship, HMS *Sutlej*, accompanied by the *Clio* and the *Sparrowhawk*. The *Sutlej* was a big ship with a crew of over five hundred and more than thirty heavy guns as well as much other armament, and the *Clio* and the *Sparrowhawk* were also much larger and more

heavily armed than the little *Forward*. According to their logbooks, the three ships immediately on the afternoon of November 7 put on a display of power, firing shells and rockets, and carrying out various exercises. Denman reported that in response the Euclataws hastily began to pull down their houses, and send them down the river in canoes with their women. Denman detained the canoes until the chiefs came to him. He put Claylik in irons for forty-eight hours as punishment for pointing a musket at Cave the previous summer. Then after Denman addressed them on November 13 the Euclataws left for Cape Mudge.¹⁷

Meanwhile Denman held a meeting with the settlers on November 10 at Cave's mission house, which he and the others reached with difficulty because of heavy rains and flooding. He found that two-thirds of the thirty settlers who attended favoured leaving the Euclataws undisturbed, as their labour was important to the farmers, and no danger was apprehended. He promised to tell the governor of the settlers' wish that the Euclataws should be allowed to continue coming for the fishing season in the autumn. Subsequently Denman, as he stated in his report to Governor Kennedy, visited several settlers. He found that a party led by James Robb was very critical of Cave for his activity in bringing in the navy to drive away the Euclataws, and that the settlers were afraid Denman might attack the Euclataws as he had the Natives at Clayoquot Sound, where in October 1864 in retaliation for the plundering of a trading schooner and killing of its crew he had carried out a punitive attack on the Ahousats, causing much death and destruction.¹⁸

As a result of what he learned in his meetings with the settlers, in his address to the Euclataws on November 13 Denman told Claylik and the other chiefs that they must not come again to Comox without the governor's permission but that he would attempt to obtain this. In the conclusion of his report he stated he thought it right to mention that the Euclataws had recently behaved well to the settlers, and that he believed they did not deserve such a bad reputation as previously. He found that the settlers, though scattered and without the ability to combine for defense, were "certainly without apprehension of violence".¹⁹

An interesting comment on these events appeared in the *Victoria Colonist* in a letter dated December 6 by a Comox settler who used the signature 'Beta'. Like some of the settlers interviewed by

Denman, he was very critical of Cave for attempting to have the Euclataws expelled from Comox. He declared that they had been accustomed to come there for salmon fishing "from time immemorial" and that Denman had no right to force them to leave:

We consider that the Euclataws have the privileges of British subjects, and as such have as good a right to visit Comox as any other men, so long as they behave themselves, and it is unfair to punish them thus before they have done wrong.

He alleged that in the past they had wrongly been blamed for the theft of potatoes actually taken by the Comox Natives. He emphasized the value of the Euclataws in providing both labour for digging potatoes and a market for their sale, as well as selling salmon and venison to the settlers.²⁰

When Admiral Denman returned to Esquimalt with the *Sutlej* and the *Clio*, he temporarily left behind HMS *Sparrowhawk* with Commander Edwin Porcher to monitor the situation at Comox and Cape Mudge. Porcher had just arrived from England with the *Sparrowhawk* to replace the two smaller old gunboats, and so he observed events at Comox with special interest as his first experience of the west coast colonies. In a journal he kept he seems to have viewed the bloodless Comox potato war as, like the bloodless San Juan 'pig war' a few years earlier, finally more comic than serious. He recorded that the events concluded with Denman presenting gifts and a certificate of good behaviour to Claylik, and undertaking to support the chief's request to be appointed a constable. Porcher reflected a little ironically on what he considered to be crisis that never was: "Thus ended our warlike expedition against the Euclataws who were supposed to be the most troublesome tribe in the whole island".²¹

Governor Kennedy immediately accepted Admiral Denman's recommendation that in the future the Euclataws should be allowed to come to Comox annually in the fishing season, as the majority of the settlers desired. The yearly arrival of the flotilla of Euclataw canoes from Cape Mudge at Comox Bay, described by Pidcock as a remarkable sight in the 1860s, continued to be a notable local event of the autumn until at least the 1880s. There were no further crises, real or apparent, that caused any large naval force to be sent to the Comox settlement.²² •