

LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

C.486.1932.VII.

C/Liberia/15(1).

Geneva, May 21st, 1932.

THE LIBERIAN GOVERNMENT'S REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE.

Note by the Secretary-General.

With reference to the report⁽¹⁾ of the above Committee, which was presented to the Council to-day, the Secretary-General has the honour to circulate the following communication, dated May 13th, 1932, from the American, British and French members of the said Committee.

Geneva, 13th May, 1932.

To the Secretary-General,

Liberia.

In a memorandum⁽²⁾ from His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom dated March 10th and circulated to the Liberia Committee, it was recorded that representations had been made by the American, British and French Diplomatic Representatives at Monrovia, on the instructions of their respective Governments, regarding the brutalities believed to have been committed by the Liberian Frontier Force on the Kru Coast in the autumn of 1931.

President Barclay's reply to these representations was also recorded and it was pointed out that His Majesty's Representative at Monrovia, in concert with his French and American colleagues, proposed to despatch a special Agent to the Kru country to ascertain the real state of affairs.

His Britannic Majesty's Vice-Consul at Monrovia, Mr. Rydings, was chosen for this mission. He left Monrovia on March 14th accompanied by native servants and interpreters, and returned on April 14th. He not only questioned the officers of the Frontier Force, missionaries and traders, but also visited the whole of the devastated area and, penetrating across it, conferred with the Chiefs of the dissident tribes. The attached report is a summary of the information which he obtained.

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(1) Document C.469.N.238.1932.VII.

(2) Document C/Liberia/9.

LIBERIA

CONDITIONS ON THE KRU COAST.

Report of the Investigation conducted on the authority of the diplomatic representatives of the British, French and U.S.A. Governments.

March 14 - April 14, 1932.

I. Origins of the trouble.

1. The unsettled conditions which developed on the Kru Coast subsequent to the visit of the League of Nations Commission of Enquiry in 1930 were due to the long standing discontent of the natives, occasioned by the oppressive acts and exploitation to which they had been subjected and to the circulation of rumours which encouraged them to believe that a change in the status of administration was imminent.

2. These rumours were promoted primarily by the activities of a certain unprincipled adventurer, one John Stuart, a Liberian, who, under the aliases of Major Frank and Major Ford, moved from place to place and stirred up the natives by telling them that the white man was coming to take over the country, that the Liberian Frontier Force was to be disbanded, that they need pay no further taxes, and similar falsehoods. These rumours were carried from village to village and, if not entirely believed, they at least had an unsettling effect.

The Liberian officials on the spot appear to have made little attempt to counteract the influences at work or to reassert their authority, but to have withdrawn to places of security and permitted conditions to develop unchecked.

Thus the District Commissioner at Sasstown, Mr. Dickerson, actually permitted Stuart to reside with him in the Government Compound, and although aware of the propaganda

Stuart was spreading, the District Commissioner took no steps to refute the former's statements or curtail his activities, to which, by abstention from action, he gave apparent sanction.

Whether the District Commissioner himself believed these statements, or was merely too weak to take action, is not clear.

3. Shortly after Stuart's departure, however, the District Commissioner himself left Sasstown hurriedly, and from that time, July 1930, until the arrival of Major Grant of the Liberian Frontier Force in October 1931, no responsible administrative official resided at Sasstown. During this period the functions of the District Commissioner appear to have been delegated to half educated natives, who abused their position, thereby contributing to the chaotic conditions.

4. The next event of importance which contributed to the disaffection of the tribes took place at Nana Kru, when disturbances, in the course of which the Liberian authorities subjected the natives to brutal and oppressive treatment, occurred. These disturbances had their origin in friction between the Liberian authorities at Sinoe and the tribal authorities of the Kra Chiefdom concerning the election of a Paramount Chief.

Pyne Nyckan, the candidate who was supported by the Liberian authorities but was unacceptable to the majority of the natives, was driven out of Nana Kru, and his property destroyed. He appealed to the authorities

at Sinow and a District Commissioner, together with a Captain and some 70 men of the Liberian Frontier Force proceeded to Nana Kru for the ostensible purpose of undertaking an investigation and re-establishing order.

On their arrival a number of prominent tribesmen and their wives were immediately put in chains and imprisoned. Women were raped by the soldiers without any intervention by the officials, and men who were taken prisoners were severely beaten. Nana Kru and neighbouring villages were plundered and cattle, sheep, rice, oil and poultry were requisitioned without subsequent compensation or payment.

5. The events referred to above at Nana Kru took place in the autumn of 1930, and during the subsequent months the unsettled state of the country increased and the Government would appear to have had little or no effective control of the coastal region from Nana Kru to Sasstown. The tendency to ignore Government authority, to revert to tribal rule and customs and delay the payment of taxes increased. Inter-tribal disputes and inter-factional feuds developed unchecked, and no effective action was taken by the Liberian Government to restore the situation. Had the Liberian Government possessed officials of the requisite courage and administrative ability, it should have been within their capacity to deal successfully with the situation without resort to a show of force and eventually to drastic military action.

6. Towards the end of April 1931 an administrative enquiry concerning the Nana Kru events was held at Monrovia.

7. In May 1931 Colonel Davis was detailed by the President to proceed to the Kru Coast and adjacent territories with a detachment of the Liberian Frontier Force for the purpose of investigating and settling the reported unrest in this area. In his instructions to Colonel Davis the President emphasised the pacifying purpose of the expedition and recommended restraint and clemency towards the tribes.

8. On arrival at Cape Palmas, Colonel Davis proceeded to the hinterland of Sinoe County, where at Tiempoh he came into armed conflict with the natives, as a result of which five native towns were attacked and burnt.

Colonel Davis would appear to have been unable to enter into peaceful negotiations with the tribes in this area who withdrew at his approach, and he had perforce to retire without accomplishing his mission.

9. Colonel Davis then proceeded to Sinoe and subsequently established his quarters at Nana Kru in August 1931, where he caused the arrest of some fifty natives on charges of seditious propaganda and held them in confinement until his departure from Nana Kru in November. This seditious propaganda consisted in a tendency to discuss the possible intervention of the League of Nations/

Nations in the administration of Liberia and openly to express a preference for white rule. Natives who gave expression to such views were held to be guilty of seditious practices.

Apart from the bitter feeling and hatred which exists among the natives of Nana Kru as a result of the maltreatment and cruelty to which they were subjected by Liberian officials and soldiers in 1930, much confusion and resentment was occasioned by the reinstatement by Colonel Davis of Pyne Nyckan, the discredited Paramount Chief.

10. Whilst Colonel Davis was at Nana Kru, a midnight raid is reported to have been carried out by a contingent of the Liberian Frontier Force on the village of Payetaye, the inhabitants of which were known to sympathise with the disaffected tribes, and many men and women were arrested, tied and carried to Nana Kru. It is also reported that before reaching Nana Kru these prisoners were placed in a hut and smoked with pepper and that subsequently some of the women were raped by soldiers. Colonel Davis is said, however, to have taken disciplinary measures against the offenders.

11. As a result of the reports which reached the natives of the events which had taken place at Tirempoh and Payetaye, certain of the tribes inhabiting the coast between Nana Kru and Sasstown, alarmed and fearful that similar treatment would be meted out to them and their women, composed their inter-tribal differences and combined with a view to opposing the passage to Sasstown of Colonel Davis and his troops. The President, on being informed of the situation, despatched

Major Grant and a delegation of Kru notables from the Kru settlement in Monrovia to attempt to conciliate the tribes. In this they were successful, and having been given assurances that they would not be subjected to harsh or oppressive treatment, the tribes permitted Colonel Davis to reach Sasstown.

12. The atmosphere was however tense and charged with mutual suspicion, distrust and fear.

A conference was arranged to take place between Colonel Davis and the tribal chiefs on November 9th, at which Major Grant, during the afternoon session, alarmed at the presence of a large number of tribesmen in Old Sasstown, interrupted the proceedings in an angry and excited manner, accused Paramount Chief Juah Ninley of having armed warriors in the town, and hurried from the Palaver House with the intention of fetching soldiers.

This precipitate and unwise action on the part of Major Grant would appear to be directly responsible for the open breach and armed conflict which ensued. The fact that the conference had been in peaceful session since the morning is an indication that the natives did not contemplate treachery.

The meeting broke up in confusion; the Liberian officials withdrew to the camp at New Sasstown, the suspicions of the natives were aroused afresh, and from this moment the outbreak of hostilities was inevitable. Demands addressed to Paramount Chief Juah Ninley for the surrender of a specified number of rifles and native knives were not complied with, and a final ultimatum requiring his unconditional surrender before

10 o'clock the following

following morning was ignored.

II. Military Operations.

13. Hostilities broke out on the morning of November 10th, following an altercation between a party of natives intent on drawing water and a contingent of the Liberian Frontier Force who were lining the stream.

Old Sasstown, a village of some four to five hundred huts, was plundered and burnt by the Liberian Frontier Force, and the natives took refuge in the interior. (Photo).

14. During the following months operations of a primitive character were directed against the dissident tribes which were conducted in a ruthless, callous and brutal manner without regard for the lives of innocent women and children. These operations, which resulted in the destruction of some forty villages* and the deaths of seventy two women and children and sixty nine men, were carried out in obedience to the President's further instructions "to subjugate the tribes". (Photos).

Unprepared villages were attacked by night; women and children were ruthlessly shot down in the confusion and flight, and invalids and children were burnt to death in huts fired by the troops.

15. The whole of the Sasstown area has been laid waste and every town, with the exception of New Sasstown, has been burnt and pillaged by the Liberian Frontier Force. Nothing remains of what were previously prosperous villages but a few charred posts, ashes and broken utensils. Foodstuffs and personal effects were destroyed in the flames or pillaged by soldiers and live-stock slaughtered by the troops for their consumption.

The troops on returning from raids on villages, carried with them the severed heads and limbs of their victims which were carried around on poles and cutlasses, whilst the officers looked on. The skulls were kept up as a permanent display in the camp at least until April 1932.

*See Appendix.

III. The Present Position (April 1932).

16. At the present time some twelve thousand natives, who have been harried and subject to punitive raids over a period of several months, have taken refuge in the bush where they are suffering from exposure and mal-nutrition and are existing under conditions of extreme hardship. They show no signs of readiness to surrender and have no confidence whatever in the assurances of the Liberian officials that in the event of their surrender no death penalties or imprisonments would be inflicted or other harsh measures resorted to. The events of 1916 are still fresh in their minds when in similar circumstances their chiefs and elders were hanged without trial or investigation.

17. The whole of the coastal belt from the Northern limits of the Kru Coast to the Franco-Liberian boundary is in a state of ferment and either open or covert hostility towards the Liberian Government. No effective control is in fact exercised over this area at the present time by the Liberian authorities. The only sanction enjoyed by these authorities is provided by a military force drawn itself from uncivilised tribes. The Liberian Frontier Force is imperfectly disciplined and badly led and resorts to methods of primitive savagery when actively engaged. It is unusually difficult to restrain men of this type on service among people of their own grade of development, and the facts adduced above indicate that in many ways this restraint has not been exercised.

12th May, 1932.

Appendix.

Appendix re Paragraph 14.

In the course of the investigation particulars were obtained of the following villages destroyed, among the 40 mentioned in the body of this Report:-

SASSTOWN TRIBE.

Old Sasstown.
2 Fish towns.
Jrugbikpo
Dajokpo.
Wolokri.
Kittiaye.
Jubor.
Kraediah.
Kunnieh.
Nonokwia.
Dorbiokpo.
Wessah,
Paleh Wiah's town.
Gbakieh.
Sloyen.
Fortiayekpo.

BCLLOH TRIBE.

Tienkpo.
Bellikpo.
Gbiekpo.
Baforwin.
Toyan.
Joprokpo.
Kattakpo.
Wakpo.

DIOH TRIBE.

Sanprokoh.
Pakunkpo.
Baelakpo.
Yenekondro.

WISSEPO TRIBE.

Kawrokoo.
Flalah.