

Ship's Letter, U.S.S. Alaska, stamped SHIP6, postmarked San Francisco, Cal, November 25, 3 PM (1880)

8 Page manuscript letter dated September 9, 1880 and sent to John R. Prentiss, Esq., Alstead, New Hampshire, USA.

*T. Hiland*

When written, sender **was aboard the (first) USS Alaska, at Upolu Island, Samoan Group.** He wrote:

*NTT*

*Thomas Hiland. Van -*

My dear John,

I have just had my hair cut by the barber of this Ship the Alaska, and I wish it was your place instead of a strangers, for he gets about \$50 per month most of which goes into his pocket though he hires some of the work done. He gets from the men about \$160 per quarter, besides what he does for the officers. The officers are charged full price, the men much less but you see it amount to considerable. This ship I find very pleasant; there are many inconveniences but everybody is very agreeable toward me and so far there has not been an unpleasant word for me and I shall try to have it continue the same way. You will have to hunt up these Islands on your atlas which you will find about latitude 12 degrees south and longitude 170 degrees west. These islands have had the attention of Americans the past few years because Gen. Grant when President sent out a commissioner to treat with the natives and afterwards the same man came out here on his own hook with a letter of recommendation from Grant, was kindly received by the natives and did considerable in assisting them to form a representative government, became a leading man in the government, was put out and taken away by the British with the help of the American consul, since which time the foreign consuls, the British leading, have made a King and are upholding him against the large majority of the natives who say he is an usurper, and at the present time there is war between the King Malie Toa and other chiefs in the islands who do not like him. Cast (caste?) is supreme with these savages, a species of Indian and it is customary to elect their \_\_\_\_\_ chief from one family and hence they object to outsiders making a ruler from another family.

England is fast gaining control of these islands and they will eventually be English I suppose unless some other nation dips in. So far as the natives are concerned I believe they would be better off let alone to govern themselves. Their old religion has been overthrown by missionaries many years ago and they are mostly Presbyterians or something of that sort, with a few Roman Catholics.

They observe Sunday very strictly and as the missionaries came from Europe east through the Indian Ocean they keep Saturday as Sunday. Think a moment and you will understand how two vessels starting from the same point one going east the other west until meeting there would be a difference of one day in their reckoning one having gained 12 hours day light the other having lost the same amount. It is usual from our vessels to change to the Sunday of the place they happen to be in but our captain has not done so and as we frequently go on with some part of our work it don't show the natives that we have any extraordinary respect for any Christian Sabbath. I wonder how the 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventists and other sticklers for a certain day as sacred would get along with these two Sundays?

We brought over 3 Catholic priests from Tutuilo who have school here of both boys and girls and are beginning to influence a good deal the natives and their government. I wish you could see these natives - once a week the ship is full of them and every day there are a good many on board especially the

*Island politics*

*Indo-Chinese*

*Native*

*Native*

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better looking girls and young women who get a good many presents. They are at Pago Pago where we have spent most of our time in these islands, strictly virtuous more than can be said of the same number of whites – so that it is perfectly safe to have them on board. There are a few who will steal but we can count more thieves in this ship's company of about 260 people. Their skin is brown, occasionally quite dark, hair straight or a little curly usually cut short and made to stick up over the whole head by coering with whitewash about once a week which I thing bleaches it a little so that it has more or let of a reddish color, form very good, clothing a piece of cloth would round the loins and descending half way down the thighs, called a lava lava, pronouncing the a's like r's. Some of the women wear a handkerchief, towel or even a chemise over the chest but they don't like to be so burdened. They anoint the whole body with perfumed cocoa nut oil which makes the skin smooth and soft and I believe helps them resist changes of weather. They all swim and dive and make nothing of being upset in their canoes. The islands were called Navigation, I believe, because the people sail about so fearlessly; it is said to be impossible to drown one of them if within any reasonable distance of the land, no matter how heavy the surf may be.

We expect to return to Pago Pago <sup>(sic)</sup> bay in a week or ten days wait for the completion of the unloading of a ship loaded with government, tow her to sea and then start for the Sandwich Islands where we may expect to arrive sometime between the middle and last of Nov. and be in San Francisco about the middle of Dec. We unexpectedly received some American papers of dates to July 23d on our arrival here. By the time we reach Cal. election for President will have been decided, and peaceable I hope. You may direct to care Navy Pay Office, San Francisco Cal. of course putting on my name and the name of this ship. I am a little curious to know what has been done with the new ship Galena to which I could have been ordered. I hope you are having a pleasant summer and that you will give me all the home news when you write. Give my regards to enquiring friends and believe me Yours Sincerely . T. Hiland

Written at sea, about six weeks prior to mailing from San Francisco.