

THE CIVIL WAR



NOTE ASKS ASSURANCE—On Sept. 5, 1863, Charles Francis Adams, the U.S. minister to Great Britain, wrote a letter to Queen Victoria's foreign minister which came close to being an ultimatum. The note concerned two ironclad rams being built in British shipyards for the Confederate navy. If completed and delivered, they would be superior to any thing in the Federal fleet. Adams asked the foreign minister, Lord John Russell, for assurances that the ships would not be allowed to

sail in the United States, the question as to what Secretary of State William Seward was doing about the situation arose. Seward learned that the British were planning to detain the rams, but he had to remain silent until the word came officially from England. The only person he told was Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles, who was sworn to secrecy on the matter. Shown, from left, are Welles, Adams and Seward. (UPI)

'War' Note Sent to Britain

By MERTON T. AKERS
United Press International

On Sept. 5, 1863, Charles Francis Adams, the United States minister to Great Britain, wrote a stiff note to Lord John Russell, Queen Victoria's foreign minister, who had achieved an earldom only a few years earlier.

The note came close to being an ultimatum, lacking only a time element.

"It would be superfluous in me to point out to your Lordship that this is war," the note read.

Adams was speaking of two ironclad rams being built in Liverpool by a British firm for the Confederates. They would be superior to any warship in the Federal Navy if and when they were completed, armed and in commission. Adams had learned through spies that one of the rams was about ready to put to sea.

The minister had told Lord Russell earlier that "there is not any reasonable doubt that these vessels, if permitted to leave . . . will at once be devoted to the object of carrying on war against the United States."

Lord Russell had told Adams that "Her Majesty's government cannot interfere in any way with these vessels."

The foreign minister's refusal to stop the rams sparked Adams' memory of the Confederate cruiser Alabama's "escape" from the Britons. At that moment the Alabama was destroying U. S. shipping on the high seas.

All this prompted Adams' near-ultimatum. In the note he quoted a Confederate publication as saying the armored rams could not only lift the Federal blockade around the Confederacy, but that they could enter any big northern port and inflict a vital blow. The publication added that "the destruction of Boston alone would be worth a hundred victories in the field."

That quotation struck home to Adams, for he was a Bostonian.

The American minister was a skilled diplomat. He was a son of President John Quincy Adams and a grandson of President John Adams. He had been his father's secretary when the older Adams was in the U.S. diplomatic service. He had been reared in the profession and understood the ins and outs of British statecraft.

The note sent, Adams waited for the answer. War or peace? Not until September 8 did the

answer come. Then he learned it from the London Morning Post. Her Majesty's government was detaining the rams, the newspaper said. Later in the day a note from Lord Russell confirmed the news.

Henry Adams, the Minister's son and secretary, wrote that " . . . this is a second Vicksburg, if we can manage to carry it through . . ."

Nearly Does
For the moment, as far as Adams was concerned, the ram crisis was nearly over.

But not so in the UNITED STATES.

News travelled by ship in those days and had not reached Washington when the Cabinet met September 18.

The question of what Secretary of State William H. Seward was doing about stopping the rams brought up by Secretary of Treasury Salmon P. Chase.

President Lincoln was absent and Seward presided. He brushed off Chase's question.

Secretary of Navy Gideon Welles returned to his office after the meeting and found two letters from U.S. consuls, one from Liverpool and one from Cardiff, Wales. Both said the same thing—that the rams were ready to go to sea and that the British government was doing nothing to stop them.

The news sent Welles to Seward. The secretary of state was affable but uncommunicative. Welles pressed him.

"He suddenly asked me if I was a Mason," Welles reported in his diary. "I replied I was . . . He said he wanted to tell me a secret which I must not communicate to any living person."

Then Seward told Welles of the British order to detain the rams "but you must not know this fact, nor must any one else know it. Mr. Adams is not aware of it. (He was however.) No one but you and the President, and I must know it here, and it is best he should not know that you know it."

Reluctantly Welles agreed to keep quiet but having nothing in writing he took no precautions to combat the escape of the rams. So far as his colleagues knew the rams might sail any day and Chase was pressing for action.

(Seward's advance knowledge of the decision to hold up the rams probably came from the

British legation in Washington which would have been notified when the decision was made rather than waiting for the official announcement.)

Seward announced the British decision to the cabinet on September 25 and explained that Welles had been committed to secrecy. That also explained why the navy secretary had not acted, "for I was much blamed," Welles wrote.

But there was more of the ram crisis.

The British government had said it would prevent the departure of the ironclads but the Alabama had sailed away under cover of bad weather. Something like that might occur again.

Nothing happened for a month. Then the Laird shipyards, where the ships were being built, asked permission to take one of the rams on sea trials. On the record, title to the warships had been transferred to a French agent, who ostensibly was representing the Pasha of Egypt.

Earl Russell acted this time. On October 9 British warships surrounded the Laird yards and officials formally took over the armored ships.

Ships Served
The rams eventually were completed and became a part of the British navy as the Scorpion and the Wivern. Both ships served until the turn of the century.

The rams were formidable warships. Each was 230 feet long with four and a half inch armor on the hulls, backed with teak.

Each had two turrets to carry two nine-inch rifled guns. One was equipped with the then new tripod masts which gave a wider area of firing while under sail and which offered less of a target than a conventional mast.

Bulwarks around the turrets were hinged and could be dropped during firing. Raised, they fended off heavy seas.

The contract price was about a half million dollars each. When the British took them over they paid slightly more than a million dollars for the two.

Naval experts agree that if these rams had escaped into action they would have played havoc with the Federal fleet and perhaps damaged big northern ports.

Minister Adams had scored a notable diplomatic victory.

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Breakfast Set to Launch Campaign

A breakfast to launch a membership campaign, which is expected to bring 100 new members into the Medford Chamber of Commerce, will be held at 7 a.m. Thursday, Sept. 5, at the Rogue Valley Country Club. Don McNeil, chamber manager, has announced.

Dwight Houghton, chairman of the membership drive, will be assisted by six team leaders or captains, who are William Longmore, Bob Taylor, Manville Hessel, William Howe, Gerald Lathan and Boyd Budge.

Each captain will have five men on his team and the winning team will be treated to a steak dinner at the close of the two weeks campaign.

The teams will be given the names of 200 prospective members to contact.

The campaign is based on a new program, developed by the chamber of commerce board from ideas submitted by members.

College Enrollment Totals 261 Students

Wood—Some 261 students were enrolled for the fall semester at the College of the Siskiyous here during the first four days of registration at the campus last week.

The total includes 174 new students and 87 who returned.

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