

**LETTERS TO, FROM, AND CONCERNING THE SECOND DETACHMENT
Tupile and Playón Chico, 1919-1923**

Playón Chico, 7/01/19, Chief Olopanique to the President of Panama:

My Dear Sir, With all due respect we inform you of the following that the village was very positive about the school but today the heads of families are displeased that their customs are being suppressed such as the use of [illegible], the use of noserings, we believe that [illeg.] instead of attracting, all of the progress will be useless, Since we are resolved not to send out children to the school after the little girls are civilized they themselves without anyone forcing them to change their costume; without any more I am your affectionate servant, the Chief, Olopanique.

Tupile, 9/02/19, Jacinta Aguilar, village schoolmistress, to Intendente:

Be so good as to let me communicate to you the disorder reigning in this school due to the fact that 17 children have been taken out by their parents, by order of Chief Colman; since it is said that he says that they are going to end the school and that very soon I will leave.

Finally: asking the child Autencio Oran why he didn't come to the school, he told me that his brother-in-law and various Indians of the village, as well as some from Mono [a small nearby island, populated by dissidents from Tupile] told him that he was already quite big to go to school: and for that reason he wasn't coming.

But the [real] cause is because he [Autencio] is holding the position of policeman named by Chief Colman. Another child, named Francisco Lombardo, despite being forbidden to go to Colón on the 30th of the last month, since I told him the mid-term examinations of the course were coming up, he went off regardless [illeg.] called "Niga."

Thus I entreat you to dictate some ruling concerning this point in order to put an end to this disorder.

Panama, 7/10/20, Secretariat of Government and Justice to Intendente:

In this office a complaint has been received that the Indians of Tupile are the object of outrages by Sr. Isidro Juncá R., Head of the 2d Detachment, conduct that can be the cause of disorders, since the exasperated Indians could commit a thousand atrocities that would be avoided with a policy of bringing together.

This is not the first time that the Indians of San Blas have complained of being outraged by functionaries that the National Government has sent to that Circumscription to protect them and protect their interests, and it is time that measures are adopted to the end that the Indians are treated with benevolence and affection, to arrive in this way at a perfect accord with

them.

Be so kind as to investigate what there is of truth in the complaint made against Junca and inform this Secretariat of the results of that investigation.

Porvenir, 7/16/20, Intendente to Secretary

I have the honor of announcing receipt of your note of the 10th of July distinguished with No.547B, related to one more complaint by Sr. S.Colman, Chief of Aligandí.

[Long paragraph about sending a subordinate to investigate, includes transcription of letter.]

... I regret that Sr. Colman, who is sick in Aligandí, never specifies his charges and now forgets that in my office he has always been well attended to, and account has always been taken of his complaints.

It also surprises me, Colman's complaint being so recent, that Inatoiquiña [collaborator-chief of Tupile], who has spent four days in Porvenir, said nothing to me. From him I learned that everything was going well in the village, and that there was no complaint at all against anyone, and I suppose that Sr. Inatoiquiña, Chief of Tupile, ought to know better than anyone how the Administration is doing in his village.

Moreover, I will tell you that Sr. Junca has not resided for some time in Tupile but rather in Playón Chico, and in Tupile is posted the Colonial Agent Guillermo Denis, an Agent who has mastered very well the Indian idiom and who is much loved in the village... etc.

Porvenir, excerpt from the report on an investigation of an incident in Playón Chico:

In the Intendencia of San Blas, seat of the Intendente of the Circumscription, on the thirtieth day of the month of September of nineteen-twenty, Sr. Santiago Castillo, Assimilated Sub-Lieutenant of the Colonial Police was summoned, with the end that he make a declaration concerning the events that occurred on the island of Playón Chico on the night of the 24th of the present month. Duly sworn, he offered to tell the truth about all he might know, and he was interrogated as follows:

I am named as given here, 33 years old, bachelor, of the Catholic religion, a Panamanian public employee and of this locality--- I found myself on the island of Playón Chico and I had the Indians of that place called together by means of Chief Olopanique for a meeting in the latter's house, with the end of making them see the necessity of keeping the village clean, because a deadly epidemic was developing there. I also declared to them that the teacher was complaining that the children were not attending school, and while I was there talking about this I was attacked by a multitude of Indians

who, armed with sticks, were striking me. One of them succeeded in giving me a strong blow on the cerebrum, in this way succeeding in knocking me to the ground, where a multitude fell on me with sticks. Seeing myself attacked by the above-mentioned Indians I made a discharge [of a revolver] in the air in order to contain them in that way, but it wasn't possible, since they continued hitting me with the sticks and one was pointing a shotgun at me in a posture to shoot me, for which reason I saw myself obliged to make a second discharge to save my life, those of my three companions, and that of the schoolmistress of that place, who was at that meeting, because it was to be of a peaceful nature.

[Castillo is questioned on details, establishing that he never intended to kill anyone, only to get free.] Question: How were you able to get free of the aggressors against you? Answer: When I made my second discharge many of the Indians who were striking me moved apart and gave me space to stand up, and retreating, always facing them, an Indian came after me pointing a shotgun until I reached the alley across from the school, when I gave a shout, and that was when I was able to take refuge in the school.

Question: Once you were in the school, were you followed after by more Indians? Answer: A little after having arrived at the school, the Chief of the island presented himself at the school and asked if I would let him speak with me, to which I said yes: the Chief told me to forgive him for what had happened in his house, which attack had not been carried out by his people but by those of Colman who had come from the island of Ostupo¹ with that intention, as he learned afterwards: [he asked] if I intended to attack those Indians with the police, to which I told him No, [if they desisted from attacking him]...

Tupile, 3/20/21, Detachment Head Castillo to Lt. Linares:

I have the honor of informing you that, with a date of the 18th of the current month, there has been registered in this office the birth of the minor, José Guillermo Denis, child of the Colonial [Police] Agent, Guillermo Denis and the Indian woman, Magdalena Pallares, this is the first case that has occurred the parents of the Indian girl being in agreement; they show themselves very pleased. As you will see, little by little the desires of our illustrious Chief Executive, Doctor Belisario Porras, which are for the crossing of the races, are being fulfilled.

Porvenir, 3/23/21, Lt. Linares to Detachment Head Castillo:

By means of your #14 of the date 20 of the current month there has come to my notice the pleasing news of the birth of the child, José Guillermo Denis. In this matter I have sent a communication to the Most Excellent

¹ Ustupu, a small island nearby populated by dissidents from Playon Chico. Olopanique's claim that his followers had not participated in the attack was in fact false.

President of the Republic, Dr. Belisario Porras, informing him of such name-giving, and I deem it satisfactory and commendable, because it indeed demonstrates the efficacy of bringing together of one race with the other, and because it gives rise to believing in the effectiveness of the civilization that is being brought into effect.

Tupile, 5/01/21, Detachment Head Castillo to Intendente.

I have taken due note of the contents of your thoughtful communication, numbered #146 with the date April 5 just passed.

I will proceed to put myself in agreement with the chiefs of the villages of Tupile and Playón Chico and with the Indians who are friends of civilization to see if by means of peaceful meetings they can be convinced that they should abandon these costumes and the use of noserings and beads, which gives their women such an ugly shape. I will commit myself to carry this task to a happy ending, beginning in the village of Tupile, which I believe is the best prepared to put these measures into practice.

Tupile, 5/03/21, [soon after the death of two policemen in Río Azúcar] Detachment Head Castillo to Intendente:

I beseech you to send me as rapidly as possible even if only two Police Agents, since we will now have to go out frequently on missions to find the turtle fishermen [to levy a tax on them], and since I only have at my disposition of three Policemen I will have to leave these villages alone, which I do not consider appropriate because the Indians can take advantage of the occasion and do some misdeed. [Note scribbled at bottom for reply: All the Agents have been called with the goal of reinforcing the Detachments, and as soon as they arrive they will be sent off.]

Tupile, 5/06/21, Detachment Head Castillo to Intendente:

I have the honor of informing you that Chief Colman, in his passage through the village of Playón Chico, gathered the Indians together and spoke to them concerning hair cutting, and he made them a promise that he would obtain from you permission so that they could once again cut it; three Indians of that village accompanied him, with the goal, it is said, of hearing the orders [on this matter] that you give...

Also on the day of Colman's arrival in that village, the [indigenous village police] once again went out [to parade through the village] with their staves of office.

Tupile, 5/12/21, Detachment Head Castillo to Intendente:

I have the honor of announcing to you, I received your thoughtful communication with the number 231, and the general order No.9, to which I will

give strict compliance and I will try to solve any matter that presents itself in the most peaceful manner possible, providing the Indians do not make an attempt on my life or that of the Police under my orders.

Tupile, 5/24/21, Detachment Head Castillo to Intendente:

I inform you that on this date I have arrested three Indians of Playón Chico, for having tried to drink chicha, of which I send you a flask as a sample, so that you may see that these Indians are incorrigible; since this has been prohibited for a long time; among the arrested are found a son of Chief Olopanique, who appears as one of the promoters of this.

Chief Olopanique is an individual who gives the appearance of heeding the orders of the Government, but his family is the first to disobey.

The arrested are being brought by Agent González, so that they aid in the propelling of the canoe, I have imposed 29 days of arrest, if you find it appropriate you can leave some there and send back the others so that they carry out their punishment working here.

Tupile, 5/26/21, Detachment Head Castillo to Intendente:

I inform you that at this moment I have just received a delegation sent by the Chief Inapaquiña,² which conveys to me part of the propoganda of Colman among the villages up the coast, I send you the letter that he sent me so that you may be informed of what he says about you, and now since Colman happens to be [with you], make him declare [the truth] in respect to the accusation made by Inapaquiña.

I also wish that you would call Chief Olopanique strongly to attention, since this person is very disobedient, one sends him a note calling him to Tupile to hold a conference with him concerning his family, which is the worst in that village, and he said that he would not come to me and that I was negligible and that he was going to you, I believe that this is the moment that should be exploited to take chiefship [i.e. the right to have chiefs] away from the Indians, since nothing ever is gotten out of it, and it does not bring any benefit for civilization, on the contrary these men [illegible] with rights and they disobey the authorities.

I entreat you that you do not grant anything to Olopanique concerning his son who is in jail and that you send him back here to serve his punishment, since if he succeeds with you in the commutation of the punishment or liberty for his son, I would be mocked, because he insisted that he would bring [his son] back because I could not put a child of his in jail.

² Chief of one of the two Kuna confederacies, bitter rival of Chief Cimral Colman.

Chief Inapaquiña to Tupile Police, 5/23/21

This is exclusively to inform you [about] the propaganda that Señor Colman is making, now in [his] arrival [back in San Blas], well to reunite all the villages that are with him, and he said to them: That a minister had come from every foreign nation to speak with him, in order to lend him support in the matter of the purchase of the lands, that everything is now arranged, only five thousand pesos is lacking. And to that end, those villages are paying. With regard to you, he says that he absolutely does not have to have anything to do with you, since he says that you are trembling with fear of the attitude that he has taken in this matter, which I believe to be a lie.

Your Friend,
Inapaquiña

Tupile, 5/30/21, Detachment Head Castillo to Intendente

I reply to your thoughtful communication with the number 297, declaring to you that with the arrival of Chief Colman at Playón Chico on the 24th of the present month, in the night of that same day, he had a meeting with the Indians of that place in the house of Chief Olopanique, to whom he declared that he would sustain on the whole coast the barbarous customs that the Government is trying to remove, for instance hair cutting, noserings, chichas, beads, etc.etc. making his [illeg] understand that to this end they should contribute with proportional cuotas for carrying out the promises he is making them.

Tupile, 5/31/21, Detachment Head Castillo to Intendente:

In this moment I have just been informed by Captain Scott of the schooner, "Marcella" that Chief Nele Guartata of Portogandí had menaced him with death threats if he tried to fish for turtles in that place. He then answered him that he had permission from that headship [i.e. from the Intendente] for [turtle]-fishing, and the latter answered him that he did not recognize any boss in San Blas.

I believe that this man must be given an exemplary punishment, since he is the most insolent Chief to be found in the whole Circumscription.

Tupile, 6/06/21, Detachment Head Castillo to Intendente:

I declare to you my receipt of your thoughtful communication distinguished by the number 312 of the 31st of May just passed. I had already thought closely about the difficulties that present themselves here in order to clarify any punishable act on which the Indians of these places comment. Well, in this respect lying is a habit, and one can never get them to say the same thing two times in a row.

In the cases that present themselves in the future I will always try immediately to clarify the facts and to gather declarations in writing,

reminding them that what they say appears in that [illeg.] and that it makes them [illeg.] to a punishment if they deny it later.

Playón Chico, 10/06/23, Agent Pérez to Detachment Head Gordón:

I Inform you that yesterday the Colonial Agent, Sr. Estanislao Hinestroza, on guard in this Section, taking advantage of the fact that I was on a mission to the [detachment] headquarters, penetrated the room that serves as jail for prisoners, where the indigenous woman, Evelia Guardia, was arrested for police offenses, making use of her by force... As I consider this a grave offense and that there can be no pardon for it, I make you aware of the case so that you in turn may inform the Intendente if you consider it appropriate.