

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY COMMAND (INSCOM)
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

DECLASSIFICATION REVIEW GROUP – ARCHIVAL RECOVERY UNIT
DOCUMENT REPRODUCTION – 12 MARCH 1970

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ARCHIVE REFERENCE: ARU-70-231-B
SUBJECT: RE-TYPED TRANSCRIPT OF 1884 WAR DEPARTMENT REPORT

FOREWORD (ARCHIVAL OFFICER'S NOTE, 1970)

The following document was recovered on 28 January 1970 during an ongoing review of unindexed War Department materials stored in the former Quartermaster warehouse facility in Alexandria, Virginia.

The document—a brittle, water-stained manuscript bound with corroded brass clasps—was discovered inside a misfiled crate marked “LOGISTICS, EQUINE FEED, 1890-1892.”

The original pages, dated 3 December 1884, were authored by Colonel Nathaniel R. Halcombe of the Office of Military Inquiry.

The manuscript was found inside an envelope labelled only:

“NOT FOR GENERAL RECORD. HOLD IN CONFIDENCE.”

Several passages show intentional erasure marks and partial ink removal consistent with late-19th-century suppression practices.

Due to the advanced deterioration of the paper, the text has been re-typed verbatim for preservation. All grammar, punctuation, and phrasing are reproduced exactly as written.

The original document has been secured in Cold Storage Unit 4-B, pending classification review.

– Lt. Col. R. M. Halloway
Archival Recovery Unit (ARU)
INSCOM, U.S. Army
12 March 1970

BEGIN TYPEWRITTEN TRANSCRIPT (FAITHFUL REPRODUCTION)

(Original date: 3 December 1884)

CLASSIFIED REPORT – FOR WAR DEPARTMENT USE ONLY

Filed by: Colonel Nathaniel R. Halcombe
Office of Military Inquiry, Washington City
December 3rd, 1884
Subject: Final Account of Private Francis J. Long – Greely Expedition

I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

This document is prepared for the eyes of senior officers and departmental officials only. The public inquiry and printed report make no mention of the irregularities contained herein. Per directive, I have recorded Private Long's statements exactly as given, despite their extraordinary and at times untenable nature.

I consider it my duty to place his entire account on record, however disquieting it may be.

II. CONDITIONS AT FORT CONGER

Long's descriptions align with the official logs: extreme privation, starvation, scurvy, and subzero temperatures.

However, he adds details omitted from the officers' journals, which may indicate either collective silence or collective fear.

"The cold wasn't just around us, sir. It was watching us."

Long reports that during the second winter, several men claimed to hear voices in the ice, calling them by name, and sometimes using the voices of deceased comrades.

He insists this began before the first recorded deaths at Fort Conger.

Sergeant Brainard allegedly wrote privately of "footsteps by the huts, longer than a man's stride and bending strangely at the heel."

Those exact words do not appear in the official journal, but the paper indeed shows erasures consistent with removed lines.

III. THE MARCH SOUTH AND THE FIRST APPEARANCE

The retreat to Cape Sabine has been exhaustively documented elsewhere, but Long's testimony adds a disturbing element.

He states the following occurred on the 11th night of their march:

"We heard someone laughing out on the ice. Not close—far. But it carried, Colonel, like the wind was helping it along."

Long, Rice, and two others reportedly saw a dark form moving between pressure ridges.

Not walking upright—leaning, as if its spine bent halfway down its length.

No one fired a weapon.

They feared the sound would drive it nearer.

Long claims Lieutenant Greely forbade discussion of this apparition, calling it "the product of exhaustion."

Yet Long notes that Greely thereafter ordered double watches and prohibited men from leaving the tents alone.

IV. INCIDENT AT THE WATER HOLE

One man—Private Ellison—vanished while fetching ice.

Long states that his footprints ended abruptly, not leading to water, not into open ice—just ending.

"It was as if he walked into a wall of night we couldn't see."

A trail of drag marks appeared ten yards beyond the last footprint, leading toward a ridge no man could climb without rope.

No body was recovered.

The official record only states: "lost in a storm."

V. CAPE SABINE AND THE FINAL NIGHTS

I asked Long directly what happened during the four days he remained alone.

He refused to speak for several minutes.

When he did, he spoke softly, as if the walls might hear him.

“It did not want the others, Colonel. It wanted the last one standing.”

Long claims that the entity—or whatever he perceived—circled the hut nightly, tapping on the wood, dragging something across the snow, mimicking the voices of his dead companions.

He believes it was attempting to lure him outside.

He also claims that on the final night, the door shook violently, though no storm was present.

“I held the boxes to my chest because I believed that’s what it wanted. The work. The record. Proof we had come that far. I don’t know why.”

To be clear: I, Colonel Nathaniel R. Halcombe, place no personal credence in the existence of such a being.

Yet the consistency of Long’s account and the erasures from Sergeant Brainard’s journal suggest that something—whether natural or otherwise—was stalking the party.

VI. MENTAL STATE OF THE WITNESS

Long is not insane.

He exhibits no signs of hallucination, delusion, or malingering.

His memory is sharp.

He answers plainly.

But he refuses, absolutely refuses, to return to cold climates.

When I suggested the possibility even hypothetically, he became pale and trembled visibly.

He asked only one question at the end of our final interview:

“Colonel... you don’t think it followed the ship, do you?”

I did not answer him.

VII. RECOMMENDATION

This document should remain sealed.

The public must not learn of the supernatural testimony associated with the expedition, nor of the men’s deteriorating morale.

Long is to be honourably discharged on medical grounds.

His statements should not be disseminated beyond this office without direct authorisation from the Secretary of War.

VIII. PERSONAL NOTE (UNOFFICIAL)

Though I do not believe in phantoms, I have served thirty-one years and learned that fear often springs from something, even if the mind misinterprets the cause.

The Arctic is a desolation beyond the comprehension of civilised men.

That twenty-four died is tragedy; that one lived is miracle enough.

Whether the horrors Long describes were real, imagined, or born from the extremity of starvation, we shall never know.

But I record them faithfully, as duty demands.

— Colonel Nathaniel R. Halcombe
Office of Military Inquiry