

From Schwatka's Narrative

"Lieutenant Irving's grave was on the crest of a gravel ridge, about twenty yards further back from the shore and obviously despoiled.

The reader must remember that nearly all Arctic graves are built upon the surface, being side walled with large stones collected in the vicinity. No doubt the natives had broken open the grave to obtain whatever articles contained, but the medal, which identified the grave, fortunately had eluded their vigilance.

Just outside the broken down walls of the grave, we came upon the skull. The larger bones were scattered over a wide area; the smaller and more perishable ones having been completely lost. In the grave we found the object-glass of a marine telescope and a few officer's gilt buttons stamped with an anchor and surmounted by a crown. Under the head was a colored silk handkerchief, still in a fair state of preservation, and many pieces of coarsely stitched canvas, indicating that this had been used as a kind of receptacle for the body when interred. From this fact I inferred that the body had never been buried from the ships, where sufficient wood (especially after they had determined on abandonment) could have been procured to construct a coffin; but that Lieut. Irving had belonged to a party that returned to the ships, after it had become evident that all could not escape, as they had originally thought when they first abandoned them.

NOTE: I'd disagree with this – the site of the grave was next to a camp littered with abandoned material from the ships – it was clearly in use not long after the abandonment, and before these items had been sorted out in terms of what would be brought, and what abandoned. To return to the ships to obtain wood would have been a far more arduous undertaking than to built the grave of stone!

The skull and a few other bones were found in and nearby the grave. They were carefully gathered together with a few pieces of cloth and other articles, to be brought home for interment where they may hereafter rest undisturbed. A reburial on King William Island would be only until the grave was again opened by the natives and despoiled."

Schwatka goes on to mention the heaps of relics found near this spot: "a lot of half-rotten navy clothing, blankets, canvas, blubber stoves, ships blocks and tackles, ropes, and cordage. Also found was a canvas sledge harness, marked in stencil T II, in a very good state of preservation. A tent had evidently been erected near this pile of waste materials, its bottom being cushioned with blankets. Underneath them was found a clothes brush which had the owner's name "H. WILKS," cut in the side of it." [Wilks was a Royal Marine assigned to HMS "Terror]

Supunger's Account, as told to Charles Francis Hall

"He said that near the sea ice was a large tupik of same kind of material as that now covering the habitation of E-bier-bing & Too-koo-li-too ... (after the dome of his Igloo fell in last evening, [Ebierbing] spread a canvas over the walls so that he has a Kong-mong (Half tupik & half Igloo.)) A little way inland from this tupik wh. was not erect but prostrate he & his uncle came to place where they found a skeleton of a Kob-lu-na (white man) some parts of it having clothing on while other parts were without any it having been torn off by wolves or foxes."

NOTE: The nearness to the sea ice, and the presence of a collapsed tent, correspond exactly with Schwatka's description.

"Near this skeleton they saw a stick standing erect wh. had been broken off - the part broken off lying close by. From the appearance both he & his uncle thought the stick, or rather small pillar or post, had been broken off by a Ni-noo (polar bear) on taking hold of that part of the wooden pillar wh. was erect they found it firmly fixed - could not move it a bit. But what attracted their attention the most on arriving at this pillar was a stone - or rather several large flat stones lying flat on the sandy ground & tight to-gether. After much labor one of these stones was loosened from its carefully fixed position & by great exertions of both nephew & uncle the stone was lifted up a little at one edge just sufficient that they could see that another tier of large flat stones firmly & tightly fitted together was underneath. This discouraged them in their purpose wh. was to remove the stones to see what had been buried there for they was [sic] quite sure that something valuable was underneath."

"Monday, June 4, 1866. Another interview with Su-pung-er who with his family (natives of Pelly Bay) came with us keeping with our company most of the way from Lat. 68F8-00-00 N, Long. 88F8-17'-15" W (where I & my party met them) to this place. 3h-00 P.M. Present Su-pung-er, myself, my good Too-koo-li-too & the widow Mam-mark. Su-pung-er had just told us that when he & his uncle were on Ki-ik-tung (as the natives denominate King Williams Land) they saw something that was a great curiosity to them & they could not make out what it was for. From his description of it, Too-koo-li-too suggests that it was a cook stove - it was very heavy & all iron. It had on one side or end a great many small pieces of iron close enough together to make it look something like spears - fish spears. By his language & symbolizing, these pieces of iron can be none other than a grate in the stove for burning hard coal.

NOTE: This may correspond with one of the "blubber stoves" mentioned by Schwatka, although it sounds like a much more substantial one.

There were several heavy Oot-koo-seeks (kettles) with handles or bales. Too-koo-li-too has asked Su-pung-er why he did not get these kettles. He answers

that he & uncle had as much of other things as they could carry & these Oot-koo-seeks were very heavy. Su-pung-er himself had 3 Boats oars & a mast besides some smaller articles that he found. The place where this curiosity (stove) was, was close by the large tu-pik (tent). The tent they found was close by the coast above Back's Bay, not far from Victory Point as Su-pung-er has shown on the chart that I placed before him. A little back (inland) from the tent, was where his uncle 1st found a large piece of wood - a post or pillar sticking up & this drew his uncle's attention to something by it. The pillar was broken off. They both thought it had been broken off by a Ni-noo. This post or pillar was sticking upright in the ground & was beside some flat stones that were very tight to-gether. They thought there must be something covered up by these stones & they tried very hard to get one loose. There was a hole near one end that appeared to have been made by some strong wild animal. After trying to raise one of these stones & failing they went back to where the tupik was. After a while they concluded to go & make other attempts to raise some of the stones where the pillar was found. At last they were successful in raising enough of the stones to see what they covered up. They found a hole of the depth from the feet up to the navel & of a length more than a man's height & wider than the width of a man's shoulders & this was all nicely walled with flat stones placed one above another, flatwise. In this vault they found a clasp knife, a skeleton bone of a man's leg & a human head (skull). There was much water, mud & sand at the bottom of the vault. The sand had been carried in by water, as they thought, running in at the hole that had been made by the wild animal on one side of the vault. Near this vault they saw parts of a human skeleton with fragments of clothing on the limbs. There was no head about these skeleton bones & Su-pung-er & his uncle concluded that the same wild animal that had made the hole in the vault had taken these skeleton bones out of the vault & dragged them where he & his uncle saw them. Su-pung-er had on this page at my desire just been marking out with my pen the vault covered with stones. It is a very rude draft as Nuk-er-zhoo (who happened to come in at the time Su-pung-er was making it) placed his finger on this plan before the ink had dried thus defacing it. I will have Su-pung-er make another & then proceed to describe it.