

November 3, 1862 (Doc. 160)

cabinet, but expressing his own long-held opinion. What followed his speech were weeks of diplomatic maneuvering, climaxing in a meeting on November 11 and 12 to consider a proposal by France that Britain, France, and Russia jointly suggest a six-month armistice to the warring parties. Both the Russian and British governments rejected the armistice proposal. Word of those decisions reached the United States at

the end of November. This was the last "serious governmental consideration of meddling" on the part of the British (Adams, 2:74).

Ephraim Douglass Adams, *Great Britain and the American Civil War*, 2 vols. (New York, [1958]), 2:47-74; Daniel B. Carroll, *Henri Mercier and the American Civil War* (Princeton, 1971), pp. 234-241.

160. TO WILLIAM ALEXANDER HAMMOND¹

Smithsonian Institution
Nov. 3rd 1862

My Dear Sir

I have thought that this Institution might render good service to our sick and wounded soldiers in the Hospitals of this city by preparing a quantity of Chloride^A of soda to be used as a disinfectant.

I have accordingly directed the fitting up of an apparatus for the preparation of this substance in considerable quantity, as recommended by my friend Dr Torrey of New-York, and can now supply you with a sample for trial.

I think the chloride of soda one of the best and most convenient articles of the kind. A small quantity poured into a vessel in which urine had been left standing for several weeks immediately rendered the liquid inodorous. It can be applied by sprinkling a small quantity in the locality to be disinfected or by placing a cloth or sponge wet with the liquid near the source of the offensive effluvia.

If you think well of the proposition, please furnish me with a supply of old junk bottles and I will fill them with the chloride.²

I remain very truly
Yours &c
Joseph Henry

W. A. Hammond
Surgeon General
US Army

Letters Received, Records of the Office of the Surgeon General (Army), RG 112, National Archives.

Reply: November 5, 1862, Retained copy, Letters Sent, Records of the Office of the Surgeon General (Army), RG 112, National Archives.

1. Hammond (1828-1900) had been appointed surgeon general of the United States in April 1862. *ANB*.

2. Hammond accepted the offer. In the next

two months the Smithsonian prepared over a thousand bottles of the disinfectant. *Smithsonian Report for 1862*, p. 33.