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Indian hostilities. Message from the President of the United States, transmitting a letter from the Secretary of War on the subject of Indian hostilities

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INDIAN HOSTILITIES.

MESSAGE

FROM THE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,

TRANSMITTING

*A letter from the Secretary of War on the subject of Indian hostilities.*

JANUARY 18, 1855.—Referred to the Committee on Military Affairs, and ordered to be printed.

*To the Senate and House of Representatives :*

I transmit herewith a letter of the Secretary of War upon the subject of Indian hostilities. The employment of volunteer troops, as suggested by the Secretary, seems to afford the only practicable means of providing for the present emergency.

There is much reason to believe that other cases, similar in character to those particularly referred to in the accompanying papers, will at an early day require vigorous measures, and the exhibition of a strong military force.

The proposed temporary provision to meet a special demand, so far from obviating, in my judgment, only serves to illustrate the urgent necessity of an increase of the regular army, at least to the extent recommended in my late annual message. Unless, by the plan proposed, or some other equally effective, a force can be early brought into the field, adequate to the suppression of existing hostilities, the combination of predatory bands will be extended, and the difficulty of restoring order and security greatly magnified. On the other hand, without a permanent military force of sufficient strength to control the unfriendly Indians, it may be expected that hostilities will soon be renewed, and that years of border warfare will afflict the country, retarding the progress of settlement, exposing emigrant trains to savage barbarities, and consuming millions of the public money.

The state of things made known in various letters recently received at the War Department, extracts from a portion of which are herewith enclosed, is calculated to augment the deep solicitude which this matter has for some time past awakened, and which has been earnestly expressed in previous messages, and in the annual reports of the Secretary of War.

I respectfully submit that the facts now communicated urgently call for immediate action on the part of Congress.

FRANKLIN PIERCE.

WASHINGTON, January 16, 1855.

WAR DEPARTMENT,

*Washington, January 15, 1855.*

SIR: In the annual report from this department, of December, 1853, your attention was called to the state of the western Indian tribes and the causes which tended to bring them into hostility with our citizens. The exposed condition of the settlements on the frontiers, and of emigrants to California and Oregon passing through the Indian country with their property, presented to those warlike and predatory tribes temptations which it was foreseen would lead them to acts of massacre and plunder unless they were restrained by the presence of a sufficient military force.

The total inadequacy of the present authorized military force for the protection of our citizens was shown, and an increase of the army was urgently recommended.

In my last annual report, the subject was again brought forward with the additional considerations presented by the realization, in some measure, of the evils which had been anticipated, and an increase of the army to such an extent as would enable the department to meet the inevitable emergency, was urged in such terms as appeared to be demanded by the occasion, and to demonstrate the necessity of the measure.

Since the date of that report, intelligence received from officers on the frontier, and through the Department of the Interior from Indian agents, and other sources, show that the Indians of the western prairies and mountains are in hostile and defiant attitude, that several of those tribes have entered into combinations for the purpose of making a general war upon the whites during the approaching spring and summer, and that those tribes can bring into the field from four to six or eight thousand warriors. Had the increase of the army, which was urged in my report of December, 1853, been, at an early period, authorized, the force at the disposal of the department would have been sufficient to prevent these combinations, and, in all probability, would have preserved the lives of many valuable citizens from Indian massacre. This measure, however, has not been acted on, and at this advanced period, should the bills, now pending in Congress, be passed, it will be found too late to organize a regular enlisted force, and place it in position in season to prevent the anticipated attack, or to suppress it until after much mischief shall have been done. The only course now left to the department in anticipation of the proposed increase, is the employment of a volunteer force to co-operate with such of the regular troops as can be collected for the present emergency, and it is accordingly recommended that authority be asked of Congress to call into service 3,000 mounted volunteers, to be organized into companies, squadrons and battalions, and to serve for a period of eighteen months, unless sooner discharged.

Should the proposed increase of the army be authorized during the present session, it is hoped that the two additional regiments of cavalry may be organized, mounted, and put in position to relieve the volunteers some time during the summer or fall; and the two regiments of infantry recruited and organized for service in the department of the Pacific,

and on our extreme northwestern frontier, where troops are greatly needed.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

JEFFERSON DAVIS.

*Secretary of War.*

To the PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

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HEADQUARTERS FORT LARAMIE,

*November 29, 1854.*

COLONEL: Pursuant to your instructions of the 17th ultimo, I have the honor to make the following report in relation to the country occupied by the Sioux, their numbers, the best points for operating against them, &c.

These Indians are divided into several bands, who live in different sections of the country, and have separate interests.

The Oyer-lal-lah occupy the country from the head waters of Powder river south, to the south fork of the Platte, and between the forks of the Platte. They generally winter on the Powder river, or between it and the Platte. The northern part of their country is intersected by the Black Hills, but wagons can pass through it in various directions with little difficulty. It is abundantly supplied with wood, and fine streams of water. They have two hundred and thirty lodges, and, counting three warriors to a lodge, and twelve persons, they number about 700 warriors, and of all ages and sexes, about 2,700.

The Brulies have 200 lodges, and the Wah-sah-zhe, a branch of the Brulies, and generally associated with them, have 75 lodges, and in all they number 800 warriors, and 3,300 men, women, and children. The Bear, who was made chief of all the Sioux at the treaty held near this post in 1851, recently deceased, of wounds received when Lieutenant Grattan's party was massacred, was a Wah-sah-zhe, and the chief of that band. It is made up of murderers and outlaws, from other bands of Sioux. The country of the Brulies extends from the sources of the White river south, across the *L'eau qui-court*, to the Platte, and as far east as the forks of the Platte. Between the *L'eau qui-court* and the Platte the country from the head of Loup fork west, to a point opposite Horse creek, is made up of sand hills, interspersed with small lakes. This country has no timber in it, and very little other grass than the buffalo grass. It is almost unknown, except to the Indians, with whom it is a favorite resort in winter. There are traders who have crossed it occasionally. Troops would have no difficulty in passing from one river to the other.

The Men-i-cou-zha have 275 lodges, and their kindred bands, who live on the Missouri, the Oak-pa-pas, have 200 lodges; the Black-feet, (a band of Sioux,) 200, and the Nobows 240; in all 815 lodges, and they number about 2,400 warriors, and 9,780 men, women and children. They occupy the country from the Missouri west to the sources of the two forks of the Cheyenne, in the Black Hills, and from the Moro river south to White river. The whole of the country is well watered and timbered, and is a favorite range of the buffalo. From the

forks of the Cheyenne west it is much broken by ranges of the Black Hills, but troops with wagons would find little difficulty in penetrating it, by two or three different routes.

Accompanying this, is a rough map made up from a description of the country by those who are best acquainted with it, and though not accurate, it will give a very good foundation on which to base a plan of operations. Two roads are laid down on the map, from this place, on which heavily-loaded wagons have passed: one to Fort Pierce, on the Missouri, and one to the north fork of the Cheyenne, by the White river, and returning by a more direct route through the Black Hills. Wagons have also crossed from Ash Hollow on the Platte north, to L'eau qui-court.

A movement against the Brulies may be made by a force from Fort Kearny, by marching up the Platte and crossing at Ash Hollow, and also from this post; and to penetrate the Oyer-lal-lah country, or that of the Minicoughas from the west, troops can move with great facility from this post. Operations may also be conducted against the Minicoughas and their Missouri allies from Fort Pierce, or some other point lower down on the Missouri.

I would respectfully recommend that these commands, each consisting of two companies of dragoons and three companies of infantry, with one or two mountain howitzers, be sent into the field against the Sioux—one from Fort Pierce, one from Fort Kearny, and one from this post. A single command sent into so extensive a country might be eluded by the Indians during a whole season.

I deem it proper to state, in this connexion, that a few days since a messenger was sent in by the chief of the Oyer-lal-lahs to a trader who lives a few miles above on the Laramie, with the following message, which they desired should be delivered to me. They say they took no part in the murder of Lieutenant Grattan's command. One of the chiefs was shot at by the Brulies for interfering in behalf of the whites. As they were leaving the morning after the massacre, word was sent to them that the Brulies were going to take the presents which were stored at the American Fur Company's store, and as they were entitled to a share of them, they returned and took their part. They then came up in this vicinity, and sent word to Lieutenant Fleming that they would establish their camp wherever he said, and that they were ready to assist him if he desired it. This part of their statement is true, and the interpreter who brought the message to Lieutenant Fleming said that at the request of the chiefs he had been haranguing the young men all night to prevent their leaving the village. Afterwards they were at the forks of the Cheyenne, where the Minicoughas were receiving presents, including arms and ammunition, from the Indian agent of that district. The Minicoughas wished them to take presents also, and to remain with them and take part in the war. This they declined, and they immediately moved their village over to Powder river, and, so far as stealing horses goes, they and the Crows are now at war with the Minicoughas. Twenty-five lodges of Minicoughas, who would not join in the war against the whites, are with them. The chiefs express a great desire to be at peace with us, and wish the Oyer-lal-lahs had nothing to do with originating the difficulty in the Brulie village, and,

as a body, they did not join in the massacre, but it is possible that some of the young men did take part in killing the soldiers.

They say they will remain quiet where they are till they hear from me. Under your instructions I could only say that, until I heard from Washington, I had no word to send them.

The messenger brought word, also, that there was a camp of a thousand lodges of Brulies, Minicoughas, Yanktons, Omahas, and Poncas on the L'eau qui-court, who say they will keep up the war on the road all winter, and in the spring they will meet the troops who are sent against them. It was from this camp that the party went who took the mules from Fort Kearney in September. He says, also, that forty lodges of Brulies are on the L'eau qui-court where the Bear is burned, and they say they will kill all the whites they find on the road. The son-in-law of the Bear headed the party which stole the mail mules from Fort Kearny recently; and it was from this camp that the war party went that attacked the mail wagon on the 13th inst., killing three men and wounding a fourth, and carrying off \$10,000 in gold among the booty.

These are Indian tales, and with some truth, doubtless, there is much fiction and exaggeration.

The messenger says, too, that the traders on the Missouri sell the Indians as much ammunition as they want, and tell them that they are their friends, while the traders on the Platte will sell them none, and are not their friends.

I have prohibited all trade with the Sioux by the traders in this vicinity, and they are not permitted to sell ammunition to any Indians. My command nominally consists of three companies, but, in fact, it is less than two companies.

I respectfully suggest that twelve or fifteen Delawares be sent out with each command to serve as guides and scouts. Without their assistance troops would find it difficult, if not impossible, to overtake Indians who are flying from them. They may be engaged at Fort Leavenworth very readily.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

W. HOFFMAN,

*Major and Brevet Lieut. Colonel 6th Infantry, Com'd'g.*

Col. S. COOPER,

*Adjutant General U. S. A., Washington, D. C.*

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FORT PIERCE, *November 21, 1854.*

SIR: I had the honor of addressing you on the 18th of October, enclosing my annual report. At that time I had just returned from my visit to the Yellow Stone river, and could only briefly remark on the late unfortunate affair at Fort Laramie.

Since that time the whole of the Brulies, as well as most of the other bands of Sioux Indians who were present at that affair, have arrived in the vicinity of this place, and their conduct and talk has produced the greatest excitement among the other bands of Sioux tribes. Feeling that their conduct will draw upon them chastisement from the govern-

ment, they are urging all the others to prepare to join them in defence against any United States troops that may be sent, stating that the ease with which they killed the unfortunate party at the Platte shows them that they can easily overcome any party or numbers that may be sent against them. They are untiring in procuring ammunition and guns, arrow points, and all implements of war, for that purpose.

It is true they have been counselled by their agents, for years past, that if they did not desist from going to war and committing depredations, that the consequence would result in troops being sent amongst them, and force them into measures, to all of which they have turned a deaf ear, lulling themselves into security by the impression that they cannot be reached.

The Brulies from the Platte, the Ouh-papas, Black-foot Sioux, a part of the Yanctonies, Sans Arc, and Minecogan bands of the Missouri, openly bid defiance to the threats of the government, and go so far as to say that they do not fear the result should soldiers come to fight them. The rest of the tribes in this agency are disposed to do right, and many of them at once would unite in exterminating the above bands. Several of them have come voluntarily to me and stated that any information that might be required, should a force be sent here to chastise these, they will hold themselves in readiness to give any information relative to their locality and movements in their power, and render any assistance that may be required of them.

Something should be done to show the power of the government, and that speedily, otherwise there is no knowing the result. Every man's life in the country is in jeopardy. Place yourself in my situation, while on a visit to the Crows, up the Yellow Stone river, with a war party of seventy-one stout, athletic, blood-thirsty Black-foot warriors, travelling after you for days, with equivalent to no protection at all, waiting momentarily for an opportunity to present itself to scalp you or any one they could reach with their guns; then witness the conduct of the *Unc-papas* and Black-foot Sioux, with one hundred or more lodges waiting on the banks of the river for my return, and in full council assembled, *peremptorily*, and with every manifestation of hostility, telling me that they did not want any of their great father's presents; that they preferred scalps and stealing horses to anything he could give them. Then witness the conduct of the Yanctonies, of some one hundred lodges, on the banks of the river. I stopped, through feelings of humanity and courtesy, to have a talk with them, and make them a present of some coffee, sugar, flour, tobacco, powder, and balls, which I purchased at Fort Clarke, knowing they would expect something. I spent some two hours or more with them in council, all of which they appeared to receive with marked respect and attention, when, to my utter astonishment, a noted scoundrel, called and known as Red Calf, drew from his scabbard a huge knife, and cut each one of the sacks, and scattered the contents furiously in every direction. He then threw the tobacco, powder, and balls in the river, and in quick succession forty or fifty guns were fired off all around and about me.

I am sure nothing but my coolness and apparent firmness saved me; and the feeling lecture I gave them, and the certainty of being punished for such conduct, caused the interview to end as favorably as it did.

The traders in this district had all proceeded with their outfits for trade to the different points usually occupied by them, previous to receiving an account of the Laramie affair, and before my return to this point, otherwise I should not have permitted them to leave their forts. I would recall them, but this cannot be done without an armed force to protect them; for, should the Indians be apprised, they would, without doubt, seize upon everything they have.

In the hope that the foregoing statement of facts will cause the immediate action of the government,

I have the honor to be, sir, your obedient servant,

ALFRED J. VAUGHAN,

*Indian Agent.*

Col. ALFRED CUMMINS,

*Sup. Ind. Affairs, St. Louis, Missouri.*

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*Extract of a letter submitted to the Department (January 15) by the Hon. D. R. Atchison, United States Senate, from Major Dougherty, of St. Louis, "An old Indian agent, who knows much of the Indians on the Upper Missouri and Platte, and has travelled over every portion of the country on the Upper Missouri:"*

"I will ask your permission to drop you one or two suggestions relative to our Sioux difficulties. It is highly important that a decisive blow should be given them at the very onset. This would have the effect to deter all other neighboring tribes from joining in with the Sioux against us. You ought to exercise your influence with the Secretary of War and convince him of the great importance of establishing a fort early in the spring, garrisoned by mounted troops and one company of infantry, on the Missouri river, opposite Fort Laramie. These two forts would not be more than two or three hundred miles apart. All quartermaster and commissary stores could be transported by water to the Missouri post, and all necessaries for Fort Laramie could be hauled across the country. All trade between our fur traders and the Indians should be stopped without delay. In this way, with a good mounted force, we could keep the Sioux travelling back and forward with their families from the Missouri river to the Big Platte, and harrass them to such a degree that the other Indian tribes would pounce down upon them and relieve us from any further trouble with them. A prompt and decisive blow on the Sioux in effect would be worth to us, for years to come, millions of dollars and many strong armies.

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"JOHN DOUGHERTY."