

3-29-1860

Report on Appropriations for an Indian War

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IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

MARCH 29, 1860.—Ordered to be printed.

Mr. DAVIS made the following

REPORT.

[To accompany bill S. 11.]

The Committee on Military Affairs and the Militia, to whom was referred Senate bill No. 11, "making an appropriation for the payment of the expenses incurred by the people of the Territories of Oregon and Washington in the suppression of Indian hostilities therein, in the years 1855 and 1856," having had the same under consideration, report :

That a disastrous and general war with the Indians existed in Washington and Oregon Territories in 1855 and 1856, and that these Territories incurred an onerous debt in the prosecution of this war.

The threatened extermination of the whole white population prompted the governor of the Territory of Oregon, as authorized by the local legislature, to call out two regiments of mounted men (the ninth regiment being already in the field) and, from time to time, other troops, within the limits of the laws, as the exigencies of the service required; so that during these hostilities from 2,500 to 4,500 men were engaged in the defense of that Territory. In Oregon from one to two thousand men were called out, to repel the savages who threatened to massacre the frontier population.

During the session of 1855-6, the Oregon legislature passed "An act for the payment of the volunteers," which allowed four dollars per day for man and horse; but the Territory of Washington passed no laws on the subject.

Conceding the necessity for calling out these volunteers, and that they were called out by competent authority, the obligation has been recognized to reimburse all necessary and proper expenditures incurred by these Territories in suppressing these hostilities.

The Washington and Oregon war claims were presented for payment in 1856, when Congress authorized the Secretary of War to appoint a board of commissioners to examine and report them to him; and Captains A. J. Smith and Rufus Ingalls, United States army, and Hon. Lafayette Grover being so appointed, reported, in October, 1857, (Ex. Doc. No. 24, Thirty-fifth Congress, first session,) that the amount due by these Territories for this war was \$6,011,497 36.

The subject being before the House of Representatives in February, 1859, it was referred by the House to the Third Auditor of the Treasury for his examination, and his report of 7th February, 1860, reviews the claims in detail. (Ex. Doc. No. 11, Thirty-sixth Congress, first session.) As directed by the House resolutions, by assimilating the pay of the troops to the army standard, and adjusting the prices of supplies, transportation, &c., to those paid by the regular army in that country at the same period, the auditor reduced the aggregate amount of claims to \$2,714,808 58, a little more than one third of the whole amount reported.

The commissioners had not authority to adjudicate and settle these claims; they were instructed to report them to the Secretary of War, and the committee, after examination of their report, consider some of their allowances extravagant. For example: \$120 per month for the pay of mounted men, \$5 a bushel for oats, and \$2 for a horse-shoe, are prices stated for allowance.

In this connection it might be proper to note, that J. Ross Brown, special agent of the government, in his letter of 4th December, 1859, to the Commissioner of Indian affairs, (Sen. Doc. No. 40,) fully reviews the origin of this war, and at page 13, says: "The commissioners at Vancouver have faithfully and impartially performed their duty. Whatever sum they may have decided upon in estimating this war debt, I hold that amount to be justly due, and that Congress will at once provide for its extinguishment."

The Secretary of War, in his annual report of 1857-58, having had before him the abstract of these claims and the report of the commissioners, (Ex. Doc. No. 24,) says: "These officers entered upon their duties on the 10th day of October, 1856, and seem to have labored with great assiduity and patience in discharge of them, until the 20th October last, when they were brought to a close. I have examined this report very carefully, and conclude that, from the data they have adopted for their guide as to the prices for stores and subsistence, and time of service rendered by the men, it is not probable a more just and accurate result could be attained than these gentlemen have arrived at. The amount ascertained to be due is a very large one, and Congress will have to make provision for its payment, if it is intended they shall be liquidated, of which I presume there can be no doubt."

An examination of the Auditor's report to the House of Representatives shows that two companies, Captain Strong's and Captain Hays's, called out in Washington Territory, are not provided for as to their pay, while it is admitted that they rendered the same service as other companies; that allowances are made by the commissioners for services, &c., rendered to volunteers after they had been discharged from service; and that, in some instances, the same persons have been allowed for services in two or three capacities at the same time.

The committee have examined these claims with the care their magnitude and importance required, and with the view to an equitable settlement, report a substitute for the bill referred to them, and recommend its passage.