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Letter from the Secretary of War, relative to the establishment of a military post near Carlin, Nev.

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MILITARY POST NEAR CARLIN, NEV.

LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

RELATIVE TO

The establishment of a military post near Carlin, Nev.

DECEMBER 16, 1874.—Referred to the Committee on Military Affairs and ordered to be printed.

WAR DEPARTMENT,
December 14, 1874.

The Secretary of War has the honor to transmit to the House of Representatives, for the consideration of the Committee on Military Affairs and the Committee on Appropriations, in connection with his letter of the 10th instant and accompanying papers, relative to the establishment of a military post near Carlin, Nev., copy of letter of the 2d instant from Maj. Gen. J. M. Schofield, commanding Military Division of the Pacific, showing reasons why the post should be established.

WM. W. BELKNAP,
Secretary of War.

HEADQUARTERS MILITARY DIVISION OF THE PACIFIC,
San Francisco, Cal., December 2, 1874.

DEAR GENERAL: I am very glad to have your approval of my proposition to concentrate the troops in the Department of California, and have no doubt Congress will see the wisdom and economy of making the necessary appropriations to carry out our plans, when the facts are fully understood.

There is in reality no question of increased appropriation, but simply one of appropriation under one head rather than others. The proposed concentration of troops will result in a single year in a saving of expense equal to the cost of new quarters, and in a number of years the saving will be correspondingly great, viz, several times the cost of making the change; so that on the side of economy, which of course Congress has mainly in view, the reasons are strong in favor of concentration, but the military reasons are stronger still.

The Army has been so much reduced that concentration is absolutely necessary to efficiency. An Army of twenty-five thousand men scattered over the country, at as many separate stations as were formerly occupied by three times that number, would be almost useless. When an emergency arises requiring active service of the troops in the field, they must be assembled from the widely-scattered posts, involving great delay, and then after leaving at posts the garrisons necessary to guard the public property, there will be few troops for service in the field, for as many men must be left to guard the public property at a one-company post as at a post of three companies. The strength of the Army is thus wasted by diffusion.

It is true this necessary process of concentration has been going on to some extent as the Army has been reduced, but has been retarded by the lack of funds for building new quarters, and especially is this the case in the Department of California. The comparative peace that has prevailed in this department, and the great demand for troops in those of the Columbia and Arizona, have resulted in reducing the garrisons in the Department of California to little more than the necessary post-guards, while nearly all the money allotted to the division has been given to the other departments where more needed. In the mean time changes in the status of Indians have rendered some of the posts unnecessary, or of little use, while others are nearly useless, and very expensive, from very faulty location, their sites having been selected in early days, before the location of the Pacific Railroad.

In view of the prospective abandonment of the posts referred to, the greatest economy has been practiced in respect to the buildings, which are mere temporary shelters for the men and animals, and which have only been kept in such state of repair as the comfort of the troops absolutely required. These temporary and now dilapidated posts cannot be continued much longer. Either new buildings must be erected or the posts must be abandoned. Indeed, the time has come when all reasons concur in favor of the construction of one new post in the Department of California to take the place of two or more old ones. The posts which should be first abandoned are Camps Halleck and McDermitt, the only two posts in Nevada. It is now proposed to concentrate the two at a central point on the railroad, where the troops can be most economically supplied, and whence they can be most quickly sent to any point their services may be required. By this means the very small force—three or four companies—available for service in Nevada may be made to do the work which would, if the Army were large enough, be allotted to a much larger force.

There is one other consideration, and a very important one, in favor of the proposed concentration; that is, the improved discipline and increased efficiency which result from keeping troops habitually in considerable bodies, under the immediate command of the superior officers. When troops are scattered at one and two company posts, the field-officers of the highest rank, character, and experience are without appropriate commands, and their services are almost lost to the Government.

Very respectfully and very truly, yours,

J. M. SCHOFIELD,

Major-General.

Gen. W. W. BELKNAP,

Secretary of War, Washington, D. C.