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Alfred B. Pleasonton

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ALFRED B. PLEASONTON.

JANUARY 15, 1884.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House and ordered to be printed.

Mr. BAYNE, from the Committee on Military Affairs, submitted the following

REPORT:

[To accompany bill H. R. 1101.]

The Committee on Military Affairs, to which was referred the bill (H. R. 1101) authorizing the President to appoint and retire Alfred Pleasonton a major-general, respectfully reports :

That the committee has considered this bill and reports it with a favorable recommendation with the following amendment: Strike out in line 11 the words "such major-general," and insert in lieu thereof "a brigadier-general," and that the title of the bill be amended accordingly. The Committee on Military Affairs of the 47th Congress made a favorable report on a bill identical in language and import with this one; and it being believed by your committee that the report so made adequately set forth most cogent and convincing reasons for the passage of that bill, it adopts that report in support of the present bill. The report is as follows :

[House Report No. 1704, Forty-seventh Congress, first session, to accompany bill H. R. 5525.]

The Committee on Military Affairs, to which was referred the bill (H. R. 5525) authorizing the President to appoint and retire Alfred Pleasonton, a major-general, respectfully reports :

Alfred Pleasonton graduated at the West Point Military Academy in 1844, and was appointed a brevet second lieutenant in the Army, and assigned to Captain Sumner's (afterward General Sumner) company of the First Regiment of United States Dragoons, which was stationed at Fort Atkinson, Iowa Territory. In 1845 he was one of the command under Sumner that marched to Devil's Lake, near the Canada line, to warn the Canadian half-breeds from coming into the United States to hunt buffalo and disturb our Indians. The expedition was successful, and accomplished a march of 3,000 miles in five months.

In the spring of 1846, Pleasonton, having been promoted to be second lieutenant of the Second Regiment of Dragoons, joined Captain May's company of that regiment, at Corpus Christi, Tex., as part of the army of occupation under General Taylor. In the battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma he was distinguished, and was brevetted on the recommendation of General Taylor for his conduct in the charge of May's squadron of dragoons at Resaca de la Palma, which resulted in the capture of General La Vega, many prisoners, and a battery of nine guns. He served with the army of General Taylor to the end of the Mexican war, and then marched with his company from Monterey, Mexico, to Santa Fé, N. Mex., in the fall of 1848. After very active service in that Territory during the winter, he proceeded in the spring of 1849 to join the staff of General Persifer F. Smith, in California, and marched across the country from Santa Fé to San Francisco, with a small detachment of men, by the way of Colorado and Utah.

Pleasanton remained in California until 1850, when, having been promoted to be first lieutenant, he returned to New Mexico and was placed in command of his company. His service for the next two years brought him in contact with the Apaches, the Navajoes, and the Utah Indians of that country, and in numerous campaigns and engagements against these Indians he learned the rough art of savage warfare.

In 1852 he was ordered on the recruiting service, where he remained until 1854, when he was appointed the adjutant of his regiment, and repaired to Fort Chadbourne, Texas, where he remained until the winter of 1855, when he was promoted to a captain. He joined the expedition against the Sioux Indians, commanded by General Harney, at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in the spring of that year, and served with the expedition, in command of his company, until the winter of 1856, when he was appointed the assistant adjutant-general of the expedition, and remained in that capacity until the Indians made peace in that summer.

In the fall of 1856, Pleasanton was selected by General Harney as his adjutant-general on an expedition to remove the Seminole Indians from Florida. The winter was spent in a hard and severe campaign against these Indians in the swamps and everglades, which resulted in their complete defeat, and they were removed to Arkansas in the spring of 1857.

Serious political troubles occurring at this time in Kansas, General Harney was ordered to the command of the troops in that Territory, and Captain Pleasanton accompanied him as adjutant-general. It was in the summer of this year that the Utah expedition was organized by General Harney and his staff, and was afterwards placed under the command of General Albert Sidney Johnston.

In the fall of 1858, an Indian war breaking out in Oregon, General Harney was ordered there to take command, and Pleasanton was assigned to him as his chief staff officer. The Indians were brought to terms during the ensuing winter, and the country was in a state of profound peace in the summer of 1859 and until 1860, when General Harney was relieved from duty in Oregon, and Pleasanton returned with him to Washington.

In March, 1861, General Scott ordered Pleasanton to join his company, then at Camp Floyd, in Utah. He proceeded as far as Saint Joseph, Mo., and was detained there for want of transportation, when the news of the firing on Fort Sumter satisfied him it was his duty to return to the East. On arriving in Philadelphia he found Washington was cut off from the North, and that the Government had placed General Patterson in command of the Department of Washington, extending from Philadelphia to Washington. Pleasanton immediately reported to him, and was sent to Wilmington, Del., to raise a force to protect the railroad to Havre de Grace, and also Dupont powder-mills, which contained at that time the materials belonging to the Government for making powder at the rate of 30,000 pounds a day for a period of eighteen months. He succeeded in less than a week in organizing, arming, and equipping a regiment of 1,000 men; but upon application being made by the regiment to General Scott to permit Pleasanton to accept the command of it, Scott's only reply was an order for Pleasanton to join his company in Utah. Pleasanton obeyed the order. He could have resigned from the Army and accepted the colonelcy of the regiment; but as the Government at that time was in the throes of a civil war, he considered it his highest duty to obey its behests.

Shortly after his arrival in Utah the news of the battle of Bull Run was received, and also orders for the troops to proceed to Washington. Pleasanton reached Washington in command of his regiment, the Second Dragoons, in the fall of 1861, having marched 1,100 miles, from Utah to Saint Joseph, Mo., and then transported the men and horses of the command about the same distance by rail to Washington.

When the Army of the Potomac moved to Yorktown, Pleasanton's regiment of dragoons formed part of it, and served with headquarters and on detached service throughout that campaign, sometimes covering a retreat, sometimes in advance, by rendered such efficient service that upon the arrival of the Army at Harrison's Landing Pleasanton was promoted to be a brigadier-general of volunteers, his rank at that time in the regular Army being that of major. A few days after his assignment to the command of a brigade of cavalry, he distinguished himself in the second battle of Malvern Hill, capturing many prisoners and showing his ability to fight cavalry in large masses. He covered the retreat of the Army from the Chickahominy, and was among the last to embark from Yorktown to Washington. On his arrival at Washington, General McClellan assigned him to the command of all the cavalry and horse artillery of the Army; and it was from this time that the Union cavalry began its career of distinction and glory which it held to the close of the war. Starting in advance of the Army from Washington, with only one brigade of cavalry and two batteries of horse artillery, Pleasanton defeated the enemy at Poolesville, Barnesville, Frederick City, and brought him to bay at South Mountain. He reconnoitered that position, and finding two mountain roads, one to the north and the other to the south of it, he suggested turning the enemy by both flanks, which was afterwards successfully accomplished by the Army. Rapidly pursuing, immediately after the

battle, with the cavalry, he overtook the enemy's cavalry near Boonesville, and, after a fierce fight, defeated them with severe loss, forcing his way to the main body on Antietam Creek, at Sharpsburg. While thus actively engaged, Pleasanton found time to organize his scattered cavalry, and had shown such energy and judgment in doing so that he collected 4,000 cavalry and formed them into four brigades, and with four batteries of horse artillery he held the center of the Union position throughout the battle of Antietam. He took the advance of the Army into Virginia after the battle, fighting the enemy's cavalry at Martinsburg, Purcellville, Union, Upperville, Barber's Cross Roads, Waterloo, and other places, being invariably successful.

In the campaign of Fredericksburg he commanded the first division of cavalry, on duty with the first grand division of the Army, commanded by Major-General Sumner. The battle of Fredericksburg virtually finished that campaign.

In the campaign of Chancellorsville, Pleasanton went into the field with one small brigade of cavalry of three regiments and one horse battery, but it was his good fortune to be at the critical part of the field at the proper time; that is, where the Eleventh Corps became panic-stricken and ran away when Stonewall Jackson attacked them, on the 2d of May, 1863. In reference to this action the Joint Committee of the two Houses of Congress on the Conduct of the War report as follows:

"About 6 o'clock in the afternoon a rattling fire of musketry was heard on the right, but nothing indicating a very serious engagement. Almost immediately, however, from some cause not fully evident from the testimony, the extreme right division of the Eleventh Corps was stampeded, and, flying along the line of the Eleventh Corps, threw the whole corps into confusion and swept it from the field. Steps were at once taken to arrest the fugitives and prevent the panic being extended to the whole Army. Perry's division of the Third Corps and a brigade of the Second Corps were directed to cover the rear of the Eleventh Corps, and, if possible, to retake and hold the position they had abandoned. This, however, they were unable to do, the enemy occupying it in great force before our troops could reach it.

"It will be remembered that some hours before, General Sickles, with two divisions of his corps, had been ordered to advance for the purpose of operating against the column of the enemy under Jackson. The giving way of the right left General Sickles in a very exposed and critical position; but upon being informed of the condition of affairs, he at once took measures to withdraw his force, which was successfully done, and without much loss. The enemy, under Jackson, continued to advance after the panic-stricken troops, until checked by General Pleasanton, who had collected and brought into position some artillery for that purpose. Although a cavalry officer, he handled the artillery with exceeding great judgment and effectiveness. His skill, energy, daring, and promptness upon this occasion contributed greatly to arrest the disaster which for a time threatened the whole Army. His conduct upon this and many other occasions marks him as one of the ablest generals in our service, and as deserving of far higher consideration than, from some cause, he appears to have received. It was during this attack the rebel General Jackson was mortally wounded. The enemy were repulsed with great loss, and active operations ceased for the night." energy, daring, and promptness upon this occasion contributed greatly to arrest the disaster which for a time threatened the whole Army. His conduct upon this and many other occasions marks him as one of the ablest generals in our service, and as deserving of far higher consideration than, from some cause, he appears to have received. It was during this attack the rebel General Jackson was mortally wounded. The enemy were repulsed with great loss, and active operations ceased for the night."

Pleasanton was now placed in command of the cavalry corps of the Army of the Potomac by Major-General Hooker, and the campaign of Gettysburg was opened by his crossing the Rappahannock and attacking the enemy's cavalry, under Stuart, at Beverly Ford and Brandy Station, on the 9th of June, 1863. He had 6,000 cavalry, 3,000 infantry, and 36 pieces of artillery. Stuart had 18,000 cavalry and upwards of 40 pieces of artillery. The battle began at 5 o'clock in the morning, and lasted until 7 o'clock in the evening. By this action Pleasanton ascertained the design of General Lee of moving into Pennsylvania, having captured official correspondence indicating the movement. The loss of the Union cavalry on that day was 1,000 men, but the loss of the enemy's cavalry was much greater, stated to have been 2,500 men. Moving rapidly from Beverly Ford to Aldie, in the Bull Run Mountains, the enemy were met and again defeated, and pursued to Middleburg and Upperville, and finally driven over the Blue Ridge Mountains. It was after the battle at Upperville that President Lincoln appointed Pleasanton a major-general of volunteers, to date from June 22, 1863.

At Frederick City, Pleasanton, finding the enemy's cavalry so superior in numbers, applied for and obtained another division of cavalry from Washington, to which he promoted his aids-de-camp, Custer and Farnsworth, to be brigadier-generals. Lee was at this time moving his army towards Chambersburg. The Army of the Potomac was put in motion by General Meade in the direction of Columbia and the Susquehanna River. The cavalry was placed to cover its front and flanks. The first di-

vision, under General Buford, was ordered by Pleasanton to Gettysburg, to hold that position at all hazards; the second division, under General Gregg, moved on the right of the Army, and the third division, under General Kilpatrick, in front towards Harrisburg.

At Hanover the third division struck Stuart, laden with plunder, which was recaptured and the enemy driven off with great loss.

At Gettysburg General Buford met the enemy on the morning of the 1st of July, 1863, and with the first division fought so hard to hold the position that he urged the necessity for the whole Army to support him, if it was expected we should retain it. Accordingly, the different corps of the Army were marched in that direction, and the result was the battle of Gettysburg.

The cavalry throughout that battle protected the flanks of the Army, and sustained very severe losses in so doing, and followed in pursuit of the enemy immediately after the battle.

In the winter of 1864 the Committee of the two Houses of Congress on the Conduct of the War called upon the different generals for their views with reference to the prosecution of the war in the next campaign. The members of the committee were so much impressed with the plan submitted by Pleasanton that they recommended to President Lincoln to place him in command of the Army of the Potomac, give him the men and material he required, and hold him responsible to execute that plan. The President was favorably inclined to do so, but other influences prevented its consummation, and the result was that in the spring of 1864 Pleasanton was ordered to the Department of Missouri, at Saint Louis. In the fall of that year the States of Missouri and Kansas were invaded by General Sterling Price with a greatly superior force of cavalry and artillery to that which could be put into the field by the Federal commander, Maj. Gen. William S. Rosecrans. In his official report General Rosecrans describes the results of that campaign as follows:

"With less than 7,000 effective cavalry, have pursued, overtaken, beaten in several engagements, and finally routed an invading cavalry, variously estimated at from 15,000 to 20,000 men, re-enforced by 6,000 armed recruits from Missouri, taken from them ten pieces of artillery, two stands of colors, 1,958 prisoners of war, a large number of horses, mules, wagons, and small-arms, compelled them to destroy most of their remaining wagon trains and plunder, blasted all the political schemes of the rebels and traitors who concerted with Price to revolutionize Missouri, destroy Kansas, and turn the State and Presidential elections against the Union cause, and by one triumph in the late elections have given to gallant and suffering Missouri the fairest prospect she has ever yet seen of future freedom, peace, prosperity—all the fruit of a campaign of forty-eight days, in which most of our victorious troops had never before seen a great battle. Rarely, during this or any war, has cavalry displayed more persevering energy in pursuit, more impetuous courage and gallantry in attacking, regardless of superior numbers, or had its efforts crowned with greater fruits of success. Major-General Pleasanton deserves the thanks of the country for the able manner in which he handled and fought the cavalry, and the brilliant and fruitful victories he won over triple his own force. I hope he may receive promotion in the regular Army."

This campaign closed the war in Missouri and west of the Mississippi River.

After the war closed and the regular Army had been reorganized, Pleasanton resigned, in 1868, as he found his relative rank and position in the Army, after twenty-four years of the most active service, to be much lower than that which he had held before the war.

General Pleasanton is now well advanced in years. Having given the best years of his life to the military service of his country, he has failed to make that provision for himself which he deserves. Having a military training, and but few, if any, business aptitudes, his application appeals with redoubled force to the favorable consideration of Congress. The delicacy of manner with which such an appeal ought to be made precludes the statement of details; but your committee is thoroughly satisfied that he needs the kindly aid of Congress.

The committee therefore reports the bill back to the House, with a recommendation that it be passed.