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## Sale of the Site of Fort Omaha, Nebraska

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IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

APRIL 6, 1886.—Ordered to be printed.

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

REPORT:

[To accompany bill S. 1861.]

The Committee on Military Affairs, to whom was referred the bill (S. 1861) to provide for the sale of the site of Fort Omaha, Nebraska, the sale or removal of the improvements thereof, and for a new site, and the construction of suitable buildings thereon, have had the same under advisement and recommend its passage, presenting the following considerations operating to produce the conclusion reached :

The present site of Fort Omaha is on the immediate northern confines of Omaha, a city containing nearly 75,000 people, the post being approached from the city over an ordinary road, and removed some distance from a railroad, which is the cause of frequent delays and increased cost of transportation of supplies. The area of the grounds of the present site is too restricted for efficient military movements, especially artillery drill and target practice, the close proximity of the population of a large city rendering efficient target practice dangerous to human life, and objectionable, in a military point of view, on account of the effect which such a location has upon the *morale*, soldierly conduct, and efficiency of troops.

The area of the present site of Fort Omaha cannot be economically enlarged by securing additional grounds contiguous to the fort on account of the high price of such lands, the conformation thereof surrounding the post being both favorable and inviting to additions to the city of Omaha, many being already laid out, the lots therein bringing high prices, the necessities of the trade and commerce and the rapid influx of population combining in the demand for an increased area for city purposes. The fact is the fort is being rapidly swallowed up in the commercial maw of a great city. The rapid growth of Omaha is shown by the census returns. In 1870 its population was 16,000; in 1880 it contained 31,000. By the census of 1885, taken in the spring of the year under the general census law, it contained nearly 65,000, and is believed to have added about 8,000 people during the last year.

The present buildings at the post are neither adequate to the needs of the service nor sufficiently comfortable for the small force of six companies and one battery now stationed there, which is so weak, numerically, as to make the increase proposed in this bill advisable.

Your committee are reliably advised that the value of the lands (80 acres) embraced in the present reservation and the buildings thereon would net in value a sum sufficient to purchase from 300 to 500 acres, desirably located for military purposes, upon a railway, within ten miles

of the city of Omaha, and that the surplus would go very far toward the purchase of the needed material for and the erection of the necessary buildings to accommodate the required military force at this point.

The necessity for a strong military post at Omaha becomes apparent from the following, among other, considerations: Omaha has long been recognized as the gateway to the West. In the language of General George Crook—

There is no place on the continent which possesses so many advantages as a strategic point as Omaha. It is geographically in the center, east and west, and on the through routes of travel in every direction.

A department commander stationed at Omaha holds every post in this department under his control.

It is the great railway center of the Department of the Platte, roads radiating from the city in every direction like the spokes in a wheel. They now extend into the Northwest, touching Fort Robinson, to within a few miles of Forts Niobrara and Laramie, and a chain of other posts in Dakota and Wyoming, traversing the region occupied by the Sioux and other restless and hostile tribes of Indians from which trouble has come and may be again apprehended. Toward the south and southwest the Missouri Pacific system and other railway lines run into Kansas, Missouri, Colorado, and New Mexico. The Union Pacific, and Chicago, Burlington and Quincy, run west through the length of the department for over 1,000 miles, the former throwing its branches north into Wyoming, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, Colorado, and Utah, both having an eastern terminus at Omaha, with branch lines radiating in other directions from Omaha, while the Chicago and Northwestern road reaches the northern and northwestern limits of Nebraska, making a rapid concentration of troops at *any* desirable point feasible. A glance at the map, showing the location of Omaha, the various military posts touched by or in close communication with the many trunk lines of railway running out of the city, will convey a more indelible impression than words of the situation and the desirability of a strong post at Omaha. The larger portion of all shipments from the East to the Territories and the extreme Western States pass through Omaha. The Government long since recognized its importance as a shipping point by establishing there, besides the headquarters, a large, permanent, and important quartermaster's depot, from which all posts in the department are supplied. The commissary supplies, too, have been for years kept in depot at Omaha, and from that point distributed to the posts of the Platte Department. In short, all supplies, of whatever character, that are not produced or obtained in the immediate vicinity of the various posts in that department pass through Omaha, after having been collected, in bulk.

Another point not to be overlooked is the fact that all recruits for the command must necessarily come to Omaha and be thence assigned, and all officers leaving or joining their stations in this department pass this gateway. The importance to the unity and efficiency of a command of intimate knowledge on the part of the commander with his officers may here be emphasized.

The General of the Army in his report for 1882 recommended that Fort Omaha be made a permanent garrison for *ten* companies of troops, which recommendation was concurred in by the Secretary of War, thus recognizing the importance of Omaha as a military rendezvous.

So, too, Omaha is the center of a large, fertile, and productive agricultural region, making forage and horses plenty and cheap, and the city is likewise in close communication with the large manufacturing centers

of the country, which enables the Government to advantage itself in the matter of cheap prices for the military stores needed from such points.

In conclusion, your committee beg leave to submit the following exhibits marked A and B, respectively, being communications from the Secretary of War and the Lieutenant-General of the Army, which they ask may be made a part of this, their report.

The committee reports in favor of the adoption of the bill, but recommends the following amendments:

Strike out the words "three hundred" in line 2 of section 2, and insert the the words "three hundred and twenty."

Strike out the words "five hundred" in line 3 of section 2, and insert the words "four hundred and eight," so that the land may be purchased according to the usual subdivisions of public lands.

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EXHIBIT A.

WAR DEPARTMENT,  
Washington City, April 2, 1886.

SIR: The Department is in receipt of your letter of the 18th ultimo, inclosing Senate bill 1861, Forty-ninth Congress, first session, providing "for the sale of the site of Fort Omaha, Nebraska, the sale or removal of the improvements thereof, and for a new site and the construction of suitable buildings thereon," and requesting to be informed if any objections thereto exist.

In reply I have the honor to advise you that the matter was referred to the Lieutenant-General of the Army, and to inclose his report, dated the 30th ultimo, in which he expresses the opinion that the bill "suggests a measure which will result in great advantage to the Government."

The views of the Lieutenant-General are concurred in, and favorable action on the proposed legislation recommended.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

WM. C. ENDICOTT,  
Secretary of War.

Hon. C. F. MANDERSON,  
Of Committee on Military Affairs, United States Senate.

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EXHIBIT E.

HEADQUARTERS ARMY OF THE UNITED STATES,  
WASHINGTON, D. C., March 30, 1886.

SIR: I have the honor to return herewith Senate bill 1861.

The central location of Omaha and the numerous railroads radiating therefrom emphatically designate it as an important strategic point, which, without doubt, should in the future as in the past be occupied by a military post. These same reasons have equal force in suggesting an increase of the garrison to ten or twelve companies, a number that possesses many military advantages and that can be maintained with greater economy at a single post so favorably located than at several small and separate stations.

The present site of Fort Omaha is so near a rapidly growing city that in a short period it will probably be well in towards its center.

In a military light this is not at all desirable, and, moreover, it prevents without very great expense the acquirement of the additional land needed to extend the restricted limits of the present reservation.

This bill suggests a measure which will result in great advantage to the Government. The contemplated reservation is ample, and its distance from the city and situation on a railroad admirable.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

P. H. SHERIDAN,  
Lieutenant-General, Commanding.

Hon. WM. C. ENDICOTT,  
Secretary of War.