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BREVET RANK ON OFFICERS OF THE ARMY IN INDIAN
CAMPAIGNS.

APRIL 27, 1886.—Referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

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

REPORT:

[To accompany bill H. R. 6758.]

The Committee on Military Affairs, to whom was referred the bill (H. R. 6758) to authorize the President to confer brevet rank on officers of the Army for gallant services in Indian campaigns, submit the following report:

The existing law relating to brevet rank is contained in sections 1209 and 1210, Revised Statutes (taken from section 2 of the act of March 1, 1869), and provides that the President, "by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, may, *in time of war*, confer commissions by brevet * * * for distinguished conduct and public services in presence of the enemy," &c.

This law has been construed by the War Department and by the Attorney-General as authorizing the conferring of brevet commissions upon officers of the Army for meritorious services in engagements with or in campaigns against hostile Indians, *if made during the existence of Indian hostilities*.

The War Department formerly acted upon this construction of the law, and in 1869 submitted a number of brevets for services in Indian campaigns, some of which were confirmed by the Senate. No brevet nominations have, however, been confirmed by the Senate since 1869.

In 1874 and in 1875 nominations for brevet appointments, based on services rendered in the Modoc and Arizona Indian campaigns, were submitted to the Senate but were not confirmed.

In January, 1876, all these nominations were resubmitted, but the Senate again adjourned without action.

No further nominations have been made, save in one instance, that of Lieut. E. S. Farrow, Twenty-first Infantry, made in April, 1880, and not confirmed.

In 1878 the President requested the views of the Secretary of War as to the propriety of again submitting to the Senate nominations for brevets for service in Indian campaigns.

The Secretary referred the question to the General of the Army (General Sherman) for his views, and in response the General remarked:

If brevet commissions are right, and should be conferred for any wars whatever, they should be for Indian wars, because these wars call for the largest measure of risk, exposure, and toil, and every possible stimulus of honor and profit should be held out to encourage officers to struggle for success.

We fully concur in this expression of the General of the Army. We can conceive of no reason that would be valid in any war that would not be equally valid for granting brevets in Indian wars.

There is rather more reason for it than less. In other campaigns there is a certain glory or distinction to be won, and an opportunity for promotion and reward, which, owing to the limited theater of operations and the peculiar nature of wars against savages, does not and cannot exist in these campaigns. And yet every highest attribute of a good soldier and officer is called for in these wars. Courage, skill, vigilance, endurance, wisdom, judgment, and unflagging energy, while usually remote from and beyond communication with officers of high rank, are all demanded in these disagreeable and thankless campaigns to protect our remote frontiers.

It is true that under existing laws the brevet commission carries with it no rank or pay or command, except in the single instance of assignment to duty by the President on the brevet commission, when officers are "actually engaged in hostilities" (act March 3, 1883).

With that exception they confer a mere title. It may be no more than a ribbon, or a cross, or other decoration, but it is a visible symbol of the appreciation of a commanding general and of the recognition of the nation through its Chief Magistrate and Senate.

Believing that there is some just doubt about the construction and meaning of the present law, and that such recognition would be only justice to some exceedingly meritorious officers, your committee recommend that the bill be amended for greater certainty by striking out in line 8 the words "commanding general," and inserting in lieu thereof the words "department commander," and that as so amended the bill do pass.