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Report : Petition of A. Pleasanton

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IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

MAY 3, 1888.—Ordered to be printed.

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

REPORT:

[To accompany bill H. R. 2972.]

The Committee on Military Affairs, to whom was referred the bill (H. R. 2972) authorizing the President of the United States to appoint and retire Alfred Pleasonton with the rank and grade of colonel, having had the same under consideration, beg leave to submit the following report:

A Senate bill in behalf of General Pleasonton has already been favorably reported by this committee and is now on the Calendar of the Senate.

Your committee adopt the House report in this case, report the bill back to the Senate with amendments, and as amended recommend its passage.

House Report No. 340, Fiftieth Congress, first session.

The Committee on Military Affairs, to whom was referred the bill (H. R. 2972) to authorize the President to appoint and retire Alfred Pleasonton, a brigadier-general, beg leave to report as follows:

“That Alfred Pleasonton was born in the city of Washington on the 7th day of January, 1824; was appointed to West Point in 1840; graduated from the Military Academy in 1844; assigned as a brevet second lieutenant to the First Regiment of Dragoons, of which Captain Sumner (afterwards General Sumner) was commander.

“Lieutenant Pleasonton served in Iowa (when a Territory) until the winter of 1845-'46, when he was promoted to the Second Regiment of Dragoons, under the command of General Zachary Taylor. He went through the Mexican war, and was brevetted by General Taylor for gallantry in Captain May's charge at Resaca de la Palma. At the termination of the Mexican war he marched, in command of the Second Dragoons, to Santa Fé, N. Mex., under the command of Colonel Washington, and was in active service throughout that winter. In the following spring he was appointed assistant adjutant-general on the staff of General Persifor F. Smith, commanding in California, and with a small force of ten dragoons and seven Mexicans to pack his mules, two guides, and one superintendent over the Mexicans—twenty-one in all—he marched from Santa Fé to San Francisco, through the savage

tribes inhabiting the country of transit. On being promoted the next year, he returned to New Mexico, and for two years was actively engaged in fighting the hostile tribes disputing possession of the country.

“General Harney appointed him adjutant-general on the Sioux expedition, which was a success; and afterwards General Harney appointed him as adjutant-general in Florida, in removing the Seminoles, which was accomplished. Lieutenant Pleasonton was transferred to Kansas, and was there during the troubles in Kansas, and subsequently aided in fitting up the Utah expedition. An Indian war breaking out in Washington Territory he was transferred with the general in command and brought the Indians to terms.

“In 1854, during the administration of President Pierce, Congress passed a bill creating two cavalry regiments and two infantry regiments, and in assigning officers to these regiments they were in the main assigned from the South, and the majority of these officers, when the war between the States broke out, resigned and went South. It was decided to call these two regiments cavalry regiments, and the result was, that according to the promotion of field-officers it was made by arm of the service, below the rank of field-officers it was made regimentally.

“In calling these two regiments cavalry, the Government made a distinct arm of the service. The two regiments of dragoons oldest in the service were one arm, the mounted rifles raised for the Mexican war was another, and the two cavalry were another arm. The promotion of field-officers was confined to them. All the senior officers were in the dragoon regiments; but by this peculiar arrangement they were left junior in rank to men who were many years their junior. When the war between the States occurred, and the majority of the field and company officers went South, the officers who remained were promoted and made field-officers over officers in the dragoons whose subalterns they had been not more than five years before. Subsequently Congress passed an act calling all the mounted men cavalry, making the First and Second Dragoons the First and Second Cavalry; and this act made the majority of the officers of these regiments the juniors of the other regiments of cavalry.

“The services rendered by General Pleasonton in the war between the States are so admirably set forth in the report made by the honorable Mr. Bayne in the first session of the Forty-seventh Congress that the same is adopted and embodied in this report and made part thereof, or so much thereof as refers to the services of General Pleasonton in said last-named war.

“In March, 1861, General Scott ordered Pleasonton 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. Pleasonton 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's 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 Pleasonton to accept the command of it, Scott's only reply was an order for Pleasonton to join his company in Utah. Pleasonton 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, but 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 afterward 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 Sharpsburgh. 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 Martinsburgh, Purcellville, Union, Upperville, Barber's Cross-Roads, Waterloo, and other places, being invariably successful.

"In the campaign of Fredericksburgh 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 Fredericksburgh 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. Berry'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 Pleasonton, 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.

"Pleasanton was now placed in command of the Cavalry Corps of the Army of the Potomac by Major-General Hooker, and the campaign of Gettysburgh 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 Middleburgh 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 aides-de-camp, Custer and Farnsworth, to be brigadier-generals. Lee was at this time moving his army towards Chambersburgh. 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 division, under General Buford, was ordered by Pleasanton to Gettysburgh, 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 Gettysburgh 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 Gettysburgh.

"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 1865 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 10 pieces of artillery, 2 stand 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, and 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.

"The military record of General Pleasanton, from the time he dedicated his services to his country in 1844, through all his service in the hard Indian campaigns, through the Mexican war, in which he served with distinction and won his promotion by gallantry on the field of battle, his distinguished and meritorious service during the late war, all entitle him to be retired of the rank provided for in this bill; and your committee report the bill back with the recommendation that the same do pass with the following amendment, namely: To strike out in lines 11 and 12 the words 'as such brigadier-general' and insert in lieu thereof the words 'with the rank and grade of colonel,' and insert the following proviso after the last line, namely: '*Provided*, That from and after the passage of this act no pension shall be paid to the said Alfred Pleasanton; but this proviso shall be no bar to any claim for pension that the widow, or children, or heirs of the said Alfred Pleasanton may leave after his decease.'"