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Military Posts in Alaska

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IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

FEBRUARY 19, 1892.—Ordered to be printed.

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

REPORT:

[To accompany S. 858.]

The Committee on Military Affairs, to whom was referred the bill (S. 858) entitled "A bill making an appropriation for the establishment of a military post in the interior of Alaska and for the exploration and survey of the valley of the Yukon River," have had the same under consideration and report it back adversely, for the reasons which prevailed during the last Congress with your committee, set forth in the annexed letter from the Secretary of War and a communication from Gen. Miles to the Adjutant-General of the Army, as follows:

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington, March 17, 1890.

SIR: I return herewith Senate bill 943, "making an appropriation for the establishment of a military post in the interior of Alaska, and for the exploration and survey of the valley of the Yukon River," referred to this Department on the 1st ultimo, and invite your attention to the inclosed copy of a report from the commanding general, Division of the Pacific, dated the 8th instant, stating his reasons why it would be injudicious to establish a military post on the Yukon River; that if the presence of troops is necessary in Alaska they should be stationed at Sitka, from which point detachments could be distributed as needed, and in these views the Major-General Commanding the Army concurs.

In this connection I also inclose extracts from correspondence received at the Department in August, 1889, favoring the establishment of military post in Alaska.

With reference to that portion of the bill relative to the exploration and survey of the valley of the Yukon, I invite attention to Senate Executive Document 125, Forty-ninth Congress, second session, containing the report of an exploration in the year 1885 of the Copper, Tananá, and Koyukuk rivers of Alaska, by Lieut. Henry T. Allen, Second Regiment of Cavalry.

Very respectfully,

REDFIELD PROCTOR,
Secretary of War.

Hon. C. F. MANDERSON,
Subcommittee, Committee on Military Affairs, U. S. Senate.

HEADQUARTERS DIVISION OF THE PACIFIC,
Washington, D. C., March 8, 1890.

SIR: I have the honor to return the inclosed papers with the following remarks:

There are very strong reasons why it would be injudicious to build or establish a military post on the Yukon River, in Alaska—the long and intensely cold winters, when the mercury registers 60 degrees below zero, and the intense suffering that a garrison would be subjected to during the short summer. Officers who have been there report that the gnats and mosquitoes are intolerable, and that they doubt if any people could live there with any comfort. Besides, there are scarcely any inhabitants in that valley, either whites or Indians. Should it be necessary to have

troops in Alaska they should be stationed in Sitka, where the atmosphere is warmed by the Japan Current, and it never gets colder than 10 degrees below zero. A garrison at Sitka could send detachments where needed.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

NELSON A. MILES,

Brigadier-General, Commanding Division

The ADJUTANT-GENERAL U. S. ARMY,
Washington, D. C.

[Extract from letter of Hon. Lyman E. Knapp, governor of Alaska.]

DISTRICT OF ALASKA, EXECUTIVE OFFICE,
Sitka, August 9, 1889.

DEAR SIR: * * * There is no doubt that the moral influence of the presence of a small military force within easy reach of the civil government and under the control, to some extent at least, of the governor, would be favorable to order and effective government. Besides, an outbreak is always possible, and if an emergency should arise it would be important to have the power to meet it promptly. Our population (white) is too transient for good local militia organizations, hence, as it seems to me, it must be United States troops, if anything. I see no indication of need of any military protection, and yet, if trouble were to come, it would be too sudden for requisitions on Washington by our slow mails.

Yours, truly,

LYMAN E. KNAPP.

Hon. R. PROCTOR,
Secretary of War.

[Extracts from a letter of Capt. P. H. Ray, Eighth Infantry, sent to this Department by Hon. Charles F. Manderson, August 26, 1889.]

SIR: Agreeable to your verbal request of the 24th instant that I express to you my views as to the establishment of military posts in Alaska, the number, location, and necessity thereof, I have the honor to state that, in my opinion, there should be established in Alaska not less than four posts, of one company of infantry each, at the following points: First, on the Yukon River, at the junction of the Tananáh with that stream; second, in the vicinity of Juneau; third, Sitka; fourth, St. Paul, Kadiak Island, with authority to enlist thirty Indian scouts for the Yukon post and fifteen for each of the other posts.

Third. Sitka, being the seat of the Territorial government, should have a permanent garrison in place of the marine guard now stationed there.

I believe the establishment of the posts will do more toward the development of Alaska than any other measure that could be adopted by the United States, and posts of one company, with the native auxiliary, would be ample and easily supplied. The native contingent would render valuable service as boatmen, scouts, and hunters, besides insuring friendly relations between the troops and natives.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

P. H. RAY,

Captain, Eighth Infantry, U. S. Army.

Hon. CHARLES F. MANDERSON,
United States Senate.