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HORSES LOST—TENNESSEE VOLUNTEERS.

LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

In reply to a resolution of the House of Representatives of the 23d ult., in relation to horses lost by the Tennessee volunteers in the Florida war, &c.

APRIL 14, 1840.

Read, and laid upon the table.

WAR DEPARTMENT, April 13, 1840.

SIR: The preamble and resolution of the House of Representatives of the 23d ultimo, on the subject of the claims of certain Tennessee volunteers for horses lost in Florida, and directing that the Third Auditor, "forthwith, dispose of said claims by either allowing or rejecting them," and that the Secretary of War "superintend said Auditor, and see that he faithfully discharges the duties herein required," have been attentively and respectfully considered, and the whole subject fully examined.

The claims of the Tennessee volunteers, for horses turned over to the officers of Government, have nearly all been finally acted upon; but those presented by them for horses lost from the failure of Government to furnish sufficient supplies of forage, do not stand alone. They are mixed up with others of a similar character, to a large extent, and very considerable amount, presented by the volunteers from Georgia and Alabama, the settlement of which must depend upon the same principles. Indemnity is claimed for about 1,079 horses, on account of the failure of the Government to supply sufficient forage for these mounted volunteers, involving the amount of about \$188,600. Aware as the department is of the vast supplies of forage furnished to the troops in Florida, it was thought necessary and expedient to institute an inquiry into the quantity furnished to these volunteers, in order to ascertain the facts attending these losses. The mounted men received forty cents a day for the use and risk of their horses, and the law only allows compensation for horses lost by the failure of Government to furnish sufficient forage. If it should appear, therefore, on examining the quartermaster's statements, that an ample supply of forage was furnished, and served out to these claimants, it would afford a strong presumption that the horses perished from some other cause than that to which their death has been ascribed. This preliminary examination required time, but has been pursued with all due diligence. Understanding by the resolution of the House that, by calling

for an immediate decision on these claims, it was not intended to stop all investigation into their merits, but that the examinations should be conducted as rapidly as a due regard for the public interests will permit, I have not thought it proper to suspend those now in progress, but will urge them forward with as much despatch as possible. It is due to the character of the officer, whose conduct has been the subject of the preamble to the resolution, that I should say that the department cannot discover any cause for censure, either in the delay complained of, or in the manner in which this business has been conducted. The same industry and zeal for the public interests, which are constantly manifested in the discharge of the laborious and responsible duties of the office of the Third Auditor, have been exerted in the progress of these investigations. The delays complained of have not arisen for want of diligence on his part; but are chiefly to be attributed to the circumstance of there not being a sufficient number of clerks in his office for the prompt discharge of business, and to the frequent interruptions occasioned by calls for information, made in resolutions of the two Houses of Congress, by their committees, and by individual members, to which it was necessary to give prompt and immediate attention.

Very respectfully, your most obedient servant,

J. R. POINSETT.

Hon. R. M. T. HUNTER,

Speaker of the House of Representatives.