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Report of the Secretary of War, 1833

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REPORT.
OF
THE SECRETARY OF WAR.

DEPARTMENT OF WAR, *November 29, 1853.*

To the President of the United States:

SIR: In submitting to you, agreeably to your instructions, a report of the operations and administration of this department for the past year, it affords me pleasure to bear my testimony to the zeal and ability of the respective officers at the head of the various bureaus; and of those employed to aid them in the performance of the important functions committed to this branch of the Executive Government.

A reference to the accompanying reports and documents will show the state of the army, as well with relation to its numbers, and their position and condition, as to the progress of the various works entrusted to them, and the collection and preservation of the necessary *materiel* for offensive and defensive operations, which is indispensable to the safety of the country. The principle, which governed the reduction of the army from a war to a peace establishment, has been found, by subsequent experience, to be salutary; and its practical operation has been to form a body of officers, equal in all the requisites of military knowledge and efficiency to those of any other service, which is known to us. The army is so organized, that, should an increase become necessary, in consequence of those conflicts of interest and opinion, to which all nations, in their intercourse with one another, have been exposed, and from which we have no right to expect perpetual exemption, any reasonable addition may be made to it without disturbing its arrangement; and the professional knowledge and experience embodied in it, will be immediately felt in the new corps, and will identify them with those previously in service. The military experience of other countries, as well as of our own, has shown that the system of extension, by which new and old troops are incorporated together, is much better calculated to produce discipline and subordination, and thus to meet the exigencies of a service, which does not allow large bodies of troops to be kept up in time of peace, than the organization of separate corps, composed of inexperienced officers and men, with all their military knowledge to acquire, and all their military habits to form. And this is more particularly true of the staff departments of an army, upon which its movement, its subsistence, and the economy of its administration, must principally depend. The system established in our service is equally creditable to the army and satisfactory to the Government, and may be applied, to any necessary extent, without any diminution of that economy and efficiency which have heretofore marked its operation.

Much advantage is anticipated from the operation of the act passed at the last session of Congress for improving the condition of the army. Already its effects have been felt, as the subjoined documents will show, in the decrease of desertion, and in the increase of the business of recruiting. The addition to the pay of the rank and file, the reduction of the term of service, and the improved condition of the non-commissioned officers, promise important meliorations in the character of the army. This prospect cannot but be interesting to the Government and the country. Although the numerical strength of the army is comparatively small, it is yet sufficient to excite public solicitude; and this must be increased by the consideration, that the character of our military establishment may hereafter essentially depend upon the measures now taken for its moral and intellectual advancement. Although it were idle, in the present state of the country, to apprehend any danger from the force which is employed, still the lessons of experience taught by the progress of events in other nations ought not to be neglected, nor the possibility overlooked, that other circumstances may lead to the increase of our military strength, and to the diminution of that wise jealousy, which is now one of our national characteristics. Moral habits in the soldiery constitute one of the best safeguards against the abuse of military power, and their inculcation has engaged the attention of this department, during successive periods of its administration. Amongst other measures, which have been adopted with this view, you have recently directed the discontinuance of all parades on Sunday, in order that that day may be exclusively devoted to the purposes of instruction and improvement. Certainly, in time of peace, no just reason can exist for converting a day of rest and devotion into a day of military parade.

The act for the better defence of the frontiers, by raising a regiment of dragoons, is in the process of execution. About six hundred men have been enlisted, and most of the officers appointed, and five of the companies have been ordered to proceed to Fort Gibson, upon the Arkansas, where they will be stationed during the winter. The remainder of the regiment will be concentrated at Jefferson barracks this season, and it is intended in the spring to order the whole to proceed through the extensive Indian regions between the western boundaries of Missouri and Arkansas, and the Rocky mountains. It is deemed indispensable to the peace and security of the frontier, that a respectable force should be displayed in that quarter, and that the wandering and restless tribes, who roam through it, should be impressed with the power of the United States, by the exhibition of a corps so well qualified to excite their respect. These Indians are beyond the reach of a mere infantry force. Without stationary residences, and possessing an abundant supply of horses, and with habits admirably adapted to their use, they can be held in check only by a similar force, and by its occasional display among them. Almost every year has witnessed some outrage committed by them upon our citizens; and as many of the Indian tribes from the country this side of the Mississippi have removed, and are removing, to that region, we may anticipate their exposure to these predatory incursions, unless vigorous measures are adopted to repel them. We owe protection to the emigrants, and it has been solemnly promised to them; and this duty can only be fulfilled by repressing and punishing every attempt to disturb the general tranquillity. Policy and humanity equally dictate this course, and there is reason to hope that the display of this force will itself render unnecessary its hostile employment. The more barbarous

tribes will perceive that their own safety is closely connected with the permanent establishment of Pacific relations both with the United States and with the other Indians.

It is due to the regiment of dragoons to remark, that its composition is believed to be good, and, I anticipate, it will do honor to the army, and render effectual service to the country.

I feel it a duty once more to ask your favorable interposition in behalf of the medical corps. There is no portion of the army, whose compensation is so utterly inadequate to their services. The pay of the highest grade but little exceeds that of a captain, and the pay of the lowest that of a first lieutenant; and these two grades constitute the whole range of service within the reach of medical officers. In the line of the army, and most of the staff departments, there are successive gradations of rank, each with increased emolument, to stimulate the exertions, and to reward the services, of the officers. The importance of professional skill and talent in the medical corps will not be doubted; and the dispersed condition of our army in time of peace, and its exposure to the effects of various climates, render the conservation of its health an object of much solicitude. And in time of war, this solicitude will be increased by the perils of active service.

In order to place in a proper condition this branch of our military establishment, a system of examination has been recently instituted, by which the pretensions of medical gentlemen seeking appointments in the army, will be subjected to rigid scrutiny. A board, composed of able and experienced surgeons, has been organized, and the various members of the department have been examined by them. The result has already been highly useful, and cannot fail to be so for the future. But while the standard of professional acquirement is thus increased, justice demands that the rate of compensation should be examined, and that it should be rendered commensurate with the duties and responsibility of this most useful class of officers. It is not to be expected, that the medical corps can retain the able men, who now compose it, or see others join it, unless their services are adequately rewarded.

The act organizing the Subsistence Department expires, by its own limitation, on the 2d day of March next. It was originally passed in 1818, and has been continued by successive temporary acts till the present time. The reason of this course of legislation is undoubtedly to be found in the fact, that the introduction of the system was an experiment, and it was deemed prudent to test its operation, before a permanent character was given to it. This has been fully done, and the result is, in every point of view, satisfactory. All who, were acquainted with the mode of supplying the army previously to, and during the late war, and for a few years after its termination, must be sensible of the superiority of the present plan. In the quality of the provisions, in the certainty of the supply, and in the economy of administration, its operation is decidedly superior to the old system, where contractors furnished and issued all the subsistence required. The continued failures that took place, and frequently in the most critical state of affairs; the controversies arising out of perpetual attempts to issue unsound provisions; and the serious obstacles which these and the other operations of the system interposed to the public service; must be fresh in the recollection of every military man who participated in the events of those periods. The army is now well and promptly supplied, and the faithful officer at the head of the Subsistence Department has established a system of purchasing, of issuing, and of responsibility, which, while it insures

this result, guards the public interest against loss and imposition as far as a business necessarily so extended permits. During the fifteen years in which this department has been in operation, more than five millions and a half of dollars have been expended under its direction, and the whole loss which has been incurred by the defalcations of its officers does not amount to sixteen thousand dollars.

I consider that the time has arrived when the present arrangement should be rendered permanent, and I therefore present the subject with that view to your notice; and I also beg leave to suggest that the compensation of the clerks in the office should be increased. It is now lower than the average amount allowed in the other public offices, and less than is due to their labor and responsibility.

The report of the visitors appointed to examine the Military Academy, shows that the institution is in a prosperous condition, and is fulfilling the duties committed to it, in the education of the young men destined for the military service of the country. The suggestions, made by the visitors, for the improvement of this national school, are the result of a careful examination, and coming, as they do, from a body of able and impartial citizens, are entitled to much consideration. They appear to me just in themselves, and promising, in the event of their adoption, salutary consequences to the institution.

There is one subject which I feel particularly desirous of placing before you. The situation of teacher of drawing corresponds neither with the nature and importance of the duties required of that officer, nor with the professional merit of the distinguished artist who has relinquished the fair prospects held out to him in a foreign country, to accept it. The art itself is highly important to military men, and its acquisition is essential to a respectable standing at the academy. It is very desirable that the instructor should unite in his person those high qualifications, natural and acquired, which have in all ages been the lot of those who have attained eminence in the art, and which have placed it among those pursuits that are at once the cause and the effect of advanced improvement in society. I respectfully recommend that this officer be placed in the same situation as the professors at the academy, and I cannot but believe that such a measure would not only be just in itself, but would be a proper tribute of respect to the liberal arts, and a proper notice of one whose professional talents and success have been honorable to his country.

I have had the honor heretofore to submit to your consideration my views in relation to brevet commissions in the army, and I am induced, as an act of justice to those entitled to them, again to present the subject. If no new legislation is contemplated, nor any action of the Senate which shall change the principle or practice heretofore prevalent, no objections occur to me to delay any longer these promotions. The officers have earned them by length of service agreeably to the established usage; and to make a discrimination, without any previous declaration, so as to exclude from this advantage those who are at this time entitled to it, does not seem called for by the exigency of any circumstance connected with this subject: and, in fact, there are no very obvious reasons, occurring to me, why these professional honors which, in common cases, make no demand upon the Treasury, but serve to foster those professional feelings which give elevation to the military character, should not be granted as they have heretofore been. Under ordinary circumstances, they would produce no practical operation,

either with relation to emolument or command. When they should do either, it would be precisely when their value would be enhanced by the very state of things producing this change in their operation. When the greater experience of the brevet officer would entitle him to an enlarged command, and to a corresponding rank over those, whether in the regular army or the militia, whose qualifications, so far as these depend upon service, are less than his.

The attention of the army has been frequently drawn to a project for the establishment of a fund for the support of invalid officers, and of the widows and children of such as may die in the service. The object is a commendable one, and as the only aid expected of the Government is such legislative provision as may be necessary to give effect to the measure, in conformity with the general views of the officers of the army, it is certainly entitled to the favorable regard of the Government. A moderate and stated deduction from the pay of each officer would create a fund which would afford essential relief to many who otherwise would be exposed to want and penury, and might soothe the declining years of meritorious officers who may have necessarily expended, in the maintenance of their families, the whole allowance made to them by law, and who, without such an arrangement, would look forward with anxiety to the future. Whatever plan may be ultimately adopted, a legal organization is essential to its operation and success; and as the funds will be provided by the officers themselves, and for their own advantage, the administration will no doubt be committed to them, to be exercised by such persons, and in such manner, as they may direct. The considerations connected with this measure are so obviously just, and in accordance with the dictates of prudence and humanity, that I trust they will be favorably considered.

And I also feel it my duty to bring before you a kindred subject connected with the rank and file of the army, and having for its object a provision for the support of superannuated soldiers. In our service, as at present organized, a soldier can only be retained as long as his physical powers are sufficient to enable him to perform the duties required of him. When his constitution fails, unless it is the result "of disability incurred in the line of his duty," he is discharged without any provision for his support, and generally, from the habits of his life, without the disposition, and too often the power, to labor, and without the means of support. He is then thrown upon the charity of the community, after devoting the best of his life to the service of his country.

This result may be easily obviated without expense to the Government, and an ample provision made for those discharged soldiers who are unable to procure the means of support. The principle which has been long and wisely applied to the navy, may be safely applied to the army. An inconsiderable deduction from the pay of each soldier would go far towards the creation of a fund for this purpose; and if this deduction were to commence with those who might enlist after the passage of the law, there could be no objections on account of the previous engagements formed with the soldiers. And there are three auxiliary sources of revenue which may be applied towards the former object.

These are, fines assessed by courts martial.

The pay due to soldiers who may die without leaving any heirs to claim it.

A proportion of the post fund, which is principally derived from a tax upon sutlers.

It is believed that the means which may be realized agreeably to this suggestion, would be found sufficient to provide for the maintenance of this class of persons, whose condition is now so hopeless, and so unsuited to the character of the Government and the feelings of the community.

The experience of every year adds to the conviction, that the sooner the Indians remaining east of the Mississippi, migrate to the region west of that river, the sooner will they be relieved from the embarrassments of their present position, and placed in a situation where they may physically and morally improve, and look forward to a prosperous and permanent destiny. All the reports which reach the department upon this subject, concur in the representation, that the emigrants already there are comfortable and contented; that the region assigned to them is fertile, salubrious, and as extensive as they, and their descendants for many generations, can require. They are making improvements, and erecting dwellings, and are evidently laying the foundation of a social system which, it is to be hoped, will afford them security and prosperity. As a striking proof of their improvement, and of the quantity of provisions raised among them, it may be stated that one of the contracts for furnishing provisions has been taken by a Choctaw, who is said to have a supply of his own amply sufficient to enable him to meet his engagement. It is fortunate for the Indians themselves, and for the great cause of humanity, that the efforts of the Government to persuade them peaceably and voluntarily to remove are every year crowned with more and more success. Since the last annual report from this department, the conditional arrangement made by the Seminoles for their emigration has been rendered absolute by a personal inspection of the country proposed for their residence. They have examined, and are satisfied with it, and, if the treaty should be ratified by the Senate, they will soon leave the Territory of Florida. An arrangement has also been made with the separate bands in that Territory, by which they have agreed to emigrate, and thus provision has been made for the removal of the whole Indian population from Florida.

The treaty with the Chickasaws has terminated all difficulties with that tribe. It is understood that the exploring party provided for in that instrument are about to commence their journey with a view to select a residence west of the Mississippi. If they succeed, they will remove within the period limited. If they do not, and choose to remain, they will become, with their own consent, citizens of Mississippi, and will occupy, as absolute owners, the several tracts of land assigned to them.

The obligations assumed by the United States in the treaty with the Choctaws, for the removal of those Indians, have been fulfilled. From the reports which have been made to the department, it appears that about fifteen thousand individuals of this tribe have been removed. A party estimated to contain from fifteen hundred to three thousand persons, have changed their usual place of residence in Alabama, and have declined accompanying the other Indians in their emigration. It is believed that this party is composed principally of the worst portion of the tribe, and that they intend to hang upon the white settlements, in order to indulge the vicious habits they have acquired. As the Government has scrupulously fulfilled its engagements with these people, which terminate with this year, and as every exertion has been made by the proper agents to induce them to remove, nothing remains but to leave them to the results of their own experience. It cannot be long before they will feel the necessity of rejoining the great body of the tribe.

Satisfied, as you have been, that the very existence of the Creeks in Alabama required their establishment in the country west of the Mississippi, where so many of their tribe already reside, you have not hesitated to embrace every opportunity which offered of accomplishing this object. Instructions have been three times given to ascertain their views, and to endeavor to persuade them to acquiesce in this course. The two first attempts proved unsuccessful, the result of the last is unknown. Independent of the general reasons arising out of our Indian relations, which operated to induce these efforts, the peculiar state of things among these Indians, and a strong desire to remove the difficulties connected with them, had much influence in directing the negotiations.

The Sacs and Foxes have quietly removed to the region assigned to them, and the Winnebagoes have left the country upon Rock river, agreeably to the stipulations of the treaty with them, and retired across the Mississippi, to their lands north of the Ouisconsin.

Treaties have been formed with the Pottawatamies, Chippewas and Ottawas, claiming the district on the west side of Lake Michigan, south of Green bay and north of Chicago, for its cession to the United States and with the Pottawatamies of the peninsula of Michigan for the relinquishment of their reservation south of Grand river.

With the exception, therefore, of the Miamies in the State of Indiana, or a band of the Wyandots at Upper Sandusky, in Ohio, and of scattered portions of the Ottawas and Chippewas in the peninsula of Michigan, north of Grand river, and of Saganaw bay, probably not exceeding altogether five thousand individuals, the whole country north of the Ohio, and east of the Mississippi, including the States of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois, and the Territory of Michigan as far as the Fox and Ouisconsin rivers, has been cleared of the embarrassments of Indian relations; and the Indians themselves have either already emigrated, or have stipulated to do so within limited periods, and upon such terms as will ensure them adequate subsistence, and the means of establishing themselves comfortably in their new residence, unless, indeed, the aid and efforts of the Government are rendered useless by their habitual indolence and improvidence. The Cherokees occupying portions of land in Georgia, Alabama, North Carolina, and Tennessee, and probably not exceeding eleven thousand persons, are the only Indians south of the Ohio, and east of the Mississippi, with whom an arrangement has not been made either for emigration, or for a change of political relations. It is to be regretted that the same causes which have heretofore prevented an adjustment of the difficulties of that tribe, and their removal west, yet continue to defeat the efforts of the Government. These causes are no doubt principally to be traced to the ascendancy of particular individuals, and to their desire to retain political influence and power. It is expected that about five hundred of these Indians will remove west this season, and the residue of the Cherokees, then remaining east of the Mississippi, will be, agreeably to previous computations, about ten thousand five hundred.

The commissioners west of the Mississippi are engaged in the execution of the duties connected with our Indian relations in that quarter. They have succeeded in arranging satisfactorily the disputed question of boundaries between the Creeks and Cherokees, which has, for some time occasioned much embarrassment. They have also formed treaties with the Creeks, the Cherokees, the Senecas and Shawnees, the Quapaws and the Seminoles, of Florida,

by which all matters connected with these tribes have been satisfactorily adjusted. Their labors will be now directed to the other subjects indicated in their instructions, and which are important to a permanent arrangement of the various questions arising out of a new state of things which will be created in that region. Among these, one of the most interesting is a practical plan for regulating the intercourse of the various tribes, indigenous and emigrant, with one another, and with the United States, and for the establishment of some general principles by which their own internal government can be safely administered by themselves, and a general superintending authority exercised by the United States, so far as may be necessary to restrain hostilities among them, and incursions into our borders. Until such a system is adopted, it is evident that the condition of those Indians cannot be secure, nor will the obligation imposed upon the Government be fulfilled. The task requires an intimate knowledge of the local circumstances of the tribes of that region and of the country they inhabit, and a practical acquaintance with Indian habits, feelings, and modes of life. I trust the commissioners will be able to report a plan which will fulfil the expectation of those who have observed with solicitude the course of this matter, and which will eventually secure the prosperity of the Indians. As it is probable, however, that this cannot be effected within the time limited for the duties of the commissioners, I would respectfully suggest the propriety of their term of service being prolonged until the close of the next year.

There have been presented for allowance under the pension act of June 7th, 1832, thirty thousand six hundred claims. The whole of these have been examined, and either admitted, rejected, or returned to the parties for supplementary action. Twenty-three thousand four hundred and thirty-eight certificates have been issued, eleven hundred and eleven claims have been rejected, three hundred returned cases are in the office awaiting or undergoing re-examination, thirteen hundred and fifty-one, which are incomplete in their proofs, are suspended till these are furnished, and four thousand four hundred and twenty-five are in the hands of the parties for additional evidence or authentication, or in *transitu* between them and the office.

It is creditable to the industry and efficiency of the Pension Office that such a mass of business should have been performed within the period which has elapsed since the passage of the above law.

I have the honor to be,

Very respectfully, sir,

Your obedient servant,

LEWIS CASS.