

MILITARY POSTS ON THE ROUTE TO OREGON.

[To accompany bill H. R. No. 27.]

DECEMBER 31, 1845.

Mr. BRINKERHOFF, from the Committee on Military Affairs, made the following

REPORT:

The Committee on Military Affairs, to whom was referred so much of the President's message as relates to the erection of a "suitable number of stockades and block-house forts along the usual route between our frontier settlements on the Missouri and the Rocky Mountains, for the protection of emigrants whilst on their way to Oregon; and the raising of an adequate force of mounted riflemen to guard and protect them on their journey;" have had the same under consideration, and now beg leave to report:

The measures recommended in the extract from the President's message have been made the subject of frequent recommendation to Congress on the part of the executive branch of this government, and seem to have become a part of its fixed and settled policy. In his annual report of December 1, 1841, the honorable John C. Spencer, Secretary of War, in speaking of the Indian tribes which roam over the vast plain extending from the lakes to the Gulf of Mexico and skirting the base of the Rocky mountains, says: "To secure a proper influence over them in peace, and to counteract and control their dispositions in war, to secure our own territory, and to protect our traders, it is indispensable that a chain of posts should be established, extending from the Council Bluffs to the mouth of the Columbia, so as to command the avenues through which the Indians pass from the north to the south, and at the same time maintain a communication with the territories belonging to us on the Pacific."

"The present state of our relations with these Indians, and other considerations which will readily suggest themselves, seem to demand prompt attention to these views, and the adoption of the necessary measures to execute them."

The honorable J. M. Porter, Secretary of War, in his annual report of November 30, 1843, says: "It is hoped that the surveys already commenced on the Platte and Kansas rivers may be prosecuted; and that means may be furnished, and authority given, to construct a road through the lands belonging to the United States, so as to afford a safe and expeditious route for emigrants to the Oregon territory. This could be done

at a moderate expense, as there would, generally, be little to do more than to survey and mark it out, and construct bridges over the larger streams. The survey should also embrace the proper positions for military posts, which will be found necessary for the purpose of keeping the Indians in order, preventing misconduct in traders among them, and furnishing security for travellers crossing the Rocky mountains. At these military posts settlements would soon be formed, and travellers, instead of encountering the troubles, inconveniences, and dangers of a long journey through a wilderness, would find themselves enjoying on the whole route the comforts and security of civilized life." And lastly, the honorable Wm. Wilkins, then at the head of the War Department, in his annual report of November 30, 1844, in advocating the organization of the new territory of Nebraska, says: "A territorial organization of the country, and a military force placed on the very summit whence flow all the great streams of the North American continent either into the Gulf of Mexico or the Pacific ocean, would no longer leave our title to the Oregon territory a barren or untenable claim. Its possession and occupancy would thenceforth not depend upon the naval superiority on the Pacific ocean. Troops and supplies from the projected Nebraska territory would be able to contend for its possession with any force coming from the sea. Natural obstructions in the navigation of the Columbia river would enable settlements gradually to approach the coast in defiance (if it should come to that) of any navy in the world. The time, indeed, might not be distant when these very settlements would supply all the elements which might be needed of naval strength to give us our natural and proper position on the Pacific ocean. In carrying out these views, I would recommend an appropriation of \$100,000 for erecting the military posts from the Missouri river to the Rocky mountains."

These extracts sufficiently demonstrate the permanent conviction, on the part of the Executive, of the propriety and necessity too, if we seriously intend to maintain our rights to Oregon, of this line of military posts, and point out the objects sought and expected to be attained by their erection and maintenance. These objects are—

1. To influence and control the political and warlike movements of the Indian tribes; to institute a kind of standing police among them, through which their combinations, plans, dispositions, policy, and wants may be ascertained; to prevent, if necessary, their migrations from north to south, or the contrary; to suppress intestine wars among themselves, and prevent the formation of confederacies and the concentration of forces which might be dangerous to our frontier; and to enable the government more effectually to restrain the misconduct of domestic traders and foreign emissaries, alike for our own safety and the best interests of the Indian.

2. To protect and facilitate the movements of traders, travellers, and emigrants. It is known that this great inland route is now the channel of a considerable fur trade; but it is found to be a business of great hardship, privation, and peril, and the traders are subject to the frequent attacks of the Blackfeet and other lawless and marauding tribes; and it is believed that, could the transit of furs, skins, and merchandise be rendered tolerably secure, as it would be if the policy now under consideration be adopted and carried out, the extent and profits of this trade would be greatly augmented. This, however, is a consideration of minor import-

ance when compared with the great object of encouraging, facilitating, and guarding emigration to our territories on the Pacific.

Such are the convictions of our people in regard to the advantages which those territories hold out to the settler; their ambition to become the founders of new States in the farthest west; their restless energy of character and daring adventure, as well as their confidence in the validity of the American title to those territories, and undoubting reliance on the, at least, implied faith of their country pledged for their protection, that, notwithstanding all the toils, privations, accidents, and dangers incident to their romantic migration, there is now supposed to be an American population of not less than six thousand souls in Oregon. This migration has involved the necessity of an entire land journey, from the frontier of Missouri to the valley of the Willamette, of more than two thousand miles, through a prairie wilderness wholly unbroken by the hand of cultivation; without a single civilized American settlement, a single post where our flag waves under the authority of government; without even that intangible but often potent protection which the existence of law affords in the remotest localities. Every where exposed to the depredations and assaults of treacherous and piratical savages: with no place where supplies of provisions could be obtained in case their original stock were lost or destroyed by any of the casualties to which such a journey is so liable; where the services of a surgeon could be obtained for the wounded, or of a physician for the sick; where damaged vehicles could be repaired; where fresh vegetables could be procured, the enfeebled recruit their strength, or the diseased nursed in security and comfort into a return of health and vigor.

How many of those who have been seriously inclined to seek a new home for themselves and their posterity on the shores of the Pacific, have been deterred from the undertaking by considerations such as we have enumerated? And how many, who otherwise would have entered upon the enterprise, have been precluded, by a knowledge of such obstacles, from giving it even a passing thought? The judicious location, erection, and proper management of the contemplated line of posts will, in the judgment of the committee, dissipate at once and forever the most, if not all, of the disadvantages, privations, and dangers alluded to, and render the journey so secure, easy, and comfortable, that none, whose interests or tastes would lead them to desire it, need be alarmed at its magnitude or its difficulties. And if six thousand people, under existing circumstances, have accomplished their exodus, and laid the foundation of a new State on the lower Columbia, how immensely would their numbers have been increased, and their strength and the strength of American interests thus been augmented, had they had the benefit of the encouragement and advantages which this project proposes to afford? It is to be greatly regretted that this measure should have been so long delayed; for it can now scarcely be doubted that if the plan had received that "prompt attention" on the part of Congress, which was urged by the distinguished and highly intelligent Secretary by whom it was first recommended, we should now have a resident population in Oregon sufficient in strength to defend themselves against any force that could be brought against them, and adequate, with very little aid, to the full vindication of American rights in that valuable and inviting region. The committee have reason to believe that the project, from the period of its first promulgation until now, has met the cordial and nearly unanimous approbation of the people

of all parties; and they indulge the hope that past neglect will, so far as is possible, be remedied by present promptness; and that the present session of Congress will not be suffered to expire without at least *definitive action* on the question.

Having said this much upon the general merits and objects of the measure, the committee will call the attention of the House to what they conceive to be necessary and proper in regard to its details, and conclude.

It is evident that, if these posts are to be kept up for many years, and all their supplies drawn from as far eastward as Missouri, their maintenance will involve an expense so considerable as to constitute, in the minds of many, a serious objection to the whole policy. The committee believe, however, that this objection can be, to a great extent, obviated, and the general objects of the project greatly facilitated, by making each post the nucleus of an agricultural settlement. Established, as they all will be, in the wilderness, the lands in the vicinity of the several posts will be of little or no consequence to the government, except so far as they may be made available for the promotion of its policy. Speaking of a projected line of military posts to extend, exterior to our settled frontier, from the gulf to the lakes, Mr. Secretary Poinsett, in his annual report of November 28th, 1838, says: "In order to maintain these remote posts at the least possible expense, as well as to secure permanent and seasonable supplies, I would recommend that a farm be attached to each of them; to be worked by a given number of laborers under a competent superintendent, with the assistance of soldiers at seed time and harvest." It is not deemed necessary to incur the expense of hired labor and superintendence in order to secure the production of supplies in the immediate neighborhood of each post; for it is believed the same result can be obtained without any actual outlay. The committee therefore propose that the President be authorized and required to grant to each male head of a family, who shall continuously cultivate the same for five years, to commence within two years from the time of the establishment of such post, a half section of land in the neighborhood of the post, in fee simple, so soon as the Indian title can be extinguished; and, in the mean time, that he insure to such settler the undisturbed possession of as much as he shall improve and cultivate. The War Department will, of course, so far as may be in consistency with the other objects contemplated in the erection of these posts, select their sites with a view to the agricultural capacities of the soil in their immediate vicinity; and it can hardly be doubted that the grant of lands proposed will afford sufficient encouragement to induce the rapid formation of large and flourishing settlements. The settler will be certain of becoming, in a few years, a freeholder—a proprietor of a landed estate; and the passing hordes of emigrants in time of peace, and moving bodies of troops in time of war, (if such should come,) together with the standing garrison of the post, will insure him protection and an adequate market. It is moreover, perhaps, not unworthy of consideration that these settlers, thus encouraged to locate themselves in the vicinity of a post, might be made to serve as its temporary garrison in case it should at any time become necessary to employ its regular garrison in more active operations.

In regard to the species of force to be employed in this service, it is believed that no one will question the position that it should, to a great ex-

tent at least, consist of mounted men. Along the entire route from Missouri to the Willamette, the Indians are everywhere mounted, moving with extraordinary celerity; and nothing but a mounted force will ever be able to control their movements, punish their aggressions, chastise their maraudings, or to overtake or intercept their marches. The almost universal and abundant prevalence of nutritious grasses, too, in the region to be occupied, renders the employment of this species of force comparatively cheap.

The number of posts to be established, and the particular locality of each, present questions of detail which can best be solved by the War Department, after the completion of the necessary reconnoissances and surveys; and it is thought best, therefore, to commit them to the discretion of the Executive.

In conclusion, the committee beg leave to report, herewith, a bill embodying the views above expressed.