

ISSUE OF ARMS TO INDIANS.

LETTER
FROM
THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

ADDRESSED TO

The chairman of the Committee on Military Affairs, relative to the issue of a large number of arms to the Kiowas and other Indians.

FEBRUARY 2, 1867.—Referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs and ordered to be printed.

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington City, February 1, 1867.

SIR: I transmit herewith, for the information of the Military Committee, a communication from Major H. Douglas, 3d infantry, commanding at Fort Dodge, Kansas, dated January 13, 1867, in relation to the issue of large numbers of arms, with ammunition, to the Kiowas and other Indians, and expressing his apprehension of serious Indian hostilities in consequence thereof.

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

EDWIN M. STANTON,
Secretary of War.

Hon. R. C. SCHENCK,
Chairman Military Committee.

FORT DODGE, KANSAS,
January 13, 1867.

GENERAL: I consider it my duty to report what I have observed with reference to Indian affairs in this country, so that such representations may be made to the Department of the Interior by the commanding general of division as he may think proper, also other items of information which may be useful.

The issue and sale of arms and ammunition—such as breech-loading carbines and revolvers, powder and lead, (loose and in cartridges,) and percussion caps—continues without intermission. The issue of revolvers and ammunition is made by Indian agents, as being authorized by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, and the sale of them in the greatest abundance is made by traders. Butterfield, an Indian trader, formerly of the overland express, has the largest investment in Indian goods of all the traders. He has sold several cases of

arms to the Cheyennes and Arapahoës. Charley Rath, a trader, who lives at Zarah, has armed several bands of Kiowas with revolvers, and has completely overstocked them with powder.

Between the authorized issue of agents and the sales of the traders, the Indians were never better armed than at the present time. Several hundred Indians have visited this post, all of whom had revolvers in their possession. A large majority had two revolvers, and many of them three.

The Indians openly boast that they have plenty of arms and ammunition in case of trouble in the spring.

The Interior Department does not seem to appreciate the danger of thus arming those Indians. The evil of presenting a revolver to each of the chiefs of bands would hardly be appreciable, but when the whole rank and file are thus armed, it not only gives them greater courage to murder and plunder, but renders them formidable enemies.

The agents have no real control over the traders; in fact, they are accused by many, both Indians and white men, of being in league with them, and of drawing a large profit from the trade. Should such be the case, (and I think it highly probable,) it is a natural consequence that the agent does not wish to control the trader.

The anxiety of Indians at the present time to obtain arms and ammunition is a great temptation to the trader. For a revolver an Indian will give ten, even twenty times its value, in horses and furs; powder and lead are sold to them at almost the same rate, and as the bulk is small, large quantities can be transported at comparatively little expense. This anxiety cannot be caused by a lack of such articles, because they have plenty to last for some time, but everything tends to show that the Indians are laying in large supplies, preparatory to an outbreak. When the outbreak occurs, we will see too late that we have provided our enemies with the means for our destruction.

A great deal of dissatisfaction seems to have been created among the Indians by the unequal distribution of presents.

The Kiowas complain bitterly of Colonel Leavenworth, their agent, stationed at Fort Zarah. Kicking Bird, a chief of the Kiowas, states that only a few small bands of Kiowas got any presents, the balance last year got nothing; that it had been represented to Colonel Leavenworth that most of the bands were bad in their hearts, and would not go in to get their presents; that he, Kicking Bird, sent runners to tell Colonel Leavenworth that his stock was poor and he could not move in there, but he would in the spring, if the agent would keep his share of the goods, but Colonel Leavenworth would not listen, and either gave all the goods to the bands then in, or sold them to other Indians, and told them they would get no goods that year.

How much of this is true I know not, but from all I can learn there seems to be at least some foundation for the story. Bad management, bad faith, and injustice are sure to produce the worst results. Kicking Bird says that all bad feeling in his tribe is owing to the injustice of their agent; that it required all his influence to prevent an outbreak, and he is afraid that they will commence hostilities in the spring.

The Arapahoës, Cheyennes, and a large band of Sioux, under the leadership of Big Bear, are now *en route* for the purpose of crossing the Arkansas into the Kiowa country. They move ostensibly to graze and hunt buffalo. A portion of the Arapahoës, under the general leadership of Little Raven, crossed the river about four miles below this post.

The Sioux and Cheyennes are encamped about 160 miles north of this post on the Republican, and are said to be hostile. They are to cross about seven miles below here. They are all well mounted and well armed with carbines and revolvers, and supplied with plenty of ammunition.

Kicking Bird says the Sioux and Cheyennes asked his permission to cross the river, and that he refused it for fear of trouble, but that his men wish them to cross, and he believes that they will all cross the river, and that in the spring, when the grass comes up, there will be war. He had been treated kindly at Fort Dodge, or he would not tell us so, but we must look out for our lives and for our stock in the spring. He says, as they talk now all the tribes north and south of the Arkansas will be in the outbreak, his own tribe among them.

He also states that Satante, or "White Bear," a principal chief of the Kiowas, is always talking of war; that they have already had a counsel at the Kiowa camp, in which the Cheyennes, Sioux, Arapahoes, Kiowas, Comanches and Apaches were represented, and it was agreed that as soon as the grass was old enough they would *commence war*; that he (Kicking Bird) had been kindly treated at Fort Dodge, and he wished to put us on our guard; that before spring the Indians might change their minds, but at present their intention was war; he said he would be backwards and forwards frequently to give us the news.

The chief (Kicking Bird) is known to General Sherman, who talked with him last fall, and is believed at this post to be the most reliable of all the Indians.

I would respectfully state that it is my purpose to keep the district and department informed of all movements of Indians in large bodies as far as it is possible.

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

H. DOUGLAS,

Major Third Infantry, Commanding Post.

ASSISTANT ADJUTANT GENERAL,

Division of Missouri.

[Indorsement.]

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF THE MISSOURI,

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, January 22, 1867.

Respectfully forwarded to headquarters military division of the Missouri. This communication should have been sent through the district commander, but on account of its importance I forward it at once in connection with the sale of arms to Indians, and other matters. I have furnished the district commander (Upper Kansas) with a copy of it.

WINFIELD S. HANCOCK,

Major General U. S. A., Commanding Department.

It may be well to state (although it is probably well known to the Lieutenant General) that Kicking Bird was one of the chiefs who killed Box and captured the Box family last summer, as stated to me by the elder daughter.

* WINFIELD S. HANCOCK.

Major General United States Army.

HEADQUARTERS MILITARY DIVISION OF MISSOURI,

St. Louis, Missouri, January 25, 1867.

Respectfully forwarded to headquarters armies of the United States, with request that it be laid before the Committee on Indian Affairs.

I know "Kicking Bird" very well; he is intelligent, and I consider full faith can be given to his statements.

W. T. SHERMAN,

Lieutenant General Commanding.

ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE,

Washington, January 30, 1867.

Respectfully submitted to General Grant, commanding army of the United States.

E. D. TOWNSEND,

Assistant Adjutant General.

Respectfully returned, with request that this communication be laid before the Military Committees of Congress.

By command of General Grant:

E. S. BARKER,
Colonel and Aide-de-Camp.

HEADQUARTERS ARMY UNITED STATES,
January 31, 1867.

Official:

E. D. TOWNSEND,
Assistant Adjutant General