HEROES OF PIONEER DAYS.

Acts of Indian War Veterans Cited in Support of Their Pension Claims.

ALBANY, Feb. 10.—(To the Editor.)—I am not an Indian war veteran, but from a residence of over 60 years in Oregon I have some personal knowledge concerning the early Indian wars, and this, with data gathered from different historical works, will enable me, as I trust, to give a brief but comprehensive outline of the leading events connected with those wars on the North Pacific coast.

There is an impression abroad, especially in the Atlantic states, that the wars between the whites and the Indians on this coast were mainly to protect the homes of the farmer; hence the Indian War Veterans are not entitled to pensions. At a recent meeting of camp No. 17, Indian War Veterans, held in Albany, by a unanimous vote I was chosen to write an article for publication in The Oregonian, giving a statement of their services, showing that they acted on the offensive and not defensive, save as indirectly. I gladly perform the task assigned to me by them.

They ask to be given the same pensions as are now paid to the Mexican war veterans. To justify their claim the following propositions are submitted:

First—The government encouraged immigration before the boundary question was settled between the United States and Great Britian.

Second—It promised lands to settlers before the Indian title was extinguished, and the occupying of these lands caused great dissatisfaction among the various tribes on the North Pacific coast, and finally led to war.

Third—It failed for years to provide any protection to immigrants en route, or to them as settlers, and the latter, in place of merely defending themselves, had to take up arms to maintain the dignity of the government, protect immigrant trains and punish Indians for crimes committed by them, especially murder. "For more than 20 years before the first immigrant party set out for Oregon, the government had been pointing out to the people of the United States the prize it was reaching after on the shores of the Pacific," are the opening words of the first chapter of "The Early Indian Wars of Oregon." And [illegible] was [illegible], even though as early as 1824, in a speech in congress, Senator Dickerson declared that "Oregon can never be one of the United States."

Who can tell to what grander proportions the "Star of Empire" will have led us in the next 75 years? The settling up of this country meant the breaking up of the trade in furs enjoyed by the Hudson's Bay Company; hence their desire to discourage immigration. The government saw in the settling of the country the surest and perhaps the only way to secure peaceable possession and hasten the settlement of the boundary dispute.

Missionaries were the first Americans to settle in Oregon. In 1840 there were about 70 connected with these missions, of whom 50 arrived that year, and were assisted by the government. In the autumn of [illegible] there arrived overland a small company of actual settlers. In 1842, Dr. Elijah White, who held a commission from the government as Indian agent, led across the plains the first openly avowed immigrant party to Oregon numbering 112 persons. This party left its wagons and cattle at Forts Laramie and Hall. At the close of this year there were not more than 270 persons in the two mission colonies, including children. In 1843 the immigration probably numbered over 800 persons, who by the direction and assistance of Dr. Marcus Whitman brought their wagons through to the present Walla Walla valley. The provisional government of Oregon was organized in May of this year. The immigration of 1844 was about 750. This year one political watchword was "Fifty-four forty or fight."

In the spring of 1845, Joseph L. Meek took the census of Oregon, and found that there 1259 males and 851 females; total, 2110. The immigration this year was nearly 3000, doubling the population, making it over 5000, before the boundary treaty was consummated, June 15, 1846. The immigration of this year added about 1000 persons. This brings us to our second proposition.

In 1842 the Linn land bill passed the senate, but failed in the house. It was the belief that a land bill would finally pass; hence, in 1847, the immigration was between 4000 and 5000, again doubling the population. The arrival of such a large immigration increased the alarm and dissatisfaction of the Indians, particularly the Cayuses. This immigration brought the measles, the Cayuses being the first Indians to take them. It was a new kind of sickness to them. To go into their sweat houses and then jump into cold water, as they were accustomed to treat themselves when sick, in this case certainly proved fatal.' The Indians were very superstitious regarding their Indian medicine men, and sometimes they killed them, for, as they believed, causing the death of one of their number. They had seen coyotes killed by poison given them by Dr. Whitman. I saw one of these wolves that had died from poison, given by Dr. Whitman in the winter of 1845-1846, when I was attending school at his mission. The renegade, Jo Lewis, whom the doctor had given a home, probably confirmed their belief that they were being poisoned by one who was truly their benefactor, treating them in sickness, but they took his life and the lives of others on the afternoon of November 29, 1847, in a horrible massacre. This brought on the Cayuse war, and volunteers were called for by Governor George Abernethy, to go in the dead of winter 300 miles to punish this murderous tribe, which was thoroughly done after great exposure and hardship and loss of life by these troops sent from the Willamette valley. However, the principal leaders in the massacre were not secured until the spring of 1850, when they were tried, condemned and hanged at Oregon City without delay. The donation land law was passed this year, receiving the signature of the president September 27. Up to this year not a treaty had been made to extinguish Indian titles, and up to the fall of 1849 not a United States soldier had been on duty to guard the immigrant road or protect settlers in all the territory west of the Rocky mountains.

In 1846 a regiment of mounted riflemen was authorized by congress, but was not raised until the next spring, and was then sent to Mexico. Returning to Fort Leavenworth, it was recruited, in May, 1849, and, under Colonel Loring, was sent to Oregon, but only a part reached Vancouver and Oregon City. Many of these soldiers afterwards deserted to go to California, and the then governor of Oregon, General Joseph Lane, was called upon to assist in their capture and return.

Indian titles to lands west of the Cascades were extinguished in 1850, but there was trouble in Southern Oregon with the Indians, who were constantly committing depredations along the line of travel from Oregon to the California gold mines, previous to 1851. In May of that year two professedly friendly Indians murdered David Dilley, and this overt act brought on the Rogue-river war. After considerable fighting, a treaty was made in 1853 with some of the tribes of this section, by which they agreed to go upon a reservation selected for them near by. They broke faith time and time again. Volunteers were called for as far north in the Willamette valley as Lane and Linn counties.

Oregon territory was created August 14, 1848, and yet four years after she was fighting her own battles. In September, 1852, there arrived at Fort Vancouver the skeleton of the Fourth United States infantry of 268 men, under Lieutenant-Colonel Bonneville. The total military force in the department of the Pacific in 1854 was 1200 men, dragoons, infantry and artillery. Of these only 335 were in Oregon. The Oregon volunteers fought the battles and forced a lasting peace with the Rogue-river tribes with but little help from the regular United States troops, most of whom were stationed at Vancouver, more than 200 miles away. Near the close of the Rogue-river war, the Yakima war commenced. The two were largely in concert. Three miners going to the Colville mines from Puget sound, were murdered in the fall of 1855 by some of the Yakima tribe. Sub-Indian Agent A. J. Bolan went out to investigate the matter and was himself treacherously murdered. Major Haller left The Dalles, Or., with about 100 men, not to punish the Indians, but to inquire into the cause of their hostility. Sixty miles from The Dalles, which place they had left the 2d of October, he was attacked in the afternoon of the 6th by 1500 Indians and forced to re-

Mason, of Washington, for two companies, and Governor Curry, of Oregon, for [illegible] companies of volunteers to take the field as fast as raised and equipped. At Vancouver there were enough arms only to equip two Oregon companies. Governor Curry saw fit to call for eight companies. Most, if not all, of these men furnished their own horses, saddles, guns, etc. They had no faith in the regulars for fighting Indians, and Major Rains refused to furnish any supplies or transportation unless the volunteers were mustered into the service of the United States. November 17 General Wool arrived at Vancouver, and this defeated every project which looked to a winter campaign or to any co-operation between the regulars and volunteers. He found fault with the governor of Oregon for raising a regiment, but at the same time called upon the government for one. In reply to Colonel Nesmith, he said:

"I have no authority either to employ or to receive volunteers into the service of the United States."

He returned to San Francisco without in any way communicating with the governor of Oregon. He became a malignant, unrelenting slanderer, without any just cause. Says one history:

"Had he devoted to the chastisement of the Indians one tithe the amount of energy or industry that he displayed in slandering the people and the authorities of the two territories, his previously well-earned laurels in long service for his country might have spared him the tarnish of his reputation by the total failure of his campaign of the winter of 1855-56, to which he invoked the attention of the world by the grandiloquent assertion that 'his headquarters would be in the saddle.' As a scold, he acquired notoriety."

In spite of all opposition, the volunteers helped carry the war into the Yakima country and then into the Walla Walla valley, commanded first by Colonel J. W. Nesmith and then by Colonel T. R. Cornelius. Here many of them spent the winter and had several engagements with the Indians. They were poorly furnished with provisions and camp equipments—tents made out of thin material and the thermometer sometimes 20 deg. below zero. At one time a number of them subsisted [illegible] days on horse meat straight. Their achievements made it possible for Colonel Wright subsequently to bring the Indians to terms of peace; but under the direction of General Clark, who superseded General Wool. The volunteers were disbanded October 3, 1856, and thus as far as they were concerned closed their service in the Indian wars of Oregon.

After waiting for years, the veterans of 1855 and 1856 received but a very small part of the pay they were promised for themselves and what they furnished. To cite an instance, one man, now old, feeble and poor, served four months, furnishing a horse, gun, etc., and all he ever received was a pair of blankets and $25 in greenbacks worth 50 cents on $1, and out of this had to pay a part as a collection fee. This is not an isolated case.

The Indian war veterans number today nearly 1400. Many of these are old and feeble and in poor circumstances. We see them with bent forms and tottering frames and heads fast whitening for the grave. Many of them were well-to-do in those early years. Wages were high; $2 to $3 per day was not uncommon for hired help. They left their homes, not for the pay, but to inflict punishment upon murderous savages and by striking terror into their hearts to prevent the union of all the disaffected tribes, which once consummated would have enabled the reds to wipe out all the white settlements on the North Pacific coast.

We have a grand and glorious country, grand in its proportions, glorious in its achievements, magnificent in its untold wealth and resources; and we are pressing on to a grander destiny. Must it be said that under these conditions we suffered the Indian war veterans, who fought as bravely as did our boys in blue at Gettysburg or later at Santiago, and who shed their blood and lost dear comrades at last to go down virtually to penniless graves, as many of them will if not helped? Surely not. Once let the truth be fully known and congress will surely heed their earnest petition and grant them pensions.

CYRUS H. WALKER.

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