

TROOPS STATIONED AT FORTS GIBSON, TOWSON, SMITH,
AND WAYNE.

LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

TRANSMITTING

*A statement of troops stationed at Forts Gibson, Towson, Smith, and
Wayne.*

AUGUST 31, 1841.

Read and laid upon the table.

DEPARTMENT OF WAR, *August 28, 1841.*

SIR: In answer to so much of the resolution of the House of Representatives as calls for information as to the number of troops stationed at Forts Gibson, Towson, Smith, and Wayne, respectively, I transmit a report from the Adjutant General's office, by which it appears that the whole number distributed among them, as therein stated, was, by the last returns, one thousand and fifty-four. It is proper, however, to communicate the fact that, prior to the date of that return, six companies had been ordered to Florida by the direction of this Department, and one to Baton Rouge, making, together, about one-half of the above force. When the direction was given, it was intended to replace the troops about to be withdrawn from the Arkansas frontier by an equal number of dragoons of the second regiment now in Florida; but the exigencies of the service on the line of the settlements in Florida may postpone for a time the execution of that purpose. In that event, an equal number of companies of the sixth regiment will be relieved from service in Florida, and sent to recruit the force on the Southwestern frontier.

In the report from the Adjutant General's office will also be found the information sought in relation to the abandonment of the site originally selected for Fort Wayne.

I am further directed by the resolution to communicate my opinion on the sufficiency of the military force now stationed on the frontier of Arkansas to protect the inhabitants of that State against Indian depredations, and to state whether any additional force will be necessary for that purpose. In my opinion the Government may, at present, indulge the fullest confidence in the peaceable disposition of all the large tribes west of Arkansas. There are, it is true, existing causes of discontent among some of them, but

it is believed they may all be removed by a prudent and just administration of affairs in that quarter; and unless there shall be a change in their present policy and feelings towards the Government and people of the United States, the military force now stationed in their neighborhood will be sufficient, not only for the protection of the inhabitants of Arkansas against the depredations of the Indians, but also for the protection of the Indians themselves (which is the most difficult service) against the depredations of the wild and predatory bands which infest the exterior borders of the peaceable and more civilized portions of their own race. These bands are composed principally of disorderly and vicious young warriors collected from all the Western tribes, and require, occasionally, to be checked by a military force. The frontier inhabitants of the State are protected from their depredations by the masses of cultivators and friendly Indians, interposed between the range of their aggressions and the State boundary. To repress the increasing disorders of these predatory bands, the chief reliance of the Government must be upon the large tribes, whose interest it is to be at peace with the United States, and whose horses and other property are the principal objects of their incursions.

The Seminoles and other bands of hostile Indians sent to the West from Florida, cannot be safely classed with the large tribes by which they are surrounded in respect to their friendly disposition. Neither their present intentions nor their future conduct can be relied on with confidence; but they are, and will be, powerfully restrained by the peaceful influence and policy of those tribes. Still, they will be required to be closely observed by the authorities of the Government, civil and military.

It is believed that two regiments, or, at most, two thousand men, will be quite sufficient as a permanent force upon the frontier in question, under any ordinary circumstances. Decided manifestations of the existence of a hostile spirit among one or more of the large tribes would, of course, point to the necessity of a greater military force. When the condition of Florida will permit, and if there should be no change in the present relations of the United States with foreign powers, two regiments may be conveniently assigned for the protection of the Southwestern frontier. The increasing disorders on the Red river and the boundary between the United States and Texas, will require an increased proportion of the force assigned to that section, to be stationed upon that border.

Of all the causes of future disturbance and war between the Indians and the frontier inhabitants of the States, the one most to be feared is a careless and inefficient civil police. Small military posts, judiciously distributed upon the boundary between the States and the Indian tribes, will be of essential service in preventing causes of quarrel and bloodshed; especially when employed as auxiliary to the law and the civil magistrate. A larger depot, both of troops and supplies of all kinds, at some point not remote from the heart of the Indian population on the Arkansas frontier, but within the limits of the State, will also have a salutary restraining influence, and should, at all times, be maintained. Some few advanced posts may also be of use in restraining the wild and predatory bands already noticed. But, as a general proposition, it is my decided opinion that, as a means of preserving permanent peace with the Indians upon the Arkansas frontier, and considering their present habits and pursuits, there is more to be effected by a strict observance of the obligations of justice and humanity

in our relations with them, than upon any amount of regular force which can be properly assigned to that district, unless the present peace establishment shall be increased in a degree neither prudent nor safe in a free Government. If, with the present military establishment, three or four regiments could be spared on the Arkansas frontier, it may be well doubted whether it would be desirable or advantageous to employ them in that service. Some apprehension of the consequences of Indian resentment and vindictiveness quickens the sense of justice and imparts vigor and activity to the administration of law and regulation. These, I repeat, are the greatest and best conservators of peace on the frontier. Too strong a military force is not friendly to their vigorous operation. The authorities, both civil and military, are apt to grow careless in the consciousness of security and overwhelming power. Wantonness in the exercise of just authority, might under such circumstances, be strongly apprehended.

These views of the amount of force required for the protection of the frontier of Arkansas are entertained upon the supposition that the Indians continue in their present friendly dispositions. If any sufficient evidence existed of hostile intentions on their part, no hesitation would be felt in recommending a considerable increase of the force now regarded as altogether adequate.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant.

JNO. BELL.

To the Hon. JOHN WHITE,

Speaker of the House of Representatives.

ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE,

Washington, August 20, 1841.

The undersigned, agreeably to the instructions of the Secretary of War, respectfully submits the annexed table, showing the number of troops stationed at Forts Gibson, Towson, Smith, and Wayne, the same being called for by a resolution of the House of Representatives.

In reply to that part of the resolution respecting the site of Fort Wayne, it is stated that the original location of that post was abandoned in June, 1840, on account of its insalubrity, by direction of the Secretary of War, dated April 27th, 1840. The present location has the advantage of healthfulness, and superior relative position to the neighboring forts.

Respectfully submitted.

L. THOMAS,

Assistant Adjutant General.

The honorable SECRETARY OF WAR.

Statement showing the number of troops stationed at Forts Gibson, Towson, Smith, and Wayne, respectively, and the description of the force at the end of June, the date of the last returns received.

Forts.	Aggregate force.	Description.
Fort Gibson - - -	216	} 807 Three companies 1st dragoons. Seven companies 4th infantry.
" - - -	591	
Fort Towson - - -	91	One company 4th infantry.
Fort Smith - - -	88	One company 4th infantry.
Fort Wayne - - -	68	One company 1st dragoons.
Total - - -	1,054	

L. THOMAS,
Assistant Adjutant General.

ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE,
Washington, August 20, 1841.

NOTE.—The seven infantry companies at Fort Gibson are ordered to be withdrawn, it being contemplated to replace them by six companies of the 2d regiment of dragoons in October.