

Report No. 412.

[To accompany bill H. R. No. 362.]

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

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MRS. J. H. McKEE.

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MARCH 28, 1848.

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Mr. GEORGE G. DUNN, from the Committee of Claims, made the following

REPORT :

*The Committee of Claims, to whom was referred the petition of Mrs. J. H. McKee, widow of the late Colonel William R. McKee, have had the same under consideration, and now make the following report:*

That Colonel McKee, who was commander of the second regiment of Kentucky volunteers, was killed in the battle of Buena Vista, where he signally distinguished himself by an exhibition of all those marked and brilliant qualities which make up the accomplished, useful, and gallant officer. In his fall the republic lost a patriotic and noble citizen, and the army an invaluable officer. But it is upon his bereaved and helpless family that this loss comes with a crushing weight. When he entered the public service in this war, though his circumstances were humble, yet the business in which he was engaged, possessed, as he was, of universal public confidence, skill in his enterprise, great energy of character, close and careful business habits, opened before him the acquisition, in a few years, of a handsome fortune. Had he been spared to return to his avocations, there is every reason to believe that his fondest hopes would still have been realized. But his untimely fate has broken the bright promise, and left an amiable wife, with her orphaned infants, in comparative destitution. In addition to the patriotic motives that influenced our soldiers generally to enter the public service in so dangerous an enterprise as war, Colonel McKee felt that the country, at the hands of which he had received a military education, had a peculiar right to his aid, and accordingly,

immediately upon the commencement of hostilities, he abandoned his lucrative pursuits, and engaged with zeal, and at considerable private expense to himself, in raising and disciplining the troops from his own State for the campaign. From that time to the moment of his death he faithfully and vigorously devoted his time, means, and energy to that service.

During his campaign he lost two very valuable horses, estimated, by the proof before the committee, at from three to five hundred each; the first stolen by the enemy before the battle of Buena Vista; the second killed in it. His arms, caparison for his horse, and his own clothing were also lost in the battle, all having been stript from the rider, and his horse by the enemy, estimated at from two to three hundred dollars in value. Besides this, the enemy also obtained from him a large amount of money, which was on his person when he fell. The precise sum the committee are unable to ascertain; but they are satisfied it was considerable. All this is lost to the family, with the husband and the father. A slave, of the value of one thousand dollars, which Colonel McKee had with him as a servant, was also, after his death, killed at Saltillo. But the circumstances attending his loss are such as to relieve the committee from presenting the question as to the obligation of the government to pay for slaves under some circumstances, or of expressing an opinion upon the point one way or the other.

In looking through past legislation, from the commencement of our government onward, there are very many instances of liberal provision being made by Congress for the support, care, education, and advancement of the families of gallant officers who have fallen in battle, both on land and sea, as well as soldiers and seamen. This is a feature in our history, of which, in the opinion of the committee, every citizen feels a just pride. It is not only a noble trait in the character of our people that they have required this provision to be made, but it is likewise a strong stimulant to the soldier in the day of trial, and a consolation to him in his dying hour; for, while he feels that he has given his life to his country, he knows that that country will take care of those who, in his fall, may have been deprived of protection and support.

In view of these facts, the committee have not thought that, in reporting a bill, they should confine themselves strictly to the amount and value of the property proven to have been lost under the circumstances, where payments have ever been unhesitatingly made, but suppose they ought rather to be guided to some extent by the spirit of past legislation in similar cases. They have therefore agreed to allow the sum of two thousand dollars to Mrs. McKee, for the use of herself and children, and one quarter section of land to each of the five children, to which end they report a bill.