

WILLIAM PITTINGER.

FEBRUARY 8, 1904.—Ordered to be printed.

Mr. FOSTER, of Washington, from the Committee on Pensions, submitted the following

REPORT.

[To accompany H. R. 3032.]

The Committee on Pensions, to whom was referred the bill (H. R. 3032) granting an increase of pension to William Pittenger, have examined the same and report:

The report of the Committee on Invalid Pensions of the House of Representatives, hereto appended, is adopted and the passage of the bill is recommended when amended as follows:

In line 8 strike out the word "fifty-five" and insert in lieu thereof the word "forty."

The House report is as follows:

This soldier, who is 65 years of age, served as a private in Company H, Second Ohio Volunteers, from April 17, 1861, to July 31, 1861, when discharged, and again as sergeant in Company G, Second Ohio Volunteers, from September 5, 1861, to August 14, 1863, when discharged on surgeon's certificate of disability by reason of pulmonary consumption.

He was one of the Andrews railroad raiders in Georgia in 1862, having been selected by his captain as the fittest man in his command for this arduous and desperate service, and received a Congressional medal of honor.

While so employed he was captured, with 21 others, at Chattanooga, April 14, 1862, as an engine thief, chained, and confined in cells, and finally paroled March 17, 1863.

Judge-Advocate-General Holt's report to Secretary Stanton, dated March 27, 1863, and to be found in the Official War Records, series 1, volume 10, part 1, pages 630 to 639, bears testimony of the valor and privations of these men, whose object was to destroy the communications on the Georgia State Railroad between Atlanta and Chattanooga.

Mr. Pittenger is now a pensioner under the general law at \$24 per month on account of disease of lungs and resulting disease of heart.

A claim on account of disease of eyes (nearly total blindness) was rejected by the Pension Bureau in April, 1898, upon the ground that the existing disease of eyes was a result of long-continued strain on account of congenital ametropia, and that the nerve atrophy was a late development, and the cataract of both eyes a result of the congenital abnormality.

The soldier admitted having been myopic before enlistment, but claimed that this preexisting disease was aggravated by his sufferings in chains and dungeons, starvation, and exposure while in the service of the United States and as a prisoner of war.

When last examined, on September 3, 1902, upon which examination his claim to increase of pension, filed January 19, 1899, was rejected on November 26, 1902, the board of surgeons at Santa Ana, Cal., rated him \$10 for disease of lungs, \$30 for disease of heart, and \$24 for disease of eyes. Vision of eyes was then as follows after correction by — 20 lens: Right eye, vision five one hundred and twentieths; left eye, one one hundred and twentieth.

The soldier's affidavit filed with your committee sets forth as follows:

"I was deliberately chosen from Company G, Second Ohio, for one of the most desperate and famous expeditions of American history, commonly known as the Andrews' railroad raid.

"My claim is that the Government is, at least in equity, estopped from denying that I was unfit for service, or that my present condition must have resulted from defects preceding enlistments. When I joined the band of 22 selected men for the Andrews raid I could travel alone day or night, could take care of myself in the midst of enemies, and handle a gun at least as well as an ordinary soldier. Now I must have attendance to live and am dependent for common comfort upon the bounty of the nation for the few months that may remain to me.

"The Andrews raid involved long marching in disguise into the center of the enemy's country, the capture of trains in the enemy's camp, a desperate chase by rail nearly 100 miles; then I was chased by men and dogs in mud and rain over the mountains until utterly starved and exhausted. I was put in prison and chained. The sufferings in this condition reduced us all to extreme misery. We were all virtually under sentence of death. The leader, Andrews, and 7 of our number were hanged in Atlanta. One of our number was beaten nearly to death. I was chained around the neck, and, what was still worse for my eyes, I was kept thus chained for a long time in damp, dark dungeons, especially in Chattanooga, Knoxville, and Atlanta.

"After being discharged, with medal of honor and highest commendation even from the Secretary of War, Hon. E. M. Stanton, I found myself no longer able as before for any employment, and felt that I might do something in the ministry, to which I felt strongly called. I was emaciated and bloodless; I could not recognize most familiar faces across a large room; my friends expected me soon to die, but I took up the work.

"My infirmities gave me sympathy. I could speak very easily, and had a story to tell. My wife, Winnie C. Osborne, married May 17, 1864, and still living, accompanied me on all visitations; was always very popular, giving me her eyes as far as possible. But the work was very hard under such conditions. We were necessarily confined to comparatively obscure places which could pay little, and were therefore not exacting, and thus we continued until recently, when any further continuance became absolutely impossible. I feel that a low rating for this work, done by the eyes of another, or the denial of any account of eyes which were unquestionably made worse by great hardships in service, is a wrong which Congress will gladly remedy when it is understood."

Medical testimony filed with your committee shows that the soldier is unable to read with any kind of glasses; that the sight of the right eye for objects is one four hundredths of normal, and that with left eye he can only distinguish light from darkness; that by reason of the heart, lung, and eye trouble he has for the last five months required the care of an attendant and has been wholly unable to follow the professional and pastoral work in which he has been engaged for years.

The case of this soldier is one of exceptional merit. A soldier who was thus chained and confined in dungeons, and who rendered such meritorious services that he was awarded a medal of honor, is deserving of the bounty of the Government, and, even if he had a congenital defect of his eyes before enlistment, it must be beyond question that his exposure and privations aggravated such preexisting disease.

Under these circumstances the relief sought for in the bill is eminently just and proper, and the passage of the bill is recommended.