

PURCHASE OF LAND ADJOINING UNITED STATES TARGET RANGE AT AUBURN, ME.

MAY 11, 1926.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union and ordered to be printed

Mr. WURZBACH, from the Committee on Military Affairs, submitted the following

REPORT

[To accompany S. 2876]

The Committee on Military Affairs, to which was referred the bill (H. R. 2876) for the purchase of a tract of land adjoining the United States target range at Auburn, Me., having considered the same, report thereon with the recommendation that it do pass.

The history of this rifle range is contained in a letter from the adjutant general of Maine to Hon. Frederick Hale, Senator from that State, and the attitude of the War Department is given in a letter to Hon. James W. Wadsworth, chairman of Senate Military Affairs Committee. Accordingly, these two letters are made a part of this report as follows:

Concerning the proposed purchase of additional land for the rifle range at Auburn, Me., the following facts in connection therewith are submitted for such use as you may desire to make.

The original purchase of land in Auburn for a rifle range was made by the United States Government on June 22, 1908, from one John F. Moody. An additional purchase of land to extend the range was made December 24, 1910, from Perley H. and Mable E. Littlefield. These purchases were made by the United States Government, and the range now in use is United States property, and it was purchased for the establishment of a rifle range for the use of the National Guard of the State of Maine and also such Regular Army personnel as from time to time care to make use of the same.

This constitutes the present Government property at Auburn. The Government and State of Maine have expended considerable money since 1908, laying out butts, telephone lines, etc., and it is now well equipped and a modern range. The range proper, however, uses up all the available space, and there is no place for camping, so it has been necessary, whenever it has been used by any number of troops for competitions, camps of instruction, etc., to hire land upon which to pitch a camp. This land was formerly owned by John Barron, who died about three months ago, and is now owned by his heirs, consisting of a wife and several children. We have an option on this property, comprising 84 acres, shown on map submitted some months ago, and it is immediately adjacent to the land

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already owned by the Government. This property can now be purchased for \$3,000 if reasonable immediate action can be had; but if we do not exercise our privilege of taking up the option, probably in a short time we will be unable to buy as other parties are anxious to secure it.

The range is particularly well adapted to our needs, as it is only 30 miles from Augusta, where the State camp is located. With the securing of additional land it will enable a large force to be camped on the range and instruction carried on both at Augusta and Auburn in case of a general mobilization or an emergency call for the assembling of a large number of troops. Under the present War Department plans, as you probably know, mobilization is to be somewhat decentralized in different localities, and Augusta is the mobilization point of the Eighty-sixth Infantry Brigade; also Field Artillery and several reserve units could be accommodated here and at Auburn.

The range at Augusta is not particularly good, and by acquiring this piece of property we could take care of the personnel which would be brought into the service in case of mobilization.

J. W. HANSON, *Adjutant General.*

This is in further reference to your communication of December 5, 1924, requesting the views of the War Department on Senate bill 3400, for the purchase of a tract of land adjoining the militia target range at Auburn, Me.

This range is a United States military reservation turned over to the State of Maine for the use of its National Guard. It is located in the city of Auburn, Androscoggin County, and contains 70 acres. It is one of the best-equipped target ranges in the United States. However, the target butts and firing points occupy practically the entire area so that there is no room for a camp site.

The John Baron plot of 84 acres, which it is proposed to purchase, adjoins the range, and if acquired would afford space for a camp site for the troops using the range. The adjutant general of Maine is of the opinion that the acquisition of this additional land would be advantageous to the State of Maine and facilitate the training of its National Guard, and I concur in this view, though I believe the project is one of convenience to the State rather than of direct benefit to the Federal Government.

In the absence of federally owned land available to be turned over to a State, the acquisition of land for use as a target range or camp site exclusively by the National Guard of one State is, in my opinion, the primary obligation of the State concerned. Such land should be acquired by purchase from State funds, or when available for that purpose, from that part of the Federal appropriation for the support of the National Guard apportioned to the State under the provisions of section 67, national defense act.

Section 67, national defense act, provides that the annual appropriation for the support of the National Guard, which is apportioned among the several States, Territories, and the District of Columbia, shall be available, among other purposes, "for the promotion of rifle practice, including the acquisition, construction, maintenance, and equipment of shooting galleries and suitable target ranges." The Comptroller General, in a decision dated March 15, 1923 (2 Comp. Gen. 558), has held that in view of the provision in section 3736, Revised Statutes, that "no land shall be purchased on account of the United States, except under a law authorizing such purchase," section 67, national defense act, does not authorize the purchase of land from the appropriation made thereunder unless such appropriation is specifically made available for such purchase. The National Guard appropriation for the present fiscal year is not so available, and the estimates for the fiscal year 1926 do not include any funds for such purpose.

While it is my opinion that under the circumstances the obligation to acquire this additional land is on the State of Maine rather than on the United States, I interpose no objection to the passage of the bill.

JOHN W. WEEKS, *Secretary of War.*