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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, May 30, 1864.—Referred to the Committee on Military Affairs and ordered to be printed.

[By the CHAIR.]

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE.

*To the Senate and House of Representatives
Of the Confederate States of America :*

A bill "to provide and organize a general staff for armies in the field, to serve during the war," was passed by your predecessors and submitted for my approval at the close of the last session. I was unable to approve it, and now desire to state my objections to it, as well as my views on this important subject, in the hope that, by a comparison of opinion, some measure may be framed equally acceptable to the Legislative and Executive Departments of the Government.

I believe it to be established by the experience of Europe, as well as our own, that it is impracticable to organize and administer armies with efficiency without the aid of a general staff permanent in its character, trained in its duties, aspiring to promotion in its own corps, and responsible to the head of the department. Such a staff should be composed of a small body of officers whose education, experience, activity and special adaptation to their duties render them peculiarly competent to perform functions on which an army depends for its capacity to act with vigor. In Europe, years of varied education in the schools, the cantonment and the field, fit the staff officer for his position, and a long experience in the lower grades is required before he is deemed competent to duty in a more important sphere. We are forced to make experimental appointments of officers unprepared by any previous training, and who can only acquire in actual service that experience which must serve in place of well-grounded instruction. It is scarcely possible to make this experience supply the defect of previous military education otherwise than by the organization of the officers into one corps, responsible to one head, who

can assign them to positions independent of the movements of general officers, and who, by judiciously varying the field or character of their duties, can give them larger opportunities for instruction and prevent their views being narrowed to the routine and usages of a single commander, himself, perhaps, without military education.

Hope of promotion founded on their own merit and length of good service is as necessary to the officers of the general staff as to those of the line, furnishing the best stimulus known to honorable exertion and zealous discharge of duty. This stimulus cannot exist unless the staff be organized into one corps, responsible to one chief, who, thus becoming intimately acquainted with the capacity and merits of each, is able properly to distribute the duties so as to secure the services of the right man in the right place, and afford to each an opportunity for distinction. If otherwise, each staff officer becomes dependent upon the particular commander with whom he is serving. No means of comparison exist between the relative merits of the officers. Each looks for promotion to the favor of his general, and rises in grade, not by his own relative merit, but by the patronage of his commander. A gallant and able commander, whose own promotion is exceptionally rapid by reason of his special merits, is thus enabled to lift to higher grades the officers of his staff to whom he has become attached by companionship in the field, although these officers may be far inferior in merit and length of service to others whose duties have connected them with generals less distinguished. Promotion thus becomes with the staff a matter of hazard, dependent on the merit, not of the officer himself, but of the general with whom he serves, and heart-burnings, jealousy and discontent are the natural results of so false a system.

Again: If the general staff is not formed into corps, there will not be the "esprit" necessary in all military organizations, and there cannot be the co-intelligence among the officers thereof which secures the certain and rapid communication of all information through the different parts of an army. There will also be embarrassment in their tenure of office and assignment to duty. As when a general officer dies, or is relieved from his command, there remain no duties to be performed by the staff which had been authorized for him especially. However, valuable or meritorious the officers may be, they are displaced by the staff chosen by the successor of their commander. Nothing remains but to deprive them of their commissions without fault of their own, or to keep them in service as supernumeraries, and thus to add to the number of officers already in excess of the wants of the army.

Again: An organization of a general staff should possess flexibility, so that the proper number and class of staff officers can be sent where needed. If an inflexible rule of assignment be fixed by legislation, some commands will be cumbered with unnecessary officers, while others will be deficient in the number indispensable to perform the necessary duties. Legislation would surely be considered unwise, if it allotted by inflexible rule the number of troops to be used in each military department, yet it would be scarcely more objectionable than

the assignment of the same specified number of staff officers to each commander according to his grade, thus applying a general rule to a series of cases, each requiring special treatment.

The inspecting duties in an army ought not, in my judgment, to be separated from those of the adjutants. The erroneous impression prevails that an inspecting department, independent of the general staff, is established in most of the armies of Europe. The reverse is the fact, and the duties of inspection are so intimately connected with the other duties of the general staff that they can be properly performed by it alone. The objections to the separation are manifold. In the first place, officers having no other than inspecting duties must frequently be unemployed, even in war, while in peace their duties will occupy but very little time. Next, it is to be observed, that where the adjutants and inspectors form one corps, the duties of the adjutant make him familiar with the details of the service where reform and discipline are most needed, and thus render him more competent to effective inspection when assigned to that duty, than he could be, if exclusively employed as inspector. Lastly, the duties of an inspector are such as not to render the officer who performs them, acceptable to his brother officers, if his duty be properly performed. It is not to be wondered at that an officer whose duties may not be inappropriately described as those of a detective, should, if his duty be rigidly performed, incur somewhat of the odium of an informer; and when these duties constitute the sole service of an officer permanently attached to an army, he must become either so lax in their performance as to render him useless, or his professional pride and self-respect are wounded, and his relations with his brother officers, unfavorably affected by the distrust and dislike resulting from his official reports. When, however, an assistant adjutant and inspector general is, from time to time, assigned to the making of necessary inspections at various points, this temporary discharge of an unpleasant duty becomes but an incident in his professional career, and does not affect his relations with his brother officers.

Having stated these as the general principles which, in my judgment should govern legislation on the subject, the objections to the bill passed at the last session can be more easily understood, and I proceed to state them briefly:

I. The first section of the bill authorizes a general commanding armies, or a separate army, to assign to duty one of the general officers under his command, as chief of staff; one of the brigadier generals under his command as inspector general; and one other brigadier as chief quartermaster; one officer below the rank of brigadier as chief commissary, and one as chief of ordnance.

This power of assignment is given without reference to, or consultation with, the War Department or the Executive, and might be exercised in contravention of the views and judgment of both. Leaving out of view the question whether it is in accordance with the Constitution to make the commander of an army independent of the commander-in-chief in the discharge of any of the duties of his office, and looking only to the effect of such a system, it plainly cre-

ates, in this branch of the service, as many independent executives as there are generals commanding armies in the field, and thus destroys that unity of design and concert of action which are indispensable elements of success in war. The generals commanding armies would be, by this section, vested with the right to derange the organization of their commands, as settled by the commander-in-chief, by removing from their appropriate functions the commanders of corps, divisions and brigades, whom the Executive had selected and the Senate approved, as specially fitted to lead the troops in battle.

That the general commanding the army has, under the terms of this section, the right of assigning general officers under his command to the duties of the general staff, without reference to the authority of the Executive, is plain from the other sections, which declare that the President is to appoint, with the advice of the Senate, the staffs of all general officers other than those who command armies.

Nor does this section restrict the commanding general in relation to the branch of the service or the grade of the officers whom he is permitted to assign to commissary and ordnance duties of the general staff. It is only necessary that they be below the rank of brigadier general. The commanding general would have the power, therefore, to assign a captain commissary to be chief of ordnance, or a lieutenant of infantry to be chief commissary, without check or control from the President or Senate, while the President would be without power to appoint subordinates to the officers thus selected by the general of an army, without submitting their nominations for the approval of the Senate. Not only, therefore, is all order of authority interverted by these provisions, but the officers assigned to duty by the commanding generals, not being permanent members of the general staff, would be independent of its chief, and inextricable confusion would necessarily result.

This section, so far from responding to the title of the bill, by providing a general staff, in reality breaks up that which now exists, subdivides it into a number of small bodies, irresponsible to the head of the department, and destroys the possibility of any regular, consistent and intelligent co-operation in the action of our forces, so essential to success. Its effect is to create a staff for generals, not a general staff.

If a contest should arise between the quartermaster generals, the commissarie generals, or the chief of ordnance, of Generals A. and B., in any district of country, for supplies or means of transportation, who is to determine between these rivals, each equal in authority and each dependent on a separate chief? How are the chiefs of those bureaus in Richmond to apportion the supplies in store, according to the wants of the different armies, without authority to exact from them reports and returns. If it be said that these officers would become temporarily responsible to the heads of departments, how is this responsibility to be enforced if the orders of the general and those of the chief of the department should conflict? If ordnance depots are provided at different points, for different commands, how is the officer in charge of these depots to act, if ordered by the chief of

ordnance of a general in the field to make a different disposal of the stores from that ordered by the head of the department in Richmond?

If such a bill should become a law, in vain would the War Department seek to exact rigid obedience to law or orders from the irresponsible staff created under its provisions. In vain would it seek for the information necessary for its guidance, or attempt to change the relative strength of armies, to meet the varying movements of the enemy. The staff-officers could be made the ready and safe means of thwarting the Government in its orders for the removal of troops from one command to reinforce threatened positions in another, and could be easily rendered subservient to the natural but dangerous propensity of most commanders to retain all the troops under their own control for the safety of their own commands, without reference to more urgent needs at other points.

It is scarcely necessary to add to these considerations more than a bare allusion to the tendency of such bodies of officers, when dependent for their own promotion on the favor of their special chiefs, to resort to agencies less commendable than the zealous discharge of their legitimate duties for the attainment of their desires.

II. Another very objectionable feature of the bill proposed is its effect on the officers of the general staff other than those who may be selected as the favorites of commanding generals.

Numbers of "zealous," meritorious, and valuable officers have made the duties of the general staff objects of special study, have embraced the staff as a branch of the profession in which, under existing laws, they are entitled to promotion for merit and long service, just as the line officers have a right to promotion in their branch.

This bill deprives the staff officers of this, the great incentive to the zealous discharge of duty. It debars them from promotion to the higher grades of their own branch of service, and bestows these prizes of honorable ambition on the officers of the line, who will thus monopolize the promotions to the higher grades, both in the line and staff to the entire exclusion of the officers of the latter. Few will be willing to remain in the staff under such circumstances. Those who consent to continue will be those least ambitious of promotion, and the whole staff service will be impaired in tone and efficiency.

III. The assignment of general officers to staff duties, as provided in the bill, would leave many brigades, some divisions, and perhaps some corps without their appropriate commanders, and no provision is made to supply the vacancies thus created. Are their commands to be considered vacant and successors appointed? If so, what is to become of those assigned to staff duty, should the commanding general revoke the assignment? If the contrary, many brigades will be commanded by the officer next in rank to the assigned brigadier, however incompetent such officer may be to command a brigade, and the like would occur as to divisions and corps, in contravention of the policy well considered and established that general officers are appointed by selection for merit and not promoted by seniority. If the commanding general is ordered to another command, is he to take his staff with him or is he to leave it for service with his successor? In

either case, is the whole general staff of each army to be changed at the caprice of the new commander? This must be the effect of the bill, for the power to assign necessarily implies the power to revoke, as it would otherwise be equivalent to a permanent appointment that could only be made by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate.

IV. The fourth objection to the bill is that it applies one rigid rule for the number of the general staff, based solely on the rank of the commander, and having no reference to the necessities of a command. The staff allowed is excessive in number and rank, in many instances, and entirely inadequate in others. A law providing a general staff on such a basis as is assumed in this bill, cannot, from its very nature, be executed according to its terms. The labor required of the staff connected with a brigade, division or corps depends on the fact of its being part of an army or a separate command, as well as on the number of men, the extent of country over which operations are to be conducted, the abundance or scarcity of supplies in the district, the existence or absence of railroad, river or other transportation, the concentration or dispersion of the troops, and the many other circumstances which control military movements in time of war. It is impossible to apply a rigid, unbending rule to such diverse cases.

An organization into corps meets all these difficulties by providing for assignment of the proper number of officers to different commands according to the needs of each.

V. The number and rank of the aides-de-camp allowed by the bill is believed to be greatly in excess of those allowed by other governments, and quite unsuited to the nature of ours. They would rather impede than improve the service. They would encourage a love of ostentation and feed a fondness for vain display which should rather be discouraged than fostered. The experience of this war has demonstrated that the most efficient commanders, those who have most attracted the respect, gratitude and admiration of their country, have avoided the large retinue of personal staff which this bill would seem to sanction as proper or desirable.

VI. The objection to the enormous increase in the number of officers and expenditure that would result from the passage of such a bill, becomes a matter of serious concern when no corresponding increase of efficiency is secured; of still graver importance, when the opposite result is to be feared.

According to the bill as passed, the staff would embrace an addition of about four hundred officers, involving an increased annual expenditure for pay, rations, forage and allowance, amounting to \$1,138,728 above the present staff, as organized by general orders under existing legislation.

If generals are to be allowed to change the staff of each army to which they may be assigned at their pleasure, it is difficult to calculate the extent to which this abuse would grow, the number of men that would be withdrawn from useful service to cumber the staff, or the increase of expenditure involved.

Congress will perceive that with objections so radical it was im-

possible for me to approve the bill passed at the last session, and that the subject was too important to be treated in a hurried message within the last few hours of the close of a Congress. Concurring in the expediency of legislation for the organization of a general staff, I have thought a full exposition of my views on the subject would perhaps conduce to the framing of a measure which would carry into effect the views of the Legislative Department while excluding the provisions which have compelled me to decline approving that devised by your predecessors.

JEFFERSON DAVIS.

RICHMOND, May 28, 1864.



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