

THE MILITARY ROADS OF WASHINGTON TERRITORY.

Fifty years ago the War Department of the general government was deeply interested in roads to the newly-created Territory of Washington, from California through Oregon, and from Minnesota and other Eastern points by Fort Benton; also in a system of roads in the territory connecting the various military posts thereof. The principal one of these roads or routes was for a railroad from the sources of the Mississippi River to Puget Sound. This contemplated the survey of a route for a future railroad, the idea being to ascertain the feasibility and desirability of a line with a view to the construction not long after of the Northern Pacific Railroad. The rapid development of the Pacific Coast country was making imperative closer connection with the States of the Mississippi Valley and those of the Atlantic beyond. Congress directed the War Department to make the preliminary surveys, along different lines north, south and central, and in accordance therewith, early in 1853, the different enterprises were placed in the hands of military engineers—Captain Gunnison, Lieutenant Whipple, Lieutenant Williamson, Lieutenant Parke and Captain Pope. The greatest of these undertakings, perhaps, was the northern, which was entrusted to an ex-engineer, Major Isaac I. Stevens, who had just resigned his commission in the army to accept another commission from President Pierce as governor of Washington Territory. For the surveys under Stevens, Whipple and Gunnison one hundred and twenty thousand dollars was appropriated, in three equal parts of forty thousand each. For the other surveys the money allowances were smaller. Stevens not only had the surveys in hand, but as Governor had to organize and set in motion the Territorial government, and as Superintendent of Indian Affairs had to make himself acquainted with the Indians along the route, and enter into treaties with the various tribes of Blackfeet, Sioux, Flatheads, Nez Percés and others whom he might meet on the way.

To assist Governor Stevens in this undertaking, Captain George B. McClellan, Captain J. W. T. Gardiner, Captain Joseph Roberts, Lieutenant Johnson K. Duncan, Lieutenant Rufus Saxton, Lieutenant Cuvier Grover, Lieutenant John Mullan and Lieutenant A. J. Donelson were assigned to the service, all with

the main party except Captain McClellan, who was given a semi-independent assignment at the western end, and of which, by the way, he made almost complete failure. Several of these men subsequently rose to positions of great distinction in the military service, becoming generals, and noted throughout the length and breadth of the land. In addition to these military men Governor Stevens was given a strong escort party and a scientific corps, besides teamsters, laborers, cooks and others.

Stevens was directed to explore "the passes of the Cascade Range and of the Rocky Mountains from the forty-ninth parallel to the headwaters of the Missouri River, and to determine the capacity of the adjacent country to supply, and of the Columbia and Missouri Rivers to transport, materials for the construction of the road, great attention being given to the geography and meteorology, generally, of the whole intermediate region; the seasons and character of its freshets, the quantities and continuance of its rains and snows, especially in the mountain ranges; to its geology in arid regions, keeping particularly in view the bringing of water to the surface by means of artesian wells; its botany, natural history, agricultural and mineral resources; the location, numbers, history, traditions and customs of its Indian tribes, and such other facts as shall tend to develop the character of that portion of our national domain and supply all the facts which enter into the solution of the particular problem of a railroad." He was to begin at St. Paul, going by the way of the mouth of Yellowstone River. After completion of the field examinations, reports were to be prepared at some point in Washington Territory, and forwarded to Washington City for presentation to Congress and publication. The instructions were from Jefferson Davis, then Secretary of War.

Governor Stevens gathered around him a company of clever young men separate from the military, who as civil engineers, scientists and clerks rendered first-class service during the expedition, and who enabled the Governor to prepare a report covering in excellent manner every desirable phase and feature of the tremendous task placed upon him. This report became historic, for a quarter of a century following being quoted and availed of in the railroad undertakings of the Northwest and North Pacific regions. It demonstrated the practicability of the proposed northern road, and made plain the great possibilities for traffic and for the sustenance of a great population of the country through which the northern line must and would pass.

Captain McClellan was given two undertakings in the road

enterprises of that year. He was directed to survey from the western end, exploring the Cascade Mountains, doing a work that it was supposed Stevens would be unable personally to do owing to lack of time. Ten officers and thirty soldiers were placed at his command, and in a general way it was ordered that every other assistance be given to him that he needed. In addition to this assignment, he was, on the 9th of May, 1853, directed to undertake the opening and construction of a military road from Walla Walla to Steilacoom, "under the general directions of Governor I. I. Stevens." Congress had made a generous appropriation for this road—\$20,000, I believe—the previous January. McClellan was ordered to survey and locate the proposed road, and to enter into contracts with responsible persons for the construction. He was urged to make haste, so that the road might be opened in season for the fall immigration. If unable to do this he was instructed "to fix the line of the road, especially through the Cascade Mountains, and to perform such work on the most difficult portions as will enable the immigrants to render the route practicable by their own exertions, detaching a suitable person as guide and director to meet them at Walla Walla." Further, he was told, if he deemed it advisable, "to let out different portions of the road, or different kinds of work, on separate contracts. On account of the peculiar nature of the work you may find it advisable, instead of contracting for the performance of a specified amount of work, to contract for the supply of the necessary laborers and tools, taking precautions to secure good ones. In any event, you will so arrange your operations as, first, to secure a practicable wagon road between the extremities of the road, devoting the remainder of the funds at your disposal to the improvement of the more important points, always endeavoring to make the whole road a good one."

Of this task McClellan also made an entire failure. He expended in unknown ways much of the money, but as far as the citizens and immigrants were aware not a dollar in actual road construction. Nor were the immigrants met at Walla Walla by a guide from him as so explicitly directed. The statement in his instructions, "It is important that this road should be opened in season for the fall immigration; you will, therefore, use every exertion to do so," meant to and with him absolutely nothing.

Knowing of this appropriation, knowing of the fostering care of the government in such matters, and knowing, too, of the immigration from the Mississippi Valley heading for Puget Sound, the people who had come before—in 1852 and previous years—

began to prepare for the making more easy the last hundred miles of the long and trying journey—the hundred miles in the Cascade Mountains. Money was given by the generous citizens, chiefly of Pierce and Thurston Counties, in amounts ranging from \$5 to \$100, and in the aggregate to about \$1,200. Others gave provisions, animals, tools and all employed gave time and labor. Edward J. Allen, of Olympia, still living, a respected citizen of Pittsburg, Pa., headed the party of road-makers, who went into the woods and with the limited means at their command endeavored to make a way by the Naches Pass that the worn-out men and teams from the East could use in the last days of their five months and two thousand miles of travel. They were so engaged during the month of September. Under the urgency impressed upon him, and the liberal instructions given him, by Secretary of War Davis, Captain McClellan would have been justified in freely co-operating with Allen and his associates, employing, paying and directing them, and making a road that would have been a credit to him and a blessing to the one hundred and sixty men, women and children who soon after struggled and suffered terribly in the final effort to get to the Western settlements and the end of their long and trying undertaking. But McClellan was slow; he did not come when wanted, and when he finally arrived on the scene he was too late to be of use. He took a look at the mountains, found snow on them, concluded they were too high for him to get over, and relinquished the task to Stevens. He made a trip into Yakima Valley, visited Fort Steilacoom, was paddled in an Indian canoe down the Sound, and went back East. He let no contract for the road, or any part of it, though he expended in unknown ways a considerable portion of the Congressional appropriation. His shortcomings and failure were a bitter disappointment to the people. The following year the work of road building that had been assigned to McClellan was intrusted to Lieutenant Richard Arnold, by the Secretary of War, under the especial direction of Governor Stevens. He left Steilacoom May 23rd, 1854, traveled over the road opened the previous season, and made a reconnaissance of the entire route to Walla Walla. He adopted as far as possible the route of Allen chosen the year before, beginning where Allen left off, and continuing to the east until the money at his command was exhausted. Arnold was not pleased with the route, and he recommended that another be chosen to the north in the event of further appropriations. He was also convinced that the course along the Naches

River had but few advantages, if any at all. When it is stated that the immigrants of 1853 crossed the Naches River sixty-eight times on their way up the valley and mountains, the reader will be impressed with the idea that Mr. Arnold's objection to that portion of the route was well founded. The Lieutenant reported the distance from Steilacoom to the summit of the mountains to be $79\frac{1}{4}$ miles; to Wenass, $137\frac{1}{4}$ miles; to Yakima River mouth, $217\frac{1}{4}$ miles, and to a point on Columbia River opposite Walla Walla, $234\frac{1}{2}$ miles. He concluded his official report with the paragraph following:

"Before closing this report, I would urgently recommend that an additional appropriation of ten thousand dollars be made. This amount properly applied, in connection with what has already been expended, will give to the work a permanence and stability that it justly demands, even at the present time, as the only military and commercial thoroughfare into this portion of the Territory from the East over which the overland immigration must pass; and more particularly when the valleys of the numerous tributaries of the Columbia are settled, and when towns on Puget Sound, now in their infancy, shall be classed among the first in importance on the Pacific. On my first reconnaissance I was fully convinced that the unexpended balance of the appropriation was totally inadequate to construct a military road; and I had, consequently, directed my attention to the most important points, and so distributed the work throughout the route that an additional appropriation could be applied in the best manner possible. The parts requiring particular attention have been previously mentioned. I would also recommend that the amount expended by the citizens of the Territory in 1853 be refunded. The greater part of the road cut by them from Steilacoom to the mountains has been adopted. But for this I do not believe the work could have been carried forward so satisfactorily."

The general government never afterwards did anything for the Naches road. Later surveys, and public sentiment, perhaps, caused a transference of official favor to the Snoqualmie Pass and route, for which recommendation of appropriation of \$100,000 was made by military officers in 1859-60-61 for a road from Seattle to connect with the Fort Benton and Walla Walla road. No money was ever given, however, in accordance with this suggestion. This road, via Snoqualmie, it was said, "would open direct communication between Puget Sound and the headwaters of the Missouri River, it would likewise afford a good wagon road connection with Fort Colville, on the upper Columbia River." The estimated length of this proposed road was 250

miles, and the cost of the recommended improvement \$400 per mile.

In 1856-57 the government opened a road from Columbia Barracks, as Fort Vancouver then was sometimes called, to Fort Dalles, in Oregon. The work was done chiefly under the direction of Lieutenant George H. Derby. It was a wagon road, and in summer was quite good. In places it was planked, and in other wet places corduroyed and graveled. As a support against the river there was some cribwork. It was said, officially, that a six-mule team could haul two tons over it, "and as the rate of transportation of the private company over the portage was \$15 per ton, and a team can easily make two trips per day, it will readily be seen that the public interests are much advanced by the construction of this road." A couple of years later \$76,000 was asked for the further improvement of this road, at the rate of \$800 per mile.

From Columbia Barracks (or Vancouver) to Fort Steilacoom was another road enterprise of the government's in the early days. There never was a good wagon road from Puget Sound to Columbia River. The trials and troubles of those who crossed the country were never forgotten by them. The first road there of which we have record was that cut by Michael T. Simmons, W. O. Bush and others, in 1845, when they came to settle—the first American citizens—on Puget Sound. They were enabled to get over it, and that was about all. Its condition was not materially changed or improved for more than ten years, and then but slightly by the opening of the military road. In 1856, under Lieutenant George H. Mendell, contracts were let to L. J. Tower and L. H. Davis for a piece of road from Cowlitz Landing to Ford's Prairie, about twenty-five miles, and for another piece, eight miles long, from Henness to Yelm Prairie. These works were finished in 1857, \$40,000 being expended, and the line or road opened to Fort Steilacoom in 1857. In dry weather, with careful driving, there was then a passable way from Cowlitz Plains to Puget Sound. Henry Winsor was soon carrying mail and passengers, and after him L. A. Davis, M. R. Tilley, Charles Coggan and others. Traffic slowly and continually increased, four and six-horse stages being run. The common passage rate was \$20, and it was hardly possible to go from Olympia to Portland for less than \$30, three days being the usual time, and sometimes four or five. Baggage was taken for seven cents a pound, and freight for five—for the stage trip only. Occasionally there were opposition wagons, when rates would

temporarily fall. There was constant demand for improvement of the service. Fault-finding was loud and unceasing. In fact, old settlers heard so much of it, particularly from the new comers, that the unpleasant noise has hardly yet stopped buzzing in their ears and annoying them. From Cowlitz Landing to Monticello transportation was by canoe, and for freight there was a charge of \$40 per ton for thirty miles of service. From Portland to Monticello steamboats were employed. Between steamboats, canoes and wagons the costs were numerous and onerous enough, farmers being severely taxed by them, while travelers always supposed they were robbed and knew that they had been half killed in transit. In 1858 seventeen miles of road were built on the west bank of the Cowlitz. At that time Congress was petitioned for \$10,000 more to complete the road to Monticello, and \$40,000 for continuance of the road to Vancouver. The smaller request was granted, and the money expended in 1860-61 on the way from Monticello north. At the best the way was little more than a trail, and in fact was often so called. Until the building of the Northern Pacific Railroad in 1871-72 the travel conditions were anything but pleasant between Puget Sound and the Columbia River.

In 1859 the idea of another wagon road was evolved by the military authorities. It was described as "from the mouth of Columbia River, via head of Puget Sound, to Fort Townsend, at the head of Straits of Juan de Fuca." The projected road was one hundred and seventy five miles long, and it was supposed that it could be built for \$500 per mile, or \$87,500. This suggestion was renewed the following year, but the coming on of the War of Rebellion, and the more urgent necessity for money expenditures elsewhere, prevented the opening of roads in the Territory thereafter by the federal government. Such undertakings were left wholly to the people in the country concerned from that time on.

Congress, by act of March 3rd, 1857, provided for a road from Fort Steilacoom to Fort Bellingham. Lieutenant Mendell had charge of this work. He employed a well-known local engineer, W. W. Delacy, and started him on the work in August. The country then was so densely timbered that pack animals could not be used, and Delacy engaged Indians instead, arrangements also being made for other Indians and canoes on the Snohomish and Skagit Rivers. The surveys were prosecuted to a finish and contracts let for construction. In 1859 a trail was well under way, from Seattle to Bellingham, the estimated cost

being \$42,500, \$5,000 for bridges and work south of Seattle, and \$2,500 for engineering and incidental expenses. To make a good road of it \$50,000 more was asked in 1860. There are yet traces of the road then built in the limits of the City of Seattle. Locally it was known as "the military road" for a generation; in fact, it is even yet occasionally so designated. In 1859, when the military were active on Puget Sound, and war with Great Britain seemed imminent over the disputed ownership of San Juan Island, Colonel J. J. Abert, the topographical engineer in charge, reported to Secretary Floyd that "this road is a military necessity; its completion would also induce settlement along the shore of Puget Sound."

The greatest of all the road projects in Washington Territory, however, was the one that included the line from Fort Benton, on the Missouri River, to Fort Walla Walla, on the Columbia. This was entrusted to Lieutenant John Mullan, who had it in hand for a number of years. He was making his start upon it in 1858, when the Indians of Eastern Washington became hostile, and vigorous war was made upon them by Colonel George Wright, Mullan changed his field, and participated in the campaign as topographical officer. The Indians being beaten and peace restored, Mullan made a beginning on the road in the summer and fall of 1859. He cut his way through the timber, blasted obstructing rocks, bridged the streams, and moved on to the north and east quite rapidly. In 1860 he was still engaged in the work, though then on the eastern section. During the two seasons he completed the surveys and construction for the entire 633 miles, Walla Walla and Benton were selected as the terminal points because they were both on navigable rivers, with steamboat service. Much was hoped from this road in aiding movements of soldiers and immigrants, as well as in the control of the Indians; but, as in the case of the military highways generally, disappointment in these respects was the result. The War of the Rebellion, the gold mines of Idaho and Montana, the sudden opening and development of the country, the coming not long after of railroads, the overpowering and speedy subjugation of the Indians, these and other things so changed the conditions that the military roads lost their relative importance, and the anticipated results of their building were not realized. It is well, however, to give full credit to the army officers for their good intentions. If they had had their way the Pacific Coast country would have been supplied with a system of wagon roads of the best character, permeating it in all directions, and

rendering travel through it by carriage easy and comfortable in the extreme. That their efforts were not more successful was due to causes they could not control, and was a loss to the people of Washington Territory well understood and deeply regretted by them at the time.

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