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Davis Replies to Bigelow

The Well Known Writer Answers the Criticisms on the Army Printed in an Illustrated Weekly

Says Criticisms Were Unjustified

Regular Army Officers Well Fitted for the Duties They Are Called to Perform

High Praise for Wheeler

Former Confederate General Declared to be Well Equipped to Lead Troops in Battle

Not a Time for Criticism

HEADQUARTERS, UNITED STATES ARMY
TAMPA, Fla., Saturday

The utmost indignation has been awakened here today by an article attacking the regular army, which appears in the current number of an illustrated weekly paper. It is doubtful if anything has appeared in print since the beginning of the war, in even the yellow journals, so un-American, so untrue, or so calculated to give courage to the enemy. The article is by Mr. Pultney-Bigelow, who, with the editor of the periodical, is tonight universally condemned by everyone who has been here a sufficiently long time to know that the statements as to the condition of our army are absolutely false.

Mr. Bigelow states that owing to the stinginess of the government the health of the men here is seriously affected, that they are being treated worse than those of any Continental army—even that of Spain—and that there is not a single regiment fit to take the field. The camp doctors, so Bigelow writes, are busy with men and officers suffering from dysentery. “We hush this up as well as we can, but to do so altogether is impossible.”

A Healthy Army

I asked colonel Pope, chief surgeon of the Fifth Army Corps, just what was the present health of the men, and he said:--“The sick list is only two per cent. This is less than one-half of the normal rate of four and a half per cent. It is the healthiest army in history.”

That is the answer of the chief surgeon, who has been on duty here for six weeks, to Mr. Bigelow, who was here four days and who says we are so anxious to hush up the truth. He also charges the government with giving the men unseasonable food

“We are in the habit,” he writes, “of pitying the soldiers of Europe For downright neglect I have seen nothing to beat the way the American is treated by Uncle Sam. There is a German military attaché at Tampa, noting all those things, and what is concealed from the American people in the North is carefully sent to Europe.”

I happened to be talking the other day on this same subject to this same military attaché, the Count von Goetzen, who said that the rations served our men here at Tampa were as good as those served to any Continental army, and that our men received the in much greater quantity. So that is the answer of the German attaché to Mr. Bigelow.

As to his most sensational charge, that there is not a single regiment here ready to take the field, I can best quote the Commander in Chief:--

Regular Army Was Ready

“There is not a regiment belonging to the regular army,” said General Miles, “that is not ready now to take the field and that has not been ready for months. Before war was declared I wished to concentrate the army at Chickamauga, but the secretary of war was of the opinion that such a movement would be considered an act of war—that it would be a menace—so I told him that wherever the regiments were they were ready to move at the pressure of a button, and when war was finally declared they did move from the mountain countries, from the lake countries, from Montana, Iowa and California. They moved like clockwork. They were equipped with everything—transportation, camp outfit and everything—and they are all ready and as fit today as they were then. I have never been so proud as I was yesterday, when I rode through the camps of the Fifth Army Corps and saw the magnificent condition and physical perfectness of our men. There is no army corps anywhere in the world that is better supplied with men and officers of courage, fortitude and intelligence.”

That is the answer of the Commander in Chief to the editor of the periodical and Mr. Bigelow.

Criticism of General Wheeler

Perhaps the most unwarranted and unkind paragraph in the article is the attack upon the ability of General Joseph Wheeler, who is, in Mr. Bigelow’s opinion, too old to understand modern cavalry tactics. This he says of the most gallant cavalry leader of the Confederate army, the author of a book on cavalry tactics and a gentleman who has studied and followed the changes in tactics that have occurred from year to year ever since the civil war

Mr Bigelow says that there has not been held at Tampa a single military field exercise likely to be of service to generals of brigade or division, and in another part of the same paper is a truth telling photograph of General Wheeler, commanding a big brigade of cavalry stretched out for miles in the woods back of Tampa

These brigade drills are frequent, and the insinuation that General Wheeler does not understand them and that he is too old for such service is both false and cruel There are two southern major generals at present. We hear a great deal about one of them and of his presidential chances Before the war is over we shall hear more of the kind.

That some official action will be taken in regard to this article is generally believed. Everyone knows that mistakes have been made and that the condition of the volunteers is bad,

but this is no time to print news of such a nature, and it is certainly not the time now, or later, to print reckless and untrue statements concerning our regular army.

The official opinion of the article may be gathered from the fact that Captain Brady sent the following dispatch to General Greely:--

“Bigelow’s article caused widespread condemnation among army officers high in rank, and correspondents pronounced it untrue and seditious.”

That is the censor’s answer to Mr. Bigelow’s article.

So you have them all. The Commander in Chief repudiates it. The chief surgeon shows it is a falsehood, and even the war artist and war correspondents of the paaper that published it repudiate it, too Any editor who publishes it is liable to comprehend that it is the sort of treason that should be pointed out quickly and nailed up high as a warning.

(Source: FultonHistory.com:

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