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OFFICE OF
Indian Affairs
Rec. FEB 21

1903

7/1/99

Indian Industrial School,

Carlisle, Pa. Feb. 20 1903.

Pratt, R. H.,

Col. 15th Cav., Supt.

Submitting reasons for tendering resignation and asking judgment.

To Secy June 10/04.
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Department of the Interior,
INDIAN SCHOOL SERVICE,

Carlisle, Pa., Feb. 20, 1903.

To The Honorable,

The Commissioner of Indian Affairs,

Washington, D. C.

Sir :

Your dispatch of the 18th saying,

"Would prefer not to accept your resignation unless you insist. Your retirement cuts no figure with your position. You can be appointed superintendent upon the retired list. "

did not reach me until nine o'clock the morning of the 19th.

In view of all the circumstances of my long service here and my hasty retirement after protest so immediately on promotion to Colonel and while a law to give the advanced grade of Brigadier is pending in Congress, I think best to lay before you the controversy over my retirement in order that you may understand why I resigned the superintendency here. The following is the correspondence in its order :

WAR DEPARTMENT.
ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE,
WASHINGTON, January 16, 1903.

Dear Colonel Pratt :

I shall be able to congratulate you upon your promotion within a day or two. By reason of your long absence and the importance of your not leaving your work with which so much of your life has been identified, the question of your immediate retirement is under consideration by the Secretary of War. Do you prefer the Secretary of War to act under the statutes by retiring you under provision of law or to have it done on your own application ?

Kindly communicate your wishes in the premises by wire.

Very sincerely,

(Signed) H. C. CORBIN,

Adjutant General

Major General, U. S. A.

Lt. Col. Richard H. Pratt,
Carlisle Indian School,
Carlisle, Pa.

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T E L E G R A M .

Carlisle, Pa., January 17, 1903.

Major General H. C. Corbin,
Adjutant General,
Washington, D. C.

Your letter yesterday. Thank you. Had written you to mail this morning as follows :

"The promotion of Colonel Hayes yesterday and retirement of Colonel Hennisee today gives me a grade. The probability of objection to keeping a colonel away from strictly army duty and at the same time the demands here may make my case something of a problem. Twenty-eight years on Indian duty and away from strictly military routine indicates more value to Government in present duty. I shall be entitled to the advanced grade on retirement. Allow me to suggest that if retired now as Brigadier General and detailed here under the provisions of the act of Nov. 3, 1893, I shall be content to remain here without regard to age as long as my services are deemed efficient; and my extra pay in Indian bill can be dropped. "

This is my application.

Pratt. Lt. Col.

Postal. 8:45 A.M.

WAR DEPARTMENT,
ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE,
WASHINGTON.

January 17, 1903.

Dear Colonel Pratt :

I have shown your telegram of even date to the Secretary of War who fully appreciates the character of your services. At the same time he does not see his way clear to advance you beyond the grade of Colonel, as the records fail to show wherein you have exercised a command of a higher grade than that of Captain. He reluctantly reaches the conclusion that the best interests of the service require your retirement immediately upon your promotion to the colonelcy, in order that a regiment may not be deprived of an experienced officer to command it. He therefore directs me to say to you that should you make application for retirement it will be granted, otherwise he shall recommend to the President your retirement under the statutes giving the President power to retire officers of over sixty-two years of age.

Very sincerely yours,

(Signed) H. C. Corbin.

Major General,
Adjutant General, U.S.A.

Colonel R. H. Pratt,
Carlisle Indian School,
Carlisle, Penna.

Carlisle, Pa., Jan. 18, 1903.

Dear General Corbin :

Both your letters of the 16th and 17th informing me of the intention of the Secretary to retire me seem to place me at a disadvantage. I may not understand the equities of the situation as I ought, but beg to present it to you as it appears to me.

It has always seemed to me that the retirement of an officer before sixty-four indicated physical disability or other infirmity which disqualified him for satisfactory service. Neither of your letters offer me the alternative of taking command of my regiment. Both state that it is the intention of the Secretary to retire me nolens volens.

* * * * *

Nineteen years ago my command here numbered 500 pupils and 50 employees and has steadily grown until during the past four years it has numbered over 1,000 pupils and 85 employees. This is a larger command than the average colonel in our army controls. The organization is semi-military and the boys are drilled to considerable efficiency in military movements. I have always been my own adjutant, quartermaster and commissary, and also my own recruiting officer, and in all the details and minutia of service have had, I venture to say, a far more exacting experience in disciplining, feeding, clothing, transporting, organizing, etc. than the average of our colonels in the army, and while I might at first fall short in some of the minor things of military service it would only be temporary. You will remember that twice early in our trouble with Spain I indicated my readiness and preference to take part, either by enlisting Indians or by joining my own regiment.

There is therefore, so far as I know, no substantial reason why I should be denied the rights that belong to me by my promotion, among which is that of remaining on the active list until I am sixty-four years of age.

I hope it is not intended to deny me this without consideration, as your letters seem to indicate.

Sincerely yours,

(Signed)

R. H. PRATT.
Lieutenant-Colonel.

Major General H. C. Corbin,
Adjutant General, U. S. A.,
Washington, D. C.

T E L E G R A M .

Lt. Col. R. H. Pratt,
Carlisle, Pa.

Washington, D. C., January 20, 1903

Is your letter of yesterday to be taken as application to join regiment when confirmed Colonel? This will take you to the 13th under orders for duty in the division Philippines. It was assumed you desired to remain on the work you had been so long engaged.

H. C. CORBIN/
Adjutant General.

Postal. 1:52 P.M.

R E P L Y .

Carlisle, Pa., Jan. 20, 1903.

Major General H. C. Corbin,
Adjutant General,
Washington, D. C.

Your message today. Having suggested and built up this school, so long as conditions are endurable I cannot consistently seek relief by asking other duty.

R. H. Pratt, Lt. Col.

W. U. - 5:40 P.M.

WAR DEPARTMENT.
ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE.
WASHINGTON.

Jan. 20.

Dear Colonel Pratt :

You are quite in error if you think that I entertain anything but the kindest feelings for you. I had instructions to make order for your retirement on reaching 62 but asked for your retention until you were made colonel. This was granted. The high rank of colonel is certainly recognition that should appeal to all. Hennisee retired with that rank after almost continuous service, but had never exercised the command of a colonel, &c . & c.

The thought that all civil war men should be retired as Brig. Genls. is not the correct one, but with one grade higher. I wish you well.

(Signed) HENRY C. CORBIN.

T E L E G R A M .

Carlisle, Pa., Jan. 21, 1903.

Major General Corbin,
Adjutant General,
Washington, D. C.

I have your personal letter of yesterday. My commission as colonel is my property by right of service and I am ready for all its responsibilities.

W. U. 5:40 P.M.

Pratt. Lt. Col.

It will be seen that the urgency that I ask retirement was accompanied by the statement that I would be retired anyhow.

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I was originally placed on this duty by the Secretary of War, Mr. McCreary, who personally took special interest in establishing this school. I suggested but did not seek it. The records of the War Department ought to show that I indicated my desire to go to my regiment rather than remain at Hampton where I had been detailed. Secretary McCreary personally drew the law under which this school was established and I continued as its superintendent. I have reported to the Adjutant General every month that I was here on duty. It was the province of the War Department to use me elsewhere at any time. My duties have been all the time in connection with the Indian who for many years has been most important to the Army. I have been performing high military duty here all the years helping to settle the Indian discontent and to maintain the peace on the frontier. No several regiments of our troops have done more to bring about proper relations between the Indians and the other people of the country than this Carlisle school, which through all its influences, its teaching of English and bringing friendly relations and a better understanding between the races made it possible to remove practically all the troops throughout the whole Indian country and send them to the Spanish War. My Carlisle duties have been supremely military. Until the foregoing correspondence I had reason to believe that I was doing good army work which from my continuance was entirely satisfactory to the War Department and for which I should receive the same consideration accorded to others for service throughout the Civil War and continuous service in the regular army since.

I may have been a little abrupt in closing my correspondence with General Corbin. His pressure urging me to ask for retirement added to some of his incomprehensible statements influenced me to

do this.

He says in his letter of January 17th that I could not be advanced beyond the grade of colonel because the records of the War Department fail to show wherein I have exercised a command of higher grade than Captain. General Corbin knew when he said that and knew that I knew that Major General Davis and Brigadier Generals Grant and Carter, all now on the active list, prior to being made Brigadier Generals, had never exercised command above a Captain's. He also knew that I knew that General Bell prior to being made Brigadier General had been only a First Lieutenant. Why should there be a special rule originated for the moment to serve in my particular case ?

In his letter of the 20th General Corbin states that "the thought that all Civil War men should be retired as Brigadier Generals is not the correct one, but with a grade higher." When General Corbin wrote that he knew that I knew that officers were being promoted more than one grade in order to be retired as Brigadier Generals. Since he wrote it Lieutenant-Colonel Baird, my junior, was nominated by the War Department as Brigadier General for retirement, and has been so promoted and retired. General Baird did not enter service in the Civil War until August 25, 1862. I went out April 20, 1861, and had a year of Civil War service to my credit more than he had. He entered the regular army before I did, but still there is three months more service to my credit than he had. He was twenty-four years in the pay department, a long time paying the monthly salaries of General Corbin and other officers about Washington. I have been twenty-three years wrestling with the Indian here.

I know of no condition or reason why I should not have been allowed to serve as Colonel until sixty-four years of age. My last

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telegram to General Corbin indicated my readiness for all the duties anywhere falling to my new commission. Before my promotion dispatches from Washington kept preparing the public mind for my retirement. None of them were fair to my service.

On the 16th instant I sent the following telegram :-

" Geo. B. Cortelyou,
Secretary to the President,
Washington, D. C.

For several days past the public press has had daily dispatches from Washington stating that the President has determined to retire me as Colonel because I am past 62. All large dailies this morning emphasize this statement. Please ask the President and wire me if he is willing to consider correspondence between myself and the War Department and Interior Department and statement I would like to make."

No reply came and on the 17th I received the following telegram :

"You are retired from active service today. Printed order by mail.
Hall,
Asst. Adjt. General . "

Naturally, this abrupt action had the effect which I felt was intended and I sent you my resignation. The guaranteed rights of petition and of trial have both been denied me. Now if with these facts you and friends to whom I shall send this letter think I should withdraw my resignation and continue my work here on account of its importance I shall give the most favorable consideration I can to what may be said, but my feeling is that the door has been permanently closed.

On the 19th I received the following :

" WHITE HOUSE ,
WASHINGTON.

February 18, 1903.

My dear Sir:

Replying to your telegram of the 16th instant, I regret to state that it was received too late for a compliance with your request.

Col. R. H. Pratt,
Carlisle, Pa.

Very truly yours,

(Signed) WM. LOEB, Jr.

Secretary to the President. "

There seems to be nothing in this to change my conclusion.

Inasmuch as there has been a continuous flow of dispatches from Washington to the public press from before my promotion explaining why the President intended to and did retire me and why he was unwilling to gratify my assumed ambitions to be a Brigadier General, I feel it perfectly proper to give this letter to the public which seems especially interested in the matter.

On reading this letter to my friend, Judge Henderson, he suggests I with-hold making it public until a reasonable time to hear from you, and also that I send a copy to the President, which suggestions I have accepted.

Very respectfully,

R.H. Pratt
Colonel & Supt.