

# DISBANDING THE UNION ARMY By Ida M. Tarbell



ON THEIR WAY HOMEWARD.



"I GOT THAT AT GETTYSBURG."

WITH THE OLD FOLKS AT HOME.

On the 1st of April, 1865, a Federal army of over a million volunteer soldiers hemmed in the ten southeastern states of the present Union. It had taken four years for this army to stretch itself from the mouth of the Potomac westward to the Mississippi, southward to the gulf and thence along the coast to its starting point. But at last the cordon was practically unbroken. Not only had the Federals inclosed the Confederacy, by capturing and holding the Mississippi river and by fighting their way from Louisville southeastward through Nashville and Atlanta to Savannah they had separated it into three enormous divisions. In all parts of the vast territory they had engirdled and dismembered there were armies and garrisons. Meade with 130,000 men, besieged Lee in Petersburg. Sherman's army of 121,000 men was waiting at Raleigh, N. C., for a battle with Joe Johnston. Thomas, who commanded the 139,000 men in the department of the Cumberland, was engaged in clearing the states in his division of the few Confederate remnants remaining from the defeat of Hood in January. Canby, with some 120,000 men, held the Mississippi from Memphis to New Orleans and opposed Dick Taylor's army, then in Alabama. There were forces in Texas and Arkansas, in the forts and outposts along the captured lines, holding towns, guarding hospitals, caring for prisoners and freedmen.

So long had it taken the Federals to accomplish this work that even now, in spite of the positions they held and their vastly superior forces—the million volunteers of April, 1865, were opposed by less than 200,000 Confederates—there was in their ranks no general belief in speedy victory. They had heard so many times that the "back of the rebellion was broken" that they had almost ceased to expect an end to the war.

That their skepticism hinged on their respect for the ability of a single one of the leaders opposing them—General Robert E. Lee—is evident from the effect produced on them by the news that on April 9 Lee had surrendered his army to Grant. "The war is over," was the universal chorus of the volunteers. And they were right. Like a structure from which the keystone has been wrenched the Confederate army fell apart. Two weeks after Lee surrendered his force at Appomattox Joe Johnston surrendered to Sherman. On May 4 Dick Taylor surrendered to General Canby in Alabama, and on May 26 the forces west of the Mississippi commanded by Kirby Smith were surrendered to the Federal authorities. Smith fleeing to Mexico. In six weeks all the organized forces of the Confederacy had laid down their arms, and the great majority of the men had given their parole not to take them up against the United States until properly exchanged. The army of a million volunteers had finished its work.

Almost the first thought of the Federal war department when the news of Lee's surrender reached it had been, "Now we can disband the armies"—a thought followed immediately by the question, "How can it be done?" The question was one to tax the foresight, the experience, the energy of even Secretary Stanton, great as was his skill in handling bodies of men. If

one will consider the army as it lay in April, 1865, scattered from the gulf to the Ohio, from Texas to Virginia, and remember its number, 1,034,064 men, he will see that the problem of the prompt transportation of such a force north was most serious.

It was a bewildering problem, but Mr. Stanton attacked it with his usual volcanic energy. Summoning General Thomas M. Vincent, the assistant adjutant general, who had in charge the organization of the volunteer forces, he asked him for a plan to suit the case. A few days later General Vincent presented a method he believed feasible. It was discussed for an hour and a half by the secretary and finally dismissed by his saying, "Send the method to General Grant and if approved by him issue the order." The notes were sent to Grant, who returned them with the brief comment, "Plans and suggestions within approved."

To one who reads General Vincent's plan today it looks so simple compared with the task on hand that it seems hardly worth considering, yet it was that plan which moved the army. It provided simply that the army organizations be kept intact and the troops sent to convenient rendezvous. There the men were to go into camp until muster rolls and payrolls had been made out, when they were to be sent by boat and rail to their various states, where they were to be paid off and dismissed. Its vital feature was the provision that the work of disbandment be carried on by an organization already in existence. The mighty machine which had been devised for getting men from their homes into the army was to be used now for returning them. The officers who had become experts in mustering in men were now to muster them out. The transportation facilities which had taken the men south were to be devoted to taking them north.

As soon as the scheme had been approved the first of a long series of orders reducing the army was issued. In rapid succession they followed each other. Recruits, patients in hospitals, officers and men whose terms expired before May 31, the troops with Meade and Sherman whose terms expired before Sept. 30 were to be disbanded. Order after order, calling the men from the field, had been issued before the last hostile force had surrendered on May 28.

As the troops reached the centers around which the hardest and longest struggles had been waged—Vicksburg, Chattanooga, Richmond—their excitement and interest arose to the highest pitch. They encountered at these places the troops who were being held for further duty and at once fell to exchanging experiences. For a full account of the march to the sea the soldier of the Army of Potomac left at Richmond conducted his comrade from Sherman's troops over the fortifications of Petersburg, through the shell-battered town, to the crater and down to City Point, so long Grant's headquarters. When Sherman's army started from Richmond it marched out by the Hanover Court House road, but there divided into four columns, one taking a route by Chillsburg, another by Culpeper and Manassas, a third by Chancellorsville and the fourth by Fredericksburg. By this distribution the army covered almost every battlefield of northern Virginia. The entire

force was completely engrossed in sightseeing, the interest beginning with General Sherman himself, who, in his eager desire to see and know all possible of the campaign of the Army of the Potomac, shifted from column to column, visiting en route Spottsylvania, Fredericksburg, Dumfries and other fields. The war was over, and already the day of reminiscences had opened.

The first large bodies of troops to reach a rendezvous were Meade's and Sherman's armies, both of which by May 20 were encamped along the Potomac, opposite Washington, most of them within sight of the dome of the capitol. In all the two armies numbered 200,000 men, brought from the field since the surrender of Lee.

The second step in the disbandment was the preparation of muster out and payrolls. Just what this entailed only those who have examined the rolls can realize. On them every man's army history had to be registered, his rank and age, when and where and by whom he was enrolled, when and where and by whom he was mustered in, when last paid and to what time, how far he had traveled, what subsistence and forage he had furnished, what equipment and clothing he had received, his absence, special duties, promotions, wounds, illnesses—an array of figures, dates and facts upon whose accuracy all the future relations of that man with the war department must be regulated. The mere printing of the blanks of these rolls and of the discharge papers for the men was keeping the government printing presses busy night and day, while filling them meant work for hundreds of officers and clerks. Everything was ready for this work when Sherman and Meade reached their rendezvous, and headquarters were at once established and the rolls started.

The delay necessary to making out the rolls caused everywhere a percentage of trouble. Why he could not be disbanded at once many a volunteer could not understand. The war was over, and he wanted to go home.

The men were kept in order by regular drilling and by many reviews. The greatest of these was a grand review

ordered by Mr. Stanton while Sherman and Meade's armies were waiting around Washington. The secretary of war wished the president, the cabinet, congress, the country, to see what an army meant and ordered that Meade's army on May 23 and Sherman's on the 24th pass in review before the members of the administration. The pageant was by far the noblest this land has ever seen. It was not the glitter of the thousands of bayonets and sabres and polished brass cannon which made it so, not the hundreds of battleflags and banners in line, not the splendid gathering of generals who had distinguished themselves in the war—Meade, Sherman, Crook, Hooker, Hartranft, Miles, Howard, Logan, Blair, Buell. It was the men in ranks who for six hours on one day, seven on the other, passed sixty abreast in "cadence step" through the wide Washington avenues. The great throng which had gathered in Washington to witness the review sat as if spellbound watching hour after hour these great blue masses passing as steadily and rhythmically as an ocean tide. Now and then men turned wondering dazed eyes to each other and asked: "Where did they all come from? Have we sent so many men to the front? Is it true that this is but one-fifth of the army?" With this surprise at the numbers came a deeper surprise—that an army looked like this. For four years they had been seeing soldiers daily—buxant lads, marching with shining eyes to the front, or crippled men crawling home to die—but soldiers like these they did not know. These men were bronzed and stern and indifferent. The spectators felt almost a terror in watching the ranks, so irresistibly seerged their power, so mighty their will. This, then, was what Lincoln meant when he talked to them of "veterans." This was the kind of men war made of their bright faced boys.

The effect of the grand review on the people of the country was deeper than Mr. Stanton ever had dreamed. They saw at last the quality of the men the war had called out, and though they stammered at what the tattered banners recalled and wept as they realized

how often the serried regiments had been cut to fragments and refilled, they carried away a great thankfulness. They saw now why the young republic had been able to grapple successfully with the most dangerous enemy a country can have—an evil within. If the belief that a great principle was in danger could raise up such a body of men as this, then government by the people was no longer an experiment. For the north the grand review was a benediction on the civil war.

In the interval after the order for disbandment came and while the troops were marching to their rendezvous transportation by river and rail had been preparing to take the men to their state camps. All the steamers, cars, engines, of the north were at the service of the government for this task. Indeed, from now on the transportation service of the north existed first for the soldier. Everything was ready then when on May 29 the first body of Sherman's and Meade's soldiers was marched to the station. Washington to lead in the northward flow of the armies. So perfect were the plans, so complete the preparation, that in the next forty days the one little railway which then led from Washington to the Relay House, a junction north of the city, carried away 233,200 men, 12,338 horses and 4,300,850 pounds of baggage. All the states of the north were represented in the two armies, so that at the Relay House the solid stream which had flowed from the capital divided for east and west. At Baltimore and Parkersburg these branches divided again. The troops for New England, New York and portions of the middle west were taken by rail to New York city. Here they were reassorted and sent to their several states. Those for the northwest were transferred to steamers at Parkersburg and carried down the Ohio to Cincinnati, Louisville, Lawrenceville, Ind., and St. Louis and again divided and forwarded. Some every railroad of the north, the Ohio, the Mississippi, the lakes, was carrying a ceaseless stream of men. To join the troops from Washington there soon came those who had been mustered at Louisville. Charleston,

Savannah, Mobile, Vicksburg, St. Louis, Nashville, and the whole country north of the Ohio was crisscrossed with lines of living blue. It was characteristic of the foresight with which the entire business of disbandment was managed that it was arranged that the soldiers should not be paid until they were within the restraining and protecting influence of their own homes. The soldiers, their pay in their pockets, would certainly have deserted in shoals in the delays at rendezvous and camps, and most of them would have been easy prey for the crowds of sharpers which gathered at every point, hoping that pay day would put the men in their power. This disorganization was prevented by making pay day the last day in the process of disbandment. The matter was the more important because the sum to be distributed was so large. The Army of the Potomac had not been paid since Dec. 31, 1864. Sherman's and Thomas' armies not since August, 1864. There were bounties coming to many men and officers. The aggregate amount of money paid out to 800,000 men discharged by Nov. 15 was about \$270,000,000.

Thus it was that, though a man reached his state camp penniless, he found himself free a few days later with a comfortable sum in his pocket. The first use he made of his money in most cases was to buy the arms he had carried through his service. These arms belonged to the government and were to be deposited in the state arsenals unless bought by the men. Many preferred to do this, and so, with knapsack on his back, musket in hand, the soldier presented himself at last at his own home door.

It was on May 29, as has been stated, that the first soldiers left their rendezvous. By Aug. 7 General Vincent was able to report 640,806 volunteers mustered out; by Sept. 14, 741,107; by Nov. 15, 800,963; by Feb. 15, 1866, 952,452.

In nine months practically the whole force of volunteers had been returned to their homes. The disbandment had been accomplished so easily, so quickly, that the country had hardly realized what was going on.

What followed was even more wonderful.

The soldier was at home, and now, according to all prophets, the country must see trouble. As soon as the order to disband the volunteers had gone forth the north had begun to ask itself what they were going to do with the million men about to inundate them. Those of the country who took forethought, who knew the history of the peoples, who had studied the phenomena of population, looked with foreboding on the coming deluge.

As a matter of fact, the men had gone to work. The soldier of 1865 did not ask to be coddled. He was a manly, matter of fact individual, who, having done his best at fighting and having enjoyed it for the most part, came home, the job done, with one idea in his mind—to get another. He had not begun to estimate how much the country owed him, he had no stomach for

sentiment, and he wanted work. He took off his blue coat, hung up his knapsack and musket and went out to "hunt a job."

There is more than one prosperous business in the United States today started in the summer of 1865 in this small way.

Great numbers of men found awaiting them places which had been kept open. Carpenters, painters, trades people of all sorts, were offered their old positions in hundreds, even thousands, of cases. Sir Samuel Peto, an Englishman, who published a volume in 1866 on "American Resources," records that soon after the close of the war he was in Chicago and there visited a printing establishment. The proprietor pointed out forty-seven compositors who had been soldiers. "This man was a major," he told Sir Samuel. "The next to him a captain, the third a lieutenant, another a sergeant. . . . They were only too happy to return to situations which I had given them an understanding when they left me that I would retain open for them."

Officers in particular were in great demand as business partners and as promoters of new enterprises, their names being considered equal to a good lump of capital. "One of our military leaders," said a New York paper in the fall of 1865, "is now in charge of a machine for a patent pumping, another is building a railway through the oil country, one of the first soldiers of the Army of the Potomac is in the pistol business, another keeps a retail grocery store, while one of Sherman's most trusted lieutenants is a claim agent. One major general prints a weekly paper in Baltimore. These starved and battered gentlemen go down from the command of colonels to become agents and partners and dealers, perhaps with the orderly who stood before their tents or the private who held their stirrups."

But there was another factor in their assimilation which should not be forgotten. It never could have taken place without the co-operation of the people at home. It was they who had by gigantic sacrifices furnished the money for the war. It was their energy which had at the same time developed the west, increased imports, opened new industries. It was they who foresaw the danger in the floods of volunteers would cause and prepared for them, opening to them their old positions, calling them to new enterprises.

As they marched into a town they saw again and again a woman rush from a cheering crowd to cling, sobbing, to a husband, a child bounding out crying, "Father, father!" a comrade spring from the ranks to clasp a mother. It was the sight of wives weeping with joy of mothers thanking God for their sons, which all the summer and fall stirred the hearts of the returning soldiers. For the sake of these sweet things more than all else these men, in whom love of danger and adventure had become a strong and compelling passion, hung up their guns and cheerfully took up the steady grind of earning their daily bread.