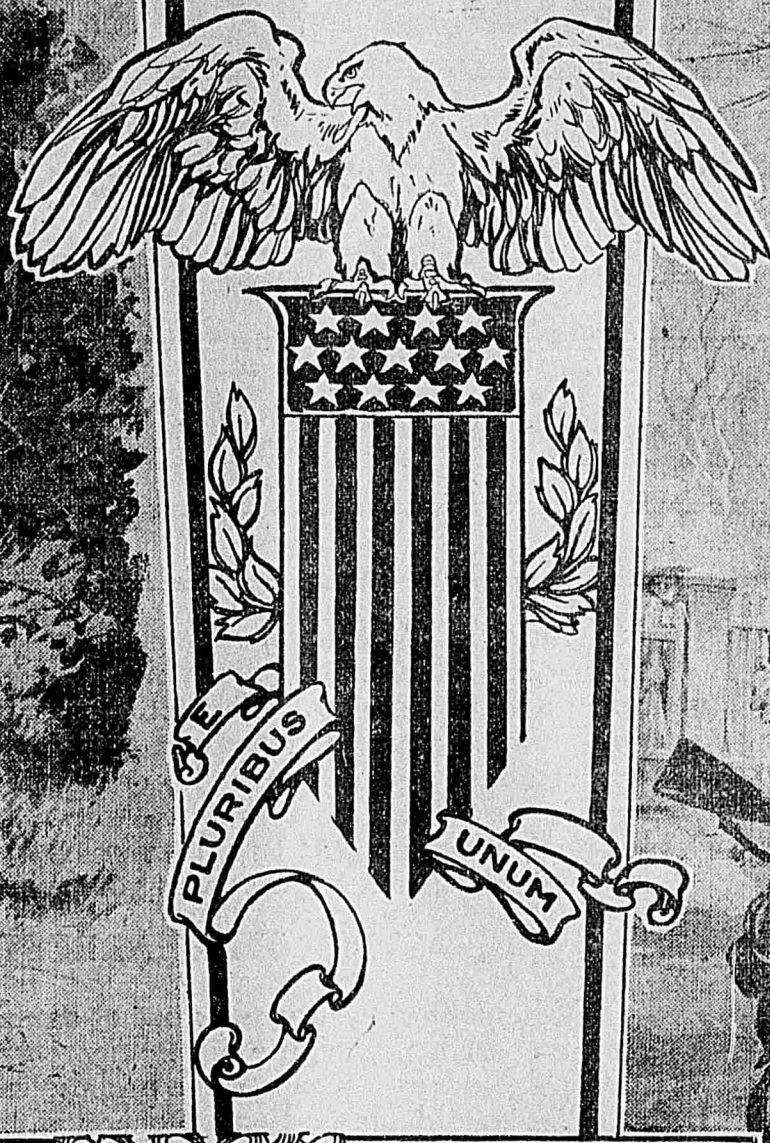


# DISBANDING THE UNION ARMY By Ida M. Tarbell



ON THEIR WAY HOMEWARD.

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 Federal army, but the Federal navy, during the past year, had been in charge of 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 the subject was then briefly and 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 responded by a few lines briefly summarizing the plan and suggestions within approved."

joined the Confederacy; by capturing the city of Vicksburg, Mississippi, 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 there were armies and disarmed there were herds of cattle and flocks of sheep, and there were thousands of prisoners. 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. The men in the department of the Cumberland, was engaged in clearing the state in his division of the few Confederates remaining from the defeat of Hood in January. Canby, with some 30,000 men, was in the line 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, and capturing capitals, caring for prisoners and freed men.

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 for the orderly 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 to the 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 men were to be sent to the states advised 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 men south were to be taken from the men south were to be devoted to taking them north.

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

that their skepticism melted on May 26, when the troops reached the centers of the rebellion. The men around which the hardest and longest struggles had been waged—Vicksburg, Chattanooga, Richmond—their excitement and interest arose to the highest pitch. They encountered no more of the "doubtful" men willing but 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 a record of the march, and the men made 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 objective. The march was not 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 Staunton, a third by Staunton, Chancellorsville and the fourth by Fredericksburg. By this distribution the army covered almost every battlefield of northern Virginia. The entire

others had finished their work. The Federal war department when the news of Lee's surrender reached it had been, "Now we can disband the armies"—a question was asked immediately by the question, "What?"

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. One day, in 1865, scattered from the Gulf to the Ohio, from Texas to Virginia, and remember its number, 1,034,084 men will see the light of day, and the transportation of such a force north was most serious.

There were complications, however, in the question of 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, from Virginia to the Carolinas, to the Vania, 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 num-

It was a bewildering problem, but Mr. Stanton attacked it with his usual volcanic energy. Summoning General Thomas M. Vincent, the assistant ad-

tutant 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 troops to the front. Only 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 to the front. In the 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 plan was a simple one, but it was 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 men were now to muster them out. That was the plan. It was 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 25.

On May 26, 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 a throng of soldiers of the same army, 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, the 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 army, the soldier of the Army of the Potomac, started from Richmond it marched out by the Hanover Court House road, but there divided into four columns, one taking a route by Chilesburg, another by the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, 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 outsteering the Indians, winning with ease. In the meantime, I, in his eager desire to see and know all possible of the campaign of the Arm 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.

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The second step in the disbandment was the preparation of muster out and



**"I GOT THAT AT GETTYSBURG."**

ayroll. 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 discharged, and, according to what time, how far he had traveled. What subsistence and forage he had furnished, what equipment and clothing he had received, his absences, special assignments and special services— 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 rolls were the basis of all these rolls and of the discharge papers for the men was keeping the government printing presses busy night and day, the filling them meant work for the army's drafters.

Everything was ready for this work when Sherman and Meade reached their rendezvous, and headquarters were there once established and the rolls started.

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—buoyant lads, strong and young, with a fighting 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 spectacle of a man who had been in the war in the front ranks, so irresistible seemed their power, so mighty their will. This, then, was what Lincoln meant when he talked of "veterans." It was this 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's words. It was the first time that the quality of the men the war had called out, and, though they shuddered at what the tattered banners recalled and wept as they realized the cost of the fighting, they had been out to fragments and galled, they

The delay necessary to making out the rolls caused everywhere a percentage of trouble. Why he could not be sure that the men were all there, he could not understand. The war was over, and he wanted to go home.

The men were kept in order by regulation. The men were kept in order by regulation. The greatest of these was a grand review ordered by Mr. Stanton while Sherman was in the city.

They saw now why the young republic had been able to grapple successfully with the war. The war was over, and the country can have—an evil within, if the belief that a great principle was in danger could raise up such a body of men. The war was over, and the people was no longer an experiment. For the north the grand review was a

man and Meade's armies were waiting in the Washington suburbs for the order for war. When 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 president, the north was at the noblest. The pageant was by far the noblest this land has ever seen. It was not the glitter of the thousands of bayonets and sabers and polished brass cannon which made it the most of the hundreds of battalions and banners in line, not the splendid gathering of generals who had distinguished themselves in the war—Meade, Sherman, Custer, Crook, Hartman, Miles, and others. It was the sight of 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 thousands of spectators who lined up 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 army of automatons. Men with wondering dazed eyes to each other and asked: "Where did they all come from? Have we sent so many men to

bedeviled on the civil war?"

After the review 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 and their state camps. All the steamers, cars, and boats 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 made to accommodate the army. The body of Sherman's Meade's soldiers was marched to the station at Washington to lead in the northward flow of the armies. So perfect were the plans, so complete the preparation, that in less than forty days, on a little railway which then led from Washington to the Relay House, a junction north of the city, carried away 232,000 men, 100,000 horses and 100,000 pounds of baggage. The two 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 ended for the first time in the history of the nation. The troops for New England, New York and portions of the middle west

were taken by rail to New York City. There they were recruited and sent to their several states. Those for the northwest were transferred to steamers at Parkersburg and arrived down the Ohio to Cincinnati, Louisville, Lawrenceville, Ind., and St. Louis and again divided and forwarded. Soon after reaching 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 out at Louisville, Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, Vicksburg, St. Louis, Nashville and from the whole country north of the Ohio was crisscrossed with lines of living blue.

There was great rejoicing that the delays at stations where changes were made should not be long. Nevertheless, at great terminals like New York, the crowds were so great as to be inevitable there should be frequent congestions of soldiers. In New York permanent barracks were erected on Howard street and at the Battery, to which the thousands were directed, as they came down town. Their arrival was so continuous that a standing head in the city papers came to be "The Returning Soldiers." It was the merest enumeration of the regiments and the list of the battles in which they had fought and sometimes the numbers of men they had lost. So common a sight did the soldiers become in the city that the police began to grow impatient. After a few weeks they passed almost unheeded in the streets. This indifference so shocked the Evening Post that as early as June 7 it protested "en masse" against the indifference of the populace and begged that henceforth the soldiers be cheered as they marched through.

It was characteristic of the foresight with which the entire business of disbandment was managed that it was arranged that the soldiers should 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. The soldiers there 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 of the 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. Sher-

man'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 \$66,309 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 ar-  
senals 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, 741,197; 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 real-

ated what was going on.

And yet this feat, which at the time passed unheeded, was the greatest feat in handling the army. I could not do this or any other thing unless I had the aid of my staff. Success was due primarily to the fact that the administration instead of organizing a new bureau for the work and filling it with inexperienced men used the trained men it had on hand in the department. There had been a change of command in the army; second, the great engines of the mustering in bureau took place at once, and from the beginning to the end of disbandment the great Napoleonic war rule—time is everything—was rigidly enforced. The great war plan was also followed.

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 it was to do. It was to be 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. The country was to be invaded. France was alive with beggars and cripples, that the end of the Thirty Years' war filled Germany with marauding bands of musketeers, that the close of the Italian war made Italy unsafe for travel, so thick were the

hills and valleys with brigades—the outpouring of capital and the papal army—the newspapers began to warn and advise. Police departments increased their force. The governors of many states asked the war department for troops to keep the disbanded soldiers in order. But by November 1865 the worst had been over and nothing had happened. The men seemed to disappear. What had become of them?

As a matter of fact the men had gone to work. The soldier of 1865 did not get called to fire as a matter of course. He was a man of a different 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 coun-

try 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" (the summer of 1885 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 jobs. The thousands of thousands of cases Sir Samuel Peto, an Englishman, who published a volume in 1886 on "American Resources," records that soon after the close of the war were waiting for the thousands of returning soldiers in the United States 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, and so on down to a private." • • • They were only too happy to return to situations which I had given them an understanding when they left me that

How would retail men fare then?" Officers in particular were in great demand as business managers, 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 mountains, and a third is recruiting the Army of the Potomac. 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 are the men who are being sent down from the command of colonies 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. The people of the north were placed 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 frontiers. It was they who, forsooth, the danger in the floods of men which the abandoning of the volunteers would cause and prepared for them, opening to them their old positions calling them to new enterprises. The men were quick to feel the stirrings of the welcome. They realized the sincerity of the enthusiasm and the helpfulness which met them on every hand. They saw themselves the honored guests of the north, and their

pride and self respect were aroused. They came at once, too, under the sanctifying influence of reunion with friends and kindred. They then marched into a town they saw again and again a woman rush from a cheering crowd to cling, sobbing, to a husband, a child bound out to service. "Father, father," a comrade called from the ranks, "I have a wife and child!" It was the sight of slaves weeping with joy, of mothers thanking God for their sons, which all the summer and fall stirred the hearts of the remaining soldiers. For the sake of the loved ones who were left behind, 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.