

4-1-1967

Homeward Bound

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Recommended Citation

Taber, John H. "Homeward Bound." *The Palimpsest* 48 (1967), 201-208.

Available at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest/vol48/iss4/9>

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HOMeward BOUND

EVER since the New Year there had been recurring rumors of the imminence of the departure of the regiment. First came the report that we would leave early in February. That hung on persistently until the time was passed and it was supplanted by another that set the last of March as the positive date; and then it was finally settled by those in the know that the 168th would not move an inch out of Germany until the treaty of peace was signed. At the rate the peace conference was then proceeding it might be for years and it might be forever. The men were daily growing more restive, but new rumors always brought new hope. Word that we were scheduled to sail from Rotterdam convinced many that we were on the point of leaving; but Antwerp was substituted for Rotterdam; and finally, after several weeks, it was announced that when we did sail we would sail from a French port, presumably Brest.

On the 17th of March the Rainbow Division left the Fourth Army Corps and entered the reserve of the Third Army as the first step toward embarkation. A week later all engineering and signal property, ammunition, stock, and rolling equipment, with the exception of kitchens, were turned in. The enlisted personnel was given a thorough physical examination and inoculated against typhoid fever. Already the long line of box cars that waited on the sidings farther down the river was being fitted up with bunks and stoves to make the long

trip from the Rhine to the Atlantic as comfortable as possible. Clerks were burning midnight oil preparing baggage and passenger lists. After so many false rumors and changes of plan, it was hard to realize that the time had actually come.

Spring has just got a real start and green tendrils were beginning to give promise of summer beauty when the first train loaded with troops of the 168th steamed out from Sinzig in the early morning of April 8th and headed up the river toward Coblenz. Soon after, the sections carrying the other units of the regiment were following the same route. It was a merry trip that lasted three days. The men were somewhat crowded, but what did they care — they were going home! Three times a day the trains halted to give them a chance to stretch their legs and to permit the mess details to make a flying trip to the kitchen cars, two of which were attached to each train. Bidding farewell to the Rhine at Coblenz, they ran over German tracks through Trèves and Luxemburg to Metz; then back into France at Conflans; past heroic Verdun, demolished St. Mihiel, Bar-le-Duc and Vitry-le-François of distant memory; through Sézanne, Versailles, Chartres, Le Mans, Laval, Rennes, and St. Briec, to Brest, where on the 11th they finally detrained and marched to Camp Pontanezen.

This embarkation center lay several kilometers out of Brest, between stone-fenced fields of rich Breton mud. Here the regiment was completely outfitted and given a final delousing. There was no opportunity for drill during the six days spent in the camp, but there were endless calls for details to work around it. The weather was most variable, a downpour about every other hour and a high wind most of the time; but between showers

the sky was startlingly clear and blue. The black storm clouds seemed to roll up from nowhere, and before one knew it, it would be raining again.

On the 13th Colonel Brewer, Captain Christopher, and Lieutenant Breslin were decorated with the cross of the Legion of Honor, and Sergeant James R. Clark of L Company, who that day was commissioned second lieutenant, and Sergeant Merl E. Clark of C Company received the Médaille Militaire, the highest award to enlisted men within the gift of the French Government. At the same time a letter was received from Premier Clemenceau expressing his personal gratitude for the services of the Rainbow Division and wishing it an affectionate farewell.

The next day, the 14th, Colonel Brewer was detached to assume charge of a boat load of nurses and casuals — the latter consisting chiefly of enlisted men and their war brides and many children. They had the misfortune to draw a German ship that had just been taken over by our government and which had not yet been conditioned for its first voyage in four and a half years, so they had a rather hectic trip.

It had been determined that the 168th should return on the *Leviathan*, which was then riding out in the harbor, but the continuing gales made it impossible to board her. On the 16th thirty more officers were detached to sail for Boston on the *Pretoria*, it having been discovered that there was insufficient room for all in the quarters assigned the regiment on the larger ship.

However, on the 17th the wind abated and the command hiked to Brest, loaded on lighters, and was ferried out to the *Leviathan*. In the eighteen months that elapsed since our experience on the *Grant*, the transport

service had acquired real efficiency in handling troops, and there was no fault to find either with the accommodations, the cuisine, or the regulations. Even if there had been, the men wouldn't have noticed it — they were so happy to be on the way home. Although all the troops had been loaded by the evening of the 17th, the sailing was held up by a delay in coaling. Then doughboy volunteers replaced the negro stevedores at that job and accomplished as much in six hours as the others had done in two days. At twenty minutes after five, preceded by the *Aquitania*, which had come in in the morning and anchored near us, the *Leviathan* pulled anchor and pointed her nose into the setting sun. France, which had greeted us in rain, was saying *au revoir* with a smiling sky. Gradually the coast line was swallowed up in the distance and the falling night, and the voyage home had really begun.

It was a great trip, the giant of the seas putting mile after mile behind her with scarcely an effort, it seemed, so steady was her movement in the calm waters. There was fair weather practically all the way across, and there was enough deck space, scientifically apportioned, for all to enjoy it, in spite of the fact that we were carrying 11,000 soldiers and between five and six hundred officers, which, with the navy personnel, brought the sailing list to well over 14,000 souls. With four bands aboard, there were concerts nearly every hour of the day, and in the evening there were moving pictures and other entertainment.

After leaving the Gulf Stream, it grew blustery and cold, and there were snow flurries on the 25th before breakfast. But land was not far away. At noon several destroyers met the ship and escorted it to Ambrose Light-

ship, off which we anchored until four o'clock. Then putting on steam, the *Leviathan* sailed in through the Narrows and proudly up New York Bay. What a cheer went up when the majestic outline of the city came into view and the graceful lines of Liberty stood out against the Jersey sky! A squadron of especially chartered ferry boats and tugs, decorated with flags and banners, whistles screeching in welcome, and jammed with cheering people from the different States represented by the units on board, puffed around the towering hulk of the transport like a brood of ducklings around a dignified mother bird. There was the Mayor's committee of welcome, a boat filled with Ohio cohorts, another from Indiana, one from Illinois, but most prominent of all to us was that one bearing the legend "Iowa Welcomes Her Boys Of The 168th".

The dock at Hoboken was crowded with several thousand more friends and relatives, many of whom had come long distances to get the first glimpse of their sons and husbands. But of all the organizations aboard, the 168th was the only one that did not disembark immediately; it was to be held on the *Leviathan* until the following morning.

There was wild happiness aboard the ship that evening, until word reached it that Major Bunch, who had seen more active service than any one in the regiment, had been killed in a motor accident a few hours before. He had obtained a pass to surprise his fiancée in a nearby town, and was on his way when the motor in which he was riding collided with another near Camp Merritt and he was crushed to death. It seemed too cruel, too unjust to be true, that Fate, which had spared him through all the dangers of battle, should snatch away his life now when

the war was over and he had so much to live for. This news took the edge off of our enthusiasm, for he was mourned by the entire regiment as an efficient officer, a courageous soldier, and a good friend.

Unloading at eight o'clock on the morning of the 26th, the 168th, after passing through a Y. M. C. A. line for breakfast, entrained for Camp Upton in the central part of Long Island, where the men were again deloused and by nightfall assigned to their quarters in barracks. There was an age-long wait in this Sahara-like waste. But the shortage in cars and the unprecedented jam of troops coming in and going out held them there for two weeks.

On the 3rd of May the regiment passed in final review before its commanding officer before being broken up into the various State detachments which its veterans represented. For only those living in Iowa were to go to Camp Dodge for discharge; and in the months of service it had received replacements from every State in the Union, with the exception of Nevada. Thirty-two hundred men and ninety-eight officers returned to this country with the 168th, but of that number only sixteen officers and less than thirteen hundred enlisted men had set out with it from Iowa in the fall of 1917 — even this represented a large proportion that had been wounded in battle — and the others had either been killed or too severely wounded to rejoin it.

In groups the detachments for the different sections of the country left camp, beginning with that very afternoon. On the 11th the Iowans entrained for the West. There is little to relate of that three days' journey, except a steadily mounting excitement as they sped toward the home State. As the three sections crossed the Mississippi and entered Iowa at Dubuque, Davenport,

and Keokuk, they were vociferously greeted by the townspeople, and by committees of prominent citizens from all over the State. There were parades and speeches and flowers and food, and then they reëntered the trains for a progress of triumph unequalled in the history of Iowa. Every town and hamlet along the three parallel routes was crowded with cheering mobs. Even at the cross-roads small crowds of country people gathered to shout their welcome as the trains shot by. Cedar Rapids, Marshalltown, Waterloo, Ottumwa, and Oskaloosa met them with enormous throngs and rousing receptions. Converging on Des Moines, the trains reached the Capital City during the night and early morning of the 14th of May. Despite the untimeliness of the arrival there were thousands on hand to greet them; but the men, still under military discipline, remained in the cars for the night. There was a big day ahead of them. There was to be a lunch at the Coliseum; then the parade followed by a banquet and dance; and at eleven o'clock they were to go to Camp Dodge where they would receive their discharges.

The crowds at the station increased with the brightening dawn. There was laughter and some tears as families were reunited after twenty-two months' separation, but every one was happy, inconceivably happy, to be home again.

Des Moines had declared a holiday, and with it as many people from the rest of the State as could crowd into it. The streets through which the parade was to pass were gay with flags and bunting, and leading up the hill to the State House, where the reviewing stand was placed, a court of honor, culminating in an arch of triumph, had been erected. The sky was blue, the air was clear — it was a perfect day.

More than eighteen hundred members and former members of the regiment lined up for the parade behind Colonel Tinley and his mounted staff. First came the Band in full strength, then the veterans of the entire campaign, equipped with rifles, helmets, and gas masks; behind them marched more than three hundred discharged or convalescent comrades who had been previously invalided home; and at the end, in automobiles, crippled and disabled members of the regiment from the hospitals at Camp Dodge and Fort Des Moines.

The concluding gesture of their military life was performed with the utmost seriousness on the part of the men. The gay youths who had gone away with smiles on their faces had not come back; in their stead were men who looked neither to the right nor the left. There was no display of emotion by those who had experienced emotion in concentrated portions. The spirit that kept up the unnecessary discipline to the end was the spirit of the Rainbow Division.

Through a solid mass of humanity that thundered out its applause and strewed the rough paving with a carpet of flowers, the regiment marched; and many saw at the side of the men marching in the flesh the dead comrades who had trod the same path with them two years before. The cheers, the smiles, the flowers, the tears, were for all.

When the reviewing stand was reached, Colonel Tinley left the column and took his place beside the high dignitaries of the State. The Band, playing an inspiring march, passed by; then line after line of straight, lithe figures, and in their midst the regimental colors proudly borne with their newly-won bands. So, as the last platoon executed "Eyes right" as a final salute to its beloved commander, the 168th Infantry marched on into history.

INTERESTING FACTS AND GENERAL INFORMATION

Cumulative arrivals in Europe of American military personnel for the A. E. F.:

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----------|
| By May 31, 1917 | 1,308 |
| By June 30, 1917 | 16,220 |
| By July 31, 1917 | 20,120 |
| By Aug. 31, 1917 | 39,383 |
| By Sept. 30, 1917 | 61,927 |
| By Oct. 31, 1917 | 92,265 |
| By Nov. 30, 1917 | 129,623 |
| By Dec. 31, 1917 | 183,896 |
| By Jan. 31, 1918 | 224,655 |
| By Feb. 28, 1918 | 254,378 |
| By Mar. 31, 1918 | 329,005 |
| By Apr. 30, 1918 | 434,081 |
| By May 31, 1918 | 667,119 |
| By June 30, 1918 | 897,293 |
| By July 31, 1918 | 1,210,703 |
| By Aug. 31, 1918 | 1,473,190 |
| By Sept. 30, 1918 | 1,783,955 |
| By Oct. 30, 1918 | 1,986,618 |
| By Nov. 11, 1918 | 2,057,675 |

Actual combat strength of the A. E. F.:

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------|
| Mar. 21, 1918 | 162,482 |
| May 27, 1918 | 406,844 |
| Aug. 10, 1918 | 822,358 |
| Sept. 12, 1918 | 999,602 |
| Oct. 12, 1918 | 1,078,190 |
| Nov. 11, 1918 | 1,078,222 |

These figures include only combat troops and exclude the troops in the S. O. S., headquarters, schools, hospitals, liaison service and other special services.

Combat strength of A. E. F. by branch of service at the time of the Armistice:

| | |
|---|---------|
| Infantry and M. G. Battalions | 646,000 |
| Engineers | 81,600 |
| Signal Corps | 21,300 |
| Air Service | 34,800 |
| Artillery | 278,500 |
| Tank Corps | 10,200 |
| Amm. Trains, Q. M., etc. | 70,800 |
| Medical Department ¹ | 152,300 |
| Cavalry | 6,000 |
| Ordnance | 122,900 |

¹Including those on duty in the Services of Supply.

Total strength of A. E. F. on Nov. 11:
Its total strength was 1,981,701, in which were included 32,385 marines.

Percentage of total strength in various branches of the A. E. F., Nov. 1918:

| | Officers; % of total | Enlisted Men; % of total |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Infantry | 23.83 | 32.40 |
| Engineers | 8.69 | 12.68 |
| Field Artillery | 10.91 | 11.18 |
| Casuals (all branches) | 3.39 | 10.81 |
| Medical Dept. (Army) | 18.46 | 7.26 |
| Quartermaster Corps | 6.33 | 7.16 |
| Coast Artillery Corps | 4.00 | 3.78 |
| Air Service | 7.30 | 3.11 |
| Ammunition Trains | 1.47 | 2.48 |
| Signal Corps | 1.63 | 1.83 |
| Supply Trains | 1.02 | 1.61 |
| Ordnance Department | 1.53 | 1.16 |
| Marines | 0.75 | 0.96 |
| Headquarters Troops | 0.21 | 0.78 |
| Military Police | 0.49 | 0.67 |
| Hdqrs. Detachments | 0.00 | 0.55 |
| Tank Corps | 0.91 | 0.50 |
| Cavalry | 0.25 | 0.29 |
| Postal Express Service | 0.15 | 0.15 |
| Medical Dept. (Navy) | 0.07 | 0.02 |
| G.H.Q. and General Staff | 8.49 | 0.00 |

Number of civilians employed by A. E. F.:
42,644 at the time of the Armistice.

Greatest number of American soldiers in hospitals in Europe at any one time:
190,564 men on November 7, 1918.

Provisions for hospitalization in A. E. F.:

On November 11, 1918, there were 192,844 normal beds, which could have been increased in an emergency to 276,547. There were 153 base hospitals, 66 camp hospitals, 12 convalescent camps, 21 hospital trains and 6,875 ambulances.

First casualty of A. E. F.:

First Lieutenant Louis J. Genella, Medical Corps, suffered a shell wound on July 14, 1917, while serving with the British at the front southwest of Arras.