

Transforming Citizens Into Soldiers

Jas. H. Howe, linotype operator and business manager of the Western World of Bandon is among the number called to the colors by the selective draft. In a recent issue of his paper he gives an account of his early experiences in the army, an account so thoroughly interesting and readable as reflecting the experiences of the fresh recruit, that we reproduce it here with.

At Ft. McDowell experiences came in bewildering array. On the way across the Bay, the sergeant told the men on ship to get rid of such liquor as they might have—either inside or out. At the dock we were met by a lieutenant and corps of assistants who gave our dunnage a thorough inspection, and sent such men as had failed to heed the sergeant's warning to the guard house. The people at home may accept at face value the government's statement that it has decided upon a strict course of prohibition for the army and navy for no man in uniform may purchase, have in his possession, or be under the influence of liquor of any kind.

From the dock we marched four abreast to a large concrete area in front of one of the three story barracks of the same material, where we were counted several times like so many bags of potatoes, and the captains of the various Local Boards required to account for their men. We were then marched inside the barracks and required to take a cold showerbath. By this time it was noon and we were marched to the mess hall and given our first army meal. It consisted, if remember correctly, of potatoes beef stew, spanish beans, bread and butter, cucumbers, canned plums, cake and coffee—all in abundance limited only to the individual's interior capacity.

From the mess hall, we were taken to the hospital nearby for medical examination. We again lined up in fours, and as our names were called, entered the personell room where we gave various facts with regard to our birthplace, home, military experience, etc., and signed our "oath". This consist merely of the words, "Having been accepted into the service of the United States, I hereby affirm that the following facts regarding my birthplace, etc., are correct to the best of my knowledge and belief." The government apparently cheerfully accepting its responsibility of keeping the men in the service during the period of the emergency. Fortunately, I was one among the first men called into line as the examination lasted through the afternoon and well into the early evening. We were taken into a large bare concrete room and told to strip. Then we were lined up and examined for physical defects and deformities. We held up our arms, stood on one foot and then the other, bent over, backwards, sideways, and otherwise showed that we were supple, or near supple. Then we went into another room took the usual eye test together with the color blind test which consisted of calling the names of a mixed array of lights. Our hearing was then tested by having us repeat the words of a man standing across the room. Each man then took a chair and a doctor, with various instruments examined his eyes, his ears and nose for defects and diseases. We then passed into still another room where we were examined for lung trouble, enlarged glands, venereal diseases and mentality. Along the way each doctor had written his findings upon our bodies with chalk, and as we stepped before a final medico we were viewed and given

cards to various rooms depending upon whether we were accepted as fit or not. Here a surprise awaited us. We were told to roll up our sleeves (we had been allowed to put on our clothes) and as our names were called each stepped forward and received his vaccinations—one in the left arm with a hypodermic needle for typhoid and one in the right for smallpox. The effect of the typhoid was rapid for although the pain of the needle was small, several men soon fainted. We then passed before a finger print man and impressions of all our fingers and thumbs attached to our medical record. Along the way through the afternoon's session we had been weighed, measured and the various identification marks, such as moles, birthmarks, scars, etc., noted. Each man is again vaccinated for typhoid two more times at ten day intervals. He is then supposed to be immune to this disease for five years, at the end of which time if still in the army he must go through the ordeal again.

It will be a surprise to most people to learn that fully half of the rejections or more were for the incurable venereal diseases, and that after the worst cases had been culled by the Local Board doctors. One of the hospital boys later told me the average percentage for all drafts ranged about forty percent of the rejections. In addition to the rejections for these diseases there is a much larger percentage of cases that are cured or fixed up so that the applicant is accepted for service. So serious has the rottenness of our civilization been shown up that the government has inaugurated a campaign by compulsory attendance lectures and pamphlets to educate the men along sex lines.

Supper had long been over when we finished at the hospital, but we were permitted a bite to eat, (if we felt like it) at the restaurant operated for the accommodation of men of the post who desire to eat at all hours or desire something other than the daily mess.

We were then once more assembled, attached to Recruit companies and taken to the quartermaster's room where we took our last farewell to our civilian garb. We passed before a sergeant, were measured and given our uniforms. My outfit consists of one woolen coat, two pair of woolen trousers, a campaign hat, one pair of splendid army tan shoes, four suits of two piece cotton underwear, a Sam Brown knitted belt and a pair of side laced leggings similar to the leggings of civilian wear. To this was added two wool blankets for bedding and a large blue barracks bag to hold all. The latter resembles a gunnysack with a draw string attached. By this time it was eleven o'clock at night and in the raw wind and fog we were almost frozen from the exposure consequent to exchanging clothes in a cold room with all windows open. Before passing I might state that my own clothing fit me as though tailor-made, but some of the boys above the average in height or size did not fare so well—some of them drawing wool trousers and a khaki blouse, or vice versa, and leggings twice too large or small, or given heavy ugly trench shoes, but serviceable.

We then for the last time that day formed lines and marched about three-quarters of a mile to the west side of Angel Island and directly in the sweep of the raw wind and fog of the Golden Gate where we were given temporarily another blanket, taken by fives to conical army tents and told to go to bed as

best we knew how. Due to my experience in the National Guard we managed to make up our coats so that we did not freeze and succeeded in getting up in time for early mess; although some of the boys had experiences that were laughable, and at the time most trying, I later found out. At five thirty we rolled out at the sound of first call and began our struggles.

Somehow, trousers did not go on well, and leggings most puzzling to string and lace up. However, not many of the boys who had not succumbed to the effects of vaccination missed the meal.

The second day was spent in receiving classification and listening to lectures on government insurance. The classification came first.

The government has a small printed card upon which are listed various questions as to schooling, technical military and average experience and training along various trades, etc. Each drafted man is called before an examiner and one of these cards filled out. If he is an expert in one of these lines of work necessary to carrying on the war, such as mule packer, mechanic, chemist, etc., his card is so marked, and if the government has immediate use of men of his qualification he is held at the post and assigned under orders from the Adjutant General to divisions in which his services are of most use.

The men are then told of the advantages of the government insurance and compensation for disability, and most strongly urged to take up the maximum of insurance, \$10,000; paid in installments lasting twenty years and amounting with interest to about \$13,000.

This insurance costs the soldier from \$6.50 to \$7, depending upon the age, per month for the maximum, which practically all of the men take out.

The morning of the third day, following mess, the Bandon and Coos county boys together with all others who had been accepted as fit left for the Presidio at San Francisco to enter the 63rd Inf. Unfortunately, for I had made friends and chums among the boys from old Coos, I was held at Ft. McDowell, as I had been assigned a job as one

of the examiners in the qualification department and was very busy I did not get to say goodbye to them.

The day following, however, I was everjoyed to see Prof. G. A. Gates of the Bandon High School appear in the classification line. He was also held from the infantry and given a job alongside me in the office. Since that time we have been working in the office at Fort awaiting assignment from Washington D. C. being held as chemists.

When not busy with heavy draft quotas, all men at the Ft. drill three hours or more per day. We first go through a half hour of calisthenics or physical culture exercises. These exercises have a wonderful effect in making a man straighten up, his chest fill out, and his muscles strengthen. I am sure they would be ideal in making robust boys and girls if used in our schools. Our drill consists of complicated foot movements, etc. It is remarkable the quickness with which the various evolutions are learned—in two days raw recruits, under their officers, would put a militia company to shame.

Ft. McDowell is but a receiving depot and outfitting station for the Western Depot of the army. Thru it passes draft men and volunteers from the west, and soldiers returning from the Philippines and Hawaii. It consists of a collection of concrete buildings, and a few overflow wooden barracks, and the aforesaid tents. There are no fortifications at this point, and the regular troops consist of three companies of infantry, the quartermaster men, hospital men and unassigned recruits. It has a most disagreeable climate, but the accommodations are said to equal those of any post in the U. S. The grounds are beautiful, being covered with a mass of flowers when not in use.

The men are served at one large mess hall and are given all they can eat of a well varied variety of foods. Of course the food is cooked in quantity and mostly by steam, which takes a decided bit of the "home quality" out of it. The men sleep in narrow bunks in the barracks. These beds have an upper story which accommodates a second man above the lower occupant. We

are given passes to San Francisco or other points once a week. The boys at the Presidio can get away almost any evening when not in quarantine.

Practically all of the new men come in on the draft, while the volunteers consist mainly of boys under age and married men above thirty one. There is a noticeable dearth of the unmarried fellows above thirty one who should be joining.

They have a saying here that if a fellow gets through his first six weeks in the army alive, he has but one worry coming—living through the last six. When that is over I will be with you again.



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