

## Heroes And Homecoming

As our Model-T chugged back and forth between town and camp, our routine chores were sparked by frequent interviews with Very Important People who came to visit Camp Dodge.

"Teddy" Roosevelt made one of his slam-bang talks to the soldiers. William Howard Taft brought his comfortable bulk and hearty laugh and talked to us about the League of Nations. General John J. Pershing was the handsome "Black Jack" of army legend, and well-remembered by former West Point graduates for his talent at poker.

I had a memorable train ride from Ames to Des Moines with Secretary of War Newton D. Baker and General Peyton C. March, Army Chief of Staff. General Leonard Wood was pleasant but declined to say whether he would be a presidential candidate. History took care of that query. Madame Schumann-Heink, who came to sing for the soldiers, told me "Don't call me 'Madame Schumann-Heink'—call me 'Mamma Heink.'"

Senator Lafayette Young and I boarded a train in Colfax to interview Ambassador James W. Gerard, who gave us a first-hand account of his stay in Germany as we rode to Des Moines. And

there were universal smiles and cheers for glamorous Captain Eddie Rickenbacker, America's Ace of Aces in World War I, when he visited Camp Dodge and his former employer, W. W. Sears, Des Moines automobile dealer.

My interview that day said:

Of course everyone knows that Captain "Rick" has 26 German planes to his credit and that he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the French Croix de Guerre and the French Legion of Honor Medals for exceptional valor.

"There's not much thrill in flying," he said, soberly. "It's not a sport at all. It's scientific murder. After a man gets one or two planes, he's deadly."

A delightful visitor, too, was Miss Anna May Pershing, the General's sister who came from her home in Lincoln, Nebraska, to visit Mrs. H. R. Howell in Des Moines.

Besides the extra-special visitors there were military missions from France and England. A trio of Iowa soldiers came from France to aid in the Liberty Loan Drive, and there was a gala reception for more than 300 Belgian and Italian veterans of the Russian campaign who stopped off at Camp Dodge on a world-circling tour. And on two occasions, young Camp Dodge heroes who had served overseas, John D. Garner, a Kentuckian, and Private Liberty Pease from Farragut, Iowa, were decorated with the Distinguished Service Cross at the Cantonment.

Rumors of peace were rife in Des Moines in early November 1918, and then came November 11 and the armistice! What a day!

"Life is just one cheer after another," I wrote in the *Capital*. "Before 10 a.m. the town was wild . . . Trolley cars didn't pretend to run. Trucks were filled with happy men and women . . . Noise seemed to be the universal watchword. Horns, bells, and klaxons blazed away the message of victory."

Brigadier General W. D. Beach took the 88th Division to France. Major General William Weigel brought the troops back to Camp Dodge for demobilization. Before they returned, members of the 88th Division, who were stationed at Gondrecourt, passed in review before General Pershing. Secretary of War Baker also was there. At this ceremony, the General decorated Major General Weigel with the Croix de Guerre with palm and the Distinguished Service Medal.

I finally said good-bye to the 88th Division, after a proxy interview with Major General William Weigel. An interview had been scheduled and I was on time but no General. Then a tall aide, with an anxious expression, announced that he had been authorized to speak for the General. It developed that General Weigel had sent his uniform to the cleaners and his boots to be shined, and he was in no state to meet a girl reporter for an interview. Of course, this made a better story

than any profound remarks I might have exchanged with this noted veteran.

As units of the 88th Division arrived at Camp Dodge they were demobilized with dispatch, under the direction of Colonel Rush Wells, camp casual officer.

Enlivening the daily routine of demobilization was the arrival of Martha "Mart" Porter, a favorite newspaper woman who had served overseas as a correspondent and expert doughnut maker for the Salvation Army. Also, here came the cast of "*Who Can Tell?*" the sensational musical show which members of the 88th Division presented in many European centers.

Perhaps a nice way to end these random recollections would be this tribute from General Pershing to the 88th Division:

The soldierly bearing, military precision, and excellent physical appearance of the men, as well as the remarkable condition of all equipment, marks your division as one of the best. You have maintained very high standards indeed. I wish to thank the men of the Eighty-eighth Division for the manner in which they bore their share of the burden of war. When you get home, the American people will thank you again.