

## THE ARMY'S "ZERO DIVISION" 10,000 GIs SOUGHT AS DESERTERS FROM U.S. FORCES

BY BILL RICHARDSON

**O**N THE EVE of the largest peacetime draft in U. S. history, the Army paused recently to take inventory, found it was short 10,000 men, the equivalent of an entire division.

The absent GIs are not heroes lost on wartime bombing or infantry missions, but case-hardened fugitives from military justice. Long-time deserters, they are hiding out all over the face of the globe, from the Pacific's jungle islands to Florida's swampy Everglades, from Paris' Montmartre to the beechwood and oak forests of southern England, from the house around the corner to, in one instance which recently came to light, a love-nest in Moscow.

In Washington's Pentagon Building, the missing legion has been unofficially tagged the "Zero Division." Technically, its members are still in the Army, but actually the division won't exist until its wandering personnel is traced.

During the war, when every male of fighting age could be called on to explain his draft status, the search was comparatively easy. But today it is a gargantuan job, for the successful fugitive's outstanding asset is mobility, and many have evaded capture for years.

Some deserted in the U. S., joined the Merchant Marine and migrated to Europe, where they settled down as black market operators. Others posed as Indians or West Indians in English waterfront slums, as French colonials in Paris, as Mohammedans in North Africa. A few rejoined the Army under assumed names.

Although the FBI fingerprinted every serviceman, the greatest handicap in the Army's search was the failure to *photograph* enlisted men. Officers are photographed for identification purposes, but the top brass feared that putting GIs before a camera would touch off charges of fascist regimentation.

To cope with its greatest postwar personnel problem, the Army mounted an offensive as rugged as any launched during the war. The Pentagon Building currently is the nerve center of the hugest manhunt in American history.

### Foreign Police Aid Search For Deserters

A "Command Post" has been set up to coordinate the farflung activities of the Military Police, FBI, Army's Criminal Investigation Division, state and municipal police. Cooperation has been requested and received from Britain's Scotland Yard, France's famed *Deuxieme Bureau*, and even ex-enemy German and Japanese police.

In the CP's spacious offices stand rows of filing cabinets containing complete records of enlisted men AWOL for more than 90 days, officers missing over 30 days. Two crack officers with wide geographical knowledge, troop experience and legal training run the CP: Col. Sylvio L. Bousquin, former CO of a combat infantry outfit in France and Germany, and Lt. Col. Fred J. Martineau, an old China hand although still in his 30s.

During postwar reshuffling, the Army accidentally "misplaced" a number of men, i.e., AWOL's from one outfit frequently were found serving in other units. The job of separating them from bona fide deserters was complicated by the fact that records of demobilized soldiers are stored in huge fireproof warehouses in St. Louis, hundreds of miles from Washington.

In 1945, for instance, while the CP was hunting for a private who had deserted from the Army, he turned up as a naval hero. Another "wanted" man had received a Navy Cross for heroism in the Pacific, under a pseudonym.

An enlisted man stationed at West Point became bored by the sight of embryo generals parading across the drill grounds. He joined the paratroops in 1942, and fought his way across France and Germany. Despite his commendable record, he was tried for desertion. Only the combined intercession of President Truman and Secretary of War Royall won him an honorable discharge.

By last spring, the CP had pared down its Zero Division from 19,000 to 10,000 men. Tracking down these disappearances unravelled mysteries as deep as any concocted by Fiction Writers E. Phillips Oppenheim and Graham Greene.

There was, for example, the Fort Bragg intelligence officer who got into his car for a drive to Washington, and was never heard from again. And a tragicomic case was the 41-year-old soldier who fell in love with a great-grandmother in southern France.

A model GI, he had grieved over the loss of his wife. When he met a sympathetic, 60-year-old farmwoman, he deserted his ordnance unit and settled down as a perfect farmhand and common-law husband. Picked up by MPs, he was tried and convicted. The psychologists' verdict, now officially in his record: "Desertion due to Oedipus complex."

One WAC deserted to become a strip-teaser. A 15-year-old youth, who fraudulently enlisted, went AWOL because "them barracks was too cold!" A society playboy deserted, and while on a binge, sent a \$9,600-rubber check to a New York broker to buy him a seat on the Cotton Exchange.



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MILITARY FUGITIVES FREQUENTLY ARE TRAPPED BY ABSURD TRIVIALITIE



**POSTWAR  
PROBLEM**

**Underworld dives** offered sanctuary to U. S. deserters. Hostess of Roman bar (above) lured prospective customers from Army-sponsored nightclub next door.

**Slums And Forests Are Favorite Hideaways**

A private in Italy quit and somehow made his way to the U. S. Cocky with success, he wrote taunting "try-and-catch-me" letters to Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, then Army's Chief of Staff.

Standard procedure in such cases first is to look for "the woman in the case." Accordingly, the private's wife was trailed to a rendezvous in a mid-western town, and he is now doing a stretch for desertion.

"You never know where they'll turn up," commented Col. Martineau. "They've been arrested in overseas redlight houses and cabarets. A group was caught living luxuriously with fraulein mistresses in elaborately furnished box-cars on a German railroad siding.

British police picked up a couple of GIs who had been living for almost three years in the forests of south England. When they gave themselves up they wore long beards, tattered clothes, and were half starved.

Slums and forests are favorite hideaways of the Zero Division. One 25-year-old GI abandoned his unit in 1945 with a sleeping bag and rifle. He led a Robinson Crusoe-like existence with a 19-year old girl in the Oregon woods until she wearied of outdoor life and went home to her father, who promptly notified the police. A sheriff's posse found him asleep in a stolen car.

Of more stoical fibre was a 32-year-old deserter, who hid out in Florida's Everglades for three years, living off fish and small game and sneaking into town to steal sugar, ammunition for his rifle, and batteries for his radio.

Right after V-E day he struck out for home in Waltham, Mass., but his ragged appearance aroused the suspicions of a cop, who turned him over to the Army. Civilian police are guaranteed a \$15-minimum for arresting a deserter, \$25 for taking him to a military post.

**Identity Switch Is Often Used**

A deserter-gang operated in the notorious Tomblo Woods outside an Army supply center at Leghorn, Italy. Armed with stolen Garands and carbines, they would venture out at night to hi-jack jeeps and Army supply trucks. They lived in pup tents and maintained a string of Italian prostitutes. But when the Army pulled out of Italy and pickings were reduced, they dispersed to the cities, where many were caught by the local police.

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Fugitives are often tripped by trivialities: an argument with a fellow-deserter, a sour love affair. One GI married a German fraulein. With black-market profits, he started a small leathersgoods factory which he placed in his wife's name. When his wife caught him flirting with another fraulein, she turned him in, and appropriated the factory.

The Zero Division's CP hopes similar carelessness eventually will betray a certain staff sergeant who was checked on board a ship at Bremerhaven, Germany, in May 1946. When the ship docked at New York, he was nowhere to be found. He had not fallen overboard, for before long his mother received a letter from him, undeniably in his own handwriting, from somewhere in Germany, but giving no address. The most plausible explanation, the CP thinks, is that he jumped ship before it sailed, and assumed the identity of another soldier.

The "identity switch" is often resorted to, sometimes for obscure reasons. The Zero Division includes a Welshman named Smith, for example, who traded names with a GI right after V-E day. Posing as the American, Smith was demobilized at a replacement depot in Britain. Handing the discharge papers to the GI, Smith reenlisted, sailed for the US with the Army, and promptly deserted.

Sociological studies reveal that the majority of deserters came from improperly adjusted homes, and exhibited unstable tendencies long before undertaking Army careers. Unsympathetic home environment also explains the letters of inquiry to the War Department from many deserters' apparently calloused wives and parents: they complain less about the loss of a husband or son than at the stoppage of pay and benefits after he has been missing for more than 90 days.

### Social Maladjustments Cause Desertion

"Asking why a man deserts is a little like asking why he commits murder," asserts Col. Bousquin. "Men have committed murder for apparently trivial reasons, but these usually were manifestations of deeper complications. A deserter, like a murderer, commits his crime because he can find no other solution."

Most common causes of desertion are financial difficulties, women, and petty crimes for which soldiers fear punishment will be out of proportion to the dereliction. During the war, unfounded rumors that the Army was executing deserters in the ETO discouraged many short-time AWOLS from giving themselves up.

A famous case was that of a 19-year old private of the 115th Infantry Regiment, 29th Division. One day in August 1944, when the Normandy skies were swept by rain and shrapnel, the private decided he'd taken all the war he could stomach. He had been in a state of shock ever since a German 88-millimeter shell exploded killing two of his buddies, and sending him to a hospital with severe battle fatigue and concussion.



RUSSIAN MPs PATROL BERLIN'S BRITISH ZONE IN DESERTER ROUNDUP. U. S. FIGURES DO NOT COMPARE WITH LARGE-SCALE RED ARMY DESERTIONS PUNISHABLE BY A FIRING SQUAD



**"ZERO DIVISION"****STRICT DISCIPLINE NECESSARY IN WORLD'S CURRENTLY UNSTABLE STATE**

**HORDES OF GERMAN PRISONERS CAPTURE BY AMERICAN FORCES AT RAMAGEN AWAIT TRANSFER TO ALLIED PRISON CAMPS. NAZIS DESERTED TO THE ENEMY BY THE THOUSANDS.**

**French Village Harbors GI Fugitive**

He abandoned his outfit, was reported missing in action, and was promptly forgotten until two years later, when a check-up removed him from the "missing-in-action" files. His papers were duly transferred to the Absentee Unit, and the following year (1947) ironically he was picked up by Graves Registration MPs.

The boy had wandered behind our lines on that rainy day in 1944, and fallen asleep in a barn. He was found by a 68-year-old peasant woman whose son had been killed in action. She took the private home, and nursed him back to health.

He pretended at first that he was employed on an Army railway job near the village. But after his division withdrew from Normandy, he could no longer maintain the deception. Because the soldier was hard-working, likeable, and had given his protector—old Mother Billard—a new lease on life, the villagers entered into a "gentlemen's agreement" to give him refuge.

Unhappily, after a bitter argument with Mother Billard, a neighbor turned informer. When MPs arrested the doughboy, the villagers rose up in arms, ostracized his betrayer, and addressed a petition to the Army authorities.

"We make so bold," the letter began in polite, old-fashioned French, "as to call your exalted attention to this matter." After extolling the boy's virtues as a model citizen, it concluded, "We take the liberty of asking you to influence the U. S. authorities to the end that his case may be examined with a maximum of kindness."

At his Paris trial, defense counsel offered proof that at the time of his desertion the lad was suffering from battle fatigue, and not mentally responsible. Medical authorities, after an exhaustive psychological examination, concurred with this testimony.

The defendant was sentenced to five years in jail, nevertheless, partly because of his frank admission that by December 1944 he was well enough to know what he was doing. Had he placed the date of his recovery after V-E day, he might have gone scot-free under the Army's statute of limitations, which does not apply to wartime desertions.

The prisoner testified that he failed to return to military control because he was afraid of being shot. Actually, only one offender has been executed for misbehavior or desertion since the Civil War. This execution occurred in World War II after the soldier had been given a second chance but failed to redeem himself in action.

**Battle Fatigue Mitigates Punishment**

On the whole, the Army considers itself lenient to offenders. A new psychological understanding of the nature of battle fatigue, and a more benevolent attitude toward war psychoses have saved GIs from the ruthless punishment meted out by earlier courts-martial.

Figures released by the Adjutant General's Department of Correction reveal that of 85,000 general prisoners (convicted of serious offenses) in World War II, about 42,000 were given suspended sentences and restored to duty.

Of that number 10 percent again fell by the wayside. But among those released from disciplinary barracks, where reported treatments struck terror in GIs' hearts, only four percent became second-time offenders.

Peacetime desertions are reaching new all-time lows. Maj. Fred Keltz, seasoned MP officer in the Caribbean and Pacific, now in charge of the Provost Marshal's search department, receives reports on a maximum of 300 deserters a month.

The Army considers this a comparatively low figure, for desertions have been a problem since the days when tattered colonials walked out on George Washington. Even in our considerably smaller 1907 Army, men went over the hill at the rate of 6,000 a year, compared with 3,600 annually today.

**Improved Army Conditions Reduce Desertions**

Announcement of high desertion figures in 1907 set off a national scandal, which reached its peak when Bailey Millard, star reporter of the day, wrote a series of critical articles. Cited in heated Congressional debates, they resulted



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in a full-scale investigation, which was largely responsible for an improvement in Army conditions: higher pay, better food, uniforms and equipment.

In those days a private's pay was \$12 a month, and a bean-eating Army never heard of a balanced diet. Such conditions may have provided a morally plausible excuse for desertion. But the Army recognizes no cause for it today, with soldier's pay at its historically highest, good clothing, housing, vocational training, choice of jobs, and even of areas where enlistees may serve.

From time to time pressure is brought on the War Department to provide amnesty for all wartime offenders. A recent plea came from Boston's Mayor Curley. In a polite, 2,000-word letter, the War Department advised him why it did not believe that thieves, murderers, and other menaces to society should be permitted to go free.

Any Army must be built on discipline, and with current instability of international relations, our high command is not inclined to relax its standards.



U.S. ARMY COURT-MARTIAL CONVICTED TWO OFFICERS, 180 GIs OF FRENCH BLACK-MARKET ACTIVITIES. SENTENCES IMPOSED RAN AS HIGH AS 50 YEARS IMPRISONMENT.



Sgt. James M. McMillin (above), 21, is accused by State Department of deserting Moscow post for love of beautiful Russian spy, Galina Dunaeva Biconish (right).



BLACK-MARKETS AND FRATERNIZATION LED TO MANY U. S. DESERTIONS. (ABOVE) GIs INTENDED SELLING WATCHES IN BERLIN'S TIERGARTEN, WERE DIVERTED BY BLOND FRAULEINS