

The AMERICAN LEGION Weekly

May 28, 1920
p. 5

Crack o' Doom for the Draft Dodger

The War Department Will Soon Be Ready to Smoke Out the 174,000 Who Took to the Tall Timber of Peace at Any Price



By Walter J. Wood

Doomsday looms just over the horizon for the draft deserter. That wily gentleman who hid behind a tree and chuckled as his neighbor shouldered a gun and marched off to battle is soon to have that chuckle mopped off his face. He will find that no tree vegetates enough to cover from shame the miserable carcass of his manhood.

The woods were good hiding while they lasted, but slowly, exasperatingly slowly, the Government has been chopping out all the underbrush, and soon now, very soon, it is promised, the more than one hundred thousand men who cheated in the greatest game that ever came or ever could come their way are going to be smoked out into the open and branded as deserters.

The whistle will blow for the slacker round-up just as soon as the great

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doomsday book of names which has been under preparation at Washington since December, 1918, is ready. According to the latest reports, 173,911 is the maximum number of draft registrants chargeable with wilful desertion. Within the next two months this maximum will be pared down to the irreducible minimum, and the War Department's long promised offensive against the draft deserter will be started.

In the meantime, the War Department is only skirmishing with the slacker. When some local community starts a drive against one of its notorious draft evaders or when some Legion post starts something or when some sheriff or constable grows suspicious about a khaki-less homecoming, the suspect is taken to the nearest Army post and turned over to the post commander.

If, in the eyes of the post commander, there is the possibility of a case against the man, he is turned over to a Regular Army court martial. If the man is clearly not a deserter, the post commander turns him loose and may, if it is a case of technical desertion, give him a discharge from the Army. But this warfare is only sporadic.

THE draft deserter is too well seasoned an old bird to be brought down with grape shot. A Big Bertha is what is needed. And the War Department is getting ready to put aside the sling-shot and use it. It is preparing, as soon as its blacklist is ready, to publish broadcast the names and addresses of the men whose ears were stuffed with the cotton batting of cowardice or indifference when the call to the colors was sounded in the eventful days of 1917 and 1918.

When the War Department makes public the list of men classified as wilful deserters, it will be assisted by the Department of Justice, various state and local officials, The American Legion and other patriotic societies, in

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making arrests. Officials who are busy loading the guns for a campaign against the deserters say that they have remarkable assurances of widespread and general cooperation throughout the country. Abstract copies of the list of names grouped by states and other convenient divisions will be made available for postmasters, police stations, sheriffs, detective agencies and all Government intermediaries.

Once they are caught, meting out justice to the draft deserters would appear to be a comparatively simple matter. Quite to the contrary. Most of these men are skilled hands at beating the devil around the bush. To get any appreciable number of convictions, the War Department must be prepared to meet every excuse known to the human mind.

When the men are apprehended, each case will be investigated on its merits. If the investigation shows a man apparently to be guilty of wilful evasion of military service he will be tried. If the offense of

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willful desertion can not be proved, although the individual did fail to report for military service, due to neglect or fault of his own, the War Department will give him a discharge stating that this man failed to report for duty until posted as a draft deserter and until after the signing of the Armistice and performed no military service whatsoever in the war with Germany.

The War Department's plan is to give sentences of from two to six months to men found guilty of desertion, except in outstanding cases, such as the Bergdoll affair, where the desertion has been a red rag in the public's face. Those in charge of the slacker clean-up assert that the general policy now contemplated will be to brand the deserter, give him a short sentence, and then turn him loose with his own conscience, stamped for eternity. The department considers this better public policy than filling the military prisons of the country for a period of years. For wherever the draft dodger goes, he will always be known for what he is.

The first step toward a final settlement of the account between the Government and the draft deserter came soon after the Armistice when, on December 23, 1918, the Secretary of War authorized the Adjutant General to "complete the records with reference to draft deserters" with a view to the preparation of just such a blacklist as is now being compiled. In order to make ready this consolidated directory of slackers, it was first necessary to have in Washington the draft records of the 4,648 local boards which reported registrants as draft deserters. In December, 1918, all local boards were directed to segregate from the list of

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24,000,000 registrants the records of all men reported as draft deserters at any time during the war. The boards began shipping these records, 489,003 names in all, to Washington in March, 1919.

NO sooner had the records arrived at the national capital than it was obvious that a long weeding-out process would be necessary before any list accurately and justly stigmatizing the wilful draft dodgers could be given to the country. The story of how this list of 489,003 names has finally been whittled down to 173,911 is a long record of painstaking research among Government archives.

After months of checking and re-checking it was found that 163,000 names could be struck out, because the cases of these men had been disposed of in some way or other while the

war was pending. The largest percentage were men who had enlisted in the Army, Navy or Marine Corps and had failed to inform their local boards. Thousands had failed to report for service at the right time and arrived late at camp. Hundreds more already had been convicted of desertion. Some, too, had been discharged as physical wrecks without trial. A certain percentage of registrants died after their induction orders were mailed and before they were to re-

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port to camp. In these and in other minor ways, 163,000 of the 489,000 were accounted for.

During the spring and summer of 1919, the Adjutant General and the Provost Marshal General went over the remaining 325,000 names of men listed as deserters and eliminated 151,000 as "shown by examination of their draft records

not to be properly chargeable with desertion." Every imaginable tangle of paper-work and human life was found to be behind the erroneous listing of these 151,000 names.

Thus, out of a total registration of 24,000,000, the list of those who, it would appear on the surface, deliberately dodged the draft, was reduced to 173,911, or considerably less than one per cent. of the total registration.

Pending publication of the list of deserters, any man who may be charged with draft desertion, and who wishes to avoid the humiliation of arrest by police officials and removal to camp, may, it is said in the War Department, voluntarily surrender at the nearest Army camp, post or station and ask that his case be investigated and his status definitely fixed.