

Section 109

Demobilization and Discharge

Demobilization

Soon after the armistice had been signed the question of demobilization came up. Many men had signed up for the period of hostilities and now had to be returned to civilian life. The miners were the first to be released as there was a real need for their services. However there was the real threat of unemployment for most of the men and they would not be released unless they had a firm offer of a job. For many estate workers this was no great problem, but for those whose jobs had been taken over by women, or for those whose jobs had disappeared either because their employers had gone out of business or their skills were no longer in demand it was a real problem.

In each county there were officials whose job it was to find employment but they had already been working for some time to find jobs for the men who had been injured and had been discharged from the army on medical grounds. There were other considerations as well. Although the fighting had stopped there was no peace treaty and the army were employed still as an army of occupation in Germany, and would remain so until 1929. In December 1918 each battalion was told to appoint a demobilisation officer and to begin the process of releasing men. They would go first to a transit camp in France and then back to their home depot for demobilisation. The officer had to establish the priorities and determine which specific men could be released. The process was thrown into confusion when the Army Office announced that any man who was on leave in England could be released without reference to his commanding officer. The result was that many of the units still in France had to deal with mutinies and riots as the government had previously given an assurance that all would be treated equally.

Gradually the battalions were reduced to cadre strength with around 50-80 men and perhaps up to 10 officers. These returned home over the summer of 1919 and were given a tumultuous reception. Within a couple of years the regiment was back to peacetime strength. Many of the erstwhile Kitchener volunteers and Derby conscripts had gained a taste for army life, or had nowhere else to go and re-enlisted as regulars.

Expectations and Procedure

As soon as the armistice was signed there was the expectation that it would not be long before the

volunteers would be demobilized. Many men were home on leave on Armistice Day and fully expected that they would not be required to return to their units. However in France, the day passed almost without mark and the men had to return to their duties.

Even before the war was over consideration was being given to the logistic problems of demobilisation. The War Office was particularly concerned to ensure that paper work was kept up to date and men's pay books were properly completed, especially when they were transferred or posted to another unit. An Army Order (GRO 5480 of 5/11/18) made it clear that new pay books must not be issued until all the details had been inserted.

On the 23rd November all Company Commanders were ordered to inspect the AB64 (Paybook) and AB439 (officers) forms for each man and to personally certify that all details were correct by the 26th. The following details were essential

- Industrial Group No
- Trade
- Date of Birth
- Whether married or single
- Terms of Service
- Whether Regular, Special Reserve or Territorial
- Recording of Specialists

This was still not enough and on 30th November the 'Trade' had to be replaced or supplemented by a code number from an official list of trades.

At last on the 14th December details were received of the plans for demobilisation. The rules for repatriation of men to overseas countries were set out. This was particularly pertinent to men who had come to Britain to enlist, usually at their own expense, and allowed for their fare home to be paid. On the 27th it was announced that soldiers who had had employment before the war and whose employers had agreed to keep their jobs open would be released early provided their employers sent them a confirming letter with the counterstamp of their local Employment Advisory Committee. Men were advised to accept these offers unless they had been notified that they were needed by the Army for essential military purposes. Men going on leave were warned they must not accept a job while they were on leave although they could secure letters of offer of employment. These would be processed after

their return to their unit. This did not apply of course to regulars who still had a term of service to complete.

Technically the men were transferred to the Z Reserve as the Army still really could not believe that the war was finally over and wanted to make sure that in the event of hostilities breaking out again, they could recall these reservists very quickly.

As part of the preparation for demobilisation many men were sent on trade courses and to educational sessions. In the week commencing 10th February the Royal Society of Arts held examinations in a variety of subjects in France for men of the BEF. The exams were at three stages, Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced.

The Eighth Battalion

The 8th Battalion itself ran classes with an Educational Officer in each Company. On the 20th and 21st Jan 1919 they ran their own examinations in the Dining Hall and men sitting exams were excused duties that day.

A Demobilisation Enquiry Office was opened opposite the Battalion HQ Mess on 11th Jan.

Leather jerkins and fur undercoats issued to the troops had to be returned before men could go to England for demobilisation or leave. They had to be deposited either at Base Depots or left with the CQMS.

The first draft for demobilisation left on the 24th December and consisted of men who had gained employment as coal miners. 20 from the 8th were included. In the new year there were further drafts sent home for demobilisation:

date	number
5 th Jan	5
6th	9
7th	2
14th	21
18th	one officer (2nd Lt R J Collett)
19th	25
21st	10
24th	22 plus 2nd Lt W J Rowlands
26th	one officer (2nd Lt A Highwood)
27th	27
31st	4 (to demob Camp)
1st Feb	42 plus two officers
4th Feb	Major L W Warr
5th Feb	6
6th Feb	40
8th Feb	22

In addition 5 men were demobilised whilst on leave in England in January. Once the Battalion had moved to Bertry the system changed and instead of being sent direct to England from the Battalion they were sent instead to XIII Corps Demobilisation Camp. Men continued to leave at a steady trickle until on the 12th April the Battalion was reduced to cadre and remaining men, including the Regulars were transferred to the 3rd Battalion for re-assignment.

Three men had opted for Ordination training under a BEF scheme and were struck off the Battalion's strength as they went to Ordination school.

The First Battalion

One of the 1st Battalion officers (RJB) was appointed as demobilization officer. In 1921 he wrote up his reminiscences of the process in the China Dragon.

When in the last days of October 1918, orders were received to demobilize the miners at once, I think we all realised that this was indeed the beginning of the end. Men whom we had grown to respect for their sterling qualities in action, and out, would soon disappear from the daily routine of our lives, though not out of our memories. There would only be a few, a very few, of us left to reminisce on the historic events of the past four and a half years. Many were the pangs of regret, and they were not confined to those whose future lay in the Army. The sensations of many of the men about to be demobilised can best perhaps be likened to those of a boy during this last day at school. Joy at the prospect of being free from the discipline and routine of school life, and intense sorrow at having to be separated from his friends and those associations which, in spite of himself, had become so dear to him.

The ensuing notes on the process of demobilisation, by no means exhaustive, are compiled from the standpoint of a Regimental officer only, and I hope that readers of these notes will take any criticism in the spirit in which it is written, without recrimination or acrimony.

Demobilisation can be said to have been in full swing in this Battalion by the second week in December. It must be remembered that we were part of the Army of Occupation in Germany, and units had to be kept up to strength in personnel and specialists. This for a time rendered our task more difficult, especially as far as specialists were concerned. However the allotment of vacancies for dispersal were so small until the end of January that we were enabled to carry on as a fighting unit, and demobilise at the same time. On February 15th we were no longer an effective and mobile force.

Let us take for a moment the problems which confronted the Battalion Commander in his efforts to demobilise his Battalion in the *fairest possible way to all*

Certain GRO's, Army and other Orders were issued, laying down definitely the method of procedure. Almost at once it became apparent that these orders could be taken as a guide only, and were not intended to apply to every case. Without doubt it was the Battalion Commander who knew his Regiment best and who could weigh each individual case on its own merits; and it was the Battalion Commander who should decide on a course of action, guided necessarily by existing regulations, and, once decided on, stick to it.

I decided to do this and, having explained my system to the men themselves I proceeded to act on it. I want to emphasise the value of taking the men into one's confidence. In this Battalion every individual man knew how he stood, and every man could come to his Commanding Officer at any time, state his case and be given a definite ruling before he left. I was of the opinion that a permanent staff must be established at once for demobilisation alone. After two or three abortive efforts, caused by NCOs and men being taken on and shortly afterwards demobilised, I established a Staff of three officers (Lieuts Greaves, Catling and Cassidy) who carried out the work with the greatest efficiency. As it was a case of dealing with not only the Military Authorities, but also in many cases with civilian employers, I made myself entirely responsible for the demobilisation of each individual man, and no man left the Battalion unless his name appeared in my own handwriting. Thus while allocating the actual work of demobilisation to others, the responsibility rested on the shoulders of one man, and one man only.

In January and February two incidents occurred which bid fair to wreck the system. Firstly the Home Authorities gave permission for men on leave to be demobilised in England, without returning to their units and without consulting Commanding Officers. A spirit of unrest grew amongst the men, especially amongst men who could not expect leave in the normal course for some months. This, as is now well known, resulted in riots, meetings and other forms of irregular conduct. Fortunately no one in this Battalion was involved, as I firmly believe because the men had previously been made au fait with the whole situation. Secondly it became known in France and Germany that nearly everybody in England was being demobilised, seemingly without method and irrespective of whether their claims were better or worse than the men who were compulsorily retained in foreign theatres of war. This in spite of the fact that the Government had announced in November that no preference would be given to men at home over men abroad. This also caused a bad impression and several men became restive until it was pointed out to them that their's was the honour of helping to maintain the prestige of the British Empire in Germany and that without their help it would be impossible to enforce our demands on the central empires.

The situation in the battalion in the middle of February 1919 was as follows: There were about 250 men with over 3½ years' service, nearly 100 pivotal men and some compassionate cases and men over 37 years of age. This, of course, does not include the men who were compulsorily retainable in an Army of Occupation.

The regulations laid down that all pivotal men and civil demobilisers were to be dispersed first. I interviewed personally each pivotal man and of the 100 men who presented themselves only three could show any claim to be genuine pivots; the remainder were farm horsemen, carters and shepherds. Doubtless most useful men in their way, but scarcely pivotal men in the business or agricultural world. Nevertheless they were all armed with Z32 and they were all conscripts who arrived in France for the first time a month after the Armistice was signed. I decided that it would be grossly unfair to the long service men if the pivots were allowed to go away at once and at the same time I told them that I wouldn't bet on their chances of success in a pivotal competition with other units.

My system then was long service a very good first and the remainder a very bad second. The Battalion dispersal

allotment until March 15th averaged not more than 20 all ranks a week for all areas. The allotment was roughly worked out as follows: 85% long service men, 10% pivots, 5% compassionate cases and re-enlisted men. No man was allowed to leave the Battalion without a guarantee letter of employment, no matter what his other qualifications. This was directly due to the Board of Trade announcement of the enormous number of unemployed men in England. So demobilisation continued and no word of discontent was heard from the men themselves. One or two employers seemed annoyed that their belongings had not been dispersed at once - if not before. In one case I was threatened with exposure in the House of Commons, but a somewhat terse reply caused the correspondence to cease abruptly. The employer who adopts a bullying attitude towards Commanding Officers is not difficult to deal with as a rule, but the heartrending appeal for release on compassionate grounds is infinitely harder. It is difficult to induce employers to try and think in millions which is the only logical course when demobilising an army; their immediate outlook usually comprises one or perhaps two men and their vision is obscured by the all-absorbing problem of the one or two. Here I should like to mention that only one employer of labour has failed to take his soldier-employee back and I was fortunate enough to find better work for this man elsewhere. Should this ever meet the eye of the employer, I hope he will be suitably ashamed of himself. Neither was he willing to take the man back himself nor did he take any steps to find him other work which he could very easily have done.

Today the Battalion is reduced to cadre strength: just 8 officers and 58 other ranks remain. Towards the end some 20 men were compulsorily demobilised without any definite work to go to. Doubtless we shall soon see many of them back at the Depot gates, anxious to don once again the badge of the Regiment, whose good name they have done so much to maintain.

In conclusion I want to mention a rather touching incident which happened when volunteers for the Armies of Occupation were called for. At the end of my lecture on the subject a sergeant got up and asked me whether I could guarantee that they would serve with the Berkshire Regiment. He was voicing the thoughts of the whole Battalion. I was unable to give that guarantee and told him so. He replied "We have no wish to serve with any other regiment, sir" When names were subsequently asked for, only two men came forward. There is little doubt that they would have volunteered to a man had they been allowed to stay with this Battalion or to go to another battalion of the R Berkshire Regiment. Alas, they are now unrecognisable in the foreign garb of another unit.

Of the 1100 men on the strength of the Battalion on Christmas Day 1918, only 55 remain. Few of those who have gone will regret the days spent in the Regiment and many I hope will gather at the Old Comrade's Association Dinner.

RJB [TX01566]

The Role of the Third Battalion

At the time of the Armistice the 3rd Battalion was the Royal Berks only Reserve Battalion and Officers and men from all battalions of the Royal Berkshire Regiment were sent it for demobilization, including returned prisoners-of-war, transferred and hardships. De-

mobilization was bound to be a troublesome business, hampered by feelings of discontent at real or fancied grievances in its conduct. The regulations for demobilization were complicated and difficult for the men to understand.

Many, especially those who had had most of the fighting, thought they were not getting fair treatment. There was a sense of grievance on the part of the men who had been to the front against those who had been at the base or in England.

Perhaps the worst difficulty of all was over the "pivotal men" who were supposed to be employers of labour who would provide work for others. They were mostly men who had only been taken at the end of the war, and it is not surprising that others who had borne the heat and burden of the day were inclined to regard them as a class who were getting out early under false pretences. Certainly there were cases where the term "pivotal" was misapplied and these, when brought to his notice, Colonel North reported to superior authorities.

Further to prevent discontent, which was sure not to be discouraged in a city like Dublin in 1918, Colonel North issued a short and simply worded notice, drafted by Captain Mant, giving a clear explanation of the regulations as applicable to the battalion, such as the most ignorant could understand. Moreover, his "Demobilization Office" was always ready to explain difficulties to any man referring personally to it. The men soon came to understand that, as far as their battalion was concerned, the rules were to be fairly carried out, without favouritism.

Terms of Engagement

When a man enlisted he signed up for a period of 12 years which, for an infantryman, was split as 7 years with the Colours and 5 years with the Reserves. To qualify a man had to be 19 years of age and of good physique. There was provision for men to join as 'boy soldiers' at age 14. They received general infantry training as well as specialised training either in a trade, or more usually as a musician. Usually boy soldiers were allowed to become full soldiers on reaching 18 years of age.

At the end of the 7 years, referred to in the records as 'Termination of the 1st period of engagement' the man would usually be automatically transferred to one of the Reserves. However some men were allowed to continue with the colours for their full 12 years. This point was known as 'Termination of second period of engagement'

In exceptional circumstances men would be allowed to continue with the Army to complete 18 or 21 years with the Colours which earned a substantially increased pension. This was however usually reserved only for senior NCOs

As an alternative however many men opted to re-enlist

at the end of either their 1st or 2nd term. Whether they stayed with their old regiment or joined a new regiment they were usually renumbered as if they had just joined although they generally retained or regained their rank. This usually followed a short period in 'civvy street' when the man realised that life in the army was not so bad after all.

Reasons for Discharge

When a man left the army, the reasons for so doing were many and various, not just that he had completed his period of engagement. In the First World War the reasons were often that the man had died, been found medically unfit or been demobbed.

The reason for discharge was given on the man's papers and often shows up merely as KR392 followed by a code, ie a section of King's Regulation 392. The codes are usually a small roman numeral followed possibly by a letter.

In this section we set out the meanings of the code. (They are taken from the 1920 edition of the Regulations)

- i References on enlistment were unsatisfactory (applies only to recruits who were attested pending reference to employers etc)
- ii Having been irregularly enlisted (applies to a native soldier of a colonial corps only)
- iii Not likely to become an efficient soldier
 - iii a - rejected by both the medical and the approving officer
 - iii b - passed by the medical officer but rejected by the approving officer
 - iii c - failed medical after course of physical training, or unable to ride in the case of a mounted corps.
 - iii d - Soldier of local battalion abroad.
- iv Having been claimed as an apprentice.
- v Having claimed discharge upon payment of £1 within three months of attestation.
- vi Having made a mis-statement as to age on enlistment.
 - vi a - under 17 years at date of discharge.
 - vi b - between 17 and 18 at date of discharge
- vii Having been claimed for wife desertion
 - vii a - by the Parish Authority
 - vii b - by the wife
- viii Having made a false answer on attestation
- ix not used

- x Having been convicted of an offence by the Civil power before enlistment.
- xi For misconduct
- xii Having been sentenced to penal servitude
- xiii Having been sentenced to be discharged with ignomy
- xiv At his own request upon payment of the specified sum.
- xv Free after a specified number of years of service
 - xv a - on extreme compassionate grounds and urgency.
 - xv b - within three months of termination of engagement to take up civil employment which cannot be held open.
 - xv c - for the purposes of residing permanently outside the United Kingdom (only for soldiers who have completed their colour service)
- xvi No longer physically fit for war service
 - xvi a - surplus to military requirements after having suffered impairment through war service.
- xvii At his own request after 18 years service with a view to a pension.
- xix For the benefit of the public after 18 years service (applies only to NCOs)
 - xix a - For a man with less than 18 years service to take up a commission or a cadetship.
- xx Inefficiency after 18 years service with a view to taking up a pension.
- xxi After termination of period of engagement.
- xxii With less than 21 years service towards engagement but 21 or more years towards pension.
- xxiii Having claimed discharge after three months notice. (applies only to a soldier who has prolonged his period of service beyond 21 years)
- xxiv Having reached the age for discharge (applies only to a warrant officer or a re-enlisted pensioner)
- xxv His services no longer required (applies only to boys or men for whom no other category is appropriate)
 - xxv a - Surplus to military requirements but not having been impaired since entry. (applies to men in a medical category for which there are no longer suitable posts)

- xxvi At his own request after 21 years service with a view to pension (applies to men who have re-enlisted but their former term was for service only, ie not for pension)
- xxvii After 21 years and with 5 years service as a warrant officer. with a view to pension.
- xxviii On demobilization (applies only for soldiers engaged for war service or in the class Z reserve on the cessation of war)

The Reserves

The army was always very mindful that it had spent a lot of time and effort training a man, so when he was released from his time in the Colours, it was anxious to ensure that that training was not wasted. The man therefore would normally be transferred to one of the four Reserves:-

Class A - liable to be called back at almost a moments notice to deal with minor emergencies. For this he got extra pay.

Class B - liable for recall on a general mobilisation

Class C - Men released early from their service

Class D - Men whose reserve service had been extended by a further 4 years.

In addition during the War a fifth class was introduced

Class Z - Men who had signed up or been conscripted for war service only.

When men finished their reserve obligation (or were in class Z) they were transferred to the National Reserve. Their only residual obligation was to notify the authorities of any change of address.

In addition there was a further group of reservists known as the **Special Reserve**. These were men who had completed the same basic training as a regular, but who had then not moved on to service with the Colours. They had to attend an annual camp and receive 28 days training every year.