

CHAPTER XXI

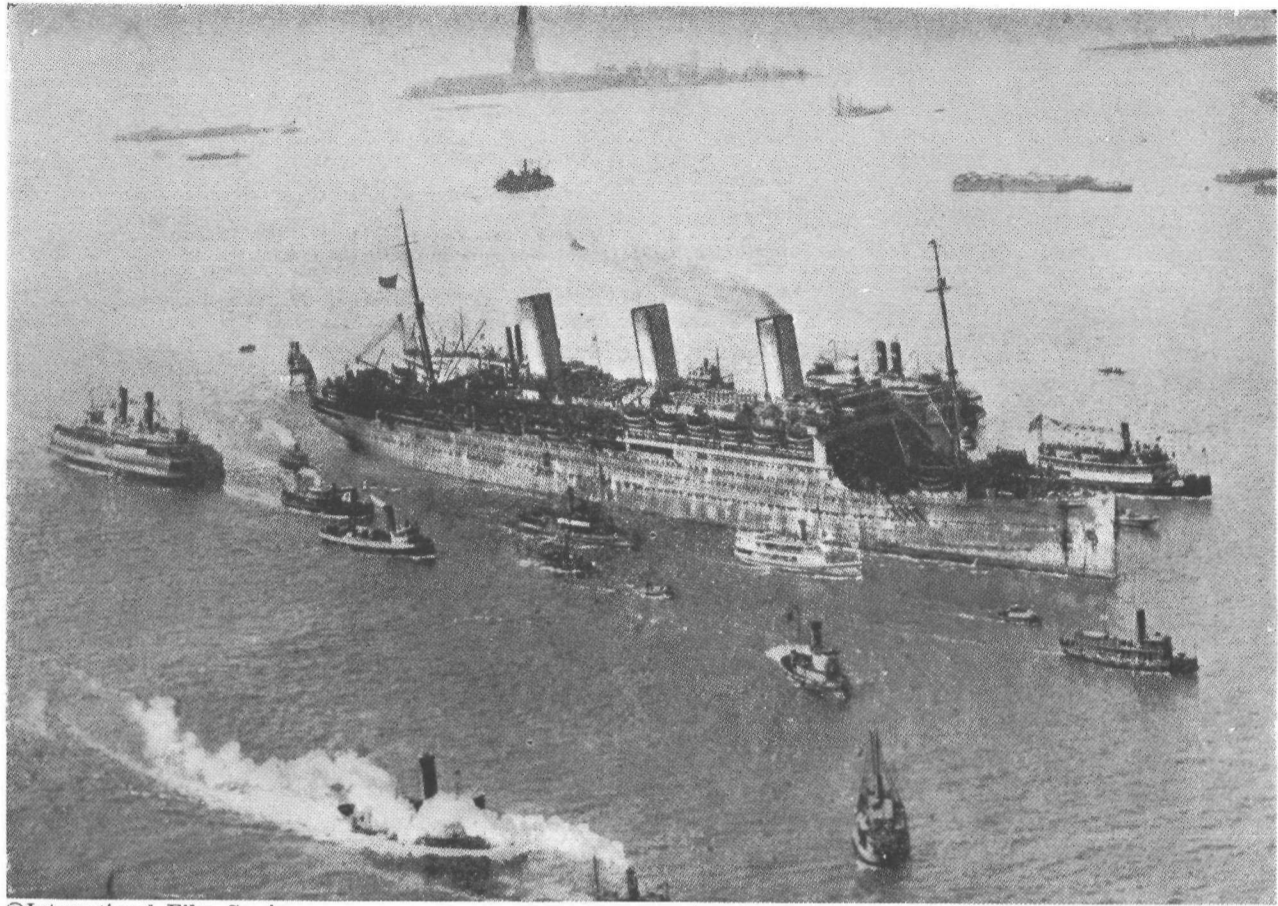
HOME-COMING, PARADE AND FINAL MUSTER



THE arrival of the 27th Division in the harbor of New York was an experience that those who participated in it will probably never forget. The Mayor of the City of New York had appointed a large reception committee to tender an official welcome to the returning troops. In addition to this official committee, there were committees representing the leading cities and towns of the state where units of the division were maintained in time of peace. There were also committees representing veterans of all the organizations of the division.

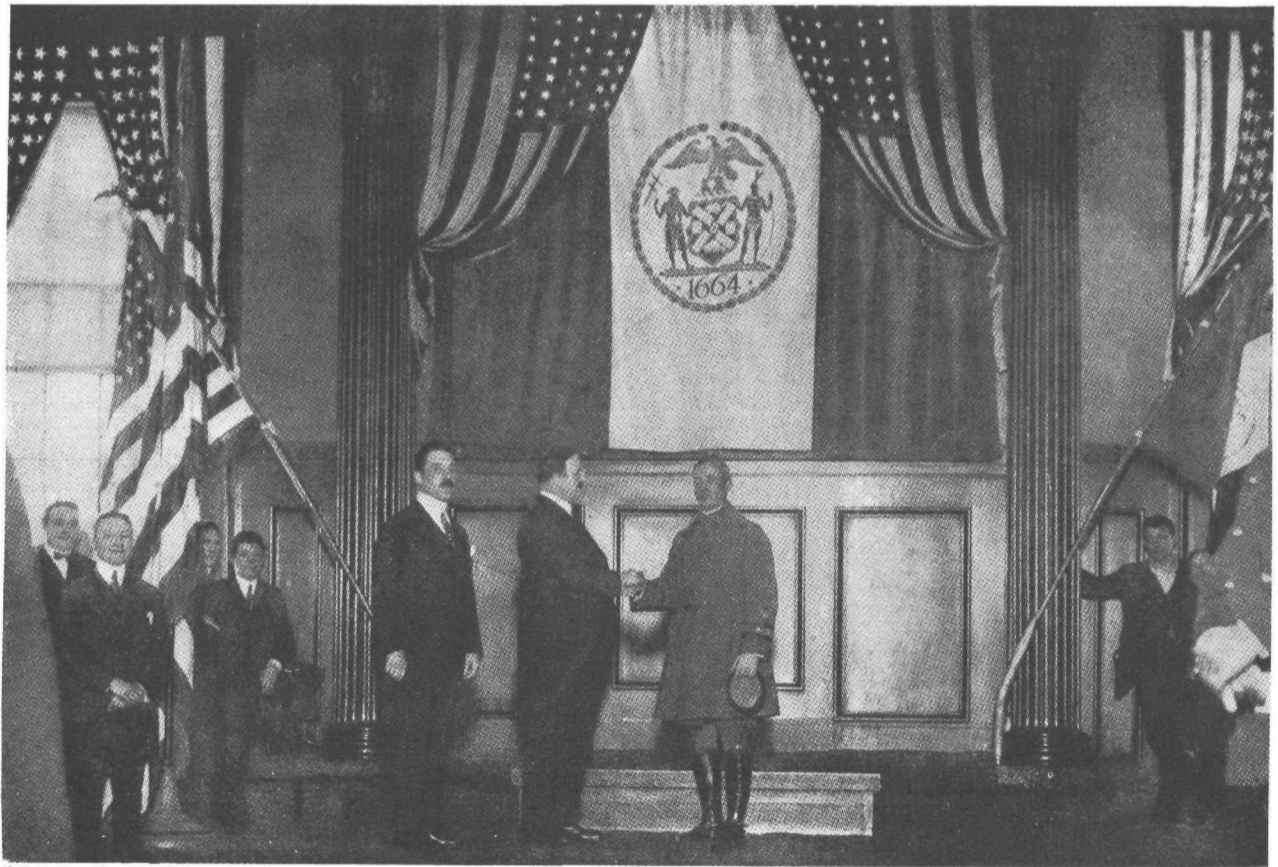
The *Leviathan*, on account of her size and of the number of troops she carried—about 13,000 officers and men—naturally attracted the most attention. As the *Leviathan* approached the lower bay, Captain Phelps of the navy, who commanded the ship, finally decided to risk permitting the men to remain on the upper decks. It had been found on other voyages that in the excitement of home-coming the men, when permitted to remain on the upper decks, would not remain in the individual places assigned them, but would run from one side of the ship to the other as something of special interest attracted them, which resulted in giving the ship a decided and sometimes dangerous list. Captain Phelps, having observed the rigid discipline of the troops during this trip, accepted the assurance of the Division Commander that the men would remain in their assigned places, and permitted them to take positions on the upper decks where they could see the many boats coming out to greet them. The men made good the representations of the Division Commander, for no men left their places throughout the trip through the bay to the docks. As the ship approached the Narrows, she was met by a large number of steamers, ferry boats and launches, apparently chartered for the occasion. These were crowded with friends of the troops and various committees. Most of the boats bore signs of welcome. Surrounded by a veritable cluster of these vessels, the great *Leviathan* made her way past Governors Island and the Statue of Liberty and up the Hudson to the Hoboken piers amid the waving of flags, the blowing of whistles, the playing of bands and the cheering of men. Among the boats gathered about the *Leviathan* was an official boat of the City of New York, bearing the Mayor of the city and other leading officials, as well as members of the families of some of the senior officers of the division. Upon arrival at the pier, the troops, already prepared for the movement, were quickly debarked and sent, some to Camp Dix in New Jersey, and the remainder to Camp Upton on Long Island.

In similar fashion, during the next few days, other ships bearing other organizations of the division were welcomed as they proceeded to their



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The giant transport "Leviathan," carrying 10,000 men of the 27th Division, passing up the North River. The vessel is surrounded with welcoming craft, all crowded with cheering relatives and friends of the men. The enthusiasm of the men as familiar home sights were glimpsed was unbounded. The "Leviathan" reached New York on March 5, 1919



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Mayor John F. Hylan extending New York's greeting to Commanding General of the 27th Division, when the latter called at the City Hall

docks. The troops aboard them were sent, some to one camp and some to the other, where they remained until all had arrived.

Meanwhile the Division Commander learned some of the details of the proposed parade. Division Headquarters was established temporarily at the Biltmore Hotel in the city of New York. As many men as could be spared were authorized to go on furlough. Short leaves were granted many of the officers.

The day following the arrival of the division in the city of New York the Division Commander was advised that arrangements had been made for a formal reception of the Division Commander and his staff by the Mayor of the city at the City Hall. This reception took place the following day, the Mayor graciously receiving the officers mentioned and through them welcoming the division. In a speech of welcome the Mayor informed the Division Commander that the key of the city was his, and that its use might be extended to the entire division, adding cautiously that it might not be well to have them accept the gift too literally.

Soon it was realized that the proposed parade was to be an extraordinary affair in the sense of the numbers of people who were planning to view it and in the thoroughness of the arrangements being made by the city. A great arch had been erected at Madison Square and another at Fifth Avenue and 60th Street. At night powerful searchlights illuminated these structures. The arch at 60th Street was covered with crystal glass, which reflected the beams of the searchlights in such manner as to present an extraordinary appearance.

At the Public Library, on Fifth Avenue near 42d Street, an altar of Liberty had been erected. In front of the altar were grouped long battle pikes of ancient model and shields bearing the divisional insignia. These were said to represent the warlike armament of the returning soldiers, which had been laid upon the altar of Liberty.

A committee representing the city was designated to confer with the Division Commander concerning the details of the parade. The result of the conferences held with this committee was the adoption of a plan which



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Brigadier General Cornelius Vanderbilt (left) greeting Lieutenant Colonel William S. Conrow, commanding 102d Engineers, upon arrival of regiment on board the "Rochambeau," February 28, 1919

was carried out effectively in all respects except in relation to the throngs of spectators, as will be told later. The crowds exceeded all the calculations that had been made by the police, with the result that they encroached upon Fifth Avenue and broke up the formation of the troops.

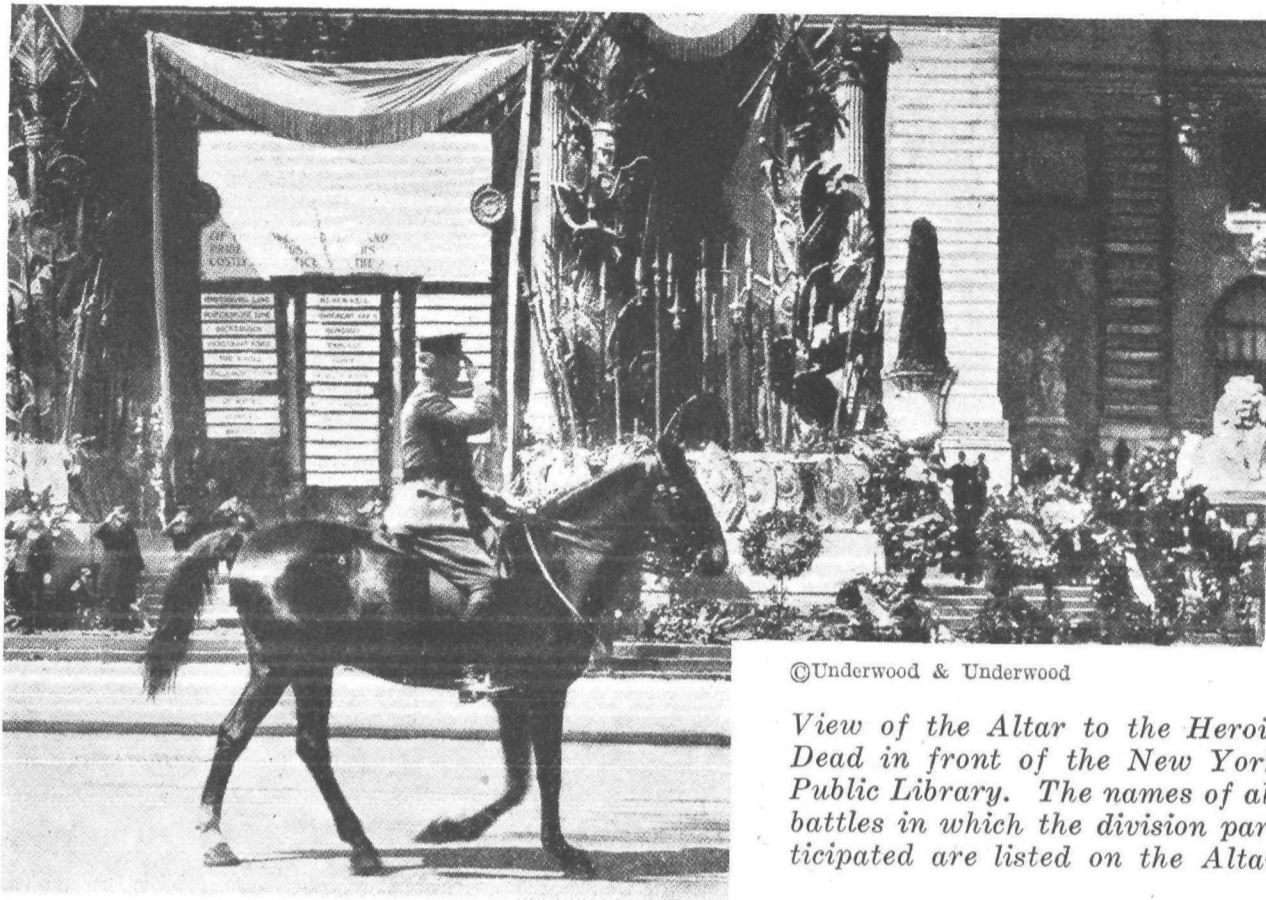
As the farewell parade held in the summer of 1917 had been down Fifth Avenue to Washington Square, it was determined to be most appropriate for the route of the home-coming parade to be uptown from Washington Square. It was therefore arranged that the division would assemble in the vicinity of Washington Square and march up Fifth Avenue to 110th Street, and there be dismissed, the various units proceeding to the places prescribed in the parade order.

When the division arrived in New York it was learned that several thousand wounded soldiers of the division who had been evacuated while in France were then in hospitals in and about the city of New York. The city committee undertook to provide automobile transportation for these wounded men, and the various hospital authorities agreed to cooperate so that the men might take part in the parade. This proposal was most acceptable to the Division Commander, and it was arranged that the wounded should precede the division in the line of march. The city committee had arranged for an immense service flag to be borne at the head of the column by an appropriate number of soldiers. This flag contained more than 1900 gold stars, representing the number of men who had been killed in battle or had died of wounds received in



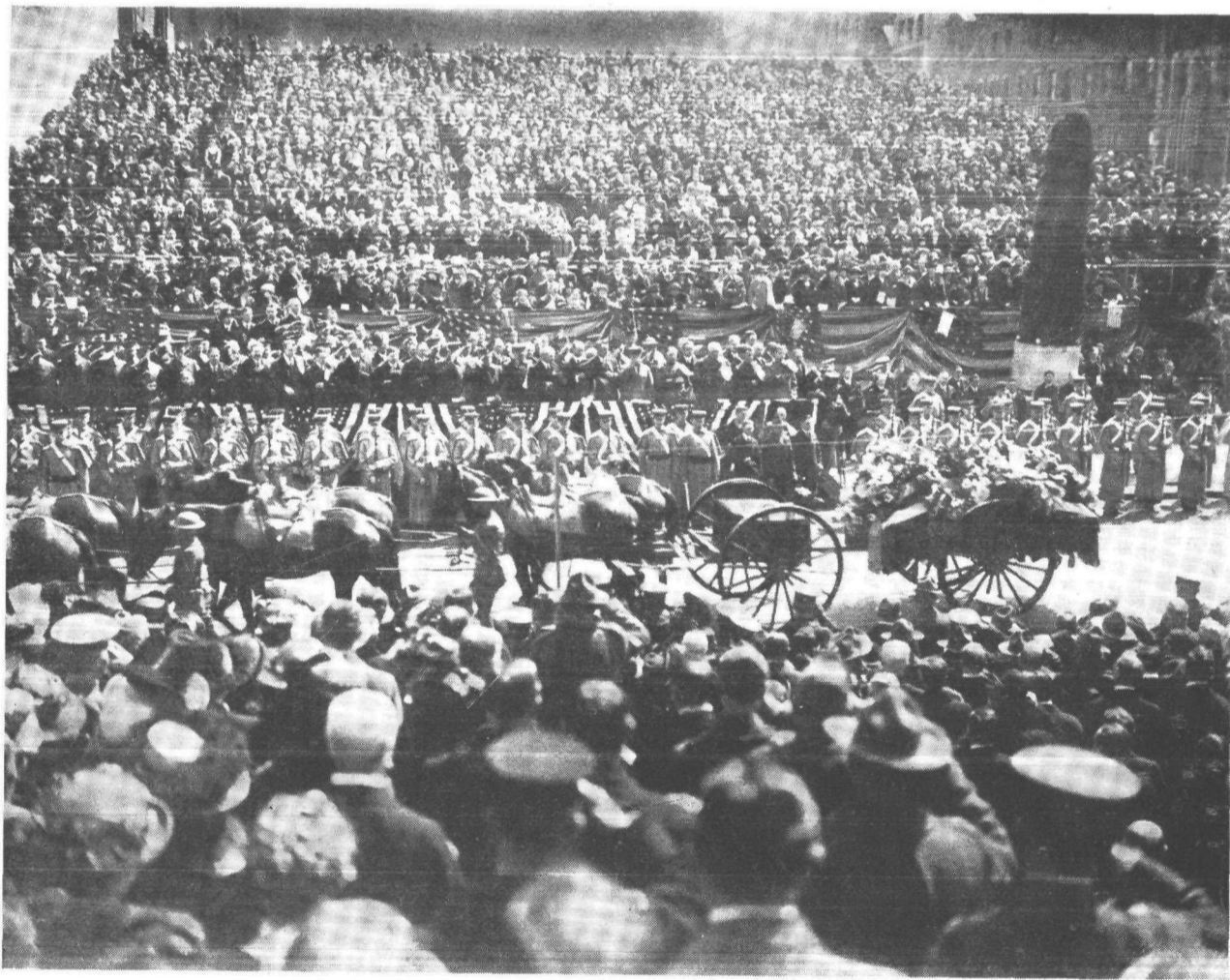
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Officers of 102d Engineers taken upon their arrival in New York on the "Rochambeau," February 28, 1919



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View of the Altar to the Heroic Dead in front of the New York Public Library. The names of all battles in which the division participated are listed on the Altar



Caisson bearing the memorial wreaths for the dead of the division passing the reviewing-stand. Note cadets from West Point at present arms

battle. A memorial feature of the parade was a caisson drawn by eight black horses, the body of the vehicle being loaded with flowers and wreaths appropriate to such an occasion.

The city had also planned an official banquet, or rather a number of official banquets, in honor of the home-coming troops. The manner in which these banquets were given was characteristic of the hospitality of New York City and of the magnitude of its undertakings. To feed 25,000 men three times a day under army conditions had become a matter of routine, but it seemed to the officers and men of the division a gigantic undertaking for the city to attempt to banquet that number of men without the extensive organization provided for subsisting troops in the army. Yet the city's committee accomplished this feat without a hitch. Not only was this done in the manner mentioned, but at every hotel where troops were banqueted the men were entertained by the leading actors and actresses of the city.

At the Waldorf Hotel all the officers of the division and the members of their families who were available were banqueted. The Mayor of the city presided at this banquet, which was attended by the Governor of the state and other prominent civil officers. Appropriate speeches were made and the Division Commander was presented with the national colors in silk, the staff of the flag being appropriately inscribed. At many other hotels throughout the city similar banquets were given, attended by groups of men ranging in number from several hundred to two thousand, who were dined and entertained at the same time.

About this time a very appreciative cablegram was received from Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Forces. A copy of this cablegram, with the reply thereto, follows:

London, March 9, 1919.

MAJOR GENERAL O'RYAN,

Care Bureau of Information, 511 Fifth Avenue, New York.

OS122 9. In the name of your comrades in the British Army I send to you and all ranks of the 27th American Division our heartiest greetings on your safe return. You can tell all those who today welcome you in your own homes that countless homes in Europe are the happier for what you have done and that the Old World will never forget her debt of gratitude to America.

FIELD MARSHAL SIR DOUGLAS HAIG, France.

New York, March 10, 1919.

FIELD MARSHAL SIR DOUGLAS HAIG,
Commander-in-Chief,
British Expeditionary Forces,
France.

Many thanks for your kind cablegram of congratulation and greeting to the 27th Division. The disciplined courage in battle of the British soldiers, their fortitude and determination during the dark days of the war and their modesty and generosity in their relations with us won our respect and high regard. We shall always remember with pride our service with the British armies under your command in the great war for world freedom.

JOHN F. O'RYAN,
Major General.



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Unusual view of the parade passing through the Victory Arch, which gives an idea of the tremendous mass of humanity which turned out to cheer the 27th Division in their "welcome home" parade. Three million people was the conservative estimate of those who saw the parade

This cablegram was supplementary to a letter containing similar cordial sentiments, which had been received by the Division Commander on the eve of the departure of the division from France. This letter and the acknowledgment thereof follow:

No. O.A. 122.

GENERAL HEADQUARTERS,
BRITISH ARMIES IN THE FIELD.

12th February, 1919.

To the General Officer Commanding and the officers, non-commissioned officers and enlisted men of the 27th Division:

You are returning in victory from the first campaign in which American troops have fought on European soil. Secure in the strength and limitless resources of your own great country on the other side of the Atlantic, the call of outraged humanity which from the outset of the war sounded so loudly and so closely in British ears was heard from afar by the manhood of our sister nation. A people less far-sighted, less imbued with the lofty ideals of liberty, might never have heeded that call. You heard it, you gave it heed, and when the time was ripe and every city, township, village, hamlet and farm in your mighty land knew the full meaning of the desperate conflict raging beyond the seas, you flung yourselves into the fray, ardent and impetuous on the side of Right.

Right triumphed. You who now return to the homes that send you forth in faith and hope, to make if need be the supreme sacrifice for the belief that is in you, can say to those who greet you that in that triumph you have had your share. You can point to a proud record of achievement, to the months of patient, earnest training, to the incessant strain and watchfulness of the trenches, to the fury of great battles. You can point also to your sacrifices, made with a courage and devotion unsurpassed in all the dread story of this war—abundant in heroism—sacrifices which were the price of world liberty and peace which you have helped so powerfully to build up anew.

Returning, you and all ranks of the American Expeditionary Force carry back with you the pride, affection and esteem of all who fought beside you, and not least of those with whom you share a common language and a common outlook upon life. The memory of our great attack upon the HINDENBURG Line on the 29th September, 1918, in which the 27th American Division, along with troops from all parts of the British Empire, took so gallant and glorious a part, will never die and the service then rendered by American troops will be recalled with gratitude and admiration throughout the British Empire. I rejoice to think, that in the greater knowledge and understanding borne of perils and hardships shared together, we have learned at last to look beyond old jealousies and past quarrels to the essential qualities which unite the great English-speaking nations.

In bidding Godspeed to you whom for a time I was privileged to have under my command, I feel confident that the new era opened out before us by the appearance of American troops on the battle-fields of the Old World will see the sympathy and friendship now established between our two nations constantly deepened and strengthened, to the lasting advantage of both peoples.

D. HAIG,
Field Marshal, Commander-in-Chief,
British Armies in France.

HEADQUARTERS, 27TH DIVISION, U. S. A.

AMERICAN E. F., FRANCE,

A. P.O. 748.

February 18, 1919.

FIELD MARSHAL SIR DOUGLAS HAIG,
Commander-in-Chief,
British Armies in France.

My Dear General Haig:

I acknowledge receipt of your very generous letter commending the battle record of the 27th Division. On behalf of the officers and men of the Division I express appreciation of your words and of the sentiments which inspired them. With you I rejoice in the knowledge that our relations born of peril and sacrifice shared together in campaign and in battle, constitute an enduring tie that will be proof against the petty distractions of ordinary times.

The personnel of our Division, being Americans, are the descendants of many races and peoples, some of them having no sentimental or other ties with Great Britain. It is natural to assume that they entered upon the service of their Division with the British Army, with widely varying notions respecting British soldiers and the soldiers of her colonies. I think I fairly state the sentiments of our officers and men when I say that upon the completion of our service, we carried with us respect and admiration for your soldiers, both officers and men. We found them to be brave and patient in adversity, courageous and magnanimous in victory, and under all conditions highly disciplined and modest in deportment. Toward us they acted like brothers—not as formal allies in a joint endeavor. And so we leave France with a complete reciprocation of the sentiments you have been kind enough to express and with gratitude for many kindnesses, both professional and personal, shown us by you yourself and by the Commanding Generals of the II and IV Armies, and the officers associated with them.

With best wishes and expressions of high personal regard, I am

Very respectfully yours,

JOHN F. O'RYAN,
Major General,
Commanding.

In anticipation of this series of banquets, which were held on the evening of March 24th, and of the parade which was to take place the following morning, the troops at Camp Upton, Long Island, had been moved by rail to the city of New York, where they were distributed for billeting purposes among the various armories in the city. During the evening of the banquets, which, as stated, preceded the day of the parade, the question was constantly asked by civilians how it was possible to expect these men, after so joyous an evening, following their many months of hardship, to turn out early the next morning for a parade. It was predicted by some that not more than fifty per cent. of the personnel of the division would be on hand. It was argued that it would not be unreasonable to expect any other result. These persons, however, did not know the dependability of the men and their pride in themselves and their division. Upon the completion of the banquets, the troops were formed by companies and were marched to their armory billets, where they

promptly turned in for sleep on the armory floors. The number of men who were late or absent without leave the following morning was negligible—no more than would account for the number of men normally ill among so large a body of troops.

In accordance with the traditions of the New York Division the morning of March 25th dawned clear and warm. The records of the Weather Bureau show that this particular March 25th was the clearest and warmest that was recorded during the preceding twenty years. As the troops left the armories for their assembly positions, it was noticed that even at that hour, dense throngs of people crowded Fifth Avenue and the adjoining streets. Literally thousands of these people, including women and children, had taken up their positions as early as 7 or 8 o'clock of the preceding evening and had held their places all night in order to insure their possession the following day.

The procession, as has been indicated, consisted of two detachments. The first of these was made up of mounted police, one of the city bands, the memorial caisson and a column of several thousand wounded soldiers of the division riding in open automobiles. These automobiles were driven for the most part by women of the various army auxiliary organizations. Hundreds of other wounded soldiers of the division, who were not sufficiently convalescent to take part in the parade, were taken in wheel chairs to appropriate vantage points where they might witness the parade. The second detachment was composed of the division, led by the Police Band of the city of New York. This highly trained and efficient band had played the division down Fifth Avenue on the occasion of the farewell parade in the summer of 1917.

The parade started on the minute of the time prescribed. The great number of wounded soldiers, many of them carrying crutches, others with arms and heads still bandaged, created a tremendous impression as they proceeded up Fifth Avenue. There was little cheering. The great crowd seemed spellbound. Their emotion was too deep for cheers. This emotion was produced not only by the sight of so many wounded soldiers, a column of them, more than a mile long, but also by the memorial caisson and the service flag with 1986 gold stars, which headed the parade. The automobiles bearing the wounded proceeded in column of twos. In the vicinity of Madison Square the crowd was so deep that the people in front were unable to hold their positions against the surging of the great mass of people behind them and were pushed out into Fifth Avenue, so that at this point the column of automobiles was compelled to break into column of single vehicles. Having passed through the neck of this human bottle, the automobiles, by virtue of their speed, quickly regained their original and prescribed formation.

After the last of the wounded soldiers had cleared Washington Square, the Division Commander and staff, followed by the units of the division in the order of their turn, followed. The delay, however, caused by the breaking up of the column of automobiles into single file and their subsequent increase of speed to regain their original formation, resulted in



Sergeant Reider Waaler, of the 105th Machine Gun Battalion, winner of the Medal of Honor, Distinguished Conduct Medal (British), Croix de Guerre with palm (French), Military Medal for Bravery (Montenegrin), breaking the silken cord to permit the passage of the parade through the Victory Arch



The memorial flag containing 1986 stars

opening up a great distance between the rear of the first detachment and the head of the division. As the troops appeared on Fifth Avenue, the vast crowd seemed to experience a reaction from the emotion which had held them while they viewed the caisson, the service flag and the wounded. With the appearance of the troops in their steel helmets, fixed bayonets and packs, swinging along with the stride of hardened outdoor men, their bronzed faces showing the lines which bespoke the determination that had marked their battle conduct, the multitude became frantic in their cheers. The roofs, cornices and windows of all the buildings were black with people. Boys and men clung perilously to niches and ledges of buildings where they had secured vantage points from which to view the spectacle. Not only were the sidewalks packed with people so that there could be no movement even along the house lines, but the side streets seemed crowded half way to the avenues on right and left. From roofs and windows people threw confetti and ticker tape until the air seemed filled with this form of hospitable grenade. The great number of horns and mechanical devices for making noise added to the din.

The troops had reached not far above 14th Street when it became apparent that the crowd, in spite of its remarkable sense of order and good will, could not, by reason of the pressure of the people in the rear, hold itself in check, and that they were being forced into the highway reserved for the marching troops. The police, under the conditions, were practically powerless. They urged the masses in front to push toward the rear with a view to holding the prescribed line, but as the head of the column approached they found it impossible, amid the tumult of noise, to make their pleas effective, and gradually the crowd in front was forced by those in the rear to encroach upon the street. This necessitated a reduction of the front of the marching platoons as they advanced. At Madison Square the crowd was completely out of hand and surged across the avenue. It was at this point that the great arch was located. The arch had been barred by a rope until the head of the procession arrived, when the rope was cut in ceremonial manner to allow the passage of the troops. The cutting of the rope was done by Sergeant Reider Waaler of the 105th Machine Gun Battalion, one of the men who had been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for extraordinary heroism in battle. Perhaps it was because of the curiosity of the crowd in relation to this ceremony, or perhaps it was because at this point the crowd was so deep that it extended clear across Madison Square, but at any rate masses of people surged across the avenue and blocked further progress of the troops. The Division Commander's horse was surrounded by thousands of enthusiastic but orderly citizens. Obviously, as the troops could not force their way through the crowd, there was nothing to do but wait until the intelligence of the crowd prompted appropriate action on their part. The Division Commander and officers of the Division Staff suggested to policemen that if the parade was to proceed it must be with the help of the people. The latter were asked to form lines four and five deep and to push the excess people into the side streets. Within four or five minutes this was accom-

plished to such an extent that a lane was opened up sufficiently wide for the troops to get through in column of squads. It was not until the head of the column had reached the vicinity of 29th or 30th Street that the troops began to reform in column of platoons at double time. Thus it will be seen that the troops had to pass through the neck of a human bottle with consequent elongation of the column. Unlike the automobile column, the marching infantry lacked the power to make up the lost distance with the same facility. When the head of the column reached 40th Street, the Division Commander halted for five or six minutes to allow as many of the following troops as possible to pass through the lane at Madison Square and regain their original formation. This halt naturally increased the distance between the head of the column and the rear of the wounded detachment, but the delay was essential if the troops were to pass the Altar of Liberty in anything approaching parade formation.

When this wait was terminated, the column proceeded up Fifth Avenue and past the altar of Liberty, receiving the same extraordinary welcome and amid the same extraordinary scenes that had been received and encountered in lower Fifth Avenue. Thus it continued through the march. Fifth Avenue, from 59th Street to 110th Street, is bounded on the westerly side by Central Park. Between the park and the street curb the sidewalk is very wide, and throughout the entire distance from 59th Street to 110th Street this walk was covered by one vast stand which had been erected at the expense of contributing citizens. Many private stands had been erected on the fronts of buildings on upper Fifth Avenue. All the stands were filled with people. All the trees capable of bearing the necessary weight, and which gave a view of the parade, harbored men and boys. Along the front of the official reviewing stand, the Corps of Cadets from West Point was drawn up. They presented arms with their accustomed precision as the head of the parade approached.

When the head of the column reached 110th Street the Division Commander and staff turned aside and took up a position in the plaza, there to watch for the last time the war division pass in review. After the Division Headquarters Troop and Detachment had passed on, the 54th Infantry Brigade, headed by General Pierce, began to swing by. General Pierce joined the Division Commander to watch his brigade. It was a magnificent spectacle to see the 108th Infantry and the 107th Infantry of this brigade march past this last reviewing point of the parade. It was a sad occasion also, for this review marked the disintegration of this great war organization with its superlative men and the associations that had become a part of the daily routine of life. Similar emotions were inspired when the 53d Infantry Brigade, headed by General Debevoise, followed along in the track of the 54th Brigade. What memories were recalled by the martial bearing and the athletic vigor of the soldiers of the 105th and 106th Infantry Regiments! So it was throughout the rest of the parade—the spick and span machine gunners, the faithful engineers, the gunners and cannoneers of the Field Artillery Brigade, the resourceful signal men, the self-sacrificing sanitary units and the efficient trains and

military police. They disappeared into side streets, some continuing their march and others proceeding by special subway, elevated or surface trains to their camps and armories, all animated by the same matter-of-fact demeanor and orderly precision that had marked their conduct in battle. Always dependable, they conducted themselves on this occasion as if a parade under such extraordinary circumstances, viewed by the greatest number of people that had probably ever been assembled, were a part of their daily routine.

The following day all the units of the division were either at Camp Upton for final muster or were en route there. By the end of the first week of April the last unit had been finally mustered out and thus ended the war service of the New York or 27th Division.