WHY WW2 SOLDIERS MUTINIED AFTER V-J DAY

THE ALLIES HAD WON THE WAR, BUT THOUSANDS OF U.S. TROOPS WERE FED UP.

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MILITARY HISTORY CHANNEL

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By late August 1945, World War II was over. Victory had been declared over Japan and, as far as thousands of U.S. troops were concerned, *it was time to ditch the uniforms and get home—preferably by Christmas.*

The problem was, it had taken four years to get the *estimated 7.6 million troops overseas and it was going to take more than four months to get them home.* Beset by homesickness and boredom, the GI's were prey to manipulation by politicians in Washington and agitators within their ranks.

During the five months, from V-J Day into January 1946, *thousands took to the streets at bases around the world, protesting the delays.* Soldiers carried placards mocking their commanders and defied orders in a way that would have been unthinkable six months earlier. According to historian, R. Alton Lee, author of "The Army 'Mutiny' of 1946" published in December 1966 in *The Journal of American History*, *the actions of many soldiers easily qualified for the charge of mutiny.*

U.S. soldiers making their way home by way of the New York harbor in June, 1945.

THE WAR DEPARTMENT USED A POINT SYSTEM

Planning for demobilization had begun long before Allied victory was declared. In September 1944, eight months before Germany's surrender, the War Department announced that soldiers would be demobilized based on a point system that counted length of service, overseas deployment, combat duty and parenthood*. Soldiers with 85 points or more were first in line to head home. Female military personnel needed fewer points. Soldiers thought the system was fair, as did the U.S. public.*

Transparent though the rating system was, it hid a huge problem: Just because soldiers were eligible didn't mean there was a ship available to take them home. Egged on by U.S. politicians, eager to score points against Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman, their families, and "hotheads" in the troops, soldiers in Guam, Manila, London, Paris, Frankfurt and other bases took to the streets, organized write-in campaigns and staged publicity stunts to pressure Washington into speeding up demobilization.

Within weeks of the Japanese surrender, U.S. Congresswoman, Clare Boothe Luce (R-CT) admitted that representatives were "under constant and terrific pressure from servicemen and their families." "Bring the Boys Back Home" became the rallying cry. Over 200 "Bring Daddy Home" groups, formed by servicemen's wives, organized a write-in campaign to representatives in Washington. *They sent pictures of their children and followed up by sending hundreds baby shoes with labeled "Please bring back my daddy."*

Troops on their way home from service overseas, while waiting for their trains, crowding into the telephone and telegraph center in temporary housing in December, 1945.

The irony was that the demobilization was working. In the five months following V-E Day (May 1945), over three million soldiers had come home, one million of them in December alone. And the War Department and other entities repeatedly announced that the pace of demobilization would be speeding up. But none of that seemed to penetrate. *On December 5, 1945, the* New York Times *reported that soldiers were "nearly psychopathic" in their desire to be repatriated.*

Days after the *Times'* report, the Army announced the deployment of 32 transport ships to the Pacific to accelerate the process. It had already slashed the point threshold from 85 to 50. But this created its own headache: it made nearly a million more soldiers eligible, increasing transport bottlenecks and frustration.

PR gaffes continued. While touring the Pacific reviewing troops in December, the newly appointed secretary of war, Robert L. Patterson*, held press conferences during which it became he wasn't fully aware of how the point system worked*. This shocked the GI's and was widely reported. The incident dogged Patterson for months.

American Sgt. George Black addressing the crowd of homesick GI's as they staged a demonstration outside the U.S. Embassy in the French capital in January, 1946. They protested the slowdown in their redeployment from Europe to the U.S.

PROTESTS PEAK ON CHRISTMAS DAY

The soldiers' mood reached the breaking point in December. The spark was the cancellation of a transport ship anchored in Manila. News of the cancellation spread like wildfire and on Christmas Day, 4,000 men marched on military headquarters, carrying banners*. One banner even compared Patterson to the Japanese commander and war criminal, Tomoyuki Yamashita, because they both claimed to "know nothing" of what their soldiers were doing.*

Over the next three weeks, the mutinous mood gained momentum. Soldiers in the army mailrooms in Manila and Tokyo made rubber stamps with the words "No Boats, No Votes" and made sure the slogan was stamped on all outgoing letters.

In Frankfurt, soldiers marched on the headquarters of the commander of U.S. troops in Europe, General Joseph McNarney, chanting, "We want to go home!" They were blocked by armed MP's. Soldiers jeered, "He's too scared to face us."

In France U.S. soldiers marched down the Champs Elysées waving magnesium flares and chanting "We want to go home." Another 400 assembled at the Trocadero across from the Eiffel Tower.

In London, 500 U.S. troops marched to Claridge's Hotel, where they asked to see Eleanor Roosevelt, who was in London on a goodwill mission. She met with a delegation and wrote to then-Army General Dwight D. Eisenhower the next day, saying that the soldiers' dissatisfaction was due to uncertainty and boredom. "They are good boys, but if they don't have enough to do, they'll get in trouble. That is the nature of boys, I'm afraid…"

American soldiers who took part in the GI demonstrations shouting, 'We want to go home!' January, 1946.

COMMUNISTS HELP SPREAD THE DISCONTENT

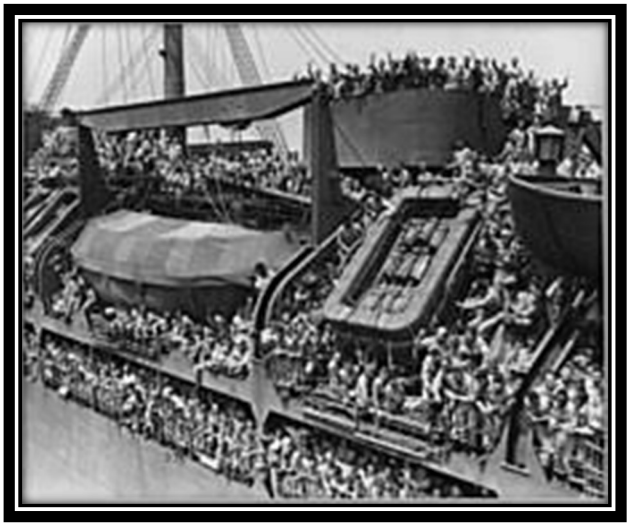
The subject of the troops' low morale became a subject of newspaper editorials and articles. Someone who must have been pleased was Erwin Marquit.

***A lifelong Marxist and a U.S. Communist Party member from a young age, he'd joined the Navy in 1945*. Marquit's detailed, personal memoir, "The Demobilization Movement of January 1946" (*Nature Society and Thought*, 2002), recounts with pride and in detail how "the Communists and those allied with them helped guide this GI outburst into a powerful, well-organized movement."**

In Marquit's eyes, any slow-down of the demobilization could only be due to the imperialistic aims of the capitalist Western powers. As Party members, their goal was to resist "the overtly imperialist ambitions latent in the new U.S. role in the postwar world."

Major John Sparrow, in his even-handed *"History of Personnel Demobilization in the United States Army,"* published in 1950, acknowledges the Party's influence on events and its destructive effect on soldiers' and civilians' morale. While neither Sparrow nor Lee felt that the CPUSA actions *created* the discontent, they agreed that they amplified and spread it.

As more and more soldiers boarded ships home, the "mutiny" faded. By March, it was a distant memory. As President Truman had presciently noted in a news conference on August 23, 1945, "It wouldn't make any difference what sort of [demobilization] plan [we] had, somebody wouldn't like it."



Comin' Home