

EPILOGUE

Demonstrations and the Desire for Domestic Tranquility

1
 Soon after the German surrender, and even before V-J Day, American servicemen and their families began pressuring the government to bring husbands, sons, and fathers home. By September 1945, President Harry S. Truman estimated that he received one thousand letters daily from persons seeking expedited discharges. Members of Congress were likewise deluged; that month they reported a backlog of eighty thousand letters and the receipt of thousands more each day.¹ After months and in many cases years overseas, soldiers were impatient to be reunited with the families they left behind. The pace of demobilization, however, failed to keep up with popular demand, and conflict soon erupted between the nation's soldiers and the government that they had sworn to serve. Once again, GIs fought to protect individual homes.

2
 Long in planning but rushed in its final phases by the unexpectedly swift defeat of Japan,² the Army's demobilization plan was designed to appeal to servicemen's sense of fair play and family values. Enlisted men were allotted points toward discharge based on time in uniform, overseas service, combat decorations, and dependent children.³ But these priorities were not always strictly observed. In the name of efficiency, for example, low-point men brought from Europe to the United States for transfer to the Pacific might be discharged before higher-point men who remained overseas. Such actions inevitably provoked cries of injustice. GI fathers and their many advocates were particularly vocal critics of delays in demobilization. Pleading family hardship, they implored their political representatives to discharge drafted fathers and to discontinue conscription of men with dependent children. Soldiers warned that the men's prolonged absence threatened, in the words of New Jersey Rep. James C. Auchincloss, to produce a "generation of broken homes and fatherless children."⁴

3
 As Christmas 1945 approached, the conflict between the government and its citizen-soldiers was close to the boiling point. Overseas servicemen were impatient with shipping delays. In the Mediterranean theater of operations, they responded with outrage to a *Stars and Stripes* report that two aircraft carriers with space for eleven thousand men had been diverted from Italy to England on the very day servicemen with fifty-five to fifty-nine points were slated for discharge.⁵ A group of eighteen GIs—four of them eligible for discharge—sent angry telegrams to several senators and to the Army Adjutant General's office in Washington, D.C. Accusing the Army of breaking its "promise" to bring eligible men "home for Christmas," they demanded an investigation of the "deployment policy now practiced in this theater." A letter to *Stars and Stripes* signed by 404 soldiers complained that demobilization favored sports stars and generals' sons and shortchanged high-point overseas veterans. Outraged by the

system of inequity that allowed Army "brass hats" to fly home for the holidays while GI draftees remained overseas, the signatories warned that once discharged, veterans would "level [their] sights" on the men who had been their former leaders.⁶

One month later, GIs in all major theaters of operations met and marched to protest a January 1946 War Department announcement that there would be a slowdown in the rate of discharges due to an insufficient supply of replacements. The protests started in the Philippines two days after the announcement and gained momentum from a *Stars and Stripes* report that implied Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson was ignorant of the workings of the Army's point system. In Manila, thousands of soldiers (officers as well as enlisted men) marched on Army headquarters and attended rallies, carrying signs that read, "When Do We Go Home?" "Service Yes, But Serfdom Never," and "Are We Patterson's Playthings?" The movement spread from the Philippines to Korea, Japan, China, Guam, Hawaii, India, England, France, Austria, Germany, and even to the continental United States. In Frankfurt guards dispersed GI demonstrators at bayonet point, and in Guam protestors burned Secretary Patterson in effigy. Enlisted men booed and jeered at officers who sought to quiet the uproar. But for all the bitterness and defiance, the protests were fairly orderly and generally peaceful. Disgruntled soldiers selected representatives to present their case to their superiors and to the public. GI delegates met with Army officials, drafted lengthy statements, inserted advertisements in leading newspapers, called for congressional investigations, and, in many cases, demanded Patterson's removal from office.⁷

Stranded servicemen decried the planned slowdown as "a breach of faith" on the part of military officials and civilian political leaders. As citizen-soldiers inducted for the duration plus six months service, they had fulfilled their duty to the nation, and now that the war was over, they expected to return home by the end of winter. Occupying conquered territory and guarding government property was, they insisted, properly the responsibility of the regular army. If lack of replacements was the cause of the delay, other men, particularly those who received deferments, should fill the gap. On a more personal note, soldiers complained of family hardship due to long-term absence. From Austria, Cpl. William Norronib wrote that his wife had spent two and half years without husband and home and that his daughter had been deprived of her father's presence during her "formative years." Believing that he and his comrades had been "double cross[ed]" by the Army, Cpl. Norronib appealed to his commander-in-chief for a "remedy." Other soldiers were less deferential; they demanded their rights as citizens and threatened to punish further delays at the ballot box—"No boats, no votes."⁸

On the home front, servicemen's families deluged President Truman and their representatives in Congress with letters describing troubles at home (an ailing parent, a failing farm, an impoverished wife, a lonely child) requiring the soldiers' prompt return.⁹ Service wives were

particularly vocal and visible advocates for a more rapid demobilization. They banded together as mothers to pressure the government to "bring back Daddy." Born of wartime networks of sociability and mutual support, Bring Back Daddy Clubs and similar associations arose in cities and towns across the nation; members organized letter-writing campaigns and lobbied public officials. One congressman reported receiving two hundred pairs of baby booties with messages, such as "I miss my daddy." In January 1946 as the soldier protests died down, the women made news by cornering and detaining Army chief of staff Dwight D. Eisenhower on his way to testify before Congress. They pressed Gen. Eisenhower and their legislators to release soldier-fathers from their military obligations, arguing that "[f]athers cannot make good occupation soldiers because their hearts and thoughts are forever at home." "[F]or the good of the Country and the maintenance of the American home," fathers in uniform should be replaced with unmarried civilians who received wartime deferments or 4-F draft status or with single servicemen stationed in the United States and slated for discharged as surplus.¹⁰

Combined with the home front "hysteria to get the boys back home," the "near mutiny" abroad played into partisan politics.¹¹ As early as the 1944 presidential election, Republicans criticized the Army's demobilization plan under then commander-in-chief Franklin Delano Roosevelt. After V-J Day and particularly during the soldier protests, the political attacks heated up. Indeed, the *New York Times* charged that some members of Congress "encouraged and abetted a bring-the-boys-home campaign which disregards our international responsibilities and encourages such exhibitions as those in Manila and Le Havre." Although not all critics were Republican, members of that party, the minority in both houses of Congress, took the lead in denouncing the seemingly slow pace of demobilization. Hoping to benefit at the ballot box in the upcoming mid-term elections, they read aloud from soldiers' letters, initiated investigations, and proposed legislation to discharge all former prisoners of war, Purple Heart recipients, fathers, students, and soldiers with eighteen months' service. Yet none of these bills ever made it to the floor of Congress, another source of contention between the two political parties. Republicans accused Democrats of creating a bottleneck; the predominantly Democratic defenders of demobilization countered that critics had lost sight of the nation's foreign commitments and were retreating into isolationism.¹²

Despite public pressure and congressional posturing, Harry Truman stood firmly behind the Army and Navy demobilization plans, stating that both services had made admirable progress. "The wonder is not that some of our soldiers, sailors and marines are not yet home," he declared, "but that so many are already back at their own fireplaces." Truman reminded the American public that the nation's international responsibilities (and thus its need for military personnel) had not ended with the close of hostilities. "The future of our country now is as much at stake as it was in the days of the war," the president warned. Although he received more complaints and pleas from servicemen and their families, Truman was less sympathetic

than his former colleagues in Congress. In a private letter to Sen. Harley M. Kilgore of West Virginia (like Truman, a World War I veteran), he complained that the demonstrations had "ruined our standing with the people with whom we have to deal, around the world." Truman blamed soft living ("sheets and gas heat in training camps") for most of the trouble but did not hesitate to disparage "lack of leadership" on the part of junior officers as well as "some dumb Generals."¹³

Sociologist Samuel Stouffer and his colleagues in the Army's Research Branch offered a different diagnosis. In Europe following the German defeat, social scientists observed a "sharp increase of feeling among the men that they had done their share in the war" and deserved to be sent home. Although most GIs favored a "tough peace," they believed that other men should be responsible for enforcing its provisions. Placing personal concerns above national goals, they were preoccupied with the question of when they would go home and resented the Army's efforts to retain personnel for postwar duties. Some accused Army officers of deliberately slowing the pace of demobilization in order to hold on to inflated wartime ranks and salaries. Others believed they were "pawns" in a political maneuver to push through the universal military training act proposed by President Truman. Many simply blamed Army inefficiency and bungling for the slowdown.¹⁴

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The January 1946 GI demonstrations do more than illustrate the shallow nature of servicemen's commitment to national priorities and military institutions. They also provide insight into the motives and desires of the generation of men who would later be celebrated by Tom Brokaw and others as the nation's, indeed the world's, "greatest," for their uncomplaining commitment to duty and sacrifice. Contrary to Brokaw's assertions,¹⁵ this generation did not serve without protest, but they generally limited their complaints to harmless gripes when the nation was at war. With the cessation of hostilities, most soldiers believed their obligation to serve also ended. It then became the nation's responsibility to bring them home as quickly as possible.

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Rallying around the twin causes of democracy and domesticity, GI demonstrators demanded their rights as citizens and as current and future husbands and fathers. They denied the legitimacy of the Army standard of unquestioning obedience to higher authority and asserted their right to free speech and assembly, including the right to heckle high-ranking officers who sought to restore discipline. Indeed, servicemen commonly characterized their demonstrations as protests against involuntary servitude and Army fascism. In Paris, the "GI Liberation Committee" even proposed a program to "democratize" the Army by abolishing officers' privileges and reforming the military system of justice to include enlisted men on court-martial boards.¹⁶

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The promise of an economically secure and satisfying home life was as important to the protestors as civic equality. GIs longed, in the words of one stranded soldier, for the "pleasurable responsibility" of husband, father, breadwinner, and homeowner; yet many feared this goal had been too long deferred. Underlying the protests was a strong anxiety about the availability of educational and job opportunities and the stability of familial, particularly marital, relations. The serviceman quoted above, for example, was a 28-year-old communications specialist stationed in Brazil; happily married but childless, he worried that the delays would hurt his chances of "starting a home and a family." Fearing a postwar recession, many more worried about post-discharge job prospects. Continued service seemed to place the soldiers at a vocational, educational, and domestic disadvantage relative to their civilian counterparts.¹⁷ **12**

GIs charged that the Army "robbed" them of their "rights" and "the fruits of our sacrifice" by keeping them from home.¹⁸ Having served in the name of private as well as national interests,¹⁹ they regarded the prompt resumption of civilian status and familial roles as their due. Retained overseas for months after the war's end, soldiers' sense of deprivation grew strong enough to disrupt military discipline. Discontented soldiers and their families effectively pressured the federal government to speed up discharges and shorten the training period for replacements, precipitously reducing the Army's combat effectiveness and threatening the nation's foreign policy objectives.²⁰ Rebellious though they were, the nation's soldiers proved to be model postwar citizens. Combined with prosperity, a generous array of preferences and subsidies, most notably the benefits enshrined in the GI Bill of Rights (Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944), smoothed the transition from soldier to civilian, enabling many veterans to match, and in the long run exceed, the educational, economic, and social accomplishments of peers who did not serve.²¹ Conforming to soldiers' understanding of why they served, these privatized rights and rewards helped ensure domestic peace. **13**

Notes

Note 1: Harry S. Truman to George B. Schwabe (19 September 1945), File: Official 190-R, White House Central Files, Harry S. Truman Library (Truman Library); John C. Sparrow, *History of Personnel Demobilization in the United States Army* (1952; reprint, Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1994), 141.

Note 2: On planning for demobilization, see Sparrow, *History of Personnel Demobilization*, chapter 1.

Note 3: On the Army's point system, see Samuel Stouffer et al., *The American Soldier*, vol. 2, *Combat and Its Aftermath* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1949), chapter 11; Sparrow, *History of Personnel Demobilization*, 65–77, 89–93.

Note 4: Sparrow, *History of Personnel Demobilization*, 159–60, 231–2; *Congressional Record*, 79th Cong., 2nd sess., 1946. Vol. 92, pt. 1, 1075–6; pt. 9, A168, A353–4; pt. 10, A1833–4; James G. Auchincloss to Harry S. Truman (11 September 1946), File: Official 190-R, White House Central Files, Truman Library.

Note 5: Until September 1945, servicemen received one point for each month in service and another for each month overseas. Each dependent child up to a total of three was worth twelve points to a GI father, and combat veterans received five points for each military award or decoration, such as the Purple Heart or the Bronze Service Star.

Note 6: W. E. Farson, "Investigation of Cablegram Complaint of 18 Enlisted Men Regarding Deployment" (10 December 1945), File: 330.11 Morale and Welfare Vol. 8 Special 1945, Box 1030, Adjutant General's Office Decimal File, Mediterranean Theater of Operations, U.S. Army, RG 492, National Archives, College Park, Md. (NACP).

Note 7: Sparrow, *History of Personnel Demobilization*, 161–70, 332, 353–4, appendix 8. Philip Rahall to Harley M. Kilgore (26 January 1946) and enclosures, Official 190-R, White House Central Files, Truman Library. Robert Trumbull, "GI Protests Win Pledge of Return"; Robert Trumbull, "20,000 Manila GIs Boo General; Urge Congress to Speed Sailings"; Kathleen McLaughlin, "Bayonets Disperse GIs in Frankfort"; Robert Trumbull, "Manila GIs Draft Protest to Army"; Kathleen McLaughlin, "GIs in Frankfort Deride McNarney as They Fail to Get Sailing Dates"; "Soldiers Get Aid of Mrs. Roosevelt"; "GIs Protest on Slow Demobilization"; all in *New York Times* (7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13 January 1946). See also John Willoughby, *Remaking the Conquering Heroes: The Postwar American Occupation of Germany* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 7–8.

Note 8: "GIs Protest on Slow Demobilization"; Anne O'Hare McCormick, "Abroad: Overseas Echoes of the Voices at Home"; "GIs Protest on Slow Demobilization"; "103 GIs Sign Protest"; all in *New York Times* (13, 19 January 1946). Petition to Harry S. Truman (7 January 1946); Cunardo S. Sarcia et al. to Harry S. Truman (10 January 1946); John F. Gribbon to Harry S. Truman (10 January 1946); William Norronib to Harry S. Truman (11 January 1946); all in File: Official 190-R, White House Central Files, Truman Library.

Note 9: Synopses can be found among the lists of letters forwarded by Truman's secretary William D. Hassett to the War Department during the fall and winter of 1945/1946. General File, White House Central Files, Truman Library.

Note 10: Bring Back Daddy Club of Milwaukee to Harry S. Truman (18 December 1945); Bring Back Daddy Club of Chicago to "Our Legislators" (ca. January 1946); Virginia H. Rowland to Harry S. Truman (8 February 1946); all in General File, Keyword: "Bring," White House Central Files, Truman

Library. Associated Press, "Demand 'Daddies' Back"; "GIs Protest on Slow Demobilization"; Thomas J. Hamilton, "Wives of Soldiers Query Eisenhower"; all in *New York Times* (10 November 1945, 13, 23 January 1946). "My Son, John," *Time* 47 (21 January 1946), <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,934352,00.html> (accessed 5 May 2007).

Note 11: Charles A. Mahoney, Provost Marshal of the United States Army Service Command in Yokohama, quoted in Associated Press, "Provost Marshal Comments"; Under Secretary of War Kenneth C. Royall quoted in United Press, "Royall Warns the Public"; both in *New York Times* (10 January 1946).

Note 12: Sparrow, *History of Personnel Demobilization*, 104–7, 141–8, 161–2, 169–70; "Manila and Le Havre": Arthur Krock, "Rift on Demobilization"; C. P. Trussell, "Truman Says Need of Troops Overseas Slows Discharges"; all in *New York Times* (8, 9 January 1946); *Congressional Record*, 79th Cong., 2nd sess., 1946. Vol. 92, pt. 1, 21, 1075–6; pt. 9, A354, A614.

Note 13: Statement by the President (8 January 1946); Harry S. Truman to Harley M. Kilgore (26 January 1946), File: Official 190-R, White House Central Files, Truman Library.

Note 14: Stouffer et al., *The American Soldier*, 2:578–82, 594; Sparrow, *History of Personnel Demobilization*, 250–51; *Congressional Record*, 79th Cong., 2nd sess., 1946. Vol. 92, pt. 1, 1076; pt 9, A168. Lawrence Milberg to *The New York Times*; "400 Soldiers Cable Discharge Protest"; both in *New York Times* (11, 16 January 1946). A Citizen to Harry S. Truman (7 January 1946); Sixty Men of the 730th Engineer Depot Company to Harry S. Truman (8 January 1946); Civil Censorship Division, Group B to Harry S. Truman (10 January 1946); Billie Ward to Harry S. Truman (8 January 1946); 309th Infantry to Harry S. Truman (9 January 1946); Stanley Crystal et al. to Harry S. Truman (11 January 1946); Terry P. Rempel to Harry S. Truman [January 1946]; all in File: Official 190-R, White House Central Files, Truman Library.

Note 15: Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House, 1998), xix–xx, xxx.

Note 16: Herbert C. Gould to Matthew J. Connelly (9 January 1946); Otis Levy to Harry S. Truman (10 January 1946); T. H. Rutherford Jr. to Harry S. Truman (10 January 1946); Missouri Farm Boys to Harry S. Truman (10 January 1946); 145 Men from 3170 Quartermaster Depot Company to Harry S. Truman (10 January 1946); GI Liberation Committee to Harry S. Truman (13 January 1946); all in File: Official 190-R, White House Central Files, Truman Library. United Press, "Paris Troops Urge Curbs on Officers"; Associated Press, "Specific Demand Listed"; both in *New York Times* (14 January 1946).

Note 17: Abe J. Lilly to Harley M. Kilgore (6 January 1946); David W. O'Grady et al. to Harry S. Truman (10 January 1946); both in File: Official 190-R, White House Central Files, Truman Library. "GIs Protest on Slow Demobilization," *New York Times* (13 January 1946); Stouffer et al., *American Soldier*, 2:597–9, 609, 611–3.

Note 18: T. H. Rutherford Jr. to Harry S. Truman (10 January 1945); David W. O'Grady et al. to Harry S. Truman (10 January 1946); both in File: Official 190-R, White House Central Files, Truman Library.

Note 19: For more on this topic, see chapter 1.

Note 20: Sparrow, *History of Personnel Demobilization*, 251–2, chapter 5.

Note 21: On the economic, social, and political effects of the GI Bill of Rights, see Suzanne Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).