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ARMY DESERTERS

System in Use by Which This Class of Military Criminals Are Detected.

LIKE BERTILLON'S PLAN.

When a Man Enlists in the United States Army a Careful Inventory of His Physical Characteristics Is Made—Many Deserters.

One of the most perplexing questions that has confronted the officials of the War Department, and one that has caused more than one officer of the army to lose hours of deserved sleep, has been the study and conception of some means or method of identification whereby the army might be purged from the unfortunate and undesirable class of deserters, and the positive identification of all military criminals who from time to time might escape punishment and apply for enlistment at one of the many recruiting rendezvous of the army, re-entering its ranks for no other purpose than to avail themselves of the favorable opportunity presented itself, or patted the individual, says the Philadelphia Times.

Strange as it may appear, the War Department battled with the perplexing question for over 100 years, during which time it had no other means of identifying a deserter than by the description and notice of one of its attaches, and there existed no means for preventing a soldier who deserted from one regiment, if he became be unfortunately lucky enough of some officer or enlisted man who would recognize him as a deserter. So common was the practice of deserting from one regiment and re-enlisting in another, that scarcely a record existing in the army that was not given the sobriquet of "deserter," in the Adjutant General's Department, signifying that they had enlisted in the fall to desert in the spring.

A Great Expense.

Immediately following the recognition of the necessity of a change in this line, desertions became so common and so extensive that the rewards paid for their apprehension and other expenses attached thereto was one of the most expensive items of the War Department. This expense increased from year to year, and often proved a barrier to securing appropriations for the department begun to insist on its abolishment.

As a result of Congressional inquiry the War Department asked for the creation of a military prison for the adjudication of military criminals. At the expense of hundreds of thousands of dollars the military prison at Fort Leavenworth was built, and the War Department it proved for the army, for it did more to increase desertion than to check it.

The prison was one of the best in the West, and was built to accommodate 800 criminals. When a deserter was detected, a long term of imprisonment followed, and he was sent to the Leavenworth prison. A comparison of the records was made annually but instead of there being a decrease in the number of desertions, it was found that it increased the more we were sending the army as well.

Wanted—a Preventative.

Something was wanted that would prevent this class of men from attempting to secure themselves for enlistment, and the prison was not the place, for it was not cheap for some debts, whereby to check it, and something that would at the same time prevent the entrance of all possible frauds, and person once in the army. Such a scheme was discovered in 1894 when Deputy Surgeon-General Chas. B. Gresham conceived the idea of establishing a system of identification of deserters who might attempt to enter the army by fraud.

Gresham had associated himself with Maj. Charles Foster, aide of the Surgeon-General's office, and as a result of their united efforts the War Department now possesses the most complete system of humans for the detection of criminals in the world, and since its inauguration there has not been one case where the system has failed to detect and prove beyond all possible dispute. The method adopted and by which means the War Department acquires its identity of all men who now enter the army is as follows:

Make an Inventory of Him.

When a man presents himself for enlistment in the army he is immediately subjected to an examination by the recruiting officer, who takes down his name, setting forth the name, age, color of eyes, hair, height, weight, birthplace and occupation of the applicant. The proper for military glory is then turned over to the medical examiner, who puts the applicant through a most rigid and severe physical examination, and the slightest defect in the physical or mental fact will cause his rejection.

Whether the applicant is found physically fit or not, the recruiting officer and the medical examiner prepares what is known as an outline figure card. Upon this card, bearing the outline of a man front and rear, the medical examiner proceeds to make a careful and minute graphic description of its appearance and its exact location on the body.

Every mark, scar, wart, mole, etc., that will assist in identifying the man at any future time. When it has been completed the outline card and a descriptive list of the man is immediately forwarded to the Surgeon-General's office, to be filed away with the archives of the Surgeon Generals office and the descriptive figs is sent to the War Department.

Cards Are Compared.

When these cards are received at the Surgeon General's office they are compared with the cards of deserters, and if received in comparison is made, it is making it utterly impossible for a duplication to occur without detection. When a second card is received that is found to correspond with the first service card, both are transmitted immediately to the Secretary of War, and the man is arrested at the upper. Instead of the man answering the description of the two outline cards. This system has proved so accurate and complete that European armies are now adopting it, and it has been in use for over seven years, and registering over 30,000 men, there has not been one case where it failed to identify a deserter, and no man who has been brought is bear to defeat it, even to men tattooing their bodies to obliterate other marks.

Many Criminals Detected.

The records of the Surgeon General's office show that on July 15, 1896, to Aug. 31, 1896, the whole number of identifications made by means of the outline cards of men who had deserted, and were dishonorably discharged from former military service; other military criminals, 196. In 87 men the men had re-entered the service and were apprehended and identified.

In the year 1896 there were 121 "re-peaters" detected out of 859 recruits enlisted, and in the year 1895 out of 1,000 thousand recruits from civil life 24.5 were identified through the outline cards as deserters, military convicts or miscreants. The character of the Surgeon General's office and the Surgeon General's office that fraudulent enlistment from future service is still standing, the certainty of detection has had a tendency to bring about the end that the War Department had so long sought after.

Decoration Day.

Monday, May 31, the Erie will sell excursion tickets to Buffalo at one cents. Take your family and spend an enjoyable day in the country. Train leaves Erie station at 8:00 a. m. Tickets also at new City Ticket Office 38 Main street (Ellicott Square).

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