

1945 May 28-June 3

Points Point the Way Home



The Guy With 85 Points

(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 May 17, page 4)

By the end of May 1945, the war in Europe had been over for more than a couple of weeks. Many troops were still needed in Europe to wind down the gigantic military machine that had crushed Nazi Germany. There were some soldiers who were anxious to go to the Pacific to get a crack at the Japs.¹ Whole divisions were being redeployed to the Pacific Theater to help end the war there. Troops would be needed for the occupation of Germany too. There were the professional soldiers who would carry on

after the war with whatever new assignment they were given. But for millions of war-weary men and women, who had seen and experienced so much in over three years of war, they just wanted to get out of the military and go home.

The problem for the War Department was how to do this in an equitable way, while at the same time finishing the war with Japan and fulfilling all the other missions and obligations required in the immediate postwar world. Everybody could not go home at once.

Even before Germany surrendered, the War Department had devised a point system for demobilization. Priority for discharge was to be determined by length of time in military service, length of time overseas, length of time in combat, and a parenthood credit for children under the age of 18 (with a limit of three).²

Combat credit was to be based on medals earned, in this order:

- Congressional Medal of Honor
- Distinguished Service Cross
- Legion of Merit
- Silver Star
- Distinguished Flying Cross
- Soldier's Medal
- Bronze Star
- Air Medal
- Purple Heart
- Bronze Service Stars (for participation)³

No other awards or ribbons were included, so awards such as the Good Conduct Medal, or even the Combat Infantry Badge (although a man had to have combat service to get one), were nice to have, but they did not help in accumulating points for discharge. Overseas service meant anywhere outside the continental United States, so Alaska and Hawaii counted as overseas service. As soon as a man left a port headed out to sea, he qualified for overseas duty.⁴

The points to be awarded for each of these criteria were not revealed until after V-E Day.⁵ Even before V-E Day, forms were sent out to commanding officers in all theatres of war that would be distributed once Germany surrendered. The calculation of points would be done on the date the war in Europe was over.⁶

Even before the point system was instituted, the Army announced they would discharge enlisted men over the age of 42 who requested it. They were also planning to release men who had been in the service four or five years by mid-summer of 1945, except for those who were deemed essential.⁷

Just a few days after Germany unconditionally surrendered, the War Department revealed the details of their points plan for enlisted men in ground, air, and service units.

- **Service credit** would equal one point for each month since September 16, 1940. (More than 15 days of a month would be counted as a full month.)
- **Overseas credit** would equal one point for each month since September 16, 1940.
- **Combat credit** would equal five points for each combat decoration (listed above) since September 16, 1940.

- **Parenthood credit** would equal 12 points for each child under 18 years old up to a limit of three children.

The magic number was **85 points** to earn a discharge from the military. That is unless the military classified a person as essential until a replacement was in place. Females in the Women's Army Corps, who were at a disadvantage without awards for participation in combat, were assigned a minimum of 44 points. Officers were put under the same system, but military necessity for their leadership and skills was the primary consideration in determining whether or not they could leave the military. Army Air Forces and service personnel to man bases and supply lines were in higher demand in the Pacific, so they would not be released as rapidly.⁸

The credit for children sometimes made the difference. Master Sgt. Joseph Watt, at the La Junta Army Air Field in Colorado, had 74 points until his third child was born just three minutes before the midnight deadline of May 12. That baby was worth 12 points and put him over the top for demobilization.⁹

If an enlisted man had enough points for discharge and was classified as "surplus," they would be shipped back to the United States and then proceed to one of 22 reception centers for review of their records and classification. Those who were certified as non-essential would be transferred to a separation center for processing from soldier to civilian.¹⁰

Even with the requisite points for discharge, a soldier could be retained if he had essential skills that were not easily replaced. These included:

- specialists in radio, teletype, telephone, and radar operation
- cryptography specialists
- powerhouse and marine engineers
- translators and interpreters of Asiatic languages
- surgical and medical technicians
- orthopedic mechanics
- hearing aid specialists¹¹

As G.I.s took pencils to forms to figure out their point totals, there were soon some complaints with the system. In what was called a "random survey on soldier opinion in Paris," men were disappointed that age and number of dependents other than children did not count.¹² Edgar Brown of the National Negro Council pointed out that the system discriminated against the 500,000 African-Americans in uniform because most had been in segregated work and non-combat units and unable to claim any combat service points.¹³ Thousands of soldiers in the Pacific had been overseas and in combat longer than most of the troops in Africa or Europe, but military necessity determined that they would have to wait for discharge until replaced.¹⁴



(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 June 14, page 9)

The start of many a conversation at bases and airfields around the world was probably, "How many points ya got?"

The highest point total in the armed forces was believed to have been accumulated by a Wisconsin engineer-gunner in a B-26 bomber of the Ninth Air Force. Staff Sgt. Martin R. Griffin of Sun Prairie, a veteran of 63 missions, was credited with 195 points.

- Air Medal and 10 clusters = 55
- Distinguished Flying Cross = 5
- Two Bronze Stars = 10
- Service in the air forces = 56
- Service overseas = 45
- Two children = 24

Another man in the same bomber group, Staff Sgt. Loren Dunn of Auburn, Indiana, was second with 178 points. Ironically, Griffin and Dunn had never met until they were at a separation center in Illinois.¹⁵

The first La Crosse County soldier to be discharged using the points system was **Donald G. Diesburg of Bangor**.



—Tribune Photo

First County Man to be discharged from the U. S. army under the point system was Donald G. Diesburg, formerly a technician, fifth class, of Bangor, who fought in the African and Mediterranean campaigns.

First County Man Released

Diesburg, With 99 Points, Discharged

To Bangor, Wis., goes the distinction of having the first man in La Crosse county to be discharged under the demobilization plan.

Donald G. Diesburg, formerly technician, Fifth class, with the 1st Armored Division, has 99 points to his credit, and these points have earned for him an honorable discharge from the army.

(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 May 26, page 1)

Donald G. Diesburg was born on April 22, 1920, in Bangor to Rudolph and Laura (Klein) Diesburg.¹⁶

Diesburg, an only child, was inducted into the Army on January 13, 1942. He recalled, "I was pretty much bewildered then, but I sure found out in a hurry what it was all about." After basic training, he spent

two months as a typist at Fort Sheridan in Illinois. Then he had more training at [Camp Crowder](#) in Missouri and [Fort Dix](#), New Jersey, where he was assigned to the [1st Armored Division](#).¹⁷



1st Armored Division insignia
(United States Army)

His division shipped overseas on May 30, 1942, to Ireland. Then they moved to England.¹⁸ On November 8, 1942, the 1st Armored Division was part of the American invasion of North Africa in [Operation Torch](#).¹⁹ They were a key unit of the Allied forces that drove General Erwin Rommel's Afrika Corps out of North Africa. Diesburg was in Algeria and Tunisia, and he was wounded on January 22, 1943, when a [German 88mm](#) shell hit a [half-track](#) five feet from where Diesburg was standing. The North African campaign ended in May 1943.²⁰

After a rest period in Rabat, Morocco, his unit was sent to Iran.²¹

On November 16, 1943, the 1st Armored landed in the invasion of Italy at [Naples](#). Diesburg remembered celebrating a cold and rainy Christmas near Bologna, Italy. Early the next year, German artillery and bombing at the [Anzio](#) beachhead caused Diesburg and his comrades to practically live underground. He likened the bombardment to Independence Day fireworks in January. The 1st Armored was part of the breakout from Anzio that eventually captured Rome.²²

Diesburg was stationed near Florence, Italy, when he was rotated back to the United States on March 21, 1945, after 34 months overseas. He was at [Fort Miles Standish](#), Massachusetts, for less than a day

before continuing on to Fort Sheridan where he was delayed for 21 days. His next stop was Miami Beach, Florida, for 13 days before returning to [Fort Sheridan](#). On May 20, 1945, Diesburg was discharged from the Army.²³

Then like millions of others at this time, he faced the transition from soldier to civilian. On his second day home from the Army, Diesburg went fishing near the Neshonoc dam at West Salem. After a short vacation, he said he wanted to get into a job that had a secure future.²⁴

He found that secure job for 30 years at the Trane Company and made a home in La Crosse. Diesburg married Aroldine Pfaff, and they had two sons.²⁵

Donald G. Diesburg, the first La Crosse County soldier to come home because of his points earned, died on November 7, 2000, at the Mulder Health Care Facility in West Salem. He was 80 years old.²⁶

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Sources & Notes:

¹ One such case was Staff Sgt. Harold M. Carothers of Denver, Colorado, a tail gunner in the Army Air Force. He had twice as many points as required for discharge, but he requested reassignment to a B-29 bomber in the Pacific. (*La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 May 14, page 3.)

² "No Decision On Discharges," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 April 9, page 10.

³ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 April 9.

⁴ Drew Pearson, "Army Discharge Credits," *The Nonpareil Journal*, West Salem, Wisconsin, 1945 April 19, page 6.

⁵ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 April 9.

⁶ Pearson, *The Nonpareil Journal*, 1945 April 19.

⁷ "Army To Begin Discharging Men In Uniform Four To Five Years," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 April 25, page 7.

⁸ "Army Discharge Plans Revealed," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 May 10, page 1.

⁹ "Zero Hour Baby," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 May 17, page 7.

¹⁰ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 May 10.

¹¹ "Men Who Have Points May Be Kept On Duty," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 May 28, page 7.

¹² "Yanks Busy Figuring Out Point Totals," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 May 11, page 9.

¹³ "Charges Point System 'Rankest Discrimination,'" *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 May 14, page 2.

¹⁴ "Point System Means Little In Discharge Of Pacific Veterans," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 May 25, page 8.

¹⁵ "Badger Airman With 195 Points Discharged," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 May 14, page 2.

¹⁶ "Donald G. Diesburg," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 2000 November 9, page D8.

¹⁷ "First County Man Released," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 May 26, page 1.

¹⁸ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 May 26.

¹⁹ "1st Armored Division," *United States Army Center for Military History*, accessed 2020 June 5, <https://history.army.mil/html/forcestruc/cbtchron/cc/001ad.htm>.

²⁰ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 May 26.

²¹ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 May 26.

²² *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 May 26.

²³ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 May 26.

²⁴ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 May 26.

²⁵ *La Crosse Tribune*. 2000 November 9.

²⁶ *La Crosse Tribune*. 2000 November 9.