

## THE SOLDIERS ARE HAPPY.

### AT LEAST THE OFFICERS SAY ALL IS WELL AT DAVID'S ISLAND.

Officials at the Army Building were questioned yesterday about the discontent said to exist among the recruits of the United States Army in barracks at David's Island, and which, according to recent published accounts, finds expression in efforts at desertion, attempted suicide, and loud-voiced mutterings anent the quality of the food furnished the wearers of Uncle Sam's uniform. The inquirer was told that the allegations were without foundation in fact.

"I would be quite content," said an officer of high rank and the responsible head of an important department, "to take up my quarters and mess with the enlisted men on David's Island, taking three meals a day of the food which is regularly served out to them. The statement that sometimes the men get bad food, and that somebody is making money out of the Government in consequence, has just this to support it:

"At David's Island the War Department is conducting a series of experiments on an extended scale with the object of demonstrating which of the two systems of subsisting the troops of the regular army is the more economical and desirable; namely, the long-established plan of cooking by company, or the more modern substitute of making each garrison or depot, such as David's Island, a single mess, and providing food for its members *en bloc*.

"The War Department has accordingly put in an extensive plant at David's Island, which for a number of months past has been and is now being subjected to practical and exhaustive tests. These tests are carried out under the supervision of officers whose experience especially qualifies them for the duty. The rations, issued in kind, are carefully inspected by them in order that their quality may be insured, and the cooked food before it is given to the men is subjected to rigid scrutiny.

"It may possibly have happened that occasionally in the course of experimenting certain articles have been spoiled in the cooking or so served as to be distasteful to the appetites of the wearers of the blue uniform who have agreed to serve in the ranks of the army at the average rate of \$15 a month. But as a matter of fact, nine-tenths of the recruits sent to David's Island are furnished three times a day with better food than they have ever previously had in the whole course of their lives.

"As for the assertion that somebody is making money out of the Government through furnishing the food supplies, that is undoubtedly correct. But whatever accrues to the contractor is a legitimate profit. The Government does not expect its contractors to supply subsistence stores at a loss, but it does expect its inspecting officers to do their duty. It may be depended upon that the War Department receives a dollar's worth of goods of the best quality for every dollar of the Government's money disbursed."

In the Adjutant General's department it was stated that the ratio of desertions, or attempts at desertion, on David's Island did not exceed that of any other army post. Cases of despondency were more frequent among new men, such as constituted the great bulk of the force at the recruiting depot, than among garrisons composed of soldiers who had become inured to the service. As a matter of record, shown by the daily morning reports, there had not been a single instance of desertion from David's Island since Aug. 1, and but three cases where enlisted men who had been granted passes had overstaid their time.

In respect to the reported attempts at suicide, the officials at the Army Building said they were without information. It was not unlikely that such attempts had been made, since the desperation which frequently led men to enlist in the army would oftentimes lead them to even more desperate deeds.

The statement that of a detail of fifty men sent some four months ago to Wyoming Territory thirty-seven deserted while en route was characterized as "arrant nonsense," the official reports showing that the detail was delivered intact at its destination by the officer in charge, and that the entire number of men at once entered upon the performance of their duties, and were now engaged in fulfilling their military obligations in strict accordance with instructions.

Reverting to the question of food supply, this officer said that the War Department had selected David's Island and the cavalry depot at Jefferson Barracks for the purpose of instituting a comparison between the relative merits and availability of subsisting the troops of the regular army by means of company or garrison messes. Up to the present the weight of demonstration had been wholly in favor of the David's Island scheme. No regular troops in the world were better fed than those of the United States Army, and if discontent existed at the recruiting station the cause for that unfortunate condition of affairs must be sought in some other direction than that of the food supply. In any event the facts remained that the War Department was holding on to the men enlisted in the regular army, and charges of wholesale desertions could be set down as a figment of the imagination.