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The Tree Troopers

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THE Civilian Conservation Corps is now three years old. It was created by Act of Congress of March 31, 1933, and on April 10, 1933, the first of the American youth signed up in this great social experiment. It was an experiment in unemployment relief, in government organization, in using green and raw youth in conservation. It was an unusual experiment in federal and state cooperation, involving 4 different government departments and 48 different states. The game started with a bang and the rules had to be made as the game went on. Plays had to be worked out and tried as the game progressed; some proved to be good and have been used ever since, others had to be dropped. The game went on, and still goes on.

THE players in this game, the enrollees in the Civilian Conservation Corps, represent a cross-section of present-day American youth. While the classes of society represented may vary from state to state, or from city and country, the fact remains that the CCC is a section of our youth. There are farm boys, small-town boys, big-city boys, boys from industrial centers, from city slums, from rural slums. There are boys who never saw a grade school, some who never got through grade school, many high school boys, and some with one or more years of college, and then there are the illiterates who, when they entered the CCC, couldn’t sign the payroll. There is a strict physical test for the CCC but no mental test.

Boys from mining towns, messenger boys, bell-hops, shoe-shiners, college boys, budding poets and artists, city guys, wisecrackers, jazz singers, tap dancers, would-be pugs, foreign strains from southern Europe, negroes, an occasional Jap or Chinese boy, many Mexicans—all these and more you find in the CCC melting pot.

When the boys first enroll some are despondent, suspicious, sullen, boastful, impudent, or timid, scared, and homesick. Some are happy, some good fellows, some unsocial. Some adjust themselves to camp life, the group life, quickly—others
find it very difficult, some are plainly misfits; the CCC is a great melting pot. This is the raw material as it comes into the Corps.

For the most part, they have the saving grace of youth, which means adaptability, and with regular meals and hours of sleep, and under the alchemy of healthful out-door work, they soon fit into the Corps. Rough spots in many an unsocial nature get smoothed off, they learn to "take it." There's the company, the barracks, the work crew, the smaller group under a leader—and the boy, if he is going to make it at all, soon fits into the place he plays in the game.

This is what one has seen take place for three years now, with over one million boys, in every state in the Union, and in Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

THE CCC camp is a small town, with its own organization and discipline, commissary and quarters, its own work and play, its own life and spirit. Some are models of sanitation, attractiveness and comforts; some not models. But each reflects the personality of the army officer in charge. In every case the camp is the home of the boys for six months, a year, or maybe two years.

I have seen camps which, in spite of unattractive settings, have been made into real homes for the boys, camps in which the enrollees took the greatest pride, and on which they spend many hours of their own time to improve and beautify; recreation halls which had a real homelike appearance and atmosphere; others which looked for all the world like hunting lodges or a sportsman's club.

I have seen mess halls as clean, as attractive and as pleasant as any dining room of a wholesome American home, with plenty of food, simply but well prepared and served. Think of what such places have meant to thousands of boys who had spent one or more years thumbing their way about the country looking for jobs which didn't exist!

I saw during the first few months of the CC many underfed boys seat themselves at mess tables and grab for meat and bread and gorge themselves like half-starved animals. And I have come back to some of these camps some months later and seen the same boys orderly seat themselves and leisurely help themselves to the food, using good table manners and displaying consideration for their fellow-diners. I have seen more than one camp where it was the camp rule that the men must be clean-shaven, have their hair brushed, and wear shirts and ties at the evening meal. Such habits will not be lightly cast aside.
later in life by these youths, wherever they may be.

As a rule, the army officers have realized and accepted their responsibilities as to shelter, subsistence, morale, discipline and education for the boys in the CCC camps. Perhaps the using of civilian agencies could have done these jobs better or as well—but I doubt it.

"EIGHT hours per day for five days per week" on conservation work was the plan. An hour out for lunch and not over an hour for coming from and going to the work. This has varied, of course, whether the work was near to or distant from the camp. The work hours are not hard; many believe they are too easy, far easier than these boys are apt to have when they get out and on their own.

Almost every kind of possible outdoor work has been done by the Triple C boy. Naturally this is true when the many different kinds of camps located in the many different states are considered.

Statistics are dry things and although they are the stuff of which reports are made, I shall omit them. Many thousands of miles of truck-trails have been blasted, cut, picked and shoveled out all over the United States; too many miles, some people believe. Foot, horse and pack trails; foot, horse, stock and vehicular bridges by the thousands, constructed of poles, logs, lumber, concrete and cable, now span dry arroyos and rushing rivers because crews of young Americans worked there. Fire towers of steel or log now look out from hundreds of mountain tops to spot the rising smokes; the silvery telephone wire gleams through miles of forest to carry the urgent message. Millions of forest acres have been saved from fire or insect or fungus. More millions of acres have been cleaned of dead and down timber, or crooked, stunted forest weeds cleared out which the forester hoped but never expected to be able to cover.

Nurseries have been grubbed out, plowed, harrowed and sown to forest seed, and later the seedlings set out to restore the vegetative cover of bare mountain sides. All these have the CCC done.

They have labored in many a gullied field to dam the rushing flood water, leveled off the steep sides and planted grass or shrubs or trees.

Camp grounds, whether on National or State Forest, or National or State Park, have become realities, with all the conveniences to make the camper, hiker and recreationist happy and content. Depleted ponds or streams have been improved,
or built, for fish life, while new refuges for game animals and migratory birds have been created and made habitable for wild life. New forests and new parks have appeared on maps and made realities by CCC labor.

All these and more has the Triple C army wrought.

THE ECW is headed by a Director (Robert Fechner) with an Advisory Council made up of one representative each from the Departments of War, Labor, Agriculture and Interior. The Director and his Council approve all camps, make the rules and regulations and formulate the policies under which the CCC operates.

The Labor Department furnishes the men; War feeds, clothes, looks after their welfare, pays them, and runs the camps. Agriculture and Interior plan their work, direct it, train the boys to work, and help in camp educational efforts. The Army runs the camps, the civilian departments run the work. The field set-up is one of dual authority which calls for mutual consideration, confidence and cooperation (again the three C's) between the Camp Commander and the Project Superintendent. Unless these two work together for the good of the CCC project as a whole, the game slows down, fumbling results and yardage is lost. Happily in the great majority of camps these men play the game together to success.

What has the boy himself gotten out of all this? Board, shelter and clothes, and the chance to send $25 home each month, or an equivalent of about $3.00 per day. It is my conviction that the average CCC has paid his way, in spite of his
He has learned to work with others and for others.

youth and unskilled labor. But the boy has received much more than any money equivalent. Among other things he has learned to work, to live an orderly life, to form regular habits, to keep his body clean and to build up that body, to learn to work with others and for others, to respect their rights, to be self-reliant, to learn from books and teachers and the men over him, if he cared to, but to learn more from his fellows, and from nature, to become a part and parcel of the conservation idea by translating it each day into work on the ground. The camp, the work, the life, have made a man of him—if he had anything in him to build on.

OVER a million boys have passed through the camps. Of these about 285,000 were given voluntary discharges to take outside jobs offered them specifically. Hundreds have stayed on and been promoted to better jobs in federal and state services. There was scheduled for some time in March a special Civil Service examination for Junior Assistant to Technician, open only to CCC enrollees in the campus and to former enrollees now on duty as sub-foremen in the camps. It is certain that a very large number of the boys will try this examination and probably a big percentage will pass. This is apt to be the largest examination the Civil Service has ever held and I should not be surprised if it resulted in an eligible list of over 10,000 names.

This examination is important from two angles—first, it is the first Civil Service examination held for any CCC supervisory personnel, and secondly, because it may be the means of open-
ing up a future for many of these fine boys who have worked hard and earnestly and who are ambitious to make good in some phase of conservation work. It is encouraging to us all that a start will be made to stabilize the selection of the supervisory personnel in the camps.

It is too early yet to say definitely and finally, but it seems certain that the CCC in some form will become permanent. The President said last September that he would like to see its strength fixed at 300,000. It is authorized by Congress to continue as it is until March 31, 1937; undoubtedly before that date Congressional action will be taken as to its continuance; probably the present Congress will not attempt to make the CCC permanent. Before it is made permanent it would seem wise for all using agencies concerned to consider and agree on certain changes found necessary during the first three years of the Corps.

The Civilian Conservation Corps has made good as far as the American public is concerned; this imposes a heavy responsibility on us all to keep that confidence. It has made a tremendous contribution to American conservation; it has sold the word, "Conservation," to millions of people. It has given to every boy who has gone through a CCC camp a stake, a life-interest in American conservation.