

### CHAPTER III - WHAT THE CCC DID FOR YOUTH

As a Nation, the United States is handy with tools, proud of the millions of tangible articles it builds so skillfully and reasonably able to appraise these things and build better ones with the passage of time. For many years, as a pioneer country, we have inclined toward and specialized in miracles of production, and, as a Nation, for the greater part of our national existence, we have been relatively untroubled by many of the great social problems which existed more critically in other and older nations. Our vast geographical expanse, with its free land, its rich resources and many other factors have been natural shields against many of the social problems and social ills which beset numerous other nations, great and small.

There have been many indications in the past that this Nation would not enjoy perpetual freedom from the major economic and social ills found elsewhere unless positive action was taken to avoid or correct such ills. Yet it was not until 1929 that the multiplicity of social and economic maladjustments grew so severe as to become nationally recognized, nationally felt, and to drop the country into the severest and most prolonged depression it had known.

During the earlier years of this depression the sense of shock was so great and the lack of knowledge and awareness of its import was so widespread that relatively little of a positive nature was done to retard or correct the situation. Indeed, the principal earlier remedies employed constituted a "hoping for the best" and doing very little.

#### PROGRAM OF POSITIVE ACTION

With the inauguration of Franklin D. Roosevelt as President on March 4, 1933, the era of wishful thinking as a depression remedy came to an end -- to be replaced by a program of positive action. An objective evaluation of this entire program from the national standpoint will not and cannot be made until after the passage of more years than have as yet elapsed. Whatever a final long range verdict may be, some facts are already clear. Men, women, and children who were hungry got something to eat, and through work, regained their self-respect and their ability to try again. The social fabric of the Nation was kept intact. The Federal Government manifested a concern and an interest in the immediate problems of the people to a greater degree than it had ever before exhibited. New social and economic programs were created and put into operation with a speed which was often bewildering. Among these social innovations were the Civil Works Program, the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Public Works Agency, the Works Progress Administration, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Agriculture Adjustment Administration, and a host of others,

including the Civilian Conservation Corps, which was initially designated "Emergency Conservation Work."

Chronologically, the CCC was the first agency created and the first agency to operate as part of the new program of acting designated to combat both the causes and effects of the depression. The execution of the CCC program has marked a definite milestone in American human engineering. Elsewhere in this report, facts, opinions, and evaluations of various phases of the CCC are given. Here we are concerned with the human values and social changes which the Corps has brought about and which affected the national life of this country very favorably.

#### NUMBER OF PEOPLE AFFECTED

As a first step in this process, an idea of the magnitude of the program must be given from a populational standpoint. During the nine and a quarter years it operated, the CCC afforded direct employment to approximately three million men -- most of them aged between seventeen and twenty-three. Roughly, five percent of the total male population has at some time worked with the CCC. In the lower age bracket -- as high as ten to fifteen percent have had this employment. Conservatively, each of the men employed directly affected (largely by supporting) about three other people -- meaning that through its operations, nearly ten percent of the total population of the country has, for some period of time, been affected by the Civilian Conservation Corps economically or socially.

That a program as large as the one carried on by the CCC should have some impact upon the social structure of the Nation is reasonably evident due to its magnitude. What those effects have been -- and in large measure, will continue to be -- become more evident upon examining the program.

#### ORIGINS OF ENROLLEES

In the main, the men who served as enrollees in the Corps came from economically insecure homes. They were drawn almost entirely from that third of the population which President Roosevelt has described as "ill fed, ill housed and ill clothed." Other than the war veteran group (about ten percent of the total) the enrollees in the CCC were young men -- most of them between seventeen and twenty -- with a few up to twenty-eight or with no upward age limit.

Roughly, their points of origin from a rural-urban standpoint were almost exactly opposite the rural-urban populational distribution of

the Nation. Something over fifty-five percent were of rural origin (farms and communities of less than 2500 population) and forty-five percent were of urban origin. While a great variety of individual reasons were given as prompting men to enroll in the CCC, two major motives impelled the vast majority of enrollments. These two major motives were social pressure and economic pressure. In many cases the two motives were so closely intertwined as to be inseparable.

#### MOTIVES FOR ENROLLMENT

Both the social pressure and the economic pressure motives may be epitomized by quoting numerous enrollees who stated, "I just wasn't gettin' along around home. Me and my father (or mother) was always scrappin'. There wasn't any money and there wasn't any jobs, so I joined the C's." Many of these young men knew little or nothing about the CCC -- and probably cared less -- but they saw in it a possible escape from conditions which were to them intolerable, and they saw a chance to do something better and more satisfying than was embraced in the lives they were then leading.

As a factor in the social and economic maladjustment of these young men, as a group, it may be noted that their median educational level was about eight grades of school completed. Often it took these youngsters nine to twelve years to complete these eight grades instead of the usual eight years (disregarding kindergarten). This eighth grade median meant that there were many thousands of boys who had never passed beyond the fourth grade in school. In fact, well over one hundred thousand of them were taught to read and write in the Civilian Conservation Corps.

While there were numerous exceptions, the great bulk of CCC enrollees came from homes and from environments which, as a result of the depression, furnished an effective bar to development, social stability, or economic opportunity. A tight vicious circle surrounded these homes and the boys living in them. To produce improvements seemed impossible because there were no jobs to bring in the money which would have insured a transformation. Too often, jobs were impossible of attainment because home conditions had created an air of frustration and personal maladjustment which did not and could not produce desirable employees. The moral dry rot of enforced idleness had produced a stagnant deadlock.

#### RADICAL CHANGE IN LIVING

It was from environments and conditions such as these that the CCC enrolled young men and assigned them to CCC camps all over the

Nation. An immediate and radical change in living patterns, habits and environment was effected. The change was so great that an appreciable percentage of the men selected for service in the Corps could not adapt themselves and deserted -- but most were able to accept and profit by the change.

In the move from home to camp, the enrollees were given what amounted to an entirely new method of living for a majority of them. Regularity replaced irregularity. Food three times a day which was generally well prepared, of good quality, and ample in quantity, appeared instead of irregular meals of dubious quality and insufficient quantity. Clothing which was adequate for work needs was provided and, in addition, neat "dress" uniforms for after work were provided. Neatness and personal cleanliness were stressed and many thousands were made acquainted with the use of the shower bath and the toothbrush for the first time in the CCC.

#### IMMEDIATE TRAINING PROVIDED FOR ENROLLEES

Instead of the idleness from which the enrollee had come, he found busy, action-packed days -- including eight hours of labor on vital conservation projects. To perform this labor effectively and to run the camp effectively required a multitude of special skills. Up to eighty percent of the enrollees had never had any type of regular job prior to entering the CCC. Thus there was no pool of already established skills to draw upon in order to carry on either camp or work project operations. This condition necessitated immediate, effective training of large numbers of men in a very wide assortment of skills in order to carry on the CCC program.

Through sheer necessity this training had to be swift, effective and practical because the entire operation would have bogged down speedily if the training had not, in the main, produced immediate results. Merely as an illustration, the matter of cooks may be cited. It takes a high degree of skill to turn out acceptable food to a heterogeneous group of 200 to 250 young men and their supervisors. Thus cooks and bakers schools for enrollees were established, likewise, a virtual apprenticeship system was maintained in the camp kitchens to further this training.

#### FORMAL PROGRAM OF EDUCATION

Another specific angle of the CCC program which had definite social significance was the formal educational program -- as contrasted with the educational processes involved in teaching men how to do their

