

## CHAPTER IV - WHAT THE CCC TAUGHT

Initiation of the Civilian Conservation Corps marked the beginning of a new era for youth and conservation.

The first CCC camp was a symbol of a new national attitude toward unemployed youth. It represented recognition of the principle that when unemployment among youth becomes acute due to a shortage of private jobs, then it is up to Government to do something constructive about it.

The first CCC camp was a symptom indicating a new note of national anxiety over the depleted state of its natural resources, principally timber and top-soil. Formation of the Corps represented epoch making recognition of the urgency of the conservation problem and the necessity for immediate and continuing action on a national scale. In a broad sense the CCC was the dynamite which smashed the log jam which for years had blocked funds and man power needed for the financing of a comprehensive conservation program which would affect importantly all parts of the Nation.

As idle youth began moving into the woods in those early CCC days, the new organization attracted world-wide attention. It attracted attention because the Corps was not only new from a national standpoint -- it was new internationally. The CCC marked the first time any government had attempted to solve the twin problem of acute unemployment among youth and neglected natural resources through a single youth-work organization. Other countries were interested because in those days acute unemployment among youth was universal. They were interested because it had been discovered that the "dole" was not the right answer to the unemployment relief problem.

One of the major cornerstones of the CCC program was the principle that young men assigned to the CCC camps must pay their own way through constructive worthwhile work on projects of definite value to the Nation. In return for the work they did to bolster the Nation's natural resources, the men assigned to the CCC camps received jobs, \$30 a month, (of which a substantial portion went to their dependents), nourishing food, comfortable clothing, adequate shelter, medical and dental attention, and opportunity for production training on the job. The young men were required to conform to a fixed camp routine that developed orderly habits and good discipline. They worked forty hours a week.

On June 30, 1942, when, by Congressional fiat, the Corps ceased operations and began to dispose of its assets it had completed nine and one quarter years of operation. Over this period there had been ample opportunity to test out on a tremendous scale the soundness

of the principles back of the CCC plan. In every state in the Union, on 500,000,000 acres of national, state and private forests, on more than 1,100 national and state parks, on 50,000,000 acres of farm lands, on the overgrazed areas of the great plains, in the dust bowl and along thousands of miles of rivers and streams, idle young men from crowded cities and war veterans stagnated by post-war economic conditions had lived under disciplined conditions in the great outdoors, had worked at conservation tasks, had developed their bodies and had won a new appreciation of the size and importance of their home land.

During the years it was a going concern, the CCC was much more than an agency for providing employment to idle young men and for planting trees, checking erosion and rehabilitating range lands. It was an agency for national preparedness too. Although the Corps was not militarized, the CCC made a signal contribution to national security. When war came, the War Department found young men trained in the CCC made splendid soldiers -- were far ahead of the average rookie at enlistment or induction. Through the CCC program, more than 2,000,000 young men of military age were toughened physically, taught to obey orders, trained in many of the most important things that make a good soldier.

Termination of the CCC program offered a splendid opportunity to assess its worth in terms of human conservation, of national preparedness and of natural resources conservation. The men responsible for establishing the Corps had no charts to guide them. They were pioneers in a new field. Undoubtedly some mistakes were made but on the whole, their activities were successful. In operating the CCC camps, certain guide posts were set up -- guide posts which should be of the utmost value to those charged with formulation of post-war CCC plans if this organization is to resume its work after victory is won. The Corps taught certain fundamental lessons. Attention will be directed to some of these.

#### CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS IDEA - SOUND

The most important lesson taught by the Civilian Conservation Corps was that the idea of combining unemployment relief for young men with the advancement of urgently needed conservation work was sound, practicable and workable. The program worked. It converted millions of young men from potential economic and social liabilities into assets which today are paying big dividends on the fighting and production fronts. The young men liked the air of adventure that permeated CCC camp life in the forests and parks, on the public domain and on farm lands. They liked the idea of doing something constructive. They enjoyed the food, the companionship of other youth of their own age and they obtained deep and lasting satisfaction from the feeling that they were earning their own way. Even

young men from city streets, after a few weeks of training, turned out to be amazingly good conservation workers. An enormous amount of work was done. The communities in which camps were located liked them. They enjoyed having the boys around. They appreciated the work which the camps did to improve and protect their farm lands, to rebuild and protect forests, and to develop parks.

#### DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING OF YOUTH MAJOR CORPS OBJECTIVE

The Civilian Conservation Corps was created to provide work relief and to conserve and develop natural resources. As the Corps progressed, it became more and more apparent that the Corps' principal contribution lay in the work it was doing to promote the welfare and further the training of the individuals making up the enrolled personnel. The development and training of youth became a major Corps objective along with the relief of unemployment and the advancement of conservation work.

A nation's youth always is its greatest asset. This was recognized by every responsible official in the CCC organization. It was recognized that the young men sent to the CCC camps were the youngsters who, up to the time of their enrollment, had not had a fair chance to develop their abilities and prepare themselves for their rightful place in the world. Accordingly, officials strove constantly to improve the general health, working skills and usefulness of all enrollees. Each year the Corps operated, new training facilities were added and greater attention was paid to the business of converting new recruits into useful and successful citizens.

But while the development of the individual enrollee was a major aim, Corps officials steadfastly refused to reduce the hours of the Corps work program or to turn the CCC camps into formal schools which would be competitive with the public schools or colleges. The camps were operated on the principle that they were supplementary to, rather than in competition with, the regular school system. If a youngster entered the camps unable to read and write or if he had not finished the equivalent of the fourth grade, he was required to attend classes. If a youngster had not finished the elementary schools or high school and desired to continue his education, the camp educational adviser did his best to give him what he needed. Academic education, however, was subordinated to work training on the job.

It was the concensus of Corps officials that the regular activities of camp life and the work programs themselves, furnished the best means, when properly organized and supervised, for the training of enrollees in work habits and skills. As a result, the training program

was integrated into and around the camps themselves. Enrollees acquired skills by actual production work on the job and by taking supplementary academic courses and vocational training in camp shops. They learned how to be good citizens by conforming to camp regulations, through contact with other enrollees and by example. They developed splendid physiques by engaging in hard outdoors work and by taking calisthenics and practicing infantry marching drills. Good health, safety and sanitation habits were required of all enrollees. In a word, the CCC training program was planned to utilize to the fullest the educational and training resources inherent in camp life and camp work projects. Enrollees learned by doing.

Experience demonstrated that in a post-war CCC, two changes should be made in the administration of the training program. All training activities should be placed under the direct control and direction of the official charged with administration of the CCC program. Steps should be taken to make organized training so integral a part of the CCC program that every enrollee would be reached. Training should be recognized in any post-war CCC act as a major objective.

Probably the most important lesson taught by the CCC was that a youth work program cannot be run without giving training and education high priority in the list of major objectives.

#### ADEQUATE WORK RETURN REQUIRED OF EACH ENROLLEE

Operation of the Civilian Conservation Corps demonstrated the soundness of the basic CCC principle that each young man enrolled should be required to make an adequate work return for the benefits he receives from life in the CCC camps. From the very beginning of the program the Director and the four departments cooperating held fast to the principle that all enrollees must work a regular forty-hour week and that those who could not be persuaded to work should not be allowed to remain in camp. Officials acted on the belief that each enrollee must be taught how to work and to do an honest day's work. It was felt that allowing boys to work part of a day was inimical to the boy's character and would handicap him when he went into private life to obtain a job. Every effort was made to model the camp work day as closely as possible upon the work day followed in private industry, so that when a youth left the camp, he would be able to fit quickly into private industry, business or agriculture.

The CCC camp enrollee developed sound work habits because he worked under competent supervisors who required all work to come up to regular government specifications. The enrollee learned to carry out

