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# Finding Work of National Importance: Conscientious Objection, Alternative Service, and Citizenship in World War II

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Finding Work of National Importance: Conscientious Objection, Alternative Service, and  
Citizenship in World War II

by

Jonathan Mount

A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee

of Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

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in

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This is accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in History.

FINDING WORK OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE: CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION,  
ALTERNATIVE SERVICE, AND CITIZENSHIP IN WORLD WAR II

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## ABSTRACT

During the Second World War, the United States government established the Civilian Public Service (CPS), an alternative service program for conscientious objectors on an unprecedented scale. Though it intended to place men in camps where they would perform “work of national importance” in lieu of military service, the CPS often assigned men to make-work projects that proved inadequate to both the government and the conscientious objectors themselves. Through an examination of the official records, periodicals, and correspondence of a diverse sample of CPS camps, this study contends that the men of the CPS actively sought to reconstruct their work program around projects that demanded extreme physical challenges, difficult environments, and individual sacrifice. By demonstrating the value of dangerous, dramatic service, the men of the CPS created a more satisfactory program and in the process helped to redefine the basis of American citizenship beyond exclusively military service.

Finding Work of National Importance: Conscientious Objection, Alternative Service, and  
Citizenship in World War II

In the early morning of May 15, 1941, slightly more than two dozen young men first set foot in their new, temporary home in an abandoned Civilian Conservation Corps camp in Maryland's Patapsco State Park. Their arrival would not go unnoticed, however, as the grounds of the park were already "consumed to the teeth" with photographers and reporters who outnumbered their subjects almost two to one.<sup>1</sup> These journalists had come to witness the opening of the first alternative service camp for conscientious objectors in the history of the United States. The media attention surprised the new campers, most of whom were unaware that they were the first such men to be assigned to the soon-to-be-nationwide program known as Civilian Public Service (CPS).<sup>2</sup> The new arrivals came from various socioeconomic, political, and religious backgrounds, but they were united by a common opposition to the use of military force to resolve international conflicts.

Despite their initial hesitation, the conscientious objectors at Patapsco quickly adjusted to the media presence, endlessly posing for photographers who wanted "pictures of the boys reading Bibles or peeling vegetables, or preferably, both."<sup>3</sup> Never mind that the camp would not begin its formal work program for several days; the media presented to the public the image of a fully-functioning site packed with idealistic, enthusiastic workers, laboring tirelessly on projects of park renovation. The conscientious objectors

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<sup>1</sup> Edith Wildman, *Journal*, May 15, 1941, Subject File: Civilian Public Service, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Swarthmore, PA (SCPC).

<sup>2</sup> Esther B. Rhoads to Edith Newman, May 16, 1941, Correspondence: #3 Patapsco Camp, Center on Conscience and War Records (DG 025), Box 2, SCPC.

<sup>3</sup> Wilma Ludlow, "Is a Third Order Being Born?" *The Christian Century*, August 27, 1941, 1049.

quickly labeled the park a “Gold Fish Bowl” in which their every move was visible to the outside world.<sup>4</sup> Patapsco was to serve as an example for future CPS camps and as a proving ground for this novel program of nonviolent alternative service in wartime. The campers largely welcomed the attention. It would help them to prove to the American public the viability of their anti-war views through their war. Sixteen months later, as the camp was quietly closed and the remaining men transferred to a more remote location, it had become apparent to the conscientious objectors that the CPS program as originally conceived would need to change drastically in order to accomplish their goal.

The Civilian Public Service was organized partly to address the controversial treatment of conscientious objectors during the First World War. Prior to the 1917 draft, the federal government had never been forced to account for large numbers of conscientious objectors in a time of conscription. During the Civil War, a small number of objectors were punished for avoiding registration, often involving prison sentences or forcible enrollment in front-line units. Most objectors, however, were not subject to this treatment. While the Union government allowed a small number of men to serve in military hospitals, those who sought to avoid military service typically found the means to do so. Northern objectors willing to ignore the disapproval of many pacifist sects could avoid conscription by securing a substitute, or in some cases, by having one hired against the objector’s will by his family or friends.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Confederate laws allowed some conscientious objectors to purchase an exemption until late in the war. More importantly, lax enforcement of conscription laws in the North and South prevented

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<sup>4</sup> Mulford Q. Sibley and Philip E. Jacob, *Conscription of Conscience: The American State and the Conscientious Objector, 1940-1947* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1952), 124.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

either government from successfully prosecuting many who avoided the draft altogether. With the draft accounting for only 8 percent of all soldiers in the Civil War, conscientious objectors were generally easier to ignore than to accommodate.<sup>6</sup>

This changed upon the United States' entrance into the First World War, as the country prepared to send millions of young men, the majority of them drafted, to fight in Europe. With the passage of the Selective Service Act of 1917, Woodrow Wilson assured the American public that the draft was "in no sense a conscription of the unwilling; it is, rather, a selection from a nation which has volunteered in mass."<sup>7</sup> Understanding that the draft was not as universally supported as the president declared, policymakers sought to address adequately the concerns of conscientious objectors while ensuring that even those with pacifist leanings were enlisted in some capacity. Fears of large numbers of anti-war registrants and questions of sincerity hampered the federal government's efforts to create an effective alternative to military service. Ultimately, the draft law allowed only for established members of the historic peace churches (the Society of Friends, Mennonite, and Brethren Churches) to register as conscientious objectors and be sent to military camps to perform non-combatant work.<sup>8</sup> What exactly this would entail, however, was intentionally left undefined. In an effort to discourage young men from claiming objector status, the Wilson administration waited until ten

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<sup>6</sup> Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 18.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>8</sup> Francis Heisler, "The Law versus the Conscientious Objector," *The University of Chicago Law Review* 20, no. 3 (Spring 1953): 441.

months after the draft law was passed before defining non-combatant work as service in the Medical Corps, Quartermaster Corps, and Engineer Service.<sup>9</sup>

While the arrangement was acceptable for some conscientious objectors, it was problematic for many others. Those who were unwilling to directly serve the military in any fashion were forced to choose between compromising their beliefs and risking court martial. The government sent those who chose the latter to prisons at Fort Jay, Fort Leavenworth, and Alcatraz Island. There they endured limited rations, dark cells, shackling, and solitary confinement, among other forms of abuse.<sup>10</sup> Other pacifists, including those unable to gain objector status because of their religious background, opted either to refuse service when called or to avoid registration entirely. While the government was again unable to pursue the majority of those who failed to register, the men who were prosecuted for doing so received strong sentences for violating the conscription law. Those who openly refused to register after being discovered by the state received its harshest punishments. By the end of the war, 142 men had been sentenced to life in prison and 17 had been sentenced to death.<sup>11</sup> The public outrage over this treatment of conscientious objectors would help to prompt the federal government to offer more favorable terms to conscientious objectors in the future.

Thus, the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940, passed on September 16 of that year in anticipation of the American entrance into the growing world war, provided

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<sup>9</sup> Sibley and Jacob, *Conscription of Conscience*, 13.

<sup>10</sup> National Civil Liberties Bureau, "Political Prisoners in Federal Military Prisons, 1918," from *Conscience in America: A Documentary History of Conscientious Objection in America, 1757-1967*, ed. Lillian Schlissel (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1959), 150-9.

<sup>11</sup> Sibley and Jacob, *Conscription of Conscience*, 14. Fortunately for these men, none of the executions were ever carried out, and the last of those in prison were granted amnesty in 1933.

two new concessions to those who refused military conscription. First, it opened the conscientious objector classification to anyone “who, by reason of religious training and belief, is conscientiously opposed to participation in war in any form.”<sup>12</sup> This enabled members of any religious group, as well as those with no formal affiliation whose personal convictions were incompatible with warfare, to refuse military service. Second, it called for the creation of an alternative service program for those unwilling to serve in non-combatant roles in the military. President Roosevelt formalized the program the following February, when he signed Executive Order no. 8675 calling for the director of the Selective Service to “establish, designate, or determine work of national importance under civilian direction” for these men.<sup>13</sup>

The CPS would place conscientious objectors in camps, where they would provide free labor on various projects, beginning with soil conservation, reforestation, land drainage, and fire fighting. The work was to be jointly administered by the Selective Service System and the National Service Board for Religious Objectors (NSBRO), a collective service organization consisting of representatives from the Friends, Brethren, and Mennonite Churches. Representing the Selective Service was General Lewis B.

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<sup>12</sup> *The Selective Training and Service Act of 1940*, Public Law 783, 76<sup>th</sup> Cong., 3d sess. (September 16, 1940) in Vol IV of *The Selective Service Act: Its Legislative History, Amendments, Appropriations, Cognates, and Prior Instruments of Security, Special Monograph No. 2* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1954), 227. The power to decide whether to grant or deny conscientious objector status (IV-E) was given to the local draft boards, which were to examine individual cases to determine the sincerity of each draftee’s convictions. These boards were notoriously disinclined to award IV-E status, frequently denying the applications of well-documented pacifists in order to meet quotas. Regional Boards of Appeal would review those whose objector status was rejected and offer a ruling typically based on a review by the Department of Justice. Overall, 3,362 appellants were granted IV-E status, 2,014 were sent to military noncombatant service, and 3,071 were rejected entirely. See Sibley and Jacob, *Conscription of Conscience*, 53-75.

<sup>13</sup> Executive Order No. 8675, *Work of National Importance*, in Vol. II of *Conscientious Objection, Special Monograph No. 11* (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1950), 9.

Hershey, a man of Mennonite descent who was generally regarded favorably by CPS men. Each camp would be directly controlled by the service organization of one of the major churches and would receive work assignments from a supervisory agency, such as the Forest Service, National Parks Service, or a similar state organization. All work assignments would be subject to approval from every group involved in the camp's administration, ensuring that controversial projects would not be approved.

When representatives from the three peace churches first presented Franklin Roosevelt with a formal proposal for an alternative service program in January, 1940, the men received a hearty endorsement from the president: "That's getting down to a practical basis. It shows us what work the conscientious objectors can do without fighting. Excellent! Excellent!"<sup>14</sup> Roosevelt had reason to be excited about the suggested program, as provisions for conscientious objectors seemed more necessary and advantageous than ever. For Roosevelt, religious conscientious objection could play a role in expanding the power of the state to wage war in Europe and Asia. Beginning with his message to Congress on January 6, 1941, in which he simultaneously promoted the Lend-Lease Bill and the "four essential human freedoms," the president wedded his war policies to the promotion of individual liberties and personal security. As David Kennedy notes, Roosevelt frequently invoked religious toleration as the trait that differentiated Americans and their enemies and "defined the very essence of the American character."

<sup>15</sup> As a result, forcing religious pacifists to violate their beliefs or punishing them for refusing to do so threatened to

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<sup>14</sup> Melvin Gingerich, *Service for Peace: A History of Mennonite Civilian Public Service* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1949), 44.

<sup>15</sup> Kennedy, David M. *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 469, 760.

undermine the rhetorical basis of American involvement in the war. Rather, by placing conscientious objectors in alternative service camps rather than prison cells, the government effectively enlisted them as active participants in the Selective Service System, simultaneously redefining and reinforcing the notion of service for citizenship.

Furthermore, as the president was well aware, his government was hardly the first to approve such a provision for conscientious objectors. In fact, despite its precarious military situation, Great Britain maintained substantially more liberal accommodations for conscientious objectors throughout the war. The National Service Act of 1939 allowed men to object to war for any reason, religious or secular, provided they demonstrate their sincerity to an independent civilian tribunal.<sup>16</sup> Like the United States, Britain offered noncombatant work in the military as well as civilian work for those opposed to military service of any form. Unlike the American government, however, Britain offered an unconditional exemption for absolute pacifists, which enabled them to avoid conscripted service entirely.<sup>17</sup> Thus, while the United States continued to imprison the small proportion of objectors who refused to register for the draft, its besieged ally continued to promote substantially more liberal policies toward those who objected to war.

Indeed, though General Hershey declared the CPS “an experiment such as no nation has ever made before... to find out whether our democracy is big enough to preserve minority rights in a time of national emergency,” it was largely modeled upon

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<sup>16</sup> Sibley and Jacob, *Conscription of Conscience*, 4.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

similar programs established in Great Britain.<sup>18</sup> During the First World War, Britain allowed some 4,500 conscientious objectors to perform civilian work in agriculture, industry, and bomb-disposal.<sup>19</sup> While the American government did not originally intend to provide the same opportunity to objectors, the Farm Furlough Act of 1918, which allowed the War Department to grant soldiers furlough for much-needed farm labor, was eventually modified to include conscientious objectors. In the final months of the war, about 1,200 of the 4,000 registered objectors were deemed “sincere” by the War Department Board of Inquiries and assigned to agricultural work.<sup>20</sup> Britain’s National Service Act of 1939 expanded its alternative service program, placing those granted conditional exemption from the draft in various civilian-run projects, occasionally with pay. Two years later, as the United States began its own alternative service program, the Canadian government announced the formation of the Canadian Fellowship Service, which assigned objectors to road or park maintenance under civilian direction. These conscripts received maintenance and 50 cents per day for their labor, an amount that almost doubled when the men were assigned to farm or factory work later in the war.<sup>21</sup> The Civilian Public Service was thus neither as novel nor comparatively liberal as its proponents suggested. The experience of conscientious objectors in Britain and Canada was undoubtedly more comfortable than that of their American counterparts. As the actions of the men of the CPS suggest, however, many of them were less interested in

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<sup>18</sup> Robert E. S. Thompson, “Onward, Christian Soldiers! The Nation’s Conscientious Objectors Work Out Their Convictions,” *Saturday Evening Post*, August 16, 1941, 27.

<sup>19</sup> Sibley and Jacob, *Conscription of Conscience*, 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 13-4.

<sup>21</sup> Gingerich, *Service for Peace*, 415-417.

attaining security than recognition for performing genuine, challenging work of national importance.

### **Historiography and This Study's Contribution**

The Civilian Public Service as a whole has received little attention from academic historians, and recent scholarship is particularly limited. Most major, scholarly works emerged in the years immediately following the Second World War, when the future of conscription remained a topic of immediate concern. In 1950, the Selective Service published *Conscientious Objection* as part of its 18-monograph history of the draft in World War II. Its discussion of the CPS focuses primarily on the regulations governing all aspects of campers' lives, from work assignments and safety protocols to sanitation and laundry service. Individual campers are absent from the study, their experiences left to be inferred from statistics and decrees. The federally-employed authors of this work present the CPS as a well-designed program that was nonetheless plagued by "individual conscientious objector assignees to the C.P.S. camps and small groups of the same who were a source of deterring irritation to satisfactory operation."<sup>22</sup> This explanation unsurprisingly absolved the government of responsibility for the early shortcomings of the CPS while suggesting that the structural problems of which both the conscientious objectors and the government frequently complained were inconsequential in the face of disinterested conscripts.

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<sup>22</sup> Selective Service System, *Conscientious Objection, Special Monograph No. 11*, vol. 1, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1950), 227.

Two years after the release of this monograph, Mulford Q. Sibley and Philip E. Jacob published *Conscription of Conscience: The American State and the Conscientious Objector, 1940-1947*, which remains the most respected and definitive treatment of the CPS. Sibley and Jacob draw from a much wider range of sources to examine the program from a legal, religious, and political perspective. Like the Selective Service study, Sibley and Jacob's work devotes much of its attention to the interactions between the various branches of the NSBRO, the Selective Service, and other administrative bodies. Again, the conflicts within the camps and contributions of individual campers are given relatively little attention. Unlike the Selective Service, however, the authors are not parsimonious in assigning blame for the deficiencies of the program. The authors, both noted pacifists, conclude that "the personal egotism and self-centeredness of even dedicated conscientious objectors, and of the inexperience and often blind optimism of church groups" handicapped the CPS.<sup>23</sup> The majority of the blame, however, was assigned to the governmental overseers of the program: "The pattern of C.P.S. administration woven by Selective Service, by Congress, and by the project supervisors restrained liberty and failed to provide adequate incentives to service. This not only thwarted adequate recognition of freedom of conscience; it robbed the nation of the full measure of the C.O.'s potential services."<sup>24</sup>

The dichotomous conclusions reached by Mulford and Jacob and the Selective Service reflect the divergent goals for the CPS work program envisioned by its original designers. For the peace churches, the early camp projects were acceptable during the

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<sup>23</sup> Sibley and Jacob, *Conscription of Conscience*, 331.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 240.

introductory period of the CPS, but would soon need to be replaced by more socially significant endeavors, such as reconstruction work abroad. In contrast, the government sought to create disciplined, compliant, and inconspicuous groups of men laboring on projects chosen for their ability to keep the objectors busy, rather than the value they provided to the public. In retrospect, neither of these visions provided a realistic means of accommodating conscientious objectors in wartime. The government could not reasonably be expected to provide scarce resources to transport, supply, and protect reconstruction workers abroad, nor could it dedicate sufficient personnel and financial resources to ensure that valuable work was constantly available in the camps at home. At the same time, sequestering the conscientious objectors in isolated, poorly-supplied soil conservation or forestry camps would not only engender poor relations between campers and the government, it would do little to justify to the public the draft exemptions given to these men.

Though the peace churches and government made sincere efforts to create a compromise plan for the CPS, much of the major changes that characterized the later years of the program originated not in the offices of the NSBRO or Selective Service, but in the camps themselves. With the exception of the institutional histories produced by the peace churches themselves, however, most CPS scholarship offers very little discussion of individual camps. Fortunately, the wealth of resources available at the Swarthmore College Peace Collection, the primary repository for administrative documents, correspondence, and personal papers from the camps, allows one to examine the evolution of the CPS through the experiences of the objectors themselves. With these

records, one can see that most men of the CPS were not the recalcitrant loafers described by the Selective Service, nor were they simply passively subject to the dictates of their administrators in the government or peace churches. Rather, they were openly, personally concerned with the success of the program and actively sought to reform the CPS in ways they felt would demonstrate that their ideals could translate into valuable, productive endeavors, even in a time of emergency.

Because of the variety of camp locations, sizes, religious affiliations, and primary work projects, no conscientious objector's experience can be said to be typical. While a careful analysis of all 152 CPS camps would fall outside the scope of almost any work, my study aims to examine a sample of camps that reflects the geographic, vocational, and administrative diversity of the program. Camp #3 at Patapsco and #8 at Magnolia, Arkansas represent the type of camp to which the majority of CPS men were assigned at some point during the war years. In these units, conscientious objectors labored on projects of park renovation, soil conservation, and fire prevention. Camp #103, located primarily in Missoula, Montana, placed young men in the well-publicized, hazardous role of parachuting out of small aircraft to fight forest fires in the west, and embodied the most successful characteristics of CPS land camps. Camp #49, at Philadelphia State Hospital, was one of the largest and best-known units of mental hospital attendants, an especially popular form of service in the later years of the war. Finally, Camp #115, in which men served as human guinea pigs for medical experiments, demonstrates the extent to which some conscientious objectors were willing to risk their health for public service.

Taken together, the experiences of the men in these camps show the extent to which they labored to make their work dangerous, challenging, and significant enough to prove the value and viability of alternative service. Certainly, for many conscientious objectors, service in the CPS would be disappointing, marked by isolation and unsatisfying, make-work projects. To combat their frustrations over the work program, many of the men in these camps coordinated targeted public relations campaigns, volunteered for community service outside of their assigned projects, and deliberately prepared themselves to take part in postwar relief work. Others sought to engender comparisons between conscientious objectors and soldiers by volunteering in great numbers for projects that involved extreme physical effort, humanitarian service, conspicuous sacrifice, and the risk or even guarantee of bodily harm. By the end of the war, the work program of the CPS bore little resemblance to that envisioned by either the peace churches or the federal government at the program's inauguration. Negotiating with the peace churches and government to gain more socially significant work, if only for a small, fortunate contingent of campers, CPS men but did much to popularize the image of the conscientious objector as a willing participant in dangerous, dramatic work of national importance. In doing so, they demonstrated their willingness to go to great lengths to fulfill their obligations of citizenship and helped to establish a secure, meaningful role for the conscientious objector in modern America.

### **Camp #3 – Patapsco State Park, Maryland**

Located ten miles from the center of Baltimore with regular bus service to the city and suburbs, Patapsco State Park seemed to offer an ideal setting for men willing to spread their message of peace to the surrounding community. The park consisted of 2,200 acres of hardwood forest on both sides of the Patapsco River, offering a popular, quiet escape for the residents of Baltimore. For almost a decade this had been the home of Camp Tydings, a Civilian Conservation Corps camp tasked with constructing trails, picnic areas, pavilions, and campsites.<sup>25</sup> By the time the CPS moved in, the grounds had been abandoned for a year and the facilities were in various states of disrepair. Many of the initial CPS workers worked to convert the site to house up to 100 men, though it would take several months for the camp to receive enough conscripts to reach this capacity.

Though the camp was administered by the Society of Friends, the campers were a heterogeneous group. They were Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Quakers, Christadelphians, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Lutherans, among other religious and even non-religious affiliations. Some had middle school educations, others held graduate degrees. The men represented a wide spectrum of personalities, convictions, backgrounds and abilities. When recording his impressions of the campers, director Ernest Wildman recognized that some men would be more productive than others. Men like Bryn Hammerstrom, a Philadelphia chemist, who was a "number one fellow in all ways, positive considerate leader [and] excellent worker who knows well how to do all things," and Reuben Cobbs, a "fine Negro, good worker [and] excellent worker" were

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<sup>25</sup> *Newsweek*, Religion, April 21, 1941.

tireless laborers who demonstrated an unflinching dedication to their cause.<sup>26</sup> Others, like Robert J. Francis, an occasional loafer who had “a clear case of girl at home,” would require more coaxing. Some, like Sturge Steinert, Ivan Fort, and Kenneth Ives were parolees, having originally chosen prison sentences rather than registering for the draft before transferring to the CPS after Patapsco opened. And of course, few would forget the antics of the eccentric Jehovah’s Witness Tony Carnevale, who despite his threats to assault photographers, was a favorite interview subject for journalists. His intentionally scandalous statements to the press and frequent condemnation of his fellow campers led many of them to formally request his removal from the camp entirely.<sup>27</sup> Future camps, whether run by the Friends, Brethren, or Mennonites would be similarly diverse. In each of these camps, the mixed composition of the men would at times prove to be a great strength, and at others, a serious weakness.

For these men, the work program at Patapsco seemingly promised a variety of tasks to suit their individual skills. The majority of the other proposed CPS camps were to be located in remote settings in national forests or agricultural districts, where they would devote the thrust of their energy to forestry or soil conservation. A state park like Patapsco required a greater diversity of projects. The camp’s administrators had already approved a number of jobs, including the construction of various camp buildings, public shelters and outdoor fireplaces, a massive park survey, the clearing of fire lines, improvement of the land, the planting and maintaining of 30 acres of trees, and during the

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<sup>26</sup> E. A. Wildman, Comments Regarding Individual Campers in the First Group at Patapsco at the end of the first five weeks, Correspondence.

<sup>27</sup> Steering Committee Minutes, February 3, 1942, Camp Government Council Minutes, American Friends Service Committee Records (DG 002), Section 1, Serious O, Box 53, SCPC.

dry season, fire-fighting.<sup>28</sup> In fact, most of the work approved consisted of tasks previously undertaken by the park's former CCC inhabitants. As NSBRO secretary Paul Comly French informed the campers, the administrators specifically chose these projects because they knew that they would prove acceptable to the public. Hopefully, once visitors to the camp saw the beneficial work being performed by the draftees, more ambitious plans would be improved, including earthquake relief camps in Mexico, and public housing construction and rural rehabilitation in the US.<sup>29</sup>

With this in mind, the campers understood the necessity of developing a positive public image. Many of the men had personally encountered strong opposition to their beliefs. One recalled the shock of hearing an enraged man "swearing up and down the people who were not loyal citizens" after a speech by a pacifist at his college.<sup>30</sup> Those who had not been exposed to this disdain before they arrived at camp would certainly see it during their service. Interested observers from around the country sent a large volume of mail to Camp #3. Much of it was supportive, but campers received their fair share of hate mail, including one letter labeling them "Hitler's Little Helpers."<sup>31</sup> Most campers felt that the United States' looming entry into the war would only encourage more negative responses. Accordingly, the camp government coordinated a public relations strategy for presenting its efforts in a favorable light. Ernest Wildman, the first camp director, assured his superiors that his campers would exemplify the highest ideals of the

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<sup>28</sup> Thompson, "Onward, Christian Soldiers!" 54.

<sup>29</sup> Bryn Hammarstrom to Ric, July 16, 1941, Bryn Hammarstrom Papers, Civilian Public Service Personal Papers and Collected Materials (DG 056), Series 1, Box 17, SCPC.

<sup>30</sup> Reed Smith, Interview by Sue Knox, October 10, 2006, Civilian Public Service Personal Papers and Collected Materials (DG 056), Series 3, Box 8, SCPC.

<sup>31</sup> Edward Orser, "Involuntary Community: Conscientious Objectors at Patapsco State Park During World War II," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 72 (1977), 139.

CPS. “We will be courteous and considerate and we will bear in mind that we have an opportunity through this medium to affect the understanding of a good many people.”<sup>32</sup> Campers formed a public relations committee to create press releases and organize meetings between conscientious objectors and the public. In one week alone, men from Patapsco spoke at eight different locations around Baltimore to promote the CPS.<sup>33</sup> The men formed a baseball team which competed against local teams, including a well-attended victory against Fort George Meade’s 29<sup>th</sup> Engineer Corps.<sup>34</sup>

The most important part of the public relations program involved showing those in the community that the men were not idly passing their time at Patpasco. The campers published the *Patapsco Peacemaker*, a weekly newspaper that they sent to various individuals, groups, and other CPS camps throughout the country. It would serve as a model for future papers at other camps. The public relations committee arranged for guided tours of the camp on weekends, public celebrations at the park, and extended stays for visitors who wished to take part in the work projects. For the camp government, public relations would remain central to almost every aspect of their planning. One camper, in a letter to the editor of the *Peacemaker*, concisely expressed the intent of campers to demonstrate the superiority of peaceful, constructive labor over violence: “We have tried to establish a standard, a miniature, that the world might come to the

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<sup>32</sup> Ernest Wildman to James P. Mullin, May 24, 1941, Correspondence.

<sup>33</sup> Minutes of Public Relations Committee, November 24, 1941, Camp Administration Records (DG 002), Section 1, Series A-1, Box 2d, SCPC.

<sup>34</sup> *Patapsco Peacemaker*, August 13, 1942, American Friends Service Committee Records (DG 002), Section 3, Box 1, SCPC.

conclusion that war has meant nothing to both sides and its only history has been blood.”<sup>35</sup>

The men of Patapsco knew that the most effective tool for shaping public opinion was the work they provided. Early in the camp’s life, men approached their jobs with eagerness and determination to prove its value. The men built tables, toilets, benches, roadside drainage ditches, and trails for hikers. Some stayed at the camp repairing the buildings, maintaining equipment, cleaning the quarters, or preparing meals. Campers particularly enjoyed working at the nearby state nursery in College Park. Of all the tasks they pursued, the men were most eager to find more opportunities to battle forest fires, a job they felt was “as valuable as any they’d been given to do.”<sup>36</sup> The superintendent of Patapsco State Park was surprised by the productivity of his new workers, claiming “I had CCC boys for five years and NYA [National Youth Administration] boys for two years and these conchies are the best yet.”<sup>37</sup> The campers were aware of the productivity records of the CCC and took delight in exceeding them. They exhibited a “strange pride in doing far more work in the eight-hour day than their predecessors,” and often donated hours of their free time to camp renovation projects each week.<sup>38</sup>

After working on the same assignments for several months, however, the men began to temper their enthusiasm for the work. Despite the variety of jobs available at Patapsco, campers still felt that many of these projects did not offer the type of work that

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<sup>35</sup> *Patapsco Peacemaker*, September 15, 1941.

<sup>36</sup> Camp Meeting minutes, June 4, 1942, Camp Administration Records.

<sup>37</sup> Thompson, “Onward Christian Soldiers!” 54. The term “conchies,” along with “conscientious objectors” and “pacifists,” was commonly used by outsiders to describe the men of the CPS. Those in the camp tended to refer to themselves as “campers” “COs,” “Ceepeessers,” or “Patapscoites.” A suggestion by the camp’s second director to adopt the name “Conscientious Citizens” was never adopted.

<sup>38</sup> Ludlow, “Is a Third Order Being Born?” 1049-1050.

they desired. While few men had specific tasks in mind when they joined the CPS, many hoped to be performing work that would be socially significant and technically challenging. Such descriptive qualities did not always lend themselves to tasks such as camp facilities maintenance and picnic table construction. Furthermore, campers were often unable to see how their individual assignments fit into greater plans for park improvement. One man wrote to CPS headquarters in Philadelphia explaining that “there was no general idea of connection of the work they were doing with the parks as a whole; work that was done one week would be ‘undone’ the next.”<sup>39</sup> Even when campers pressed for an explanation of the purpose of their work, it was usually declined. One draftee complained before the camp government council that the administrators typically told campers to perform their work without question rather than seeking to understand the greater significance of each task.<sup>40</sup> Another vented his frustration in an editorial in the *Peacemaker*, echoing the view of many of his comrades that “this piecemeal construction work about camp is slowly driving us bugs.”<sup>41</sup>

Complicating the matter was the lack of materials provided for campers to complete their assignments. Because of limited funds and the high priority assigned to national defense measures, the Maryland Department of Forests and Parks and National Parks Service required projects to have minimal financial outlay. Men assigned to build outdoor fireplaces in the park were forced to stop each day after building just one unit because of a chronic shortage of cement. The *Peacemaker* expressed its disappointment

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<sup>39</sup> Lloyd Estes to James Mullin, February 22, 1942, Camp Administration Records.

<sup>40</sup> Discussion Evening with Bernard Walton and Bob English, Subject: Work of National Importance, June 12, 1941, Camp Government Council Minutes.

<sup>41</sup> *Patapsco Peacemaker*, October 10, 1941, American Friends Service Committee Records (DG 002), Section 3, Box 1, SCPC.

that such problems continued to plague the camp, stating “we are used to this sort of thing, only we had hoped it was a thing of the past!”<sup>42</sup> Too often, crews would be forced to discontinue work while they waited for supplies to trickle down the bureaucratic network of the CPS to Patapsco. At one point, a road-building crew managed, after much lobbying, to secure a tractor and a scraper for their work, only to find that the former was too small to pull the latter.<sup>43</sup> Though the National Park Service felt the camp could hold 100 campers by late August, 1941, it was clear that adding too many new campers would only exacerbate the shortage of materials. Explaining the difficulty of Patapsco’s position, a camp administrator replied to the NPS’s declaration: “I am very much concerned about building up the camp’s strength before the additional equipment is actually on hand at the camp. To do so would be another blow to the morale of the camp.”<sup>44</sup>

For many, morale was already perilously low. Shortly after arriving, camper Emerson Darnell wrote home and expressed his and other draftees’ worry that CPS might not be a worthwhile experience. “Only by the furthest stretch of imagination could anything be called of national importance, and I am distinctly unsettled in my mind as to whether I made the right decision. But there are others here whom I have talked to who feel somewhat the same way.”<sup>45</sup> The work programs suffered further from the low spirits of the men. Enthusiasm declined at the work site, occasionally resulting in laborers walking off the job in frustration. Men complained to their superiors that their projects

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<sup>42</sup> *Patapsco Peacemaker*, Vol 1 Issue 1, n.d.

<sup>43</sup> Frank Olmstead, October 23, 1941, Correspondence.

<sup>44</sup> James P. Mullin to George Reeves, August 27, 1941, Correspondence.

<sup>45</sup> Emerson Darnell to his mother, n.d., Darnell Family Papers, Civilian Public Service Personal Papers and Collected Materials (DG 056), Series 1, Box 10, SCPC.

presented little challenge and that they were simply “piddling around.”<sup>46</sup> Soon, those in charge of the CPS program began to worry that Camp #3 was a lost cause. Less than two months after its celebrated opening, CPS Associate Secretary James P. Mullin warned, “If the work project at Patapsco is insignificant, then we will have to give it up and move to another location.”<sup>47</sup>

The campers themselves proposed several new projects, including the construction of a new home for an elderly woman living on the park grounds, a public swimming pool, bath house, ice house, and the manning of additional fire towers outside of the park itself.<sup>48</sup> The complex structure of camp administration, however, effectively prevented most projects from ever being implemented. In order for a new job to be approved, it would have to be accepted by several different groups. After passing a vote in a camp government meeting and gaining the support of the camp director, a proposal was subject to the approval of a technical agency of the federal government. Unlike most other camps, Patapsco had a “dual agency arrangement,” in which it was under the aegis of both the National Park Service and the Maryland Department of Forests and Parks.<sup>49</sup> If these agencies gave their endorsement, the proposed project would then be sent to the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), the Quaker service branch of the NSBRO, which was nominally in charge of the camp. The AFSC would then present the project to the Selective Service for final approval.<sup>50</sup> If any of the aforementioned organizations

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<sup>46</sup> Memorandum to James Mullin from Charlotte Salmon, July 18, 1941, Correspondence.

<sup>47</sup> James P. Mullin to Paul Comly French, July 19, 1941, Correspondence.

<sup>48</sup> Nelson Fuson, “About Patapsco,” Correspondence.

<sup>49</sup> Arthur Gamble to Mary Newman, June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1942, Camp Administration Records.

<sup>50</sup> Because General Hershey of the Selective Service and his appointee to head the CPS, Lt. Col. Fred Kosch, held the final say on camp activities, the NSBRO argued that the camps were not “under civilian direction”

objected to a project, it would be eliminated. Because of the drastically different types of work sought by the government and church groups, most proposals met this fate.

Although the camp government was a forum for discussing ideas for new projects, business in the meetings was conducted at an agonizingly slow pace. The men of Patapsco held widely divergent views on how to best contribute meaningfully to the CPS program, so consensus proved difficult to achieve. In the words of one camper, there were “52 different brands of cosmic jive” present at each meeting.<sup>51</sup> Attendees debated issues thoroughly before putting them to up to vote, with unanimous consent for approval. Over time, the inefficiency of this system became more and more problematic. The camp government quickly gained a reputation as a source of much discussion and little action. Eventually, the campers agreed to only require a two-thirds vote after two discussions of a new item.<sup>52</sup> Though a necessary reform, this measure did little to increase the capability of the camp government to address the myriad problems faced by campers. Despite its many limitations, the camp government council remained the Patapsco men’s primary means of lobbying for work of national importance.

While campers’ relations with their own leadership were not ideal, their interactions with the Selective Service were much worse. The draftees understood the importance of cultivating an amicable relationship with their government overseers. Visits from Major McLean, a representative of the Selective Service, however, revealed how dissimilar the government’s concept of work of national importance was from that

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and thus in violation of the Selective Service Act of 1940. For more, see: George Q. Flynn, *Lewis B. Hershey, Mr. Selective Service*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 130-31.

<sup>51</sup> *Patapsco Peacemaker*, July 1942.

<sup>52</sup> Camp Meeting Minutes, February 5, 1942, Camp Government Council Minutes.

of the campers. Rather than concerning himself with the productivity at Patapsco, McLean devoted his time to making the campers meet military standards of disciplined appearance. While the campers' enthusiasm was undoubtedly linked to the perceived value of their assignments, McLean equated the attitudes of the campers to the cleanliness of their living quarters. The "morale" section of his camp visit reports almost exclusively discussed the physical appearance of the campers and their barracks. Two weeks after a visit in which he worried that "their barracks are very disorderly and they seem to resent any suggestions for improvement," he was surprised to see that the "attitude of men seems to be changing and a better view being taken toward neatness, camp housekeeping, etc."<sup>53</sup> Two months later the reports again turned critical toward the neatness and order of the camps. Campers resented these criticisms. One wrote to the *Peacemaker* expressing his astonishment:

As I first read Major McLean's report I became incredulous, finally indignant.

One would think that our camp was a dump, our attitude that of surly slaves being driven to work. It magnified enormously our lack of impeccable taste in manners of orderliness, system, neatness, and cleanliness – yet totally ignored the existence and development of those exclusive intangible human values of tolerance and genuine good fellowship.<sup>54</sup>

The campers' inattention to decorum, though derided by the men as insignificant, inevitably resulted in unfavorable reports sent to Washington, hampering their ability to secure favorable work and resources from government overseers.

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<sup>53</sup> Report of Camp Visited, October 10, 1941, Correspondence; Report of Camp Visited, October 24, 1941, Correspondence.

<sup>54</sup> *Patapsco Peacemaker*, October 24, 1941.

Following the declarations of war on Japan and Germany, the conscientious objectors at Patapsco grew increasingly concerned about the impact of their labor. Less than a week after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the *Peacemaker* declared, “Projects that seemed significant a week ago now find us conscience-stricken as our nation and the world enter a long period of extreme trial.”<sup>55</sup> For the rest of the camp’s existence, the men attempted to find work that was “no less dramatic, no less dangerous and no less urgent than military service” to win public acceptance for their cause.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, the Selective Service was becoming even more concerned with assuaging the concerns of outsiders. It made sure that campers were aware that their views were even less popular than they had been before the war. Letters sent to the Service calling for the end of the IV-E objector classification were forwarded to Patapsco and read by the camp’s director in front of the men.<sup>57</sup> Regulations, including one instructing campers to remove their cars from the park and ones increasing the weekly work hours requirement were designed not to increase the effectiveness of campers’ labor, but to assure the public that the conscientious objectors were not benefitting from any special treatment in wartime.

The war also brought with it a different nature of job proposals. For the government and much of the public, the most important work in the country was that which contributed to an American military victory. CPS workers found it increasingly difficult to separate their work from the war effort. Campers were asked to form disaster

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<sup>55</sup> *Patapsco Peacemaker*, December 12, 1941.

<sup>56</sup> *Patapsco Peacemaker*, March 8, 1942.

<sup>57</sup> Camp Meeting Minutes, March 5, 1942, Camp Administrative Records.

relief units and required to comply with blackout plans.<sup>58</sup> Much controversy ensued when the chairman of the local American Legion proposed a plan for campers to clear a road to an airplane spotter's tower on the camp grounds. The project was supported by the Maryland Department of Forests and Parks and the Selective Service, but it met heavy opposition from the campers. Some CPS men believed the plan to be worthwhile, but others opposed any work that was part of the national defense effort. A number of campers expressed their concern that this work would set a dangerous precedent for the CPS, leading them to pledge to accept jail sentences if the road was approved.<sup>59</sup> One man's mother even wrote to the *Peacemaker*, attacking those who supported the project, saying, "If there are boys who won't follow the dictates of my boy's conscious, they don't deserve to be in camp."<sup>60</sup> Despite this resistance, the project was eventually approved. A similar incident took place at the state nursery where campers had worked since the opening of the camp. When some of the workers found out that the trees they were growing were to be used as camouflage for Fort Bragg, North Carolina, they protested by going on a hunger strike.<sup>61</sup> In stark contrast to the situation before the war, the campers were now the ones disapproving of new ideas for work.

With little chance of securing official, government-sanctioned work of national importance within the park grounds, the campers were forced to pursue alternate means of valuable service. The most promising new area of work was in detached service

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<sup>58</sup> If the *Patapsco Peacemaker* is any indication, the campers did not take the threat of an air raid very seriously. Instructions printed in the January 21, 1942 issue tell campers, "As soon as the bombs start dropping, run like hell," and "If you should be the victim of a direct bomb hit, don't go to pieces."

<sup>59</sup> Lloyd Estes to James Mullin, February 22, 1942, Camp Administrative Records. There are no records of these men following through on their threats, likely because campers were allowed to opt out of the project if they objected.

<sup>60</sup> *Patapsco Peacemaker*, January 24, 1942.

<sup>61</sup> Smith, Interview, 4.

projects. These involved removing individual men or small groups from CPS camps and placing them in individual jobs in areas of need throughout the country and abroad. Following the first such venture, in which a man from a Cooperstown, New York camp was sent to work as a research assistant at Swarthmore College in November, 1941, the campers began to hear about dozens of proposed projects making their way through the bureaucratic ranks.<sup>62</sup> Some were fortunate enough to have their petitions accepted and receive assignments at some of these new positions. Oliver Pearson left to prepare microscope slides for the Fish and Wildlife Service while Smedley Bartram went to Florida to take part in a hookworm control project.<sup>63</sup> Others accepted positions in clerical or educational settings, or served in a nearby mental hospital. An informal poll taken by 52 campers at Patapsco revealed that 41 desired some form of detached service.<sup>64</sup> Many campers specifically expressed their willingness to work on rumored projects including reconstruction projects in England, firefighting in the west, and assignments in Japanese internment camps. When they heard of a group of chemical researchers seeking volunteers to study “the effects of gasses on the body,” four campers quickly volunteered.<sup>65</sup> While this project was never approved, the campers’ willingness to be used as test subjects in medical experiments anticipated an especially fraught yet popular form of service in the later years of the CPS.

For most campers at Patapsco, the desire for detached service was never fulfilled. Detached service programs were defeated for a variety of reasons, including organized

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<sup>62</sup> *Patapsco Peacemaker*, November 11, 1941.

<sup>63</sup> Report on Oliver Payne Pearson, on detached service from C.P.S. Camp #3, April 8, 1942, Work Reports.

<sup>64</sup> *Patapsco Peacemaker*, July 29, 1942.

<sup>65</sup> *Patapsco Peacemaker*, January 31, 1942.

opposition from groups like the American Legion. Domestic programs faced heavy scrutiny from the Selective Service, which was hesitant to embrace them for the same reason that the CPS enthusiastically received them: because they offered a chance for conscientious objectors to work with the public. Soon after the inception of detached service, Camp #3 learned that “any social service work that involved contact with the public was out.”<sup>66</sup> The federal government delayed or cancelled foreign service programs because Washington was incapable of dedicating the necessary logistical, military or diplomatic resources. Campers were particularly upset to hear that a plan for earthquake reconstruction assistance in Mexico was cancelled by the State Department, which feared that the Nazi government would use this “infiltration of pacifist C.O.s” as a propaganda tool.<sup>67</sup> In fact, conscientious objectors were so frequently disappointed by cancelled detached service projects that the Selective Service chastised church groups for disclosing information about the proposals before they were approved.<sup>68</sup> Ultimately, only a small minority of campers at Patapsco would take part in detached service before the camp was closed.

With their chances for wartime detached service looking grim, the men of Camp #3 looked to the future for their chance to provide significant work outside of the camp grounds. Since many campers hoped to assist with reconstruction projects in Europe following the completion of the war (just as members of the AFSC had done after World War I), they consciously emphasized the educational possibilities of camp life. The men devoted their free time to classes taught in camp, including first aid, nutrition, auto

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<sup>66</sup> Camp Meeting Minutes, February 26, 1942, Camp Administration Records.

<sup>67</sup> *Patapsco Peacemaker*, December 12, 1941.

<sup>68</sup> Selective Service System, *Conscientious Objection*, 183.

mechanics, foreign languages, and various other subjects that would help them rehabilitate war-torn Europe.<sup>69</sup> They called on the Department of Forests and Parks and the National Parks Service to provide on-the-job training, arguing that “not only would it fit them better for their work, and future work, but it would provide greater interest in the entire work project here.”<sup>70</sup> The camp government implemented a rotation system for jobs, allowing campers to work at various projects for short periods of time, hoping that the experience would prove useful in reconstruction work.<sup>71</sup> The technical agencies overseeing the camp persistently challenged this arrangement, however, arguing that it caused unnecessary inefficiencies. Despite this constant pressure, the rotation system remained largely in place until the camp’s closing.

The campers also pursued a particularly contentious issue in their own community that they felt to be of urgent importance. Patapsco State Park was officially segregated, with only a single, undeveloped, 100-acre tract set aside for the use of African-American visitors. Most campers objected to this unequal treatment, though they were divided on how to address the issue. Some felt that the 100-acre section should be developed, providing at least a small area where non-white visitors could enjoy themselves. Others stoutly refused, feeling that any work in establishing a recreation areas for African Americans would be tacit support for racial discrimination.<sup>72</sup> Regardless, the issue of park segregation was constantly discussed at Patpasco, and was eventually brought to the attention of the Department of Forests and Parks. For the state and federal governments,

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<sup>69</sup> Monthly Time and Work Report, May 1942, Work Reports: #3 Patapsco Camp, Center on Conscience and War Records (DG 025), Box 2, SCPC.

<sup>70</sup> Camp Meeting Minutes, February 19, 1942, Camp Government Council Meetings.

<sup>71</sup> Camp Meeting Minutes, February 6, 1941, Camp Administration Records.

<sup>72</sup> *Patapsco Peacemaker*, July 29, 1942.

this was exactly the type of attention they did not want the campers to draw. Indeed, after the men were informed that Patapsco would be abandoned and the campers moved to a more remote location, their assistant director Russell Freeman concluded that a major reason was that “the camp has concerned itself with the Negro issue.”<sup>73</sup> Ironically, the transfer of the camp would engender more conflict over desegregation. When the campers learned of their impending move to a part of Maryland that they and their government overseers feared would be less racially tolerant, the men began to suspect that the African-American members of their unit would be sent to another location. At a camp meeting shortly before the relocation, the campers were reported to be “completely united in urging that the camp be moved as an entire group.”<sup>74</sup> Because of the concerns of the Selective Service, this effort would be unsuccessful. For the campers, these efforts to eliminate racial segregation were an attempt to create important work that would personally impact the lives of a large group of people. For the government, these actions were an embarrassing source of civil conflict. Thus, unsurprisingly, little would come from the forward-thinking racial ideals at Patapsco.

The inability of the campers, AFSC, and government agencies to create a satisfactory work program was used to justify the Selective Service’s decision to close Camp #3 in May, 1942. Informing the camp government about the decision to close the camp and move the men to a river drainage project in Pokomoke, Maryland, Colonel Kosch was not reserved in his appraisal of the camp. “You will agree, I believe, that the work program at the Patapsco camp has been, since its inception, more or less under fire

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<sup>73</sup> Russell Freeman to Paul Furnas, August 13, 1942, Correspondence.

<sup>74</sup> Camp Meeting Minutes, August 27, 1942, Camp Administration Records.

from your camp directors, from the assingees, and from us. It has never worked satisfactorily.”<sup>75</sup> The campers, in turn, believed that the Selective Service no longer felt that the proximity of conscientious objectors to a major city like Baltimore was acceptable. Now that public opinion was less favorable and the views of the conscientious objector more dangerous than ever, the time was ripe to move the camp to a remote location where CPS would quietly labor far from the public view.

The campers vociferously resisted the move. Many believed that leaving Patapsco would reflect poorly on the CPS program. One camper wrote, “Complete removal of the camp from this site... would be an admission that what we have been occupied in doing for 14 months has not even enough importance to retain a skeleton crew of 30 or 40 men for maintenance.”<sup>76</sup> Mostly, campers were concerned that the drainage project in a secluded area would not meet their standards of important work. They were willing to concede that the task at their new camp could be more physically productive than their previous efforts. But as camper Carroll O’Neill explained, “in terms of social significance – in terms of value to people and their happiness – I don’t think there can be any doubt that Patapsco is more valuable than any of the other locations mentioned.”<sup>77</sup> This measure of value, however, was not the one used by the Selective Service. By the end of September, 1941, the camp at Patapsco would be abandoned. Thus, the first camp for conscientious objectors, the site that only sixteen months earlier had been a “Gold Fish Bowl” with the eyes of the country on it, met a

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<sup>75</sup> Lewis F. Kosch to Paul J. Furnas, June 22, 1942, Camp Administration Records.

<sup>76</sup> John S. Hollister to Paul Furnas, July 29, 1942, Camp Administration Records.

<sup>77</sup> J. Carroll O’Neill to Paul Furnas, August 12, 1942, Camp Administration Records.

quiet end. Though Patapsco was meant to be a model for future CPS camps, it instead served to highlight the weaknesses of the work program.

### **Camp #7 – Magnolia, Arkansas**

Opening shortly before the Patapsco camp closed and located outside of Magnolia, Arkansas, Camp #7 proved to be a longer-lasting, more successful early CPS camp. Like those at Patapsco, the conscientious objectors of Magnolia occupied an abandoned CCC camp, spending much of their spare time in their first few weeks renovating the facilities. Unlike Patapsco, Magnolia was administered by the Brethren Service Committee, another branch of the NSBRO, though the religious composition of the campers was similarly mixed. The primary distinction between the two camps, however, was one of work. The men of Magnolia were assigned to work under the supervision of Eugene Gatlin of the Soil Conservation Service (SCS). Though only three other SCS camps were established before Magnolia, soil conservation would ultimately occupy one-sixth of the man-hours contributed by the entire CPS system.<sup>78</sup> This work consisted primarily of erosion control projects, including the construction of terraced land, earthen dams, and channels for flood control. The men also constructed stock ponds and springs for livestock irrigation, and occasionally suppressed forest fires in the area.

Accordingly, the campers of Magnolia found much more significance in their daily tasks than the men of Patapsco. In a region still recovering from extended periods of drought and flooding, the Soil Conservation Service had already attained a favorable

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<sup>78</sup> Sibley and Jacob, *Conscription of Conscience*, 130.

reputation in the farming communities. An early edition of the camp's first newspaper assured campers that their efforts would be well-received by the people of Arkansas. "Those who think of the future of our nation remember that great civilizations have wasted away simply because of the fertility of the soil became depleted... There are many thinking people who believe that the future history of our country will reveal that the work done by C.P.S. camps was of utmost national importance in that the boys who shared in it were indeed patriots."<sup>79</sup> Though they often labored in seclusion, work performed on nearby farms allowed the campers to demonstrate the value of their labor to those in need. One farmer gratefully reported to the men after they finished building a stock pond on his property that he would not be willing to sell it for \$500.<sup>80</sup> And like their counterparts in Maryland, they were often told that their performance exceeded that of the previous occupants of their camp. The campers even organized a soil conservation class in their spare time in order to better understand the goal of their labors. And though the men of Magnolia were located far from any major city, their ability to personally interact with the residents of the town ensured that their results of their efforts would be more conspicuous and gratifying than those of Camp #3.

The campers also enjoyed more favorable relations with the Selective Service. Owing somewhat to its Brethren administration, the conscientious objectors of Magnolia were more inclined to adopt the rigid discipline of military service. Reflecting on the government's intolerance of unkempt bunks and sloppy mess halls, camp director J. H.

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<sup>79</sup> *Magnolia Time-Peace*, November 15, 1942, American Friends Service Committee Records (DG 002), Section 3, Box 2, SCPC.

<sup>80</sup> *Magnolia Peace Pathways*, October, 1944, Subject File: Civilian Public Service, Material from Individual Camps, Box 4, SCPC.

Mathis observed: “The pattern of the Brethren home is cleanliness and order. Therefore, we have a background that should put us far ahead of the basic requirements.”<sup>81</sup> Indeed, following Major McLean’s first visit to the camp in late December, 1941, Mathis received a glowing report for the Selective Service. Unlike the disdain with which the Patapsco assignees viewed McLean, Mathis found him to be “a patient, understanding, helpful gentleman.” Unsurprisingly, after praising the campers for their cleanliness, the major strongly approved their work program.<sup>82</sup> Later visits were similarly successful, with the quality of planning and execution of the work consistently acknowledged.

Though Magnolia certainly did not create as much press as the first CPS camp, what little attention it received was generally positive. An article in the Memphis’s *Commercial Appeal* again remarked on the neatly-maintained camp and compared the campers to soldiers:

These C.O.s are no physical weaklings... a distinct impression is registered on the observer of healthy, husky bodies. They are more serious-minded than would be found among groups of the same size at Army or other camps, which is to be expected, since these are men who have taken a stand opposed by an overwhelming sentiment and attitude of the general public.<sup>83</sup>

To encourage more favorable support, the campers established an interpretation committee, which emulated Patapsco’s public relations strategies. They quickly began publishing a newspaper, the *Magnolia Time-Peace*, “with the intended purpose of serving

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<sup>81</sup> *The Gospel Messenger*, January 17, 1942, 20.

<sup>82</sup> *Magnolia Time-Peace*, December 15, 1941.

<sup>83</sup> *The Commercial Appeal*, November 9, 1941.

as a peace organ to help mould and solidify as much public opinion as possible in the way of desiring peace, and working with herculean efforts to preserve it.”<sup>84</sup>

The men of the interpretation committee frequently spoke at churches and public events in Magnolia, but the town was not always receptive to their presence, particularly in the early years of the war. Townspeople complained that too many campers loitered in groups on the streets of Magnolia in their free time. They were particularly upset by campers’ wives living in town and visiting their husbands in camp, a privilege rarely afforded to other conscripted men. To address these problems, some in the community suggested increasing the campers’ working hours.<sup>85</sup> By early 1944, camper Max Ginsburg reported that public relations with the community had reached a new low, as evidenced by “a great deal of antagonism shown toward us by the natives.”<sup>86</sup> Though relations remained amicable with the farmers and others with whom the campers personally interacted, others in the community worried about their beliefs spreading. Such was the concern that girls from the nearby state college were expressly discouraged from interacting with conscientious objectors in social events.

To make matters worse, the work program of Camp #7 experienced a number of complications as the war progressed. In the summer of 1943, camper Morris Koston reported that conditions had severely deteriorated in the camp since he first arrived. The amount of government funding for soil conservation projects continued to decrease, while frequent increases in the weekly work hours exhausted the men. Expressing his

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<sup>84</sup> *Magnolia Time-Peace*, November 15, 1941.

<sup>85</sup> *Magnolia Peace Pathways*, May 16, 1942.

<sup>86</sup> Max H. Ginsburg to Hank, Camps General – Magnolia, American Friends Service Committee Records (DG 002), Section 1, Series A,1, Box 2c, SCPC.

disappointment, Koston suggested that the camp may be closed if the situation did not improve, declaring, “People seem to appreciate our ways less now than in June, 1941. We may move to other projects any day.”<sup>87</sup> A meeting between Ralph Stearns of the SCS and the CPS men revealed that both groups felt that the camp was not as productive as it could have been. Stearns complained that the many men were working without enthusiasm and too frequently questioned the decisions of their technical supervisors. The campers responded by complaining that the purpose of individual work projects were not being explained to them, leading them to fear that they were laboring on unplanned make-work projects. Stearns assured the men that these efforts were carefully planned, but nonetheless held that the SCS was not responsible for explaining projects to the campers.<sup>88</sup> On the whole, campers at Magnolia still considered their work projects more valuable than the men of Patapsco saw their own, but it was becoming clear that soil conservation alone would not be sufficient to meet Magnolia’s standard for work of national importance.

Fortunately for those seeking a better situation elsewhere, there were multiple opportunities to leave. Detached service had expanded in recent years, with projects opening up throughout the country and prospects of service abroad appearing more realistic. Edgar Johnson was one of the first to take a detached service assignment as an attendant at Duke University Hospital. Writing to his friends in Magnolia, he relayed the approval of the work program by his fellow attendants. “All of the fellows, I believe, have a feeling of much more satisfaction with the kind of work we are doing now,

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<sup>87</sup> *Magnolia Peace Pathways*, June 10, 1943.

<sup>88</sup> *Magnolia Peace Pathways*, September 15, 1943.

compared to the work we did in camp. We are happy to have this opportunity to serve humanity and sincerely desire to do our work well that it might be influential in helping place others in the type of work they want.”<sup>89</sup> Another camper, George Furse, secured a spot with the Puerto Rican Reconstruction Administration while several others left to provide emergency labor on dairy farms. In final year of the camp’s existence, the men learned about several new camps opening up that sought personnel from Magnolia. Within a year, 39 men would leave to help start a BSC fire control camp near Santa Barbara, California, and another 25 would go to new hospital camps in Newton and Mansfield , Connecticut.<sup>90</sup> The willingness of campers to seize opportunities to leave was not only an indictment of the work program at Magnolia, but also a severe hindrance to the future operations of the camp.

Those left behind were left to construct their own forms of satisfying work. Like the men of Patapsco, they prepared themselves for post-war reconstruction work with their own educational program, an initiative they felt accorded with the Brethren concept of the “second mile in service.” The newspaper staff encouraged their readers to serve on volunteer committees, reminding them to take advantage of ways to “keep alive the visions and ideals that caused us to take the pacifist stand.”<sup>91</sup> In addition, they volunteered to serve by rehabilitating the city park in their spare time and repairing and painting toys for underprivileged children at Christmas. Others performed farm labor at the Arkansas A&M College on the weekends, coached local sports teams and served as

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<sup>89</sup> *Magnolia Peace Pathways*, January 12, 1943.

<sup>90</sup> *Magnolia Peace Pathways*, June 10, 1942; May 1, 1943.

<sup>91</sup> *Magnolia Time-Peace*, December 1, 1941.

musicians and preachers in local churches.<sup>92</sup> Much to the chagrin of some residents of the small, southern town, the campers also worked to improve the condition of African Americans in the community. The campers had previously been warned about the poor race relations in their community, a fact that they later witnessed first-hand when their director was harassed and fined by the town police for screening films to African Americans.<sup>93</sup> Nonetheless, they continued to devote much of their time to various projects, primarily the building of outdoor privies for poor white and African-American families without adequate plumbing.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of volunteer service at Magnolia occurred in the spring of 1943, when 80 men began a radical experiment in camp. Under the direction of Dr. Charles F. Schnabel, a nutritional chemist, the men served as guinea pigs in a study of the nutritional effects of grass consumption. Believing that food aid in the war-torn regions of the world would result in malnutrition from inadequate fruits and vegetables, the designers of the experiment sought to discover whether dehydrated grass tips could serve as an effective alternative. For the campers, this meant substituting some or all of the produce in their diets with one to three ounces of grass tips every day. It also meant frequent physical exams, blood and urine samples and endurance tests, not to mention nausea and upset digestion.<sup>94</sup> Unfortunately, the experiment fell victim to the same issue that plagued the camp's work program: the massive outflow of men to other camps. The trial was originally intended to last four months, but had to be cancelled one

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<sup>92</sup> *Magnolia Time-Peace*, January 1, 1942; *Magnolia Peace Pathways*, March 2, 1942; *Magnolia Time-Peace*, November 15, 1941.

<sup>93</sup> "Farewell Camp Magnolia!" *Magnolia Peace Pathways*, October, 1944.

<sup>94</sup> "Nutrition Experiment: Civilian Public Service Camp No. 7", Miscellaneous Material from/by Individual Camps, Magnolia Camp #7, Subject File: Civilian Public Service. SCPC.

month early, as more than half of the test subjects had been transferred to other locations. Nonetheless, the moderately positive long-term results convinced the researchers that grass tips could, in fact, be used as an effective dietary supplement in times of emergency. To those who read about the experiment in *Time Magazine*, the *Dallas Morning News*, and other papers, it revealed an especially novel way in which conscientious objectors were willing to provide valuable alternative service.

By 1944, the future of Magnolia was becoming increasingly uncertain. No plans to close the camp had yet been revealed to the campers, but the outflow of men and challenges with the work program augured poorly for the continuation of Camp #7. Surprisingly, the camp ultimately succumbed not to personnel shortages or the inadequacies of the work program, but to a violent act of nature. On April 11<sup>th</sup>, Magnolia was hit by a massive tornado that swept through Arkansas, leaving 34 dead in its wake.<sup>95</sup> Though no campers were killed, several received severe injuries, including kidney damage, a broken pelvis, and an amputated arm. In addition, the camp itself was effectively demolished, with all fifteen buildings sustaining major damage. With the grounds in shambles and several men hospitalized, the Selective Service quickly decided to shutter the Magnolia camp and transfer the remaining able-bodied men elsewhere. Some would stay in Magnolia to clean up the rubble, but on October 1, Camp #7 was officially closed. In its three years of existence, the men of the Magnolia camp explored numerous means of making valuable contributions to prove the worth of their beliefs. They were undoubtedly more successful in doing so than the earliest CPS men at Patapsco, due in large part to the higher demand for soil conservation work and the

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<sup>95</sup> *New York Times*, April 12, 1944.

conscious efforts of the campers to supplement their labor with other initiatives. But as the mass exodus of the campers suggests, the men of the CPS still believed that more important efforts could be found elsewhere. The utilitarian value of soil conservation was beyond dispute, but for many, it was not what they had hoped for. For them, work of national importance would be found in areas of even greater need, in exceptionally dramatic service, or in extreme personal sacrifice.

### **Camp #49 – Philadelphia State Hospital**

In terms of personnel shortages, few professions suffered more during the early war years than the field of mental health. In psychiatric hospitals throughout the country, ward attendants left in droves because of conscription, low pay, and the increasing availability of war industry jobs. In Pennsylvania hospital attendants received an average of \$900 per year, while the average annual pay for prison guards was \$1,950.<sup>96</sup> Combined with the unsanitary, dangerous work and shamefully poor conditions, mental health institutions offered few incentives for those capable of working elsewhere. Unsurprisingly, hospitals attracted few employees, and those they retained were often dangerously underqualified. With few doctors and even fewer attendants, these psychiatric institutions were largely forced to abandon any hope of curing patients and instead served as holding facilities where those with mental illnesses could be safely kept away from public view. Even so, instances of patient abuse and neglect were rampant, though rarely publicized. With hospital administrators so desperate for competent

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<sup>96</sup> Albert Q. Maisel, "Bedlam 1946: Most U.S. Mental Hospitals are a Shame and a Disgrace," *LIFE*, May 6, 1946, 109.

employees, the NSBRO saw a major opportunity for service. By placing conscientious objectors in these institutions, the CPS was to simultaneously provide compassionate care for patients while demonstrating the practical applications of nonviolence.

In August, 1942, one of the first, largest, and eventually best-known mental hospital CPS units began operations at Philadelphia State Hospital at Byberry (most would refer to the camp simply as “Byberry”). Camp 49 was administered first by the AFSC and then by the Selective Service after the war, though day-to-day operations were primarily in the hands of the nominal camp director, hospital superintendent Dr. Charles Zeller. Beginning with 25 men, the unit would eventually grow to over 100 attendants, who slept in tightly-packed dormitories in old patient housing. These carefully-selected men encountered conditions far more challenging than their comrades in other CPS camps. They were concentrated primarily in Service 2, the side of the hospital containing male patients, 1500 of whom occupied a space originally built for 600.<sup>97</sup> They worked in four parts of the hospital: the incontinent ward, the violent ward, the epileptic ward and the infirmary, each of which contributed its own unique difficulties for even the most experienced attendants. And even when the camp was at full strength, the conscientious objectors would still have to attend to far more patients than the hospital originally intended. Between 1941 and 1943 alone, Byberry lost 42 percent of its employees, a deficit that the CPS men would not be able to fully correct.<sup>98</sup> Despite this and the countless other challenges they experienced, the conscientious objectors at Byberry

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<sup>97</sup> *Philadelphia State Hospital Newsletter*, November, 1942, American Friends Service Committee Records (DG 002), Section 3, Box 11, SCPC.

<sup>98</sup> Sibley and Jacob, *Conscription of Conscience*, 136.

helped to legitimize a form of service that, more than any large-scale CPS venture before, met their standard of work of national importance.

Reflecting on the conditions of the hospital when the campers first arrived, CPS attendant Ward Miles described perhaps the most inhospitable camp in the alternative service program to date. “Everywhere one turned there were lacks: lack of supplies, lack of recreation or occupation for the large majority of patients, lack of personnel, lack of training for the personnel who were there, lack of buildings, lack of therapeutic measures, lack of proper food, lack of enough bedding, and worst of all, lack of love or understanding.”<sup>99</sup> For men who previously worked in isolated camps performing labor that few outside the CPS program noticed, the possibility of working where such a pressing need existed was motivation enough to leave the relative tranquility of soil conservation, forestry, and park renovation. Those who volunteered to join the hospital unit were admitted on a 60-day probationary period. During that time, if they were not able to handle the harsh conditions or difficult work, these new CPS attendants were free to move back to their original camps.<sup>100</sup> The majority of new ward attendants would choose to remain, and many would spend the remainder of their time in the CPS at Byberry.

Even though the men at Byberry had been specifically recruited from other CPS camps, and usually had ample time to ready themselves for their assignment, few were prepared for what they would encounter when they entered the hospital. Roland Smith, who joined the mental health unit in its first year, described the grim conditions he

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<sup>99</sup> Mss. “Out of Sight Out of Mind”, Ward Miles and Alice Calder Miles Papers (CDGA), SCPC, 9.

<sup>100</sup> “C.P.S. 49 Handbook”, Subject File: Civilian Public Service, Miscellaneous Material from/by Individual Camps, Box 6, SCPC.

encountered on his first visit. In Building A, the incontinent ward, he encountered patients in various states of neglect: “some stark naked; some elderly, decrepit, deformed, many with feces stains on buttocks and legs or sitting in their own feces as they ate; a few stealing food from the others.”<sup>101</sup> The conscientious objector attendants in Ward A spent most of their time scrubbing feces off beds, floors and walls, even climbing 20 foot ladders to clean waste off the walls and ceilings. When not doing so, they were charged with washing the patients and their laundry, treating ulcers and rashes, and attempting to eradicate crab lice in the ward.<sup>102</sup> Meeting these immediate needs was challenging enough, but CPS attendants nonetheless attempted to make small improvements to the treatment of patients. The attendants created a recreation program to engage the patients in productive, social activities, encouraged more exercise time, helped malnourished patients gain weight, and fought to open the unit’s closed “hydrotherapy” (shower) room.<sup>103</sup> These improvements were slow to arrive but eventually well-received by the patients.

Building B, the violent ward, presented even more challenges for attendants. Turnover of non-conscripted personnel in was exceptionally high in this unit, and those who remained were often physically abusive toward the patients. Roland Smith recorded his shock at his first experience inside the Building B: “While Kramer and the nurse were peddling pills in the day room, one of them without any warning hit the nurse and scattered the pills to the four winds... Some of the other patients restricted the malefactor

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<sup>101</sup> Roland F. Smith, *Diary*, July 12, 1943, Roland F. Smith Collected Papers (CDGA), Box 1 of 2, SCPC.

<sup>102</sup> *Philadelphia State Hospital Newsletter*, May 15, 1943.

<sup>103</sup> “Out of Sight, Out of Mind”, 13.

and later took him downstairs to beat him as a punishment.”<sup>104</sup> As other CPS men would learn, the sight of paid attendants standing by as patients abused each other or even other hospital staff members was not at all unusual at Byberry. Those assigned to the violent ward helped regular employees and volunteer patient-workers to prevent patients from harming themselves or others. Though state regulations required hospitals to provide a specific reason and duration to be given before using restraints on patients, steel-bound cuffs and chains were regularly used by employees without this documentation.<sup>105</sup>

Employees physically abused patients, forced patient-workers to labor seven days a week for very little reward, and scattered loose tobacco on the floors to see patients fight for it.<sup>106</sup> Unsurprisingly, this ward was severely understaffed, even with the arrival of CPS workers. Without an adequate number of attendants, the men who worked in the ward found themselves in immediate danger of losing control of the most violent patients.

After one CPS attendant was badly hurt by a patient, the camp council voted to require a minimum of seven men in the block or “the sponge will be thrown in.”<sup>107</sup> Few wanted to do so, however, since the violent ward appeared to be the unit that would benefit most from the nonviolent principles of the conscientious objector attendants. Fortunately, through a strict rotation system, CPS attendants assured their continued presence in the ward throughout their time at Byberry.

Despite the numerous difficulties of working at Byberry, Camp 49 contained numerous advantages over other CPS camps. The most noticeable was the pay the men

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<sup>104</sup> Roland F. Smith, *Diary*, July 12, 1943.

<sup>105</sup> Maisel, “Bedlam 1946”, 108.

<sup>106</sup> “Out of Sight, Out of Mind”, 13.

<sup>107</sup> Council Meeting Notes, November 1, 1944, Camp Council Records, 1942-44, American Friends Service Committee Records (DG 002), Section 1, Series O, Box 53b, SCPC.

received. In most CPS units, the conscientious objectors were responsible for their own expenses, which typically meant a monthly \$35 payment to the government administrators, of which \$2.50 was returned to the men as a stipend. The peace churches generally covered the expenses of those who were unable to raise enough, but almost all men struggled to some degree with their day-to-day expenses. Though the men at Byberry originally received \$2.50 per month from the hospital, the profound demand for mental hospital workers enabled them to receive higher pay than their comrades in other camps. After threatening to withdraw CPS units from all state hospitals in 1944, the NSBRO secured a \$15 monthly stipend from the state for all Pennsylvania workers.<sup>108</sup> In addition, for the relatively few married men, mental hospitals like Byberry offered an employment possibility for their wives. A small number of these women worked in cooperation with the CPS, but were officially regular employees of the hospital. Their earnings were paltry, but still over four times that of their husbands, allowing married couples to live together in relative financial security. Finally, since CPS mental hospital attendants typically worked in or near major population centers, they rarely experienced the isolation felt by those in CCC-style camps.

Most importantly, the work the men performed provided a level of satisfaction that was almost unparalleled in the CPS program. As the camp newsletter stated, the attendants at Byberry felt that their work was truly beneficial: “All the men who have worked here to date, and the women among us, have become accustomed to these conditions, and have a high morale. This is work of social significance, exactly the type

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<sup>108</sup> John Morgan to Friends, December 21, 1944, Subject File: Civilian Public Service, Miscellaneous Material from/by Individual Camps, Box 6, SCPC.

of service of which the men of CPS have long been seeking. We are desperately needed.”<sup>109</sup> The men counted a number of successes during their tenure, including better interaction with patients, cleaner wards, the elimination of bedsores in the infirmary ward, and a decrease in violence. Unfortunately for these men, they initially lacked a strong public relations strategy to demonstrate the value of their endeavors in the mental health field. For purposes of patient confidentiality, the camp paper was circulated only within the hospital, and the 54-hour work weeks often left attendants too tired to participate in community events or speaking engagements.

The more time the conscientious objectors spent at Byberry, however, the more they felt that the public had to know about the appalling state of mental health facilities in America. Many men began quietly documenting the issues they encountered in their daily work, in an effort that would produce two strongly influential works. The first, an article that appeared in a 1946 issue of *Life*, would expose millions of Americans to the poor conditions at Byberry. The article featured shocking photographs secretly taken by camper Charles Lord during his work in the incontinent and violent wards. Black-and-white images of frail, naked men seated against the walls of a barren room, covered in human waste seemed more reminiscent of recently-liberated concentration camps than medical institutions. Another photo of a woman seated alone, emaciated, with a bloated stomach and her head lowered was simply captioned, “Despair.”<sup>110</sup> Based partially on interviews with anonymous CPS attendants, the article vividly describes instances of abuse, negligent deaths of patients, and poorly-trained employees. To the delight of CPS

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<sup>109</sup> *Philadelphia State Hospital Newsletter*, November, 1942.

<sup>110</sup> Maisel, “Bedlam 1946”, 107.

attendants, the article suggested that their efforts to improve the conditions in mental hospitals were admirable. Reflecting on the CPS workers, the author of the article concluded, “One may differ, as I do, with the views that led these young men to take up a difficult and unpopular position against service in the armed forces. But one cannot help but recognize their honesty and sincerity in reporting upon the conditions they found in the hospitals to which they were assigned.”<sup>111</sup> This powerful exposé thus not only inspired future mental health reforms, but also brought one of the more valuable forms of CPS service to American living rooms.

Still, the conscientious objectors of Camp 49 felt that exposés, even in publications as influential as *Life*, were not enough to satisfactorily improve the state of mental health institutions throughout the country. To create long-lasting, substantive change, the men of Byberry created the Mental Hygiene Program (MHP) of the CPS. Founded by four campers, the program sought to compile records from attendants throughout the mental health profession to establish better attendant training practices, to improve popular understanding of the need for better conditions in hospitals, and to advocate for legal reforms.<sup>112</sup> The MHP intended to pursue this strategy through two means. Beginning in 1944, the MHP began publishing *The Attendant*, a best-practices publication that was circulated in mental hospitals throughout the country. For those outside of the mental health profession, the MHP commissioned *Out of Sight, Out of*

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>112</sup> Sibley and Jacob, *Conscription of Conscience*, 164.

*Mind*, a book compiled by Frank L. Wright Jr. from over two thousand reports taken between 1942 and 1946 from attendants at 46 US mental institutions.<sup>113</sup>

Like the article in *Time*, *Out of Sight, Out of Mind* featured numerous photographs and first-hand accounts of deplorable conditions. But the book sought not only to arouse the outrage of the public, but to carefully document every problem plaguing mental health institutions. Because the CPS attendants at Byberry feared that wartime exposure of the poor conditions in hospitals would focus attention on the conscientious objectors themselves rather than the institutional weaknesses of the mental health profession, they waited until the end of the war before releasing this book.<sup>114</sup> Upon publication in 1947, *Out of Sight, Out of Mind* drew the attention of a number of influential readers, most notably Eleanor Roosevelt, who endorsed the book in her syndicated “My Day” newspaper column.<sup>115</sup> With the publication of this book, conscientious objectors conspicuously established themselves as the leading force in mental health reform.

Though Camp 49 was officially disbanded in October, 1946, the actions of the CPS men at Byberry would far outlast their physical presence in the hospital. The Mental Health Program they founded later became the National Mental Health Foundation, which expanded beyond the CPS to continue to advocate for mental health reform. In addition, the men had done much to secure a better position for conscientious objectors in the future. In their time at Byberry, they had pioneered a new form of alternative service that provided stable, but desperately needed work. Mental hospital service allowed

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<sup>113</sup> Steven J. Taylor, *Acts of Conscience: World War II, Mental Institutions, and Religious Objectors*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009), 139.

<sup>114</sup> “Mental Hygiene Program Plan of Action,” Charles Lord Papers: CPS Service in Philadelphia State Hospital, Civilian Public Service: Personal Papers & Collected Materials (DG 056), Series 1, Box 17, SCPC.

<sup>115</sup> Taylor, *Acts of Conscience*, 139.

conscientious objectors to demonstrate that their nonviolent ideals were practically applicable in many areas, not just foreign policy. Most importantly, because of the nationwide need for attendants, opportunities for this type of service grew immensely throughout the war. By 1946, over 2000 CPS men were serving in mental institutions all over the country, and the need for even more men persisted.<sup>116</sup> Mental hospital work, though not the most dramatic or dangerous form of service undertaken by the CPS, successfully enabled conscientious objectors to perform genuine, sustainable work of national importance on an unprecedented scale.

### **Camp 103 – Smoke Jumpers in the West**

As far as dramatic service was concerned, no camp offered a more appealing assignment than Camp 103, centered on an abandoned CCC camp in Huson, a very small town outside of Missoula, Montana. Beginning there in the summer of 1943, a select group of CPS men became among the first “smoke jumpers” in history, parachuting out of airplanes to fight forest fires over a wide portion of the American northwest. Prompted by appeals by CPS camper Phil Stanley, who heard about smoke jumping while working at a camp in Coleville, California, the Forest Service and NSBRO decided to request applications from men throughout the program for airborne firefighters.<sup>117</sup> Though smoke jumping traced its roots back to 1939, it was still in an experimental stage, and conscription decimated the ranks of Forest Service fire fighters. Most CPS men assigned to camps administered by the National Parks Service, Forest Service, or Soil

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<sup>116</sup> Sibley and Jacob, *Conscription of Conscience*, 134.

<sup>117</sup> Ed Nafziger, “CPS Provides Smoke Jumpers,” *Smoke Jumper*, (Missoula, Missoulian Publishing Company, 1944), 30.

Conservation Service were familiar with fire fighting of some form, but this novel method of fire suppression was especially appealing to those willing to risk their lives for adventure and work of national importance. Before the camp opened, the NSBRO received over six times as many applications as available openings, most accompanied by letters of recommendation from individual camp directors.<sup>118</sup> Each of the three historic peace churches selected twenty applicants to serve as founding members of Camp 103, though the it would more than triple in size by 1946. During their tenure in the northwest, the men of the CPS would establish smoke jumping as an integral, effective part of fire control in the west. As they confronted the dangers of jumping out of airplanes and battling wildfires, these campers presented the public with the image of conscientious objectors as healthy, strong, young men putting themselves in great peril to serve their fellow man.

Of course, the daily routine of these smoke jumpers was little different from that of many other CPS camps. The irregularity of fires, combined with the relatively small proportion of the camp typically required to combat individual fires meant that campers spent the majority of their time on more mundane projects. They cleared trees around the landing field, built storage units, maintained trails, and planted trees, depending on which “spike camp” they were assigned to.<sup>119</sup> During the winter, when fires were rare, some men returned to their original camps while others cleared fallen timber, constructed fire

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<sup>118</sup> *Phifer's CPS Communique #34*, n.d., American Friends Service Committee Records: Civilian Public Service (DG 002), Section 3, CPS Camp Periodicals, Box 16.

<sup>119</sup> *Smoke Jumper's Load Line*, September, 1943, American Friends Service Committee Records: Civilian Public Service (DG 002), Section 3, CPS Camp Periodicals, Box 16.

lines, and helped to build bridges in the area.<sup>120</sup> Even when this type of work predominated, the campers exhibited an eagerness to perform these somewhat menial projects. Lewis Berg, who previously worked in a soil conservation camp in Ohio, expressed his surprise at the reaction of his fellow campers to their daily work: “Certainly there would be complaints about such foolishness in the camp from which I came – and rightly so.” The difference with this group, however, was its “high degree of project enthusiasm rarely found in CPS,” since campers could easily see the way in which their daily tasks were a necessary supplement to their infrequent fire-fighting.<sup>121</sup>

The rare opportunity to smoke jump served as a constant source of motivation for the men of Camp 103. As camper Murray Braden described, those campers not chosen to jump on any given day passed their time “waiting and praying for more fires.”<sup>122</sup> Smoke jumping was dangerous, grueling work, but the excitement and prestige made the challenge a rewarding experience. A typical fire was reported by a Forest Service lookout tower, which requested men from one of the six spike camps located in Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Washington (all of which were officially part of Camp 103, though the camp administration was located in Huson, Montana).<sup>123</sup> Depending on the size of the fire, the men typically worked in small units of 2 or 6 men, though in the later years of the war they would experiment with larger groups. The chosen smoke jumpers would climb into a Ford Trimotor (operated by civilian contractors), from which they would parachute to a landing spot a safe distance from the fire. Though the highlight of every

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<sup>120</sup> *Smoke Jumper's Load Line*, October 1943.

<sup>121</sup> *The Load Line*, July 1944.

<sup>122</sup> Murray Braden, “...Fire on the Mountain,” *Smoke Jumper*, 26.

<sup>123</sup> *Smoke Jumper's Load Line*, July 1943.

fire was the jump, it was just the beginning of a long, arduous day. From their landing site, the jumpers would have to gather their supplies, hike to the fire, build fire lines to prevent the spread of the blaze, and then trek several miles back to the nearest camp or airstrip. The entire process often involved between 15 and 20 hours of continuous activity.<sup>124</sup>

Still, the men of Camp 103 eagerly awaited their turn on the job. The morale of Camp 103 was always its greatest strength. The men were frequently told by NSBRO and Selective Service visitors that their project enthusiasm exceeded that of any other camp in the system. And as the campers themselves admitted, their morale was highest when the fire situation was the worst, a fortunate condition, as the incidence of fires increased every year until 1946.<sup>125</sup> Since every man in Camp 103 had to have served in other CPS camps to be nominated for the smoke jumping project, they were cognizant of their good fortune. Elmer Neufeld described his joy in leaving park maintenance and irrigation projects behind to join the smoke jumpers: “All of a sudden, here we’ve got a job where it looks like we are going to do something. It’s going to be worthwhile.”<sup>126</sup> Even the most enviable detached service assignments in the system did not compare to the thrill of serving at Camp 103. Writing to his comrades at the smoke jumper camp after being sent from there to an attractive position in Puerto Rico, former Patapsco camper Bryn Hammarstrom admitted that he longed to return to Montana: “We have planes overhead every day, and it keeps reminding me. I’ve been away some time now

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<sup>124</sup> *Smoke Jumper’s Load Line*, September, 1943.

<sup>125</sup> Gregg Phifer, “...Among Ourselves,” *Smoke Jumper*, 46.

<sup>126</sup> Elmer Neufeld, Interview by Steve Smith, Boise, ID, 1999, CPS Men as Smokejumpers, Subject File: Civilian Public Service (CPS), Miscellaneous Material from/by Individual Camps, Box 2, SCPC.

and I'm as eager to jump now as ever."<sup>127</sup> The men of 103, chosen as they were for their work ethic and favorable dispositions, could receive primary consideration for any such detached service project, but few would ever accept an opportunity to leave the smoke jumpers.

Beside the visceral excitement of jumping out of airplanes, Camp 103 provided a number of reasons for its campers' high morale. Discussing what drew the camp's jumpers to apply, the newspaper found one predominant common element: "Most men combined a desire to do really significant work with a perhaps unexpressed desire to prove to his critics that C.O.s can have courage."<sup>128</sup> Indeed, the danger of jumping and the physical rigors of fire fighting were in many ways comparable to military service. Visually, the act of smoke jumping mimicked the action of combat. When reading about the exploits of the smoke jumpers, the American public was exposed to young, able-bodied men parachuting into rough terrain, marching long distances, consuming K-rations, and working in small units to combat fires and protect those living in the northwest. The editor of *The Load Line*, one of the camp's newspapers, saw special significance that the first fire jump of the 1944 season occurred on June 6, the same day that paratroops initiated the invasion of Normandy. Placed next to an article from *TIME* about a D-Day parachute jump was an article about the first fire jump at Camp 103.<sup>129</sup> By carefully mirroring the language used in the *TIME* article, the *Load Line* suggested

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<sup>127</sup> *Static Line*, May 29, 1945, American Friends Service Committee: Civilian Public Service (DG 002), Section 3: CPS Camp Periodicals, Box 16.

<sup>128</sup> *Static Line*, January 26, 1946.

<sup>129</sup> *The Load Line*, July, 1944.

that the gulf between the conscientious objector and the soldier was one of ideals, not of constitution.

There certainly was no shortage of dangers at Camp 103. Even before arriving in camp, new recruits were well aware that injuries were common even when their equipment functioned perfectly. Jump-related incidents stemmed primarily from jumpers hitting trees during their descent, a situation that was tough to avoid in heavily-forested areas. One jump in July, 1945 resulted in one camper chipping his vertebrae and spraining both ankles, another goring his leg on a branch and a third breaking his thigh and foot. The latter would be confined to a hospital bed until November while his comrades wore plaster vests through the end of the year.<sup>130</sup> Other men suffered dislocated vertebrae, head wounds, and fractured skulls. And almost every jumper at one point dealt with ankle or foot problems from rough landings. These issues were particularly problematic given the isolated nature of the drop zones, causing many injured men to march several miles before reaching an extraction point. The campers were fortunate enough to avoid any fatalities among their group, though they came exceptionally close. In August, 1944, one of the Trimotor planes used by the camp experienced motor failure soon after takeoff, forcing the pilot to conduct an emergency landing with all of the jumpers still on board. On the next flight after repairs were made, the pilot was killed as another motor failure resulted in a fiery crash near the camp.<sup>131</sup> For the men using relatively unproven equipment and techniques to perform work that

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<sup>130</sup> *Static Line*, July 31, 1945; *Static Line*, November 10, 1945.

<sup>131</sup> *Static Line*, August 14, 1944.

few had done before, incidents like those were a constant reminder that with no amount of preparation could their safety be assured.

The vigorous training the smoke jumpers constantly endured was also somewhat reminiscent of the military experience. Upon arrival, new recruits spent seven to ten days in an intense conditioning program known as the “Torture Chamber” and consisting of jogging, calisthenics, extended hikes, tree climbing and fire training. Most intimidating was the jump tower, a large device “obviously designed to break the unwary trainee’s neck” that in reality was used to train the men on proper jump technique.<sup>132</sup> The initiation concluded with seven training jumps from the Trimotor. Asked about his first jump, camper Oliver Petty demonstrated the extent to which the campers were carefully, repeatedly conditioned to do what few before them had ever done: “I jumped – not because I had thought the situation over and decided to, but because I had made up my mind ahead of time and had been trained to jump.”<sup>133</sup> After completing all of this, the men were expected to maintain their level of physical fitness throughout their stay at Camp 103. For most, this entailed daily hikes, calisthenics, and occasionally long swims. One camper, who later joined the Forest Service as a professional smoke jumper, claimed that the training he received in the CPS was more intense than that he received after the war: “It was a little bit tougher than it is now. ‘Cause we trained hard. We were in good physical condition because we’d worked all our life. The instructors just poured it on. And we kinda surpassed the instructors in a lot of cases.”<sup>134</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the campers were eager to share their experiences with the public.

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<sup>132</sup> *The Load Line*, July 1944.

<sup>133</sup> *Smoke Jumper’s Load Line*, June 1943.

<sup>134</sup> Elmer Neufeld, Interview by Steve Smith.

Fortunately, the press was quite eager to run stories about daring, young conscientious objectors risking their lives on the western fire lines. Articles were published about the camp in *Colliers*, *Popular Mechanics*, *Esquire*, *Harper's*, and several local newspapers. The men were especially excited when Paramount spent a week at the camp filming the training program.<sup>135</sup> Understanding the great potential for their experiences to positively affect the public's view toward conscientious objectors, the men at Camp 103 took great care to ensure that the exposure they received was positive. When *INFORMATION* ran a story that suggested that the smoke jumpers had suspended operations after the deadly plane crash because the men were concerned about their safety, camp coordinator Robert Painter wrote a letter demanding to know what sources that claim was based upon. He assured the editors that the men were more eager to jump than ever, and that the short delay was the result of the wait for a new plane and the cleanup process at the accident site.<sup>136</sup> By juxtaposing the image of campers retrieving pieces of the pilot's body with men clambering to become the first to jump out of the new plane upon its arrival, Painter highlighted the fearlessness of his fellow campers. The easiest way to ensure good publicity, however, was for the campers to provide it themselves. Beginning in 1944, the campers began collecting stories and photographs for *Smokejumper*, a small, heavily-illustrated book that would be sold directly to the public. First published in December, 1944, at a cost of 75 cents per copy, this chronicle of the exploits of Camp 103 was sold to other CPS camps, churches, and individuals. To the delight of the campers, by mid-1945, the men had almost sold out of their second printing, sending a total of 3400 copies

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<sup>135</sup> *The Load Line*, June 1944.

<sup>136</sup> Robert Painter to the editors of *INFORMATION*, American Friends Service Committee Records, Series 1: CPS Administration, Series M,2, Box 36e.

to interested readers throughout the country.<sup>137</sup> By the end of the program, the smoke jumpers would be among the most famous of all conscientious objectors.

By the time the camp closed in 1946, the small contingent of men at Camp 103 had a distinguished record of achievements. They had already smashed all smoke jumping records for the Forest Service. In fact, the 1945 season featured over 1100 fire jumps, compared to a combined total of 452 from all previous years combined.<sup>138</sup> The smoke jumpers had revolutionized the process of fire fighting in the isolated regions of the Northwest, helping to perfect parachute designs, training regimens, and fire suppression techniques. They had saved the Forest Service tens of thousands of dollars per year in expenses while successfully preserving valuable lumber and recreation sites. To conscientious objectors, the value of Camp 103 could simply be measured by the physical results of they performed. Fewer than 300 men ever served as CPS smoke jumpers, and even if the program were expanded to cover the entire Forest Service, only a small minority of conscientious objectors would be able to serve in this capacity. Thus, unlike those in mental hospital camps, the men of Camp 103 knew that most conscientious objectors would likely not find themselves serving as smoke jumpers in future times of war. Nonetheless, they ably demonstrated that dangerous, courageous service in any capacity could show the public that conscientious objectors differed from those in the military only in ideals.

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<sup>137</sup> *Static Line*, June 1945.

<sup>138</sup> *Static Line*, September 20, 1945.

## **Camp 115 – Human Guinea Pigs**

For those looking to prove their willingness to sacrifice and endure risk to serve others in an exceptionally dramatic way, there were other opportunities that did not require jumping out of an airplane. Beginning with volunteer, spare-time projects, CPS men offered themselves up as medical test subjects in a variety of experiments. In addition to self-organized experiments like the grass tip diet at Magnolia, over 500 men throughout the system served as human guinea pigs in experiments for the US Army and various research universities. Campers working on a road-building project in New Hampshire wore lice-infested clothes for 3 weeks to help develop a pesticide for typhus control. Small groups at the University of Pennsylvania and Yale volunteered to expose themselves to infectious hepatitis to determine how the disease is transmitted. And later, over a hundred men in North Carolina and Tennessee camps drank throat washings from soldiers infected with atypical pneumonia in an experiment that was critical to identifying the viral source of the disease.<sup>139</sup> The scientific knowledge gained from these studies, combined with the favorable press received by the conscientious objectors, convinced the NSBRO and the Selective Service that these experiments were work of national importance.

These men serving in these experiments between 1943 and 1946 were all officially assigned to Camp 115, regardless of where they were located and whether they were still working concurrently at another camp. Each group was given its own subunit number from 1 to 37, depending on which experiment they were assigned to. The most remarkable of these subunits was undoubtedly Unit 17, located at the University of

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<sup>139</sup> Sibley and Jacob, *Conscription of Conscience*, 143-5.

Minnesota Laboratory of Physiological Hygiene. There, under the direction of Dr. Ancel Keys, 36 men from across the CPS system gathered to take part in the “Minnesota Starvation Experiment.” Of the more than 100 applicants, these men were chosen for their good physical and mental health, friendly personalities, and, most importantly, their “personal sense of responsibility in bettering the nutritional status of famine victims.”<sup>140</sup> This final quality was crucial in helping the men to endure the challenges they would face over the next year, as they would be required to eat a semi-starvation diet to great detriment to their physical health and mental disposition. For their trouble, the researchers and campers both hoped to gain a greater understanding of the challenges of rehabilitating the malnourished populations of war-torn areas in Europe and Asia after the conclusion of the conflict. The lead researcher and nominal director of the camp, Dr. Keys felt that the experiment could be extremely beneficial to the malnourished: “If our results allow an increase in efficiency of relief feeding by as little as five per cent, we shall be able to reduce the sum of starvation suffering by an amount incalculably greater than would be possible with the same effort and expenditure on direct relief.”<sup>141</sup> For such a small contingent, the volunteers at the Minnesota Starvation Experiment had secured a chance to greatly help a large group of those in need.

Beginning in November, 1944, the volunteer subjects spent 12 weeks on a control diet, consuming an average of 3,492 calories per day, an amount that the researchers

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<sup>140</sup> *Ancel Keys, et. al., The Biology of Human Starvation*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1950), 65.

<sup>141</sup> Brethren Service Committee, “Research for Relief,” Subject File: Civilian Public Service, Miscellaneous Material from/by individual camps, Box 2, 5.

calculated would result in no weight lost or gained.<sup>142</sup> After this, they began the 24-week period of semi-starvation. During this time, they were strictly limited to an average of 1,570 calories per day, composed primarily of wheat bread, potatoes, cereals, turnips and cabbage. While they were on the diet, the men were required to walk 22 miles every week, in addition to the 14-21 miles per week they walked to and from the dining hall.<sup>143</sup> Once a month, the men would fast for an entire day, during which they also walked at least 3 hours on a treadmill. After the semi-starvation phase, the subjects were placed on a gradually-increasing rehabilitation diet consisting of greater quantities of the same foods they were eating in the semi-starvation diet (since these were the items most likely to be available in war-torn areas). Even during this phase, the men were allotted less calories than in the control diet until the final two weeks.<sup>144</sup> Consequently, the recovery period would take much longer than the subjects had originally hoped.

While they were subjected to this diet, these self-styled human guinea pigs continued to do much of what they had done at their previous CPS camps. They were each given a job at the laboratory that they were required to perform for 15 hours every week, regardless of which phase of the diet they were enduring. Most men performed general maintenance or laundry, while some worked as laboratory assistants.<sup>145</sup> Like many other camps, Camp 115 formed its own educational program with the intent of training the men for postwar reconstruction. When not walking, working, or studying,

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<sup>142</sup> Joseph C. Franklin, et. al., "Observations on Human Behavior in Experimental Semistarvation and Rehabilitation", *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 4, (January 1948), 28.

<sup>143</sup> Keys, et. al., *The Biology of Human Starvation*, 69.; *Guinea Pig Gazette*, May 1943, American Friends Service Committee: Civilian Public Service (DG 0023), Section 3, Box 17, SCPC.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid*, 76.

<sup>145</sup> Keys, et. al., *The Biology of Human Starvation*, 69.

the men volunteered for various community service projects. They devoted one night a week to building toys for child welfare programs in the Minneapolis/St. Paul region, and performed social work in settlement houses when time permitted.<sup>146</sup> On some weekends, the men would venture into Minneapolis, usually to buy gum, which they felt helped to stave off thoughts of food. The men were required to strictly follow a buddy system when doing so, however, since the temptation to purchase food in town was at times too much for an unguarded individual to bear.<sup>147</sup> Because of this system, their high level of project morale, and their strategy of combating hunger pains by reading cookbooks and chewing gum, the CPS men, with very few exceptions, avoided any deviation from their diets.

Like their fellow campers throughout the CPS, the men of Camp 115 developed a public relations plan for their work and experience. They published their own camp newspaper, the *Guinea Pig Gazette* (published “whenever we squeal like it”), though its circulation was primarily restricted to campers themselves, their friends and family, and others in the CPS system.<sup>148</sup> Fortunately, the extraordinary nature of their assignment attracted the attention of the national press. The *New York Times* ran several stories on the human guinea pigs, comparing them to soldiers who volunteered for other experiments and commenting on the “psychoneurotic disturbances” faced by the starving men.<sup>149</sup> Once again, *LIFE* provided the most compelling and favorable coverage of the CPS test subjects. The magazine printed an article in early 1946 detailing the experiment

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<sup>146</sup> *Guinea Pig Gazette*, May 1943.

<sup>147</sup> “Men Starve in Minnesota: Conscientious Objectors Volunteer for Strict Hunger Tests to Study Europe’s Food Problem,” *LIFE*, July 30, 1945, 43.

<sup>148</sup> *Guinea Pig Gazette*, May 1943.

<sup>149</sup> *New York Times*, June 25, 1944; March 7, 1946.

and illustrating the condition of the test subjects toward the end of the semi-starvation phase. In addition to descriptions of their daily activities, their physical changes, and the reason for their sacrifice, the article featured numerous photographs of the test subjects performing their daily tasks. The men are visibly emaciated, with gaunt faces and protruding ribs as they are measured by doctors and performing their daily exercise. Yet in each photo, the men show no indication of lamenting their position. Rather, with their friendly yet determined gaze, the men were seemingly projecting to the magazine's readers that they were contentedly enduring their hardship, with their will to serve superseding their physical needs.

In reality, the experience of the human guinea pigs was in some ways even more difficult than researchers had predicted. The semi-starvation diet was effectively maintained for almost all of the men, causing them to lose a fourth of their body weight. Given the relatively low levels of body fat in the test subjects before they began the experiment, this change brought with it a number of corresponding problems. The men found themselves unable to sit on hard surfaces and felt muscle soreness throughout their bodies. Their hair began to fall out in large clumps and their fingernails grew at a much slower rate. Their body temperature dropped almost three degrees below normal and their circulation decreased, resulting in edema in the face, knees and ankles. Though wounds bled much less, they were also much slower to heal than before. And curiously, the researchers noted that the test subjects developed a greatly increased tolerance to heat along with an aversion to cold temperatures. The men requested that their food and drinks be prepared abnormally hot and slept under heavy blankets in the summer

weather.<sup>150</sup> By the end of the semi-starvation phase, the human guinea pigs hardly resembled the exceptionally strong, healthy young men who had volunteered the year before.

Though much of these physical affects could be foreseen, the behavioral and emotional changes that accompanied them were more surprising, and in many ways, more troubling for the men experiencing them. In addition to their frequent physical exams, the CPS men received regular psychological examination. Over the course of the experiment, the psychologists noted marked decreases in the men's ability to concentrate on tasks and enforce self-discipline. Their subjects' dispositions became increasingly more irritable and many exhibited signs of depression. Most notably, the men were unable to sustain extended physical or mental effort, leading to drastic changes in their daily activities. The camp's volunteer efforts and educational program withered as the men found themselves apathetic and discouraged.<sup>151</sup> For one camper, the strain of starvation proved too arduous to continue with the experiment. Listed only as Subject No. 234, this 24-year old man began to exhibit manic behavior, violent outbursts, weeping, threats of violence, and talk of suicide. After being removed from the experiment, he was placed in the psychiatric ward of the university hospital to recuperate.<sup>152</sup> Though the goal of the experiment continued to be the primary motivation of the subjects who remained, they became increasingly pessimistic about their ability to produce meaningful results from their efforts. Worse yet, the psychobiological problems they experienced persisted well into the recovery phase of the experiment, when the

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<sup>150</sup> Keys, et. al., *The Biology of Human Starvation*, 827.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid*, 820-1; 835-7.

<sup>152</sup> Keys, et. al., *The Biology of Human Starvation*, 883-886.

subjects began to regain weight. In their published results, the researchers noted that this was especially disappointing to the men: “They had anticipated that rehabilitation would bring about alleviation of their symptoms and distress. This belief was a sustaining motivation during the semistarvation period. The expected ‘new lease on life’ did not materialize.”<sup>153</sup> Nonetheless, by the time they were discharged from the experiment, all of the test subjects had largely recovered from most of the psychological and physical stresses of semi-starvation.

In the end, the experiments carried out at the University of Minnesota not only aided the reconstruction effort, but served as the basis for much scientific understanding of hunger for decades to come. Before the results were formally published, aid workers distributed pamphlets with recommendations based on the researchers’ work. Four years after the conclusion of the experiment, Dr. Keys published *The Biology of Human Starvation*, a mammoth, landmark study largely based upon the tests performed on the men of Camp 115. Through this, the work of the human guinea pigs would affect the treatment of malnourished people as well as the rehabilitation of those with eating disorders well into the twenty-first century. But this was not the only way in which this small group of volunteer test subjects had a disproportionate influence on the world around them. Through the national press they attracted, these CPS men substantially helped to improve the public image of conscientious objectors. Assessing the motivation of the human guinea pigs to volunteer their bodies for such a novel and uncomfortable experiment, Dr. Keys concluded that the CPS men applied both to contribute to the

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<sup>153</sup> Franklin, et. al., “Observations on Human Behavior in Experimental Semistarvation and Rehabilitation”, 37-38.

improvement of famine treatment and to “participate in and be associated with activities which more closely paralleled the discomforts, risks, and sufferings of the men in the armed forces and the civilians of war-ravaged areas.”<sup>154</sup> Unlike the smoke jumpers, the men of Camp 115 resembled these groups not because of their strength or bravery, but because of their frailty and selflessness. Once again, by inviting comparison to the participants in and victims of war, these CPS men demonstrated the extent to which conscientious objectors were willing to sacrifice in order to perform work of national importance.

### **Conclusion**

By the closing of the final Civilian Public Service camp in early 1947, over 12,000 conscientious objectors had served in one or more of the 147 operating camps that the system comprised. Their combined labors had benefitted the government and public alike, primarily through fire prevention, soil conservation, erosion control, national and state park maintenance, and mental health reform. Many who had joined the CPS with high aspirations to demonstrate the value of their beliefs through their work would be disappointed, however, as isolated camps with mundane or even make-work projects offered few opportunities for campers to conspicuously labor on socially significant projects. But the inefficiencies present in many camps should not suggest that the CPS as a whole was unsuccessful. As conscientious objectors were largely aware, the quality of their work in these early camps, even when performed efficiently, did little to help them to accomplish the larger goals of the CPS program, whether those of the government or

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<sup>154</sup> Keys, et. al., *The Biology of Human Starvation*, 65.

the peace advocates. These men intended to show the American public that conscientious objectors were personally invested in the welfare of the nation. They wanted to prove that their peaceful ideals were practical and applicable even to the problems of a country at war. Most importantly, they hoped to redefine the basis of citizenship simply as service to one's country, military or otherwise.

Following a trip to Canada in 1944, NSBRO secretary Paul Comly French recorded his impressions of the Canadian Fellowship Service. Noting the numerous advantages of the Canadian program over its American counterpart, including better pay, dependent support and assignments aligned with each objector's vocational skills, French nonetheless felt that the program fell short of success:

In the main, it seems to me that this program is more satisfactory to individuals as individuals than the American system, but I have grave doubts as to whether it contributes effectively to the total pacifist witness against war as the American system of men operating in groups as pacifists or nonresistant Christians. I have wondered whether the government planned to make the situation so that it would appear to returned soldiers that conscientious objectors had made little sacrifice for their beliefs.<sup>155</sup>

Comly's conclusion reflected the desire of conscientious objectors in America to engender comparisons between their efforts and those of the military. To do so, they needed work that not only fulfilled a serious need, but that was exceptionally challenging and involved conspicuous sacrifice.

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<sup>155</sup> Gingerich, *Service for Peace*, 421-2.

While soil conservation, forestry, and fire prevention undoubtedly filled some need, these projects went largely unnoticed by the majority of the public. In camps like Patapsco and Magnolia, high project enthusiasm slowly eroded as the campers realized that their work, performed as it was in relative obscurity, did little to publicize the sincerity of conscientious objectors in serving their country peacefully. By spending their spare time serving their communities, advocating for social reforms, volunteering their bodies for scientific experiments, and preparing themselves for reconstruction work, these men salvaged meaning from their experience in the CPS in a way that anticipated the more successful camps of the later war years. With mental hospital camps, the smoke jumpers, human guinea pigs, and similar initiatives, the NSBRO and Selective Service acknowledged that few considered most land management camps to be performing work of national importance. While soil conservation was beneficial to agriculture, the fields of the South could hardly compare to nightmarishly overcrowded mental health facilities in terms of urgent need for compassionate service. Reports of campers digging ditches paled in comparison to accounts of young men jumping out of airplanes and fighting fires. And pictures of skeletal men enduring voluntarily enduring starvation were far more memorable than those of campers building park shelters. These dramatic new positions were only available to a minority of those in CPS, but in terms of spreading the message of service and sacrifice, their success was well out of proportion to their numbers.

In the end, by helping to gradually transform the work program of the CPS, conscientious objectors successfully positioned themselves as a dedicated group no less

willing to serve their country than those in the military. Whether or not work of national importance was ever found, the CPS would have provided conscientious objectors with a chance to avoid military service, imprisonment, or abuse, as so many had endured in the prior war. Had the men of the CPS contented themselves to laboring in obscurity on projects abandoned by the dissolution of the CCC, they would have passed the war years secure in the knowledge that their wartime experiences were far more comfortable than those of their predecessors. Nonetheless, by eschewing mundane but stable labor in favor of dangerous, dramatic, work, the men of the CPS displayed their dedication to gaining acceptance for conscientious objection. Though the CPS model would never again be used, the legacy of the program extended well into the twentieth century with the reemergence of alternative service in the Korean and Vietnam Wars, which typically placed men directly in health care, church relief, or other service projects. Ultimately, the efforts of the smoke jumpers, human guinea pigs, mental hospital attendants, and all who advocated for these projects during the Second World War helped to convince the American public that conscientious objectors were not just worthy of future exemption from military service, but deserving of the full rights of citizenship. By adapting alternative service to suit the material needs and emotional demands of a nation at war, the men of the CPS did much to establish a place for the conscientious objector in American civil society, one which could be maintained in future times of conflict as well as peace.

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