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IS THE CCC (CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS)
WORTHY OF RESURRECTION?

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BY

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FIELD ARTILLERY

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by

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AUTHOR: Robert F. Hume, LTC, FA
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The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) has been examined for the purpose of evaluating it as a possible solution to current social and environmental ills. The nine year history of the CCC is reviewed to determine accomplishments and failures of the program created in 1933 to save a wasted youth and a wasted land. An attempt is made to correlate the problems of the 1930's with those existing today: unemployment, discontent among young people, a polluted environment, and wasted natural resources. An appraisal made of the Job Corps program suggests that the CCC might again be desirable if it parallels the original program; if it retains conservation as the key; and if it uses the Army, as before, in a major supervisory role.

IS THE CCC WORTHY OF RESURRECTION?

BIRTH OF THE CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS (CCC)

During his speech accepting the Democratic presidential nomination, on 2 July 1932, Franklin D. Roosevelt hinted of his plans for a national conservation program that would fight soil erosion and timber famine, and in doing so, give employment to a million men.¹

Roosevelt, then Governor of New York, had long been a champion of conservation practices. In 1910 he had taken over management of Hyde Park, the family estate on New York's Hudson River. To restore fertility to the land, long abused by poor conservation practices, Roosevelt planted trees. He hoped that in a century his great grandchildren might raise corn on the soil that had produced prize corn as late as 1840. He thought of trees as the "lungs of our land, purifying our air and giving fresh strength to our people."² As governor, he had been responsible for developing a broad reforestation scheme as part of New York's unemployment relief program which gave temporary employment to 10,000 people, all taken from relief rolls.³

At this period in our country's history there were about 250,000 young people, "the teen-age tramps of America" as they were commonly

¹John A. Salmond, The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942: A New Deal Case History (1967), p. 8.

²Frank R. Smith, The Politics of Conservation (1966), pp. 240-241.

³Salmond, pp. 7-8.

called, "wandering the land looking for a future." These drifting juveniles were but a fraction of the total number of young people that were jobless after the depression. There was a need for immediate corrective action.⁴

As of 1932 the lack of a national conservation policy and the unplanned usage of our forest resources had also resulted in the loss of billions of tons of fertile soil washed to sea and millions of acres of devastated forest lands left unproductive. Facilities to protect the forests and parklands distributed throughout the Nation were pitifully inadequate.

There was need for men and money to plant trees, build lines of communication and transportation through inaccessible areas, erect fire detection towers, develop forests and parks for public use, demonstrate practical and proper soil protection measures, and to advance programs which would reduce flood damages.⁵

Thus, during the depression of the 1930's, the stage was set for what was to become one of the most popular of Franklin Roosevelt's "New Deal" alphabet agencies and probably the most ambitious social undertaking of the Army for years to come; creation of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The new President on 9 March 1933, only five days after his inaugural address, outlined his plan for the new force to the Secretaries of Agriculture, Interior, and War (Army); the Director of the Budget; the Army Judge Advocate General; and the Solicitor of the Department of the Interior. The draft

⁴Ibid., p. 3.

⁵Annual Report of the Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps, Fiscal Year 1938 (1938), pp. 18-19 (hereafter referred to as "Report of the Director, 1938").

bill was requested by and submitted to the President that very evening. The Secretary of Labor was included in subsequent discussions. A final draft was prepared by 23 March when joint hearings on the bill were commenced and on 31 March, after passage by Congress, the measure was signed into law by the President.⁶

The official name of the new force, as created by the act of 31 March 1933, was Emergency Conservation Work. However, the name Civilian Conservation Corps, as had been used by the President, had caught on and supplanted the official designation from the very start. Not until 28 June 1937, by an act of Congress, did CCC become statutory.⁷

Decisions reached at a White House conference on 3 April 1933 were embodied in an executive order issued by the President on 5 April and the CCC began its official existence. A Director, assisted by an Advisory Council consisting of one member from each of the cooperating departments, was to head the new agency. The Labor Department was to select the men for enrollment; the War Department was to enroll, feed, clothe, house, condition, and transport the men to camps; the Departments of Interior and Agriculture were to select work projects, supervise the work, and administer the camps. Enrollments, six months at a time, were to be limited initially to single men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, primarily those with families on public relief

⁶Salmond, pp. 9-23.

⁷Ibid., p. 26.

rolls, and who were willing to allot \$22 to \$25 of their monthly wages of \$30 to such dependents.⁸

The President's objective called for 250,000 enrollees and 24,375 woodsmen to act as technical assistants, to be set up in 1,300 camps by 1 July 1933. Almost immediately it was realized that neither the Department of Agriculture nor the Department of the Interior had the men, equipment, or experience to administer the camps. The Army's role was therefore greatly expanded to include building and operating the camps. Thousands of reserve officers "eager for work or a living wage themselves were the most obvious administrative officers for the camps."⁹

The Advisory Council adopted an Army plan that called for immediate action, wider disciplinary powers over recruits, the delegation to the Army of wide authority over movement of men, and the maintenance by the Department of Labor of a flow of 8,540 men per day. Thanks to the success of this plan the President's goal was met. On 1 July 1933 he received word that the full quota of 274,375 men was enrolled and in camps. The Army had successfully undertaken the largest peacetime mobilization of men, and in three months the CCC had developed from a statutory authorization to the largest peacetime government labor force the United States had ever known.¹¹

⁸Ibid., pp. 29-31.

⁹Smith, p. 245.

¹⁰Salmond, pp. 32-37.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 40-45.

CRITICISMS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The program from its very inception had its share of criticism. Most negative reaction stemmed from the Army having a role. William Green, President of the American Federation of Labor, argued that an Army role in the scheme would lead to a "regimentation of labor" controlled by the military and paid Army wage rates. A. F. Whitney, President of the Brotherhood of Trainmen, complained that it "would place Government's endorsement upon poverty at a bare subsistence level."¹² Socialist Norman Thomas described it as a "system of forced labor."¹³

Some liberals, although supporting the basic philosophies that prompted creation of the CCC, also distrusted the Army. They believed that problems of youth had to be solved in their own environment, not in forests and parks. They were critical of the education program, and rightfully so. Although an educational program was established in the camps it was never enthusiastically supported by the Director nor the Army. The Director considered relief of the unemployed and promotion of conservation work as the purpose for which the CCC was established. Education would have to be secondary.¹⁴ Enrollees were learning "scund habits of work, pride in accomplishment, respect for constituted authority, and the habit of orderly living" just by being part of the program.¹⁵

¹²Ibid., p. 14.

¹³Ibid., p. 114.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 47-53.

¹⁵Report of the Director, p. 24.

Accomplishments of the program were impressive. As an example of just one year's accomplishments, during the fiscal year of 1938 over 9,100 miles of truck trails or minor roads were built, 610,920 erosion control check dams were constructed and 270,312,300 trees were planted. Of \$102,400,000 paid to enrollees that year, \$72,260,000 was allotted to their dependent families, or deposited, payable to them upon discharge from the Corps.¹⁶

A businessman who spent one year in the CCC as a former enrollee expressed the human dividend of the program this way:

I learned how good plain food can taste and sound sleep can feel and how strong a humble spirit can become from clean, honest, hard work and in living under circumstances stripped of all the superficiality that society feels is so important.¹⁷

A public opinion research poll taken in August 1939 indicated that the CCC was the most popular of all the "New Deal" programs. Eighty-four percent approved the program, eight percent disapproved, and eight percent expressed no opinion or had no knowledge of the program.¹⁸

Enrollment reached a high of 500,000 in 1935. Before the demise of the experiment in 1942 over two-and-a-half million unemployed youths had participated. More than two million acres of trees had been planted. Overgrowth had been thinned in another four million acres.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 1 and 16.

¹⁷US Congress. Senate. Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, The Youth Conservation Act of 1959, 86th Cong., 1st sess., 1959, S. Rept. 536 (1959), p. 3 (hereafter referred to as "Congress, Youth Conservation Act").

¹⁸Elmo Roper, You and Your Leaders (1957), pp. 37-38.

A half-million miles of roads, trails, and firebreaks, built and repaired by the CCC, were responsible for saving thousands of additional forested acres.¹⁹

DEATH OF THE CCC

Attempts by the President, in 1937 and 1939, to get Congress to make the CCC permanent, failed. Up to this time the program had been extended a year at a time. Though the success of the CCC was never a point, the House had reservations about the program becoming permanent; therefore, only a three-year extension was approved at a time, from 1937 to 1940 and the last to 1 July 1943.²⁰

It was noticeable that the high morale of the first four years of the program was disintegrating. The quality of youths enrolled had deteriorated. They were younger and more subject to homesickness. The economic situation of the country had improved and the more able young men could get jobs without going the CCC route.²¹

Desertion rates were becoming excessive. By 1939 deserters accounted for one out of every five enrollees leaving the program. This was contributed, in part, to changes that had been made to the program. The relief provision, removed in 1937, now permitted enrollment of young men from more affluent families. These families, not requiring the \$25 allotment, had little force in compelling enrollees to stay in camp. The growing international tension and

¹⁹Smith, p. 246.

²⁰Salmond, pp. 152-160.

²¹Ibid., pp. 184-187.

the addition to the program in late 1940 of 20 hours per week of general defense training had some enrollees deserting for fear of being drafted into the Army and sent to war.²²

In October of 1941 there remained only 160,000 enrollees in nine hundred camps. Industry was drawing those left at the rate of six thousand per month.²³

At the time, a joint Committee of Congress was investigating all federal agencies to determine which could be eliminated if not essential to the war effort. On 24 December 1941 the Committee recommended abolishment of the CCC no later than 1 July 1942. A split in Congress on the recommendation was finally resolved on 30 June 1942. The House provided eight million dollars for liquidation of the CCC in exchange for agreement by the Senate for its demise. The CCC was dead!²⁴

As just described, the CCC though not achieving permanence helped to bridge a gap during one of the dark periods of our time. That gap, a high unemployment rate, aimless youth and a waste of our natural resources, was recognized; immediate action was taken; and all were put on a sound road to recovery.

TODAY'S YOUTH

Today we have somewhat of a different gap or illness facing the Nation than that of the 1930's. The same cure, however, might be

²²Ibid., pp. 131-134

²³Ibid., pp. 210

²⁴Ibid., pp. 212-217

prescribed.

Today the unemployment rate is still considered high although it stands at less than six percent²⁵ now, compared to about 25 percent in 1933.²⁶ However, teenagers in the labor force have doubled in the last decade. The rate of joblessness among teenage boys is almost 17 percent and of teenage girls, 15 percent.²⁷ This can be attributed in part to the "baby boom" following World War II and peaking out in 1957,²⁸ now adding to the labor force. Also the estimated two million plus men separated from the services or from defense jobs, as a result of the winding down of the war in Vietnam,²⁹ are now competing with youth for any new jobs.

Lowering of the voting age to 18 by the 26th Amendment to the US Constitution has prompted many States to establish most adult rights at age 18, rather than 21. This is already leading to new problems. Public drinking by the young-adult is on the increase, accompanied by increases in crime and auto accidents. Some young people are losing out on benefits from social service and welfare programs which formerly were applicable to them to age 21. Children of divorced or separated parents may find it particularly difficult. If still in high school at age 18, the young adult becomes a burden on the mother who may no

²⁵"Unemployment: Any Quick Remedy in Sight?" US News and World Report, 19 June 1972, p. 43 (hereafter referred to as "Unemployment, US News")

²⁶US Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Youth Conservation Corps and Youth Public Service Program, 87th Cong., 1st sess., 1961, S. Rept. 976 (1961), p. 31.

²⁷Unemployment, US News, p. 43.

²⁸"End of the 'Baby Boom'," US News and World Report, 29 May 1972, p. 51.

²⁹Unemployment, US News, p. 44.

longer get State assistance for dependent children and the father will no doubt be relieved of any legal responsibility to support the child beyond age 18.³⁰ This, of course, is going to work the greatest hardship on the child that is already neglected. With new rights, youth must learn to cope with new responsibilities.

Again we have aimless youth among the younger generation. There are the poor; the high school dropout; the affluent, yet discontent; those turned inward and moody; those who desire to relate to nature, the "flower people"; and those who are students, taking advantage of higher education, yet opposed to intellectual discipline, wanting to be moved personally, but not instructed. Some of our institutions of higher learning are partially responsible for this latter group. Dr. Peter L. Berger, Professor of Sociology at Rutgers University, in a recent address to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, challenged his audience to return to a:

Structured curricula instead of the "cafeteria" style of education that is so often confused with intellectual freedom; objective standards ...instead of the currently fashionable chaos of subjectivity; respect for hard intellectual labor instead of the cult of self-expression and "creativity"; an understanding of the values of specialization instead of an orgy of "inter-disciplinary" chit-chat.³¹

³⁰"Adulthood at 18 - How It's Working" US News and World Report, 13 November 1972, pp. 60-62.

³¹"A Lot of 'Beautiful People'...No One Left to do the Chores" US News and World Report, 4 December 1972, pp. 57-58.

So, we have hopeless and apathetic young people needing something to do; something that they can relate to until they find themselves; something that will be productive to themselves and to their country.

TODAY'S NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Despite progress made through the years by conservation programs, we yet abuse our natural resources. "In a time of growing need for space, solitude, and relief from stress, we continue the destruction of the earth's natural areas."³²

Our streams, lakes, and rivers; our air and our landscape; once pure, are now polluted by untreated sewage from our cities, by industrial wastes from our factories, and by each of us negligent and wasteful with our natural resources.

Lake Erie, for example, the most polluted of the five Great Lakes, is said to have a mat of algae two feet thick and a few hundred square miles in area that floats in its middle in mid-summer. Reduction of oxygen levels to zero in some areas of the lake has resulted in the substantial displacement of indigenous fish by scavenger and trash fish.³³

Thousands of acres of cutover timber lands still lie abandoned to wind, fire, and insect. Fertile soil eroding from these lands

³²George Laycock, The Diligent Destroyers (1970), p. viii.

³³"Under Way: Drive to Clean Up the Lakes," US News and World Report, 24 April 1972, p. 52.

is silting up lakes, streams, and rivers. These lands must be put back into production and the erosion to them stopped.

Strip mining, carried on in 24 states from Virginia to Alaska, is devastating large portions of our countryside, often leaving in its wake "silted streams, acid filled ponds, and enormous gashes of barren land."³⁴ As of 1965, this industry had made reclamation efforts on less than 17 percent of the 3.2 million acres of American landscape laid to waste by its operations. The remainder has been abandoned for someone else to repair and heal.³⁵

In the State of Kansas alone about 50,000 acres were strip mined before laws were enacted in 1969 requiring the restoration of mined land to an acceptable contour and condition. Since 1969, approximately 3,500 of these spoiled acres have been restored to a productive level. Costs just for reshaping these ravished acres averaged \$125 to \$508 an acre. Fertilizing and seeding costs added another \$18 per acre. Thus, strip mined land can be salvaged, whether it is put back in agriculture crops or is used for recreational purposes and turned into lakes or camping and second-home sites. More must be done.³⁶

Each year, more and more Americans visit our national parks. Over 200 million visits to all units of the National Park System were made in 1971. By 1981 this figure is projected to climb to

³⁴"Battle Over Mining That Scars the Land," US News and World Report, 25 September 1972, p. 76.

³²Loycock, p. 134.

³⁰"Parcel-by-parcel Land Reclamation," Farmland News (Kansas City, Missouri), 30 June 1972, p. 20.

300 million visits. Only about five percent of the 30 million acres in the park system is developed for access and visitor use.³⁷ There is a growing need to convert for visitor use additional acreage in the existing system or to convert additional Federal lands into parks for use by the general public. Under the Legacy of Parks program, the Government has already started to turn over to the States small and large parcels of Federally owned acreage for use as parks.³⁸

CAN A CCC WORK AGAIN?

Can we once again then bring some wasting resources, poverty stricken and "aimless" youth and an eroding environment, together in an attempt to treat and cure them? I believe we can.

It was attempted in 1956 when Senator Hubert H. Humphrey introduced a bill that would establish a Youth Conservation Corps.³⁹ This was merely the CCC, warmed over. The bill called for a three year program with provisions for subsequent continuation; an appropriation of up to \$375 million annually; and a six month enrollment, with reenrollments possible up to a total of two years. The bill also provided for an initial enrollment of 50,000 males "of good character" between the ages of 16 and 21. Enrollments were to be increased by 50,000 each year to a maximum of 150,000. Base

³⁷"Going to a Park? Your Visit May Be Rationed Now," US News and World Report, 8 May 1972, p. 40.

³⁸"Push to Turn Federal Lands into Parks for the Public," US News and World Report, 28 August 1972, pp. 52-54.

³⁹Shirley Scholbie, Poverty Is Where the Money Is (1968), p. 46.

compensation to enrollees was to be \$60 per month with the annual cost per enrollee estimated to be between \$2700 and \$3000. The program would be established within and administered by the Department of Labor with advice and assistance coming from a four member Commission, chaired by the Secretary of Labor and composed of one representative each from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare; Department of Agriculture; and the Department of Interior.⁴⁰ There was no indication that the Army would have any involvement with the proposed program.

The program, advocated by the Humphrey bill, was to fill a "noticeable gap in our social structure." It was not to correct a momentary dip in the economy, solve a temporary lack of jobs for youth, be a panacea for delinquency, or give or be a substitute for military training. "There would be no 'made work' or artificial projects." Enrollees would "learn by doing," thus developing knowledge and a sense of "work responsibility," and job satisfaction that would equip them to meet a wide range of occupations. Conservation practices, long neglected for lack of funds, would be benefited at the same time.⁴¹

The measure won Senate passage in 1959 but failed to reach the floor of either House in later years. The bill was opposed by the Departments of Agriculture; Interior; Health, Education, and Welfare; and the Bureau of the Budget. It was felt the 4.9 percent unemploy-

⁴⁰Congress, Youth Conservation Act, pp. 3-6, 43-44.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 8.

ment, at the time, did not warrant such a program; there was "no need for inflationary, anti-depression remedies;" the bill would add to the current national deficit; and there was no evidence to prove that the bill would be effective in curbing juvenile delinquency. The bill was termed as "technically unsound."⁴²

On 11 August 1964 the Economic Opportunity Act was passed. The Act authorized establishment of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) within the Executive Office of the President. The OEO was to operate and oversee programs designed to fight poverty.⁴³

One of the programs to be operated by the OEO was the Job Corps. The Job Corps borrowed from the resurrected Youth Conservation Corps bill the idea of residential camps for boys where they were to receive on-the-job training, work experience, and education. The conservation part was dropped, initially, because emphasis was to be on training that could be used by the enrollee upon his return home. Later, to assure passage of the Job Corps legislation, an amendment was added specifying that the Youth Conservation Corps would constitute 40 percent of Job Corps enrollees.⁴⁴ The Job Corps became a program most like the CCC of the past. Yet, in the Job Corps there was something lacking and many mistakes were made.

The Job Corps, like the CCC, was started on a crash basis; however, unlike the CCC, the Job Corps has had much adverse publicity. An independent research study commissioned by the National Chamber

⁴²Ibid., pp. 44-45.

⁴³Scheible, p. 34.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 46-47.

of Commerce of the United States likened the Job Corps as "only a band aide (sic) for a very large wound." It was found to be doing little to aid graduates in job placement; employers contacted rated the majority of the graduates' training as "poor" or "satisfactory;" only 28 percent of the graduates were found to be working at jobs for which trained; and it was costly, with an average of \$8100 having been spent on each enrollee who had left the program.⁴⁵

Other problems have been noted to exist in the Job Corps, also. Enrollment was slip shod with little or no screening of applicants. "Illiterates and those with several years of high school education, hardened criminals and boy scouts, men of 21 and boys of 16, all were put together in the same groups."⁴⁶ Disciplinary authority was denied to the centers. Many centers were opened before they were equipped to train. Pre-entrance medical exams were so inadequate that the government paid plane fare to training centers for some enrollees who were physically unfit to participate.⁴⁷

CONCLUSION

A solution to "aimless youth" is not to find him a job or train him for a job but to place him, on a voluntary basis, in a disciplined environment where he can experience hard, satisfying work; eat good, wholesome food; learn good work habits; and mature into

⁴⁵"Youth and the War on Poverty," Independent Research Study Commissioned by the National Chamber of Commerce of the United States, 1969, pp. 1-4.

⁴⁶Scheible, p. 49.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 49-51.

adulthood. Having found himself, he should be able to return home and be better prepared to know what he wants to do in life. He should then be in better condition, physically and mentally, to finish his schooling, if that is desired; train for a vocation; or seek out, find, and hold a job. He should be better prepared to contribute to his community.

A CCC can help this young man find himself as it did once before. And the Army can once again play an important part. The Army is already equipped to screen enrollees, provide them with physical examinations, clothe them, and pre-condition them physically. The Army also has in its ranks or in a reserve status the experienced personnel required to administer camps set up to do conservation work. The experience that military personnel can contribute to such a program cannot be overlooked.

President Nixon, in a recent interview just before the 7 November 1972 election, stated that the election would "demonstrate that the American people want and the American people will thrive upon a new feeling of responsibility, a new feeling of self-discipline...."⁴⁸ He compared the average American to the child in the family. Give him responsibility and he will amount to something; make him dependent upon you or pamper him and he becomes a spoiled and weak individual.⁴⁹

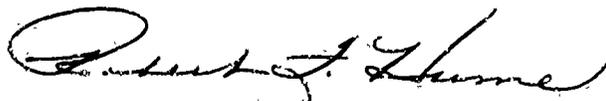
The President also talked about the next Administration being one of reform; using money more effectively and doing away with or

⁴⁸"A New Feeling of Self-Discipline," US News and World Report, 20 November 1972, p. 73.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 73.

trimming down programs that have been failures.⁵⁰

Perhaps, now is the time to reform or eliminate the Job Corps and re-establish an efficient program such as the CCC, with the Army taking an active part; a program that will once again bring together a "wasted youth" and neglected natural resources in an effort to salvage both of them.



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⁵⁰Ibid., p. 72.

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