

University of North Carolina at Asheville

The Good War: Life in Civilian Public Service Camp #108

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by
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In September 1943, Maestro John Kendall, violinist and "man of culture," learned by telegram that he was a new father to a bouncing baby boy. Ecstatic, Kendall made his announcement to the rest of his colleagues in the dining hall, and proceeded to write his wife a lengthy letter expressing his excitement about having a male firstborn. When Kendall went to the telegraph office to relay his message, the same operator who had first broken the news was still working and had the unfortunate duty of letting Kendall know that in all of the excitement, he did not hear the part of the message that informed him of his bouncing baby *girl!*¹ A seemingly humorous story printed in a newsletter written and published by war objectors was, for one World War II conscientious objector, everyday life. Religious objectors across the country were missing out on important moments in their lives because rather than raise arms across the Atlantic Ocean, they followed their religious compass and went to work on the home front instead.

John Kendall was not able to be present for the birth of his new daughter because during World War II he chose to stand as a conscientious objector and work in a Civilian Public Service (CPS) camp rather than report for drafted combat duty. For conscientious objectors in World War II, options were very limited. A conscientious objector could choose to serve in the military in a non-combat post, go to jail, or serve time in one of the many CPS camps scattered throughout the United States National Park System. Through the work done in these camps, the National Park System was able to go beyond simply surviving through World War II to thriving by building roads and trails, increasing accessibility. In particular, Camp #108 in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, where John Kendall was stationed, was considered a great success for the Great

¹ "Papa Perplexed," *The Calumet* II, no. 15 (September 1943): 3.

Smoky Mountains National Park, but what about the men who called it home? Because they chose to follow their pacifist faith, assignees to Camp #108 were stigmatized by their peers and persecuted for expressing their religious opposition to war, despite the fact that they were their country. CPS prisoners did manual labor day in and day out with no pay, causing their families great financial stress. They sacrificed their health and sanity by participating in human guinea pig experiments, and all along the way they were met by aggression from their fellow countrymen, local law enforcement, and their own government. Within the confines of the camp, affectionately named Camp Rufus Jones after a well known Quaker theologian, the conscientious objectors coped as best they could by establishing a library, a drama department, a labor union, and even an accredited branch of Guilford College, a college with which camp director John Ferguson had been affiliated.² All of these things, however, were poor substitutions for the lives conscientious objectors left behind in order to follow their faith and serve their country.

Scholarly works written on the topic of CPS camps are very rare. *The Conscientious Objector*, written in 1972 by Walter Guest Kellogg, focuses on the history of conscientious objection, rather than the work of COs at CPS camps. In 1999, *A Question of Conscience: Conscientious Objection in the Two World Wars* was published describing the lives of conscientious objectors during World Wars I and II.³ Since this book focuses on British conscientious objectors, there is no mention of CPS camps. However, the research in this book is very valuable when studying conscientious objection in America, as the reaction from the general population toward conscientious objection in Britain was very similar to the reactions seen in the

² "Ferguson is New Director," *The Calumet* II, no 12 (July 10, 1943): 3.

³ Felicity Goodall, *A Question of Conscience: Conscientious Objection in the Two World Wars*, Stroud: Sutton Pub, 1997.

United States. *Conscience and the State* was published in 1973, and was one of the first scholarly works to give a detailed account of conscientious objection during World War II. But, like those written before, this text devotes only a small number of pages to detailing the lives of conscientious objectors in CPS camps. *Conscription of Conscience* by Mulford Sibley and Philip Jacob was one of the first scholarly works published which includes the work camps in their study of conscientious objection.⁴ Published by the Cornell University Press in 1952, *Conscription* focuses specifically on conscientious objection during the years of 1940-1947. This book gives a detailed account of the process of becoming a conscientious objector, including a history of the historical peace churches that participate in conscientious objection. While it does devote four chapters to the establishment of and work done in CPS camps, the majority of the book focuses on other penalties for conscientious objectors, like non-combat positions in the military and prison sentences. The last part of the book is dedicated to the laws that make alternative service an option for conscientious objectors.

There are works available that highlight the work of the Civilian Public Service, however these books tend to focus mainly on the work of conscientious objectors in other capacities, such as working as orderlies in mental hospitals or as skydiving firefighters called smokejumpers.

Acts of Conscience: World War II, Mental Institutions, and Religious Objectors was published in 2009 and details the role of the Civilian Public Service in the reformation of mental health services.⁵ Author Stephen Taylor dedicates the majority of his research on CPS camps to the abhorrent conditions found in mental institutions at the time and the role of conscientious

⁴ Mulford Quickert Sibley and Philip E. Jacob, *Conscription of Conscience; The American State and the Conscientious Objector, 1940-1947*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965.

⁵ Steven J. Taylor, *Acts of Conscience: World War II, Mental Institutions, and Religious Objectors*, Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2009.

objectors in bringing about drastic change, though he makes only a passing mention of CPS work camps established around the country. In *Smoke Jumping on the Western Fire Line: Conscientious Objectors During World War II*, Matthews goes into great detail about the role of the CPS in assisting the U.S. National Forest Service.⁶ While the focus of firefighting was relevant to the assignees at Camp #108, *Smoke Jumping* deals exclusively with the CPS camp in Missoula, Montana that trained conscientious objectors to fight forest fires while the regular fire fighters were overseas fighting.

Aside from these three books, the subject of Civilian Public Service camps has been largely overlooked. In volume 3, issue #2 of *Smokies Life* magazine, David Brill wrote an article entitled *The Smokies' Conscientious Objector Work Camp*, which went into great detail about life within the Gatlinburg CPS camp.⁷ Although only ten pages long, this article is the most in depth secondary source published specifically on CPS Camp #108. While this source does not come from a scholarly publication, it is the first piece to chronicle life as a conscientious objector within a CPS camp. Brill gives an overview of many areas of camp life, from day-to-day operations, financial details, side camps, religion, scientific testing, and outside aggression faced by the assignees. Aside from the archived material found at the archives of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Brill uses another valuable source in writing his article: a former conscientious objector once stationed at Camp #108 named Hugh Bustin, whose inclusion in this article gives an invaluable contribution to both the information and the emotion relating to the

⁶ Mark Matthews, *Smoke Jumping on the Western Fire Line: Conscientious Objectors During World War II*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006.

⁷ David Brill, "The Smokies Conscientious Objector (CO) Work Camp," *Smokies Life Magazine* 2, vol. 3 (2009): 11-20.

camp. Other than the occasional passing mention, Brill's article is the first and only secondary source to give a detailed account of the life and operations of Camp Rufus Jones.

In 1940, President Roosevelt signed the Burke-Wadsworth Act, creating the country's first peacetime draft. But included that Act was one very important provision. Section 5(g) states:

Nothing contained in this act shall be construed to require any person to be subject to combatant training and service in the land and naval forces of the United States who, by reason of religious training and belief, is conscientiously opposed to war in any form. Any such person claiming such exemption from combatant training and service because of such conscientious objections whose claim is sustained by the local board shall, if he is inducted into the land or naval forces under this act, be assigned to noncombatant service as defined by the President, or shall, if he is found to be conscientiously opposed to participation in such noncombatant service, in lieu of such induction, be assigned to work of national importance under civilian direction.⁸

Because of the Burke-Wadsworth Act, conscientious objectors of World War II were also able to choose to be assigned to "work of national importance" should even a non-combat military role be unacceptable in their faith. In total, 43,000 men refused to fight in World War II and almost 12,000 of those men chose to serve in a CPS camp rather than a non-combat role or a prison sentence.⁹ 152 CPS camps were established by the United States government across the country, and the governing and financing of these camps was the responsibility of the three American historic peace churches: the Mennonite Church, the Church of the Brethren, and the Society of Friends, commonly known as the Quakers.

When the U.S. entered World War II in 1941, the National Park Service was facing pressure from many different sources. Commercial interests wanted to use the resources found

⁸ *The Selective Service and Training Act of 1940*, Public Law 783, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 54 [1939-40]: 885.

⁹ John M. Glen, "Secular Conscientious Objection in the United States: The Selective Service Act of 1940." *Peace & Change* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 1.

on the land for their own profit, while government agencies, which had in the past been occasionally allowed to use park land, wanted the facilities and resources to be used for the war effort.¹⁰ Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) had previously set up camps that provided the manpower for construction and park maintenance throughout the 1930s and had been mostly abandoned by 1942.¹¹ One of these CCC camps became the new home for CPS Camp #108 and conscientious objectors were assigned projects at a minimal cost to the government.¹² A July 1944 description of projects showed that the majority of work done within the camp was related to road maintenance, bridge building, and trail maintenance.¹³ In July 1943 alone, over 1,800 conscientious objector man-hours were spent doing manual labor throughout the park. conscientious objectors were also responsible for fire control within the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. On October 16 and 18, 1943 a training school was held at Camp #108 for conscientious objectors, who were trained and then assigned duty at fire towers throughout the park.¹⁴ During the fire season, conscientious objectors trained to fight fires were moved to a spike camp, a smaller branch of the main CPS camp, at Smokemont, Cataloochee, or Cade's

¹⁰ Janet A. McDonnell, "World War II: Defending Park Values and Resources," *The Public Historian* 29, no. 4 (Fall 2007): 15.

¹¹ McDonnell, 19.

¹² Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Superintendent's Monthly Report, File No. 207-02.3, April 1943.

¹³ "Description of Project Jobs," Great Smoky Mountains National Park Archives, Civilian Public Service (CPS) Camp 108 Archival Material, GRSM 108923, Folder 6, Gatlinburg, Tennessee, (July 1943), 1-2.

¹⁴ Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Superintendent's Monthly Report, File No. 207-02.3, October 1943.

Cove.¹⁵ It was reported that in 1943, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park suffered fewer burned acres than any year before.¹⁶

CPS Camp #108 was a very successful, organized camp. At any given time, there were approximately 160 assignees at #108. While all men were sent to this camp on the basis of religious objection, only about two fifths of them were Quakers.¹⁷ The camp was led by a director, who was in turn assisted by an assignee who acted as assistant director, a nurse, and a dietician.¹⁸ Conscientious objectors were expected to work 51 hours a week, with the bulk of their work being manual labor. As in Army camps, men were allowed leave on Sundays, and they were granted free time before the morning bell and after the evening meal. While all financial duties fell to the American Friends Service Committee, the United States government was responsible for providing the camp with buildings, tools, and supervisors for work projects.¹⁹

Despite the grueling work being done by conscientious objectors in Camp Rufus Jones, primarily clearing fire trails and doing various upkeep work for the National Park, the majority of the reactions by the locals of Gatlinburg were negative, even resulting in violence against the pacifist Quaker workers. Some attacks against the conscientious objectors were fueled by alcohol, something else in which Quaker conscientious objectors did not indulge in. On September 11, 1943, Peter Olmstead was hitchhiking his way to Knoxville to meet with friends.

¹⁵ "Side Camps," *The Calumet* II, no 14 (September 1, 1943): 5.

¹⁶ "Fire Record," *The Calumet* III, no 1 (April 20, 1944): 3.

¹⁷ "Questions and Answers About Camp Rufus Jones," Great Smoky Mountains National Park Archives, Civilian Public Service (CPS) Camp 108 Archival Material, GRSM 108923, Folder 4, Gatlinburg, Tennessee (1943), 1-2.

¹⁸ "Information About Camp Rufus Jones," Great Smoky Mountains National Park Archives, Civilian Public Service (CPS) Camp 108 Archival Material, GRSM 108923, Folder 9, Gatlinburg, Tennessee (n.d.), 1-2.

¹⁹ "Questions and Answers," 2-3.

Just outside of Gatlinburg, Olmstead approached a small gas station/bar combination. Men were outside talking and, according to Olmstead, clearly intoxicated. Having already been involved in more than one run-in with locals, Olmstead decided not to ask them for a ride and to keep walking. A short while later, those same men pulled up beside Olmstead as he was walking to offer him a ride. According to Olmstead's statement, he believed one of the men to be a soldier who did not appear to have been drinking. As soon as the car was in motion, the intoxicated passenger began barraging Olmstead with questions about his conscientious objector status and calling him a liar and a coward. After approximately ten minutes of this, the passenger ordered the driver to pull over the truck so that he could "c'm on an' fight." When the soldier pulled the car to the side, both Olmstead and the passenger got out of the vehicle, and Olmstead began walking away. The drunk man approached Olmstead from behind and began hitting, kicking, and pulling out Olmstead's hair. The man also attempted to push Olmstead off of a nearby cliff. Finally, the soldier got out of the car and called his friend back, leaving Olmstead to be picked up by another passing car without further incident.²⁰ This was the first documented act of violence by locals against conscientious objectors from Camp #108, but over the next three years there were many more to come.

The reaction of the local authorities to incidents like these was minimal at best. Police intervention was rare, but when an incident got to the point where authorities were called, they treated the conscientious objectors with indignance. In an earlier incident on July 31, 1943, several men from the camp went to a square dance in Gatlinburg. A few of these men had gone to one of these dances previously and reported no problems. On this night, however, some of the

²⁰ Peter Olmstead, "Of Public Relations Incident of Sept 11, '43," Great Smoky Mountains National Park Archives, Civilian Public Service (CPS) Camp 108 Archival Material, GRSM 108923, Folder 12, Gatlinburg, Tennessee (1943), 1.

local men were upset that the conscientious objectors were dancing with their girls. When the dance ended at midnight, a local man asked an unnamed conscientious objector if he was from the camp "up the road." When he replied that he was, the local man asked him to step outside because he had "something to tell him." Once outside, the local man recruited the help of another local in questioning the conscientious objector, asking him if he did not think it dishonorable to refuse to fight for one's country. The conscientious objector was twice hit in the face and twice knocked unconscious. Once up, the conscientious objector was ordered by the locals to go inside, gather the rest of the conscientious objectors, and leave quickly "if you know what's good for you." After relaying the story, two conscientious objectors left immediately, and soon after the remaining five followed suit.²¹

As practicing pacifists, the men attempted to remove themselves from the situation, but when they left the building, they were greeted by a mob of 35 people. The men began walking down the street toward their camp and the crowd followed behind them, shouting at the conscientious objectors louder and louder. For their own safety, the conscientious objectors decided to take refuge in one of the hotels that was along the road to wait for the crowd to disperse. Instead, eight to ten local men followed the conscientious objectors into the hotel lobby and demanded that the clerk kick the conscientious objectors out or they would "burn the place down." The locals grabbed one of the conscientious objectors, the first man to be questioned after the dance, and dragged him out of the hotel. The rest of the assignees followed their comrade. Once outside, all five of the men were attacked individually by members of the crowd.

²¹ Kenneth Bache, "Report of the Incident of July 31," Great Smoky Mountains National Park Archives, Civilian Public Service (CPS) Camp 108 Archival Material, GRSM 108923, Folder 12, Gatlinburg, Tennessee (1943), 1-2.

The local police arrived and the crowd disbanded, and the campers, who had begun their walk back to the camp, were picked up by a squad car and driven back to the camp.²²

The reaction to the violence of that night was entirely unsympathetic towards the conscientious objectors. In a letter from one unnamed conscientious objector to another, he sums up the violence of the night and the reaction of the dance hall owner:

Those sons-a-bitches are mean babies. About 10% of the camp personnel have already been beaten up by them...the proprietor of the dance hall asked [conscientious objectors] not to attend because as he explained, "there might be a shooting in here - and that's bad for business."²³

The reaction from the media and local authorities was no improvement. The morning after the altercation, *The Gatlinburg News*, the local newspaper, published an article titled "Even 'Homefront' Fight Is Too Much For CO's." The article began by stating that "Conscientious objectors are not cut out for any type of warfare, especially the kind that begins over girls." It continued to report that the local men "reigned supreme" after the fight. The Sheriff, who stated that he was present the whole time, reported that the conscientious objectors had been bragging about dating the girls and that they "might have known what those [Gatlinburg] boys would do." The Sheriff continued to say that four conscientious objectors had already run away and one was laying on his face just "playing possum" when he decided to put a stop to the fight. Not that he thought it was much of a fight anyway as he concluded that "four of those fellows ran too fast to get hit much." No arrests were made.²⁴ The tensions within Camp #108 increased as, when faced

²² Bache, 1-2.

²³ Untitled letter, Great Smoky Mountains National Park Archives, Civilian Public Service (CPS) Camp 108 Archival Material, GRSM 108923, Folder 12, Gatlinburg, Tennessee (1943), 1-2.

²⁴ *The Gatlinburg News*, "Even 'Homefront' Fight Too Much For COs," August 1, 1943.

with violence that their faith forbid them from retaliating against, camp inmates could not even depend on law enforcement to protect them.

In addition to the manual labor performed by conscientious objectors, these men also voluntarily sacrificed their health to participate in scientific experiments while enlisted in the CPS. Some camps, like Camp #115 in Pinehurst, North Carolina, were wholly dedicated to medical testing. Others, like Camp #108, merely dabbled in human guinea pig experiments. In September 1943, two doctors from the Commission on Acute Respiratory Disease arrived at Camp Rufus Jones. The doctors had come to the camp to select fifteen men to participate in a medical experiment involving atypical pneumonia (AP). They explained it as a minor disease, ranking somewhere between a serious illness and a bad cold. A disease that usually puts its victims on bed for a week or so, AP was difficult to treat.²⁵ In a report that followed the experiment, the doctors stated that they did not know if it was possible to "give" AP to anyone, or if it was a virus at all.²⁶

The idea of using the CPS camp as an experimentation center was proposed to camp director John Ferguson by Alex Burgess of the American Friends Service Committee. After Ferguson held a meeting with the campers on September 19, the doctors arrived in only a week and campers lined up to enlist.²⁷ When doctors initially talked to campers about the experiment, it was explained that the men would be required to commit to the experiment for six weeks, which meant no manual labor and therefore appealed to many campers. When the conscientious

²⁵ No Title, *The Calumet II*, no 16 (October 1943): 5.

²⁶ James Read, "The Guinea Pig Experiment at Gatlinburg," Great Smoky Mountains National Park Archives, Civilian Public Service (CPS) Camp 108 Archival Material, GRSM 108923, Folder 7, Gatlinburg, Tennessee (1944), 1.

²⁷ No Title, *The Calumet II*, no 16 (October 1943): 5.

objectors asked why the tests were being done at a CPS camp, rather than at the doctors' home base of Fort Bragg, the doctors explained that the mortality in an experiment like this was 3 in 2,000, and should one of the soldiers die, the public relations would be a mess. They were worried that people would complain about "our boys" dying like animals and then Congress, who would not have allowed human guinea pig experiments in the first place, would find out about the experiments.²⁸

Out of ninety volunteers, the twenty-five men selected for the experiment led by Dr. John Dingle were asked to sign waivers promising not to hold the government responsible for any future health issues. The waiver was a point of issue for some conscientious objectors as it contained a clause stipulating that the experiment was being done "for the good of humanity and for other good and valuable considerations." Some of the men were concerned that in the future, historians might interpret this clause to mean that the conscientious objectors were profiting financially from this experiment, which they were not. Because of this clause, a few men were unwilling to give consent. In total, thirty men were involved directly in the experiment, fifteen as guinea pigs and fifteen as controls. The experiment lasted for the full six weeks with the guinea pigs isolated to the infirmary, affectionately nicknamed the "pest house."

In general, the men in isolation enjoyed a short reprieve from the manual labor to which they had been subjected for more than a year. Most men used their time to read and write, one man finished composing a symphony that he had been unable to complete prior to confinement, and others continued working on their college courses that they were taking through correspondence with their professors.²⁹ In order to keep informed about camp happenings, the

²⁸ Read, 2.

²⁹ Read, 2-3.

guinea pigs posted "The Daily Grunt," a typewritten, daily newsletter, on a camp bulletin board. In response, the campers sent their own daily newsletter, "The Daily Hog Slop," to the pest house.³⁰

During the course of the experiment, when it initially did not produce the extreme sickness that Dingle had hoped for, he decided that instead of trying to cure the men by putting them on bed rest, he should have the men attempt to play touch football in the cold, damp weather to give the virus a fair chance. It should be noted that one of the pigs had all along refused bed rest. A former University of Pennsylvania football player, he refused to admit to any illness and, once out of isolation, ran through the camp in shorts daily to prove his health. This gentleman contracted the third worst case of AP of the whole group. After two weeks, most of the men were out of isolation, but two men became so ill that they had to be sent to a local hospital. Many campers were jealous, because when the hospitalized men were well enough to write, they sent glowing reports of the "pulchritude of the nurses" - although James Read, author of *The Guinea Pig Experiment at Gatlinburg*, explains that this "was a relative matter - influenced by the length of time some of the boys had been out of touch with the feminine element."³¹ As a whole, Dingle was happy with the results and reported that the experiment would likely be conducted again on a larger scale. A *New York Times* article from June 25, 1944 revealed the role of CPS camps, Camp #108 in particular, in the testing of various strains of influenza and pneumonia. Because of the test at Camp #108 and a subsequent medical

³⁰ Read, 2-3.

³¹ Read, 4.

experiment, it was found that vaccinations against the flu were the most effective means of protection.³²

For all of the work done and beatings taken, the conscientious objectors enlisted in CPS did not get paid. Rather, they were expected to pay the government for the privilege of working at a camp such as #108. Each conscientious objector was expected to pay \$2.50 per month for the entirety of their conscription, as well as any other living costs.³³ In 1944, Friends CPS (F-CPS) cost roughly half a million dollars. To pay for the expenses, \$190,000 was raised from Friends Meetings, \$150,000 from non-historic peace churches, and the remainder was paid through miscellaneous sources including the Mennonite Church and special gifts. Many families of conscientious objectors paid for individual expenses out of pocket. At Camp #108 in particular, the AFSC was responsible for all of the camp finances. A camp farm was established in an attempt to ease the burden on the AFSC, but after the closing of Buck Creek Camp #19 in 1944, their farm equipment was sold at a value that was \$600 more than its actual worth, leaving Camp #108 with a year end deficit of nearly \$500.³⁴ Aside from camp expenses, the AFSC also took responsibility for the needs of the campers within Camp Rufus Jones. From May 1943 to February 1945, the AFSC paid for a multitude of conscientious objector expenses, including travel advances, legal fees, and emergency loans.³⁵

³² Read, 2-3.

³³ Public Broadcasting Service, "The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It: Alternative Service," <http://www.pbs.org/itvs/thegoodwar/alternative.html> (accessed April 14, 2011).

³⁴ Stephen Powelson, Letter to Paul Furnace - Executive Secretary for CPS American Friends Service Committee, Great Smoky Mountains National Park Archives, Civilian Public Service (CPS) Camp 108 Archival Material, GRSM 108923, Folder 14, Gatlinburg, Tennessee (April 4, 1945), 4.

³⁵ Powelson, 2.

The financial burden did not fall just to the AFSC or conscientious objectors. The wives of conscientious objectors were now responsible for being both full-time parents to their children as well as sole breadwinners for their families. A survey sent to all CPS camps in the country inquiring about the livelihood of conscientious objector dependents was sent from camp #108. John Goeing, the conscientious objector responsible for the survey, found that there were no specific plans in place for spouses and dependents within any of the CPS camps. Furthermore, none of the camps polled kept any type of record indicating the financial needs of conscientious objectors' families back home. The 853 men who responded to the survey listed a total of 1,258 dependents. Over one third of the dependents recorded in the survey reported that they had no means of support at all, not even family or church support. This one third were left simply to survive with no income at all. Other dependents surveyed were able to gain partial assistance from church organizations or from family members, though it was only about a tenth of all dependents. The majority of all conscientious objector families, just under half, simply relied on their fast-dwindling savings for support. When the director of a Brethren Service Committee responded to this information, he further elaborated that within his unit, approximately twenty percent of dependents were not able to self-support and preferred risking their health by overworking or living on very little rather than face the embarrassment of accepting charity. Other conscientious objectors reported that they had wives at home with newborn babies, and one even went so far as to relay that his wife, in an attempt to work to support the family, had been forced to move eight times in the course of a year. At the time of this survey, October 1944, it was

hoped that the AFSC would be able to start providing funds for dependents as early as November 1944.³⁶

In the face of physical, mental, and financial hardships, conscientious objectors struggled to find ways to cope with daily life. Many assignees took part in various camp educational activities, like glee club, play performances, first aid classes, and religious studies.³⁷ Campers more serious about their education were given the opportunity to receive college credit through an accredited branch of Guilford College, which began its classes in July 1943.³⁸ At Rufus Jones College, conscientious objectors could choose from four courses to take in English, Philosophy, or Political Science.³⁹ In its first semester, Rufus Jones college saw eight assignees complete an English Composition course.⁴⁰ By the second semester, twenty men were enrolled and over half of the men at the camp expressed an interest in taking classes.⁴¹

One assignee in particular was able to put his free time at Camp #108 to good use. Arthur Edwin Bye, a landscape architect and *Calumet* cover artist stationed at Camp Rufus Jones, was put to work by the National Park Service drawing up plans for government buildings. Since Bye was a conscripted conscientious objector, the Park Service was able to employ his skills without paying any type of salary. While assigned at the National Park headquarters, Bye designed plans for multiple museums, including a Museum of Natural History, a community amphitheater, and a

³⁶ "The Problem of CO Wives and Children," *The Calumet* III, no 8 (October 20, 1944): 2.

³⁷ "Educational Programs," Great Smoky Mountains National Park Archives, Civilian Public Service (CPS) Camp 108 Archival Material, GRSM 108923, Folder 4, Gatlinburg, Tennessee (1943), 1-2.

³⁸ "Educational Program Starting," *The Calumet* II, no 12 (July 10, 1943): 3.

³⁹ "Rufus Jones College," *The Calumet* II, no 16 (October 1943): 6.

⁴⁰ "Rufus Jones Stirs," *The Calumet* II, no 18 (March 27, 1944): 5.

⁴¹ "Chips From a Double Bit Axe," *The Calumet* III, no 8 (October 20, 1944): 5.

“pioneer culture” museum. Because of his technical training at Penn State University, Bye was considered very valuable for his ability to adapt his plans to a particular environment. *Calumet* editors jokingly complained that they were unsure about his skill as “he [was] not being half as creative” in his *Calumet* covers as he was in his building design.⁴²

With increasing frustrations over working and living conditions, some conscientious objectors formed an after-hours group called the After-Ten Club. This group met after mealtime at the camp to air their grievances and discuss solutions to camp problems. One of the problems brought to light in Camp #108 was need for protection of workers rights. To solve this, in November of 1944 sixteen men formed a local unit of the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU). Assignee Ralph Koeppel sent a letter to Phil Minor of the CPSU stating:

We finally succeeded, on last Saturday nite [sic], in getting 15 men signed up for membership in the CPSU. I am attaching a list of names, adding my own, and on the basis of this active nucleus of 16 we hope to develop an active local.⁴³

Their plans to form an active local proved to be difficult as many men who were interested at the start were transferred out of the camp. Although disorganized and often without a leader, the local union of Camp #108 was eventually an organized unit with elected officers and monthly meetings.⁴⁴ Only one month later, in December of 1944, new CPSU member Kenneth Bache called upon the Union for assistance. When Bache applied for a medical release, he was informed that either he would be granted release and leave Camp #108 as a free man, or his request would be rejected and he would be sent to Germfask, a CPS camp in Michigan notorious

⁴² "The Cover and the Man," *The Calumet* III, no 6 (August 5, 1944): 2.

⁴³ "Letter to CPSU," Great Smoky Mountains National Park Archives, Civilian Public Service (CPS) Camp 108 Archival Material, GRSM 108923, Folder 9, Gatlinburg, Tennessee (1944), 1.

⁴⁴ "CPS Union," Great Smoky Mountains National Park Archives, Civilian Public Service (CPS) Camp 108 Archival Material, GRSM 108923, Folder 9, Gatlinburg, Tennessee (April 21, 1945), 1.

for attracting troublemakers. Brache argued in his letter to Tom Leonard, a board member of the CPSU, that he was a Friend “of the convinced variety,” and should not have to tolerate being removed from his camp without consent. He further alleged that he found this to be a ploy brought on by the Selective Service to keep discharge numbers low.⁴⁵ In response, an official from the CPSU looked into the case and worked as an advocate for Brache in order to prevent a transfer to Germfask or any further complications.⁴⁶

When these methods of coping were no longer effective, some conscientious objectors chose to walk away. At Camp #108, on May 21, 1944, Donn Yarrow became the second conscientious objector in eighteen months to go AWOL.⁴⁷ This had been the case at many CPS camps across the country, but often this was due to religious or moral reasons.⁴⁸ For Yarrow, however, that was not the case. A thirty-eight year old father, Yarrow had a twelve year old daughter back home in New York. Yarrow was an objector sent to camp #108 to await a medical discharge, but in the meantime he was unable to support his daughter. That, in addition to his increasing dissatisfaction with the work, caused him to make the decision not to return to Camp Rufus Jones after a furlough. Yarrow was arrested seven months later and charged with going AWOL from Camp #108. When brought before Judge Taylor in Knoxville, Tennessee, Yarrow was very forthcoming about his situation and explained to the judge that not only was his family unable to survive on the nonexistent salary from CPS, but he also let the judge know what he

⁴⁵ “Letter to Tom Leonard,” Great Smoky Mountains National Park Archives, Civilian Public Service (CPS) Camp 108 Archival Material, GRSM 108923, Folder 9, Gatlinburg, Tennessee (April 21, 1945), 1.

⁴⁶ “Letter to Kenneth Brache,” Great Smoky Mountains National Park Archives, Civilian Public Service (CPS) Camp 108 Archival Material, GRSM 108923, Folder 9, Gatlinburg, Tennessee (April 21, 1945), 1.

⁴⁷ “Requiescat: Work of National Importance,” *The Calumet* III, no 10 (December 20, 1944): 2.

⁴⁸ Edward Flud Burrows, 1992. "Recollections of Buck Creek (North Carolina) and Crestview (Florida) Civilian Public Service (CPS) August 1941- February 1943," *Southern Friend* 14, no. 2: 11-19. America: History and Life with Full Text, EBSCOhost (accessed October 09, 2011).

thought about the "work of national importance" going on within the CPS camps, calling it unworthy of his abilities. In the short time that he had been AWOL, he explained, he had worked as a volunteer orderly in order to continue his service to his country. The judge responded that he considered some conscientious objectors "plain bad citizens", but he was sympathetic to Yarrow's situation because he believed that for the most part conscientious objectors "generally suffered from mental quirks."⁴⁹

This was not the first time that a government official voiced their concerns about conscientious objectors have some sort of mental disability. On February 17, 1943, General Hershey testified at a Senate Military Affairs Committee that it was his opinion that conscientious objectors were "a little psychopathic" for taking extreme measures to avoid killing and even fighting.⁵⁰ Judge Taylor decided to parole Yarrow to Presbyterian Hospital in New York City as an orderly making \$50 a month. Most conscientious objectors who went AWOL were not nearly so lucky, usually facing a penalty of two to five years in prison.⁵¹

Life in a CPS camp was difficult, tedious, and thankless. Thousands of men gave up years of their life to do "work of national importance" while their families waited with no end in sight. Conscientious objectors made it possible to preserve the safety and natural beauty of the National Park System for less than no money. Primarily based on religious convictions, conscientious objectors were obligated by their faith to refuse war and violence, and rather than go to prison, these men chose to dedicate their time and health to a cause that would benefit their nation. conscientious objectors at Camp #108 fought fires and worked on trails, in addition to

⁴⁹ "Requiescat: Work of National Importance," *The Calumet* III, no 10 (December 20, 1944): 2.

⁵⁰ "Some Are A Little Psychopathic," *The Calumet* II, no 12 (July 10, 1943): 6.

⁵¹ "Requiescat: Work of National Importance," *The Calumet* III, no 10 (December 20, 1944): 2.

becoming the on-call help for any random problem that arose within the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.⁵² In Camp #108, men voluntarily enrolled in a scientific experiment that used their bodies as carriers for atypical pneumonia. Even while enlisted to conserve the nation's resources, conscientious objectors were still looked upon as yellow-bellied or cowards. Because of the manual labor done digging ditches and clearing fire trails, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park saw record low fire numbers. Because of the physical sacrifices made by these assignees, medical research was able to advance to a level that was so sophisticated that we use the same treatment methods for the flu today that these experiments directed us to. Research in this field is necessary in order to protect the legacy of World War II conscientious objectors. The work done in specific CPS units has been very well documented, for instance the smoke-jumpers of the midwest. However, the work done by assignees at Camp #108 in Gatlinburg, Tennessee was equally important to the survival of America's National Park System. To date, the bulk of historical research has overlooked the efforts of these men, who worked tirelessly to ensure that they could serve both their country and their God with honor.

⁵² Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Superintendent's Monthly Report, File No. 207-02.3, July 1942.

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