Searching For Work Of National Importance Civilian Public Service Smokejumpers In World War II

Annie Hanshew
Carroll College, Helena, MT

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SEARCHING FOR WORK OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE
CIVILIAN PUBLIC SERVICE SMOKEJUMPERS IN WORLD WAR II

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR GRADUATION HONORS

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY
ANNE HANSHEW

HELENA, MONTANA
MAY 2003
This thesis has been approved for honors recognition for the Department of History.

Robert Aronson
Director

O. M. Wittman
Reader

David A. Messinger
Reader
CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .............................................. vi

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION ............................................. 1

II. THE NEED FOR ABLE-BODIED MEN. ................ 9

III. WORK AT THE CPS SMOKEJUMPER CAMP .... 22

IV. SOCIAL, SPIRITUAL, AND POLITICAL LIFE AT CAMP 103 . 37

V. SMOKEJUMPING AS A MODEL FOR CIVILIAN PUBLIC SERVICE 49

EPILOGUE .................................................. 59

NOTES ................................................... 62

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................. 76
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I decided that I wanted to write my thesis about wildland firefighting while working for the Helena Ranger District’s Initial Attack crew in the summer of 2001. A fellow firefighter told me that a group of World War II conscientious objectors had worked as smokejumpers near Missoula. That was the spark, but this paper would not have gone far had it not been for Dave Walter of the Montana Historical Society, who, in addition to giving me encouragement and guidance, generously gave me access to his copies of the Camp 103 records. Dave also led me to Roy Wenger, the first director of Camp 103, who currently lives in Missoula. Roy was kind enough to let me interview him—an experience that I thoroughly enjoyed. In addition to his memories and insights, Roy gave me informational material on the camp and the Mennonite peace movement.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In 1940 the United States government enacted the country's first peacetime draft. While Americans generally supported the government as it prepared for entry into World War II, a few organizations remained deeply committed to pacifism. Dedicated to peace for centuries as part of their dedication to Christianity and the nonresistant message of Jesus Christ, the Historic Peace Churches (HPCs) were threatened by conscription. Having struggled historically to maintain their nonresistant stance in the face of governmental opposition, these peace sects—primarily the Society of Friends, the Mennonite Church, and the Church of the Brethren—worked together for the first time on the eve of American involvement in World War II to secure an alternative to the armed services. The result of their efforts, Civilian Public Service (CPS) was the culmination of past HPC struggles with the United States government and various European governments.

For many conscientious objectors (COs), the CPS experience entailed a struggle to balance their pacifist beliefs with a desire to do meaningful work for their country and humanity. Discouraged early on with menial tasks and a sometimes hostile, inflexible Selective Service System (SSS), CPS men began searching for the "moral equivalent of
war”—a type of work that would allow them to make a significant contribution to society without aiding the war effort.

Many COs would remain frustrated in their search. Some men turned to nonviolent resistance within the CPS camps, refusing to eat or work and usually ending up in jail as a result. Others fought with Selective Service to be allowed to do social welfare work. For a handful of CPS men, the search would lead them to an abandoned Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp near the city of Missoula, Montana, and the Seeley Lake Ranger Station, which had become a headquarters for the newly developed United States Forest Service (USFS) smokejumper program. Camp 103 was the only one of its kind in the CPS program, and in many ways the men at the camp had a CPS experience unique from any other. But at the same time, the CPS smokejumper camp represented a model for “work of national importance”—valuable work done by men who wanted to help their country but could not in good conscience fight a war.

The Civilian Public Service program must be viewed in light of the history of the sects that participated in it and their experiences with the United States government. Antimilitarism was an important part of the early Christian Church belief system. Followers of Jesus looked to the Book of Matthew and the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus preached that Christians should love their enemies, for a model of Christian behavior.¹ This viewpoint suggested that vengeance belonged to God and that humans should follow Christ’s example of nonresistance—which could involve earthly suffering—while keeping in sight the promise that the meek would someday inherit the earth.²
The nonresistant viewpoint prevailed in the early Church, but problems began to arise as Christianity spread to Roman soldiers in the second century. Often the Church failed to censure Christians in the imperial army even though it was inconsistent with the official Church position. But it was the conversion of the Emperor Constantine that prompted the “Christianization of the warrior’s function.” This abandonment of official Church pacifism was completed in the fifth century when St. Augustine of Hippo forwarded the Just War doctrine, which justified Christian warfare to defend the “city of God.” The only remnant of early Church pacifism was the ban on clerical participation in battle and the pacifism associated with monastic movements.3

While there were some peace movements in the medieval Church aimed at limiting war, sectarian pacifism did not revive until just before the Protestant Reformation. The Hussites of Bohemia influenced both Martin Luther and John Calvin, along with a string of nonresistant sects that developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Followers of John Hus believed that the feudal system was inconsistent with Christian principles and that Christians should form small communities and live based on the New Testament. This interpretation of the New Testament included a strong commitment to pacifism, a principle that was subsequently adopted by the Czech Brethren, the Swiss Anabaptists, and their successors, the Mennonites, the Hutterites, and the Society of Friends.4

The history of these sects is one of persecution and conflict. To varying degrees, they believed in separatism from the governments under which they were living. This separatism became a source of contention when the sect members refused to serve in militias, pay taxes, or participate in local governments. Although the sects were
sometimes able to work out arrangements with the government to avoid military service and maintain general autonomy, these agreements were often tenuous. Pressures from the state usually resulted in a weakening of separatist, nonresistant principles or emigration to countries that promised a greater degree of religious tolerance.\textsuperscript{5}

Finding opposition to their religious beliefs throughout Europe, many HPC members eventually relocated to North America, where they hoped to find religious freedom. The colony of Pennsylvania held especial promise. Founded by British Quaker William Penn in 1682, Pennsylvania was predicated on religious tolerance, a feature that attracted Mennonite and Brethren immigrants, in addition to Friends. Early HPC immigrants also settled in the colonies of Maryland and Virginia.\textsuperscript{6}

Generally able to gain exemptions from colonial militias, the HPCs faced the first real challenge to their nonresistance in the American Revolution. This experience would mark the beginning of a difficult relationship with the United States government in wartime. Many Mennonites and Brethren were grateful to the British king for the degree of religious tolerance they had experienced, but church principles required them to remain neutral in the conflict. At the same time troops were needed for colonial militias and the Continental Army. As a compromise the HPCs were allowed to pay heavy fines for refusing to serve or to hire a substitute (a practice which was particularly abhorrent to Mennonites and Brethren), in addition to paying steep wartime taxes for not fighting in the Revolutionary cause. Although few conscientious objectors were forced to fight against their will in the American Revolution, some were jailed for their beliefs. Many, unhappy with the results of the war, either moved to Canada where they could remain
loyal to the British Crown or refused to pay taxes to the new government for decades after the war ended.\textsuperscript{7}

Although HPC members were generally nonparticipants in the new government and had virtually no role in the drafting of the United States Constitution, one member of the Constitutional Convention of 1787 almost secured permanent protection for the rights of conscientious objectors. James Madison wanted the Second Amendment to the Constitution to include language protecting religious COs. His version of the amendment read: "The right of people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed; a well-armed and well-regulated militia being the best security of a free country; but no person religiously scrupulous of bearing arms shall be compelled to render military service in person."\textsuperscript{8} Despite opposition based on the argument that conscientious objection was not a natural right, Madison’s version of the amendment narrowly passed the House of Representatives; however, the Senate later removed the CO language. As a result, conscientious objection in the United States is a matter of legislative and political privilege rather than a constitutionally protected right.\textsuperscript{9}

Congress did not face the task of deciding the extent and form CO privileges for almost a century after the American Revolution. During these decades before the Civil War, HPC members remained devoted to nonresistance, but their commitment went untested. As slavery and secession became national political issues, the HPCs generally sympathized with the North and even began to vote for the Republican Party. With the onset of the Civil War, many young HPC members willingly joined the Union army to fight. Those who did not join once again faced the choice between paying a large fine (a choice which was restricted to peace sects) or hiring a substitute. Because Mennonites
and Brethren are baptized in adulthood, young men who were members of the church but had not undergone baptism were not given the option of paying a fine. These men were forced to choose between serving in the army and hiring a substitute, two practices which their churches condemned.¹⁰

This situation in the South was even more difficult. Many Friends who lived in the Southern states had already moved to the northwestern territories in the years prior to the Civil War because of their strong antislavery beliefs. By the time the war began, the remaining religious conscientious objectors were mostly Brethren concentrated in the state of Virginia. Loyal to their state but sympathetic to Union principles, these COs were not initially granted exemption from the state militia or, later, the Confederate army. Many tried to escape to the North but were caught and imprisoned. Eventually, southern COs were allowed to pay a commutation fee of five-hundred dollars to avoid military service.¹¹

In some respects the Civil War weakened the peace witness of the HPCs. Many members believed so strongly in the Union cause that they willingly joined to fight. Although these combatants would normally be excommunicated, the men were usually allowed back into their churches after the war if they said they were sorry for fighting. However, the peace sects experienced a renewed commitment to pacifism in the years after the Civil War. This renewal was augmented by an influx of Mennonite immigrants who left Russia after the implementation of universal military conscription. Even this strengthened support for peace did not prepare them for the challenges they would face in the First World War.¹²
Once again the nonresistant principles of the American HPCs were not challenged for decades. As a result, American HPCs were ill-prepared for United States involvement in World War I. War began in Europe in 1914, but a policy of neutrality kept American soldiers out of the conflict for over two years. On April 30, 1917, more than two months after President Woodrow Wilson severed diplomatic relations with Germany, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) met to discuss two concerns: how to obtain combatant and noncombatant exemption from military service and how to devise a program for alternative service satisfactory to both the government and conscientious objectors. The result was a plan to create a unit of COs for reconstruction projects in France. The Mennonites developed a similar plan. But, although the American Friends coordinated their efforts with the British Society of Friends, none of the American peace sects worked with each other to oppose conscription. This failure to unite severely undermined the strength of their position against the government.13

Thus, when President Wilson signed the Selective Training Act on May 18, 1917, the CO provision required that conscientious objectors be given noncombatant status. The HPCs desired CO exemption from both combatant and noncombatant status because noncombatants still fell under military control and aided the military effort. While the president had the authority to define noncombatant status, he did not want to appear lax with COs and chose to interpret noncombatancy only in military terms. This definition provided no option for those objectors who could not accept military service.14

The churches lobbied Secretary of War Newton D. Baker for a form of civilian service, but the Secretary—who was aware of abuses to the exemption process in the Civil War—was initially reluctant to accommodate these requests. The CO
noncombatants became a problem for the military when the men were sent to training camps. Many noncombatants refused to cooperate, prompting Baker to order that they be segregated from the rest of the draftees in an effort to shame them into compliance. When this did not work camp authorities resorted to physical abuse and court martials to deal with the COs.\textsuperscript{15}

Eventually the difficulties in camps forced the government to take the HPC requests for alternative service seriously. In January 1918 Baker sent a letter to the Senate Military Affairs Committee asking for a joint resolution to allow him to grant furloughs for civilian work. Passed on March 16, 1918, the Furlough Act allowed men to be furloughed without pay for civilian employment involving agriculture, reconstruction and relief abroad, forestry, and other general work. Although the furloughed men were still working under the military and the War Department continued to treat COs harshly, the act represented a relative victory for the HPCs.\textsuperscript{16}

The rhetoric of World War I suggested that it was a “war to end war” fought to make the world “safe for democracy.” In the war’s aftermath, and especially in the 1930s, the HPCs found new ideological support from the burgeoning secular peace movement. But as fascism grew in Europe, pacifism declined in the United States. On the brink of World War II the Historic Peace Churches again stood virtually alone in their conscience objection to military service. While they had been abandoned by most of their secular allies, the HPCs had the fresh memory of the First World War to guide them in their quest for alternative service.\textsuperscript{17}
CHAPTER II
THE NEED FOR ABLE-BODIED MEN

In February 1937 Americans responded to a survey in Harper’s asking if the United States should participate in another war like the World War; ninety-five percent said “no.”¹ Public opinion would change rapidly. Within a few years the United States had implemented the country’s first peacetime draft and was preparing for entry into the Second World War. In those months of preparation, the country united behind the war effort.² Comprising only 0.5 percent of the United States population, absolute pacifists had little support from the country in general and Congress in particular.³ As a result, the American peace sects were alone in their task of representing the interests of conscientious objectors to ensure that problems arising in past American wars were not repeated.

Fortunately, the peace sects were not caught off guard, as they had been in earlier wars. Mobilization for future preparedness began almost immediately after the failure to secure alternative service in World War I. In 1919 the Mennonite Church established a committee to educate its members in peace and maintain contact with the government on peace-related issues. The Society of Friends held a global conference in 1920 to address the wartime experience. The Brethren, Mennonites, and Friends all performed reconstruction work in France and incorporated this type of service into their church
missions. Additionally, the Friends (and, to a lesser degree, the Brethren) actively worked with secular organizations to promote pacifism in the 1930s.

Perhaps most significantly, the peace churches held a conference in August 1923 at Bluffton College in Ohio. Representing the first time that American peace sects gathered together, this historic assemblage produced the Conference of Pacifist Churches, which met six times in the next decade. The sects synchronized to speak out against war, support disarmament, and prepare a plan of action in case of conflict. As a result of these meetings, the key figures in each sect knew each other and could work well together when it became clear that America would become involved in another World War. The crucial failure to coordinate in World War I would not be repeated, although the sometimes-conservative Mennonites were reserved in their involvement in the Conference until 1939.

Realizing that they would need a plan of action if they wanted draft exemption for COs, the HPCs established a continual committee in 1936. By 1938 the committee had agreed to push for alternative service (as opposed to absolute exemption from conscription). Preferably, this service would be under civilian direction, of significant moral value, and sufficiently challenging to counter “wartime waxing of patriotism and war hysteria.” The men wanted to remain loyal to their country without aiding the war effort, and alternative service was envisioned as a “CO ‘moral equivalent of war.’”

While the HPCs were preparing a plan for pacifists, the Military Training Camps Association (MTCA) was pushing for preparedness, which included influencing President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to appoint Henry Stimson as Secretary of War and more importantly, authoring a conscription bill. The Burke-Wadsworth Bill was
introduced to Congress on June 20, 1940—the same day that the Germans entered Paris. Section 7 (d) of the bill contained language almost identical to that in the 1917 Selective Training Act. Initial, no one imagined that a peacetime draft would pass (including Roosevelt, who waited a month before lending the draft his official support), so the HPCs lobbied to defeat the bill. Over time, however, it became apparent that the bill had sufficient backing in Congress to pass. The HPCs shifted their efforts to the unacceptable Section 7 (d) and drafted an amendment that included five elements: a national registry for COs, a civilian bureau for COs reporting to the Attorney General, a provision for the COs to do work of national importance under civil control, a board of national appeal, and complete exemption for COs who refused all service (a position which was later dropped for fear that it would endanger the entire amendment). Subsequent amendments to the bill took CO classification out of Department of Justice jurisdiction and placed it in the hands of local draft boards. The final version of Burke-Wadsworth contained a complicated appeal process, did not define “work of national importance,” and placed COs under the Selective Service System, an arm of the war machine. But the HPCs had won minor concessions, including a civilian trial for violators and the expansion of exemption to religious pacifists who were not members of historic peace sects (although secular objectors were still subject to conscription).

Congress approved the Burke-Wadsworth Bill on September 14, 1940, and it was signed into law as the Selective Training and Service Act two days later. Under the act “a conscientious objector faced four choices: (1) classification IV-D, a ministerial deferment; (2) classification 1-A-O, noncombatant service in the Army (e.g., medical and
signal corps); (3) imprisonment for the duration of the war; (4) classification IV-E, participation in the Civilian Public Service (CPS) Program.”\textsuperscript{10} But the character of the Civilian Public Service program was yet to be determined.

Shortly after Burke-Wadsworth passed, sixty-five HPC representatives met to create the National Council for Religious Conscientious Objectors—later renamed the National Service Board for Religious Objectors (NSBRO)—which was charged with creating a plan for alternative service and influencing government decisions about the program. The NSBRO eventually settled on three forms of alternative service: government agency camps (such as the Civilian Conservation Corps), camps operated by churches in conjunction with the government, and camps operated solely by the churches. Clarence Dykstra, director of the SSS, accepted the HPC suggestions with little revision, but Roosevelt thought the plan was too lax on COs. The president was later persuaded to soften his position.\textsuperscript{11}

After months of negotiation, Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8675 creating the Civilian Public Service program. COs in CPS would do soil conservation and reforestation work through the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior (eventually the program would expand to include food production, social work, and, of course, smokejumping). The men would be held in old CCC barracks, the War Department furnished the camps, and Selective Service paid for transportation. Otherwise, the HPCs were responsible for funding the program.\textsuperscript{12}

The SSS supervised the overall program, and the NSBRO operated underneath the government agency. Publicly, the SSS lauded CPS, with its director, General Lewis Hershey, describing CPS as “an experiment in democracy to find out whether democracy
is big enough to preserve minority rights in a time of national emergency." In private the SSS struggled to assert its authority over the NSBRO, prompting the author of one memo inside the administration to go so far as to say that the COs were not free agents but rather subjects of the United States military. Compounding the problems of infighting, it became increasingly difficult to organize CPS as the program grew. In a jumbled system, each major sect—the Friends, the Mennonites, and the Brethren—administered their own camps and reported to the NSBRO; the NSBRO then reported to the SSS, which would not deal directly with the individual sects. In spite of these challenges, the first CPS camp opened near Baltimore on May 15, 1941. Over the next six years, the program would accommodate over 12,000 men in 152 camps.

At the same time the Civilian Public Service program was developing, a small experiment conducted by the United States Forest Service (USFS) was struggling to establish itself as a valuable firefighting technique. The smokejumper experiment began with tests in 1939, and the technique was proving to be successful. But the war drained resources from the Forest Service, putting the experiment in danger of being cut.

The Forest Service was established in the early 1900s, at a time when forestry and conservation were gaining increased popularity in America. Although it would later be charged with overseeing millions of acres of national forests and developing a national model for wildland firefighting, the agency had humble beginnings. An appropriations bill passed by Congress in August 1876 included a rider to Department of Agriculture funding that authorized two-thousand dollars for a forestry study. One man, working on an extremely limited budget, wrote the first two reports. But the findings were so impressive to Congress that in 1881 the forestry research function was permanently
placed in the Department of Agriculture with the establishment of the Division of Forestry.

Forestry also became an important issue for the Department of the Interior when, in 1891, Congress enacted the Forest Reserve Act. Section 24 authorized the president to set aside forest reserves from public lands, which would be overseen by the Office of Land Management in the Department of the Interior. The creation of reserves marked a major shift in American public land policy. Prior to the Forest Reserve Act, the government focused on distribution to private interests as a way to settle the western United States. Fearing that American wilderness was disappearing, forces within the conservation movement illuminated the need to save some of these public lands.¹⁵

At the turn of the century, two influential conservationists attained important positions of power within the government and worked together to increase the prominence of the Division of Forestry and alter the fate of the forest reserves. Gifford Pinchot, an ambitious and dynamic forester who had been Chief of the Division of Forestry since 1898, expanded the Division’s role to include cooperation with the Department of Interior and private timber interests. In September 1901 President William McKinley was assassinated, and Vice President Theodore Roosevelt was administered the presidential oath. Roosevelt was an avid outdoorsman and a good friend of Pinchot. Since becoming Chief, Pinchot had secretly desired to wrest the forest reserves away from the Department of Interior. He built congressional favor with the help of the American Forestry Association, private stockmen’s groups, and, most importantly, the president. The result of these efforts was the 1905 Transfer Act, which authorized transfer of forest reserves (soon to be dubbed national forests) to the Department of
Agriculture. The Division of Forestry was renamed the United States Forest Service and was charged with protecting the reserves for public use.\textsuperscript{16}

The national forests were not intended to be held inviolate. The public could utilize them for timber, grazing, and recreation. The issue of timber use was particularly important. Prevailing thinking of the time suggested that the country faced a timber famine if current levels of logging continued in the Northwest. The national forests were places where logging could be managed to ensure that United States timber supplies would not be depleted. Through its timber policy, the Forest Service could also control the amount of timber on the market, strengthening the price of lumber so that loggers did not face pressure to sell large volumes to meet costs.\textsuperscript{17}

If timber was the most important commodity on national forests, fire was the biggest threat. When it obtained the responsibility of overseeing the forest reserves, the Forest Service also received the task of protecting them from fire. Few models existed dictating a fire management strategy, and there was widespread disagreement about what elements fire prevention should include. The need for a comprehensive strategy became painfully clear in the 1910 fire season when fires ravaged five million acres of national forests in the Northern Rockies. Many of the men who fought the fires would later become important Forest Service officials, and they were deeply affected by the devastation they witnessed that year. As a result of the 1910 fires, the Forest Service dedicated itself to a policy of full suppression and became a key player in national fire policy.\textsuperscript{18}

Reacting to the fires, Congress passed the Weeks Act in 1911, allowing the Forest Service to form cooperative fire protection agreements with the states. This cooperative
role was expanded when William Greeley became Chief Forester of the Forest Service in 1920. Greeley had been the regional forester for the Northern Rockies in 1910, and as Chief Forester “advocated a national vision of cooperative forestry, founded on cooperative fire protection.” Perhaps Greeley’s most important accomplishment was to influence the passage of the 1924 Clarke-McNary Act, which allowed USFS fire policies to be disseminated to federal and state fire agencies.

In the first thirty years of Forest Service history, the agency’s fire policy slowly evolved to meet the unique needs of American national forests. In the early 1930s, this evolution was rapidly thrust forward with an influx of money and resources from President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal. Specifically, the Forest Service largely administered the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), which had been created to employ huge numbers of men in forest rehabilitation and recreation work. Nearly half of the CCC camps established were run by the Forest Service. CCC funds were used to purchase over eight million acres of private lands to be added to the national forests (so that the men would have plenty of forests to rehabilitate). The administrative responsibilities of the Forest Service multiplied almost overnight.

With the money and labor force of the CCC, the Forest Service had—for the first time—access to crews of skilled forestry workers who could be used in fire suppression. Prior to the 1930s, the Forest Service had sent individuals to suppress fires or, when the size of the fire required a larger force, had gathered temporary crews from the unskilled labor pools that fueled mining and railroad operations in the West. The CCC men formed expert fire suppression forces and developed organized methods of constructing firelines. Firelines are a technique in which a line is cut into the ground around the fire to isolate it.
Firefighters dig until they reach mineral soil and clear any combustible material out of the line so that the fire does not have fuel to continue spreading. It is an integral tactic of wildland fire suppression.22

The CCC was a blessing to the United States Forest Service (if also an administrative curse), but the USFS became so dependent on New Deal resources that it was seriously threatened when the CCC was disbanded and Congress focused its attention—and funds—on preparation for World War II. The Forest Service lost an enormous chunk of allocations and most of its professional firefighters. At the same time, domestic timber supplies were crucial to the war effort. In addition to the lumber needed for barracks, trenches, and innumerable military supplies, timber yielded wood cellulose (used in explosives), glycerol (processed into nitroglycerine, a key component of dynamite), and turpentine (used in flame throwers).23 Facing the mission of securing the country’s valuable national forests against fire with less money and fewer human resources, the Forest Service formed citizen reserves and utilized new power equipment, which cut down on the number of laborers needed. With the help of the Civilian Public Service program, the agency also nursed the fledgling smokejumper program, which saved suppression costs and labor.

The Forest Service had been experimenting with the use of planes in fire suppression since the 1920s, when the vehicles were used to patrol for fires and drop cargo to fire crews. In the 1930s the Aerial Fire Control Project, directed by David Godwin, experimented in bombing fires with chemical retardants. The trials were disappointing. Godwin was inspired to reorient the program based on the experiences of German and Russian paratroopers and a USFS ranger in Utah who had experimented
with jumping in 1934. In 1939 the project was moved to the Northwest and began to focus on the aerial delivery of firefighters.\textsuperscript{24}

That fall the Eagle Parachute Company of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, successfully bid on a Forest Service contract to conduct the tests. The company provided equipment and professional riggers and jumpers. Eagle and the Forest Service made dummy drops and performed actual jumps in different terrain on the Chelan National Forest in Washington. By the end of the experiment, the Forest Service determined that jumping could be a valuable way to travel to small fires in otherwise inaccessible terrain, concluding “that smokejumpers could land safely in all kinds of green timber common to the national forests, at altitudes ranging from 2,000 to 6,800 feet. Successful jumps were also made in open meadows and ridgetops and onto steep, boulder-strewn slopes.”\textsuperscript{25}

Given the initial success of the experiment, the Forest Service implemented the program in two of its regions for the 1940 fire season. Regions 1 and 6 both organized small crews containing some of the men who had jumped in the USFS experiments. The crew in Region 1 trained at the ranger station in Seeley Lake, Montana, not far from the abandoned Civilian Conservation Corps camp at Huson that would later be converted to the CPS smokejumper camp. After completing several training jumps with only a few minor injuries, the crew of eight left for the Moose Creek Ranger Station, where it was stationed for the rest of the season. On July 12, Rufus Robinson and Earl Cooley flew from Missoula to jump to a fire near Martin Creek. After digging line around the fire, Robinson and Cooley had completed the first fire jump in Forest Service history. That season, the crews in both regions made several more successful jumps. By sending smokejumpers instead of more expensive hand crews, the Forest Service saved
approximately $30,000 in suppression costs. Based on the impressive savings and safety record, the Forest Service recommended expanding the smokejumping experiment for the next season.26

While the Forest Service was developing this new firefighting technique, Congress was implementing the first peacetime draft. Conscription affected many of the men whom the Forest Service would normally employ for the fire season. Following the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the shortages became even more critical. Earl Cooley reflected on the period: “After Pearl Harbor the Forest Service, and especially the smokejumper project, found itself literally fighting for existence. Just when parachuting men to fires had proved practical, we were hit by shortages of men and equipment. And yet the Forest Service was responsible for protecting its timber, which was critical to the war effort. The seemingly impossible job fell to a handful of men, most of whom were rejected by the armed forces for various physical flaws, and to boys too young to be drafted. It was a case of make do and do without.”27 In response to this shortage, the Forest Service lowered the minimum age of their workers from twenty-one to eighteen, but the military soon did the same. As a result, the smokejumpers were understaffed and lacked experienced men in the 1942 fire season. Even with these hardships, the program saved the Forest Service approximately $66,000 in suppression costs.28

The strategy of smoke jumping was increasingly successful; however, the program could not grow without a bigger labor pool. The Forest Service discovered a new workforce in the fall of 1942. Phil Stanley, a CPS man assigned to Camp 37 in Coleville, California, wrote a letter to the head of Fire Control for Region 1:
It occurred to me some three months ago that you might need men for your parachute fire-fighting corps. . . .

You have probably heard a great deal of CPS both pro and con, but a few pertinent facts might be welcome. We are all drafted men, pretty well fit physically, self-supporting, and have had a moderate amount of fire fighting. . . . We are all very anxious to get into this type of fire fighting, and I think it is safe to say that our enthusiasm has passed the fascination stage. So we would greatly appreciate a favorable answer. 29

Desperate for men, the Forest Service agreed. That winter, it obtained permission from the SSS and began work with NSBRO to establish a CPS smokejumper camp near the Seeley Lake Ranger Station.

Each CPS camp was administered by one of three peace churches: the Mennonites, the Brethren, or the Friends. Camp 103 was controlled by the Mennonites through their organizational body, the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). In a coordinated effort with the Forest Service, the MCC opened Camp 103 at Camp Paxson, a children’s summer camp across the lake from the Seeley Lake Ranger Station. Later the headquarters was relocated to Ninemile, an old CCC barracks in Huson, Montana. Roy Wenger, a Mennonite from Ohio who was serving as educational director at a camp in Colorado Springs, was appointed to the position of camp director. His wife Florence became the camp’s dietician. 30

The Forest Service had solicited other CPS camps for volunteers and Wenger worked with several officials from the Forest Service to choose from a pool of three hundred men. One of these officials was Earl Cooley, who had been appointed to supervise fire training. Upon deliberation, sixty-two men were chosen from the pool for the 1943 fire season. An equal number of men came from the Mennonites, the Brethren
and the Quakers. In subsequent fire seasons, the program expanded to include men from other sects, as well as a few men who did not claim a church affiliation. 31

Throughout the war, the USFS increasingly relied on the smokejumper program to suppress fires in the Northern Rockies. By all accounts, the program would not have been able to survive without the free labor of CPS men. In this sense, Camp 103 played a small but crucial role in Forest Service history. But the importance of the camp extends beyond fire suppression. The COs who were drawn to Camp 103 were searching for CPS work that would be rewarding. Frustrated by boring soil conservation work or reforestation work and stung by the harsh body of public opinion that labeled them cowards for not fighting in the war, these young men were looking for opportunities to prove themselves. Smokejumping would give them that chance.
CHAPTER III

WORK AT THE CPS SMOKEJUMPER CAMP

Roy Wenger, the newly appointed director of Civilian Public Service Camp 103, transferred from Colorado Springs to Seeley Lake in late April 1943 and began to prepare for the arrival of sixty handpicked CPS smokejumpers. Chosen for their intelligence, dedication, and good physical condition, these men would soon become one of the Forest Service’s most important fire suppression forces. But before allowing the COs to jump on their first fire, the Forest Service required the men to complete a rigorous training.

In early May, a small group of COs transferred to the camp for rigger instruction. Generally responsible for the maintenance of the parachutes, the riggers inspected the parachutes for holes, repaired the damaged areas, and packed the parachutes.\(^1\) Six COs and six USFS employees were selected to complete this vital course, spending eight hours each day on lectures, discussions, and parachute examinations. The training was overseen by Vic Carter, chief foreman of the parachute squad, and instructed by Frank Derry, who had been in charge of the initial smokejumper trials in 1939 and had returned each subsequent season to supervise parachute training.\(^2\)

As the rigger training neared completion, more COs trickled into the camp. All sixty men had arrived by mid-May, and the actual smokejumper training commenced. The work they would be performing on fires required strength and endurance, so the initial training stage tested the physical fitness of the men. Each morning before
breakfast, the men jogged around the camp and engaged in fifteen minutes of calisthenics. Later in the day, they maneuvered through an obstacle course designed to build muscles that were not used in a normal workday. Smoke Jumper, a book published by Camp 103 in 1944, offers a daunting description of the “Torture Chamber”:

Descending into a pit beside the loft, the squad finds a motley collection of ropes, ramps, nets, stakes, and tubes... One by one the men run up the first steeply inclined ramp, grasp the edge, drop seven feet to the ground, and roll under the watchful eye of the squad leader. Ahead of them hangs a rope to climb from which they step to a wooden platform and turn a flip into a rope net.

Then they run along the two ankle strengtheners, three planks... The horizontal ladder follows... Each squad leader vies in thinking up new and torturing methods for its use.

Dropping from the horizontal ladder, the neophyte runs uphill toward a series of alternate shallow holes. Like a football halfback he crisscrosses his feet as he stumbles past his obstacle. Then comes the tight squeeze, a pair of corrugated tubes through one of which he must wriggle... Final item on the Nine Mile obstacle course is another, lower ramp designed for more intensive “hit and roll” practice.

All of the men were required to perform the physical training each day, but because the new squad was too large to be administered smokejumper training at once, the men were then divided into two groups. One group performed physically demanding project work—such as camp construction and trail maintenance—while the other group completed the smokejumper training. The thirty men undergoing training were also subdivided, with one section focusing on parachute instruction and the other completing fire training.

Before performing actual practice jumps, the men in parachute training learned about their equipment. The Forest Service used two types of parachutes, one made by Eagle and the other made by Irving. Although the men would train on both, they overwhelmingly preferred the parachutes made by Irving, which had been modified by
Frank Derry (former employee of the Eagle Parachute Company) to include two seven-foot slots that allowed the jumper to steer.\textsuperscript{5} Parachute training also involved a twenty-foot tower that had been constructed in the camp. The men jumped from the tower in a harness. The jolt they felt at the bottom of the jump simulated the feeling of a parachute opening. Finally, the trainees were instructed on lowering themselves from a tree if their parachutes became entangled in the branches and retrieving the parachutes once they were safely on the ground.\textsuperscript{6}

Next came the part that the men had been waiting for (and also dreading). After learning the basics of parachuting, the COs were ready for their first practice jumps. The Forest Service had a contract with Johnson Flying Service of Missoula. On a day of practice jumping, one of Johnson’s pilots would fly a Ford Trimotor (nicknamed the “Tin Goose”) to a small landing strip near the Seeley Lake Ranger Station. The men suited up and boarded the plane. Once in the air, the men hooked their static lines—another parachuting innovation that had developed in the smokejumper program, which automatically pulled the parachute’s ripcord as the men jumped out of the plane—and waited for the spotter, the person in charge of deciding where the jump should be made, to tap them on the back. The plane engine was cut, the spotter made the tap, and the novice jumper took the ultimate leap of faith.\textsuperscript{7} Bert Olin’s description of his first jump captured the anxiety felt by many of the COs: "‘So you want to be a parachutist?’ were the encouraging words of Frank Derry as we neared our objective. The air seemed rarified; my breathing increased, my heart pounded, shaking my entire body like a jackhammer. Reason said, ‘You’re crazy!’ Too late now; we’re over the spot; I’ll be out in a minute—and I was—out like a light! A little rag doll being swung around in space on
the end of a string, opening shock over, and I’m still in one piece. . . . If ma could only see me now!” The experience may have been nerve-wracking, but it was a source of pride in Camp 103 that no COs failed to make that first jump. And after their first jump, most men were hooked, as Calvin Hilty’s account suggested: “After challenges from various individuals I suppose I would have stepped out without a chute. . . . The thrill of floating through space cannot be expressed in words, but must be tried for oneself. My only regret on landing was that I couldn’t step right into the plane and do it all over again.”

The thrill of jumping was only a small part of being a smokejumper. The men were repeatedly told, “Our parachutes are just a means of transportation; fire-fighting is our job.” Most of the men at the camp were chosen because they had some experience with wildland firefighting in other CPS camps, but, because they would spend anywhere from two to seven days fighting the typical fire, a week or more was dedicated to fire training. Fire training supervisor Earl Cooley taught the men how to use their fire tools, which included a Pulaski (a unique Forest Service invention that is half-ax, half-pick), a small shovel, and a Pacific marine pump. The men were taught to dig line to mineral soil, use compasses, and administer first aid. Cooley also set practice fires for the men so that he could observe their technique.

That first spring the Forest Service trained all of the men at Camp Paxson. In subsequent seasons the training was held at Ninemile. Upon completion of the training, the CPS smokejumpers relocated to side camps, or “spike camps,” where they would spend the rest of the fire season. In the 1943 fire season, the men dispersed over six camps: Big Prairie, Montana; Moose Creek, Montana; Huson, Montana; Seeley Lake,
Montana; Cave Junction, Oregon; and McCall, Idaho. The camps were spread over Forest Service Regions 1, 4, and 6—the regions that covered the American Northwest. In subsequent seasons increased numbers of COs were accepted into the program, allowing the Forest Service to add more side camps. By 1945 Camp 103 had grown to include 150 men spread over seventeen camps and three lookouts.¹³

The use of side camps had interesting implications for the administration of Camp 103. As camp director, Roy Wenger stayed at the camp headquarters. The Forest Service had informally agreed to pay Wenger’s transportation costs to visit the spike camps, but Wenger found it difficult to get the organization to deliver on this promise in the first fire season. After further negotiations with the Forest Service, Wenger was able to travel to the side camps more extensively in 1944.¹⁴ To balance the headquarters’ limited contact with the spike camps, Wenger established a system in which the COs at each camp elected a man to represent their interests. This elected leader served to “provide for the religious life needs of the unit, educational and recreational needs, and health, food, and clothing needs.”¹⁵ This system gave all of the COs a trusted contact within their crew, and it allowed Wenger to indirectly administer the side camps.¹⁶

Overall, Camp 103 had an excellent safety record, but accidents did happen. Interestingly, the injuries seldom occurred when the men were on actual fire jumps. Many trainees would injure themselves when they were learning the basics of jumping; project work and camp recreational activities could also be hazardous. Scrapes, bruises, and twisted ankles were standard fare, but occasionally there would be a more serious broken bone.¹⁷
Each year a handful of men received injuries that were severe enough to keep them from jumping for the rest of the season. Some of these men would transfer to a different CPS camp where they were physically able to perform the work. Others became lookouts for the Forest Service. Stationed in remote areas on the national forests, the lookout would spend the summer months alone in a high tower with a view that extended for miles. The lookout’s job was to spot “smokes” on the forest and report them to the ranger district; it was an important duty, but it could also be mind numbing. Aubrey Garber, a CO who broke his hand playing volleyball during the 1944 training, wrote a letter to Camp 103 describing his life as a lookout.¹⁸

I now take up my pen in hand and proceed to type you the low-down on the high-up. . . . It is Wonderland, for I am always wondering what day it is. I’m sitting on top of the world. . . . But don’t get me wrong; this isn’t Paradise. It can’t be, for I have to walk . . . after water . . . down a mountain foot trail. It is only 2 1/2 miles down there but it is 7 3/8 miles back. Unlike Ponce de Leon, I call it the Fountain of Old Age.

Water is so scarce that I just compromise by taking a sun bath. . . . At the time I am writing this I have no idea when I will get to mail it, for the postal service is slow here. Everything is slow here; the creek only runs three days a week. . . .

Remotely Yours, Aubrey Garber¹⁹

His description reflects the positive outlook and good sense of humor a lookout needed to stay sane.

Garber sent his account of life as a lookout to the camp headquarters, where it published in the Static Line. This casual camp paper allowed the men to maintain the friendships they had formed during training. Newsletters from each side camp were sent to Ninemile on a semi-regular basis. Once a week (or whenever the men at Ninemile had time in between fires), the letters were compiled, along with general news about the camp, the war, and Civilian Public Service. Issues of the Static Line were distributed to
all of the spike camps and lookouts, although the remoteness of some camps prevented quick mail delivery. Because the men of Camp 103 were so widely dispersed during the fire season, the camp newspaper was an important way for them to maintain contact.

The COs who transferred to Camp 103 came to be smokejumpers; in reality, the men spent very little time suppressing fires. The smokejumpers headed to their side camps in early June, when the forests were still receiving quite a bit of moisture. While waiting for the hot months of July and August, the COs busied themselves with project work. The project work done by the men of Camp 103 was not significantly different than that at other CPS camps. The men built and improved buildings at their spike camps. They maintained trails and repaired telephone wire on the national forests. The work, while necessary, was not particularly interesting. But in the context of smokejumping, it was extremely important. The project work was designed to be physically demanding so that they men would be in peak condition for their work as smokejumpers. Anticipation of the exciting jumping that they would be doing helped the men get through the duller project work. Additionally, the men had occasional practice jumps and fires to break up the monotony.

The unique organization of Camp 103 also made the project work more tolerable. Other CPS camps were run like army camps, and it was very clear to the COs that they were working under Selective Service. At Camp 103, the decentralized nature of the spike camps facilitated a more relaxed atmosphere. Forest Service officials generally treated the COs as equals and individuals, giving the men incentive to work productively. The COs were given project work and left to complete it largely unsupervised. The trust
that the Forest Service personnel gave the COs made them feel more like employees of the Forest Service than conscripted men.\textsuperscript{22}

This feeling of equality was particularly important to the COs, who, unlike conscripted soldiers, did not receive a salary from the government. The Mennonite Central Committee provided a small monthly allowance (between two and five dollars) to the men in its camps, but this money did not go far. Many CPS men throughout the United States were disheartened, feeling that they were essentially performing slave labor.\textsuperscript{23} At Camp 103, even if they did not have a monetary incentive to work hard on sometimes boring projects, COs did have the respect of Forest Service foremen to keep them motivated.

Eventually, the COs at Camp 103 also received some funding from the Forest Service. When the men arrived at camp for the 1943 season, their clothing was completely inadequate for the work they would be doing. Already facing massive costs associated with camp administration, the MCC could not afford to provide the men with more appropriate attire, and the monthly stipend the men received was far too small for the men to purchase the necessary clothing. Roy Wenger received correspondence from the side camp leader at Cave Junction, Oregon, describing the problems: "Jack (Forest Service Squad Leader, Jack Heintzleman) is concerned about our clothing and the way we tore it to shreds on that last fire. Several of us came out of the brush with bare and bloody knees."\textsuperscript{24}

The situation was even more dramatic at the Idaho spike camp. After McCall smokejumpers answered their first call, one CO's pants were so tattered that they were literally falling off. The ranger of the district in Pierce, Idaho, where the fire had
occurred, felt that the CO’s appearance was too inappropriate to send him back to McCall on public transportation. He bought the CO a two-dollar pair of overalls and drove the crew back to their camp himself. It took the ranger two years to get the Forest Service to reimburse him, but the incident prompted Forest Service officials to lobby the USFS office in Washington, D.C., for a clothing stipend. The next season, the Forest Service provided a monthly clothing allowance of five dollars to each man, which was used to purchase logger boots, pants, shirts, socks, and gloves. An additional five dollars per month was issued to purchase insurance for the men; the amount was sufficient to cover the costs of medical, dental, and optical care.

The Forest Service also covered the costs of feeding the men, a burden which would normally fall on the MCC. Believing that men performing work of such a strenuous nature should be well fed, the USFS spent a generous $1.35 on each CO every day. And, at a time when the country was rationing food supplies, the men enjoyed extra rations of fresh meat and fresh vegetables, making them some of the best-fed COs in the country. The small allowances provided by the Forest Service did not approach the salary a normal smokejumper would receive; however, in the context of Civilian Public Service the USFS stipends made the COs at Camp 103 comparatively wealthy.

After weeks of project work, the fire season began to heat up in late July and early August. The 1943 and 1944 fire seasons were mild, and the men jumped on small fires. The first fire jump of the 1944 season (which, occurring on June 6, coincided with the landing of American paratroopers in Europe) was typical of the small fires that the jumpers were usually sent to contain. Four jumpers, two COs and two Forest Service personnel, left Ninemile in a Ford Trimotor around 9:30 in the morning and were
dropped on a nine-acre fire in the Superior Ranger District on the Lolo National Forest. The men gathered their equipment and hiked to the fire, which, for the most part, had already burned itself out. They began to “mop-up,” working to put out burning logs and snags that could simmer for days if not extinguished. In the afternoon, a rainstorm aided the men in their mop-up efforts, and around eight o’clock in the evening, the soaked smokejumpers left the fire and hiked three miles to the nearest road. They were picked up by a Forest Service truck and returned to the Ninemile camp the next morning.29

In contrast to the early seasons, the 1945 fire season was much more active. Since that spring, the Forest Service had been predicting dry weather throughout the Northwest regions. Worried that the typical fires started by lightning and human carelessness could blow up in dry timber, the Forest Service also faced a new threat to the national forests in the form of Japanese War Balloons. In the fall of 1944, the Japanese celebrated the emperor’s birthday by launching ten thousand balloons carrying bombs and explosive hydrogen. Designed to self-destruct when they fell, the balloons climbed to thirty thousand feet and were carried by the jet stream to the Pacific Northwest.30 Although the balloons failed to inflict serious damage that winter, the Forest Service feared the destruction that the balloons would cause if they landed in the national forests during a dry summer. The USFS prepared for the balloon threat in the 1945 season by expanding the smokejumper program to include about 235 men.31 It also established “Operation Firefly,” dispatching the 555th Parachute Battalion (an all-African American paratrooper squad) to Pendleton, Oregon, to be trained and equipped to fight fire.32

The establishment of an experimental aerial fire control area in Region 1, known as the “Continental Unit,” compounded the administrative duties of the Forest Service in
the 1945 fire season and placed increased responsibilities on the smokejumping squad. Located on the Continental Divide, the unit included two million acres of roadless area that was patrolled and protected exclusively by air detection and smokejumpers.

A combination of a dry season, fear of Japanese balloons, and the exclusive use of smokejumpers on the Continental Unit kept the men of Camp 103 extremely busy in 1945. As Earl Cooley later summarized, “The record for 1945 shows the three regions used smokejumpers on 269 fires, with a total of 1,236 jumps... The jumpers covered fires on 23 national forests, in Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, and California... A far-from-complete cost analysis... indicated a net savings of $346,780 for the season. In many cases, savings on a single fire might have equaled the entire project cost.”

One fire that most of the smokejumpers remember from that season was the Meadow Creek fire on the Nez Perce National Forest. Forty-eight smokejumpers were dropped on the fire, along with fifty-three paratroopers from the 555th Battalion and hundreds of smokechasers. On the second day, before the ground crews arrived for reinforcement, the smokejumpers had constructed line around most of the fire, using the Meadow Creek as a natural barrier. The men were fighting spot fires in two different groups when the blaze blew up between them. One crew was safe and continued to attack the fire, but the other crew was in the path of the flames. Dave Flaccus later described those intense moments:

The second day... we were fighting these spot fires... and they suddenly just seemed to be jumping up everywhere... All of [a] sudden there’d be a fire here and a fire there and it suddenly dawned on us that this whole mountain was just about to explode so we finally gave up... And we went down to the creek bottom. Just about that time, the fire blew up... And just went roaring up into the tree tops and right on up the
mountain. We were down in a very small meadow with a small stream. We all got down in the stream and kept our faces right down in the water... Art Cochran, the fire boss, and David Kauffman, a CPS smokejumper, went through the area the fire had already consumed to check on the men, who, fortunately, had all made it safely to the water. The men followed Meadow Creek out of the burned area and watched the fire as it crowned (spread into the treetops) on the other side. The fire, which would eventually consume almost one thousand acres and take a week to control, was the largest the smokejumpers had ever fought. The smokejumpers garnered widespread publicity for their efforts on Meadow Creek, with newspapers around the state of Montana displaying headlines like “Greatest Air Attack in History Hurled against Forest Fire.” Forest Service officials also lavished praise on the COs for their hard work.

Although the 1945 did prove to extremely busy for the smokejumpers, the threat from Japanese War Balloons did not materialize. It is impossible to predict what the COs would have done if most of the fires they fought that summer were ignited by Japanese bombs. In good conscience, the men could not aid in the war effort. Extinguishing blazes caused by enemy bombs would certainly seem to qualify. Yet the purpose of the smokejumper camp was to protect the country’s national forests from fire. It is perhaps fortunate that the men did not have to face this difficult ethical question.

The smokejumper program developed early in the history of parachuting. Improvements in equipment, such as the static line and the Derry Slotted Irvin chute, were made by smokejumpers in the first years of the experiment. Different uses for parachuting also developed out of the smokejumper program. During World War II, the Forest Service began to send smokejumpers on rescue jumps. If a person was injured in a
remote area and could not hike out, smokejumpers were sent in to administer first aid and carry the patient to a road. Smokejumpers were also used to jump to plane crashes and look for survivors.41

The concept of rescue jumps eventually led to the occupation of paradocctors, trained medical professionals who could jump to remote locations to help injured persons. Early paradocctors, usually training for military rescue units, went to Ninemile to learn jumping techniques. The camp was also used to train units of the Coast Guard, the Navy, the Canadian Air Force, and the 555th Battalion.42 Camp officials initially feared conflict between the military trainees and COs. On the contrary, the CPS men seemed proud of their skills and eager to demonstrate. The COs got along particularly well with the men of the Coast Guard—so well, in fact, that one Forest Service official said he could not tell the men apart because they spent so much time together.43

Originally, the MCC intended for Camp 103 to close for the winter 1943–44 and reopen for the next spring training. The Forest Service, so pleased with the work the men had done in the first fire season, was afraid that the men would not return if they transferred out for the winter.44 Wanting to maintain an experienced smokejumper force for the next season, the USFS created winter projects for the men. About sixty percent of the 1943 force stayed, working on projects ranging from equipment repair to tree nursery labor to office work at the Forest Service regional headquarters in Missoula.45 During the summer, the smokejumpers had developed a nickname for Forest Service desk workers, calling them “wafflebottoms” for the marks that were left after sitting in a chair all day. The COs stationed in Missoula during the winter embraced this nickname for themselves and called the vacant fraternity house they were living in Wafflebottom Lodge.46
Although the winter projects tended to be slightly more tedious than summer project work because the men did not have the promise of jumping to keep up their spirits, most men were generally satisfied with the winter projects and glad that they stayed on for the next season.47

The men at the CPS smokejumper camp were clearly not averse to doing hard work. Earl Cooley reflected on the strong work ethic of the COs:

When they said that COs were coming, I figured on getting a bunch of renegades, a bunch of draft dodgers and all that. But by golly they were just about the opposite when they got here. . . . They wanted to get into . . . good . . . productive work where they could make a show for themselves. . . .

They were real good at jumping. I think . . . they would jump any time, any place we’d ask them. I think if we went right over Flathead Lake here, put them out and they had all the confidence in the world in . . . getting in the right place. . . .

They were all in . . . their early twenties and they were good, husky fellows. . . . They just couldn’t see . . . an eight hour day. . . . They’d been working from sun up to sun down in the corn fields, you know, and they were used to good, hard work.48

In fact, the COs were so dedicated to their work that Forest Service officials determined that one CPS smokejumper could do as much work on a fire as an eight-man hand crew, which, in the years since Burke-Wadsworth, had been comprised of old men and young boys ineligible for the draft.49 Thanks to the COs, the future of the Forest Service smokejumper program was no longer uncertain. In 1944, because suppression savings increased yearly and the USFS had a secure labor force for the duration of the war, the smokejumper experiment became a permanent program financed through regular USFS appropriations.50 A report on the 1944 season summarized the program’s success: “For the first time the parachute crew became a major source of strength for regional fire control managers to depend upon. . . . The direct savings through reducing the need for
additional . . . crews was considerable." Undoubtedly, this level of success would not have been possible without the labor of CPS men.
CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL, SPIRITUAL, AND POLITICAL LIFE AT CAMP 103

The men at Camp 103 were fortunate to have found interesting, rewarding work within the Civilian Public Service program. But the experiences of CPS smokejumpers cannot be defined simply in terms of the labor they performed. The camp offered myriad activities for the men to take advantage of in their spare time. Naturally, this spare time was limited during the fire season, but the recreational opportunities the COs enjoyed at Camp 103 provided entertainment and education, in addition to facilitating their spiritual, social, and political development.

One of the major benefits of working for the Forest Service was that the smokejumpers lived in some of the country’s most beautiful forests. Camp Paxson, situated on handsome Seeley Lake, was undoubtedly a wonderful place to be sent for training. The side camps were equally appealing. Newsletters to the headquarters exclaimed, “Heaven can wait, this is Big Prairie.”¹ Not to be outdone, the men in Idaho responded with “Big Prairie can wait, this is McCall.”² In 1945, when the “Continental Unit” was established, COs were stationed at Glacier National Park, another majestic location.³

Outdoor recreational activities were immensely popular. The COs enjoyed boating and hiking. Newsletters from the side camps during the summer inevitably recounted tales of fishing successes and failures, and friendly competitions arose around
who could catch the most fish. COs stationed near a lake or a swimming hole swam nearly every evening. In fact, the COs at Cave Junction swam so often that they attracted the attention of local children, who would gather to watch them swim and dive. Seeing their interest, the men set up regular swimming lessons for the children, which cumulated in a public exhibition to display their students' skills. In the winter, outdoor activities included skiing and ice-skating.

The men also played competitive sports to enjoy themselves and to maintain physical fitness. In the summer, the men were alternately obsessed with volleyball and softball. During the volleyball crazes—which the Forest Service endorsed because it built the upper-body strength necessary for steering parachutes—the men would sometimes play completely suited up in their fire gear just to make the game more challenging. When softball was in fashion, the smokejumpers formed teams and played evening games against the USFS smokechasers. During the winter, the competitive sport of choice was basketball. The smokejumpers formed teams to play against both Forest Service employees and local high school basketball players. Although they were definitely not braggarts, it was a source of pride to the COs that the softball and basketball games often ended in smokejumper victories.

Other, less strenuous, games that were popular in the side camps were badminton, ping pong, pool, billiards, horseshoes, chess, and checkers. In their spare time the men built any equipment they lacked, such as a ping-pong table or badminton net. One particularly innovative (and perhaps overly bored) group of COs at Moose Creek created a game of checkers by using the buttons on their shirts as pieces. The men enjoyed their
leisurely afternoon of gaming, but regretted the decision to play that evening when they had to sew all of their buttons back on.\textsuperscript{12}

Often a CO’s recreational opportunities depended on his side camp’s proximity to a town. Men at remote locations had to make due with the great outdoors and the limits of their ingenuity. COs closer to a town had increased options for enjoyment. The men stationed at Cave Junction and Missoula could walk to local theaters, gymnasiums, or libraries.\textsuperscript{13} During the winter, many of the men lived in Wafflebottom Lodge. Having established friendships with members of the Missoula community, the COs at Wafflebottom Lodge held an open house on Christmas Day and a New Year’s Eve party. A handful of men were cast in a Missoula community play in the 1944–45 winter, one in a leading role that required him to kiss a girl (contact with girls was probably the most popular recreational activity among the young COs).\textsuperscript{14} Smokejumpers at the Redwood Ranger Station also held parties (albeit on a much smaller scale), inviting people from Cave Junction to come for dinner and an evening of fellowship.\textsuperscript{15}

Other side camps, such as Moose Creek and Ninemile, were not within walking distance of Missoula but were close enough to invite members of the community to the camp. Reverend Harvey Baty, coordinator of religious activities at Montana State University (later renamed the University of Montana), immediately welcomed the men of Camp 103 into the Missoula community. The majority of students at the university during the war were females whose male peers were fighting overseas. Reverend Baty wanted the young women to have contact with reputable men of the opposite sex, so he organized a party at Seeley Lake in June 1943. The Forest Service was concerned about having women stay overnight in the camp, but it acquiesced when the COs agreed to sleep
outside and let the girls sleep in the barracks. Camp meetings decided the entertainment for the evening, which included dinner, a sermon, and square dancing.

The issue of dancing proved contentious, and would illuminate a problem unique to Camp 103. Although the Mennonite Central Committee ran the camp, the majority of the smokejumpers were not Mennonites. In contrast, other MCC camps were almost exclusively populated by Mennonites, allowing for a high degree of religious and ideological unity. The Mennonite Church held the position that dancing between couples was immoral, but it allowed for group activities such as square dancing and circle dancing. Out of respect for the Mennonites, the COs had decided to limit dancing to groups. On the night of the party, however, the Mennonites at the camp went to bed after the square dancing, and the remaining COs decided that there would be no harm in ballroom dancing once the Mennonites were gone. The incident caused some initial hard feelings among the Mennonites and raised questions about how the camp could unobtrusively meet the religious needs of all the smokejumpers. Fortunately, the men were able to work out their differences democratically. Many of the non-Mennonites expressed their regret at having offended the Mennonites, and all the men agreed to respect different religious perspectives in the future.

Although there was potential for religious strife at Camp 103, the overwhelming consensus was that contact with a variety of religious backgrounds enriched the CPS smokejumping experience. The men were tolerant of each other’s beliefs and learned to get along well. Men engaged in theological and spiritual debates, but, rather than causing conflict, these discussions served to broaden their religious perspectives.
Informal religious activities became central to the spiritual life of the camp. Religious opportunities were a main concern of the MCC, and officials were often worried that the nature of the camp—with its sprawling organization and the potential for fire calls on Sundays—prevented spiritual growth. In spite of these difficulties, religious life at Camp 103 was rich and varied. Men in side camps close to a town could attend local Sunday services, and many took advantage of these opportunities on a regular basis. Some of the COs even formed quartets and sang in the local services. Because the men at Ninemile could not make the weekly trip to Missoula, Reverend Guy Barnes of the Missoula Congregational Church volunteered his time to give a Sunday sermon at the camp. Unfortunately, he arrived one Sunday to find that his congregation had been sent to a fire; after that, the men did not ask him to come back in case he would again be inconvenienced. Instead, the COs took turns giving the service, a system that added variety and perspective to the Sunday sermons.

For the deeply devoted group of men, religious life did not begin and end on Sunday—it was a constant part of life at Camp 103. Wafflebottom Lodge held Sunday night discussion groups with members of the local community, but the majority of religious discussions that took place among the smokejumpers were more frequent and spontaneous. The camp also received visitors with a variety of religious backgrounds; the visitors would give theological lectures, perform sermons, and teach classes on the Bible. Not surprisingly, many of these religious activities were also connected to the pacifist movement.

The somewhat casual religious structure of Camp 103 fit the religious diversity of the camp. It also reflected the sensitive position that CPS smokejumpers were in as a
result of their relationship with the Forest Service. In contrast to other camps, the COs were not segregated from non-objectors. In addition to working with Forest Service supervisors and staff, the CPS smokejumpers often shared meals and living quarters with USFS employees. Conscientious objectors recognized that many people did not agree with the nonresistant nature of their religious beliefs. As a result, Camp 103 administrators worked to ensure that camp religious practices would be as unobtrusive as possible. Roy Wenger and Frank Neufeld, the camp’s assistant director and educational director in 1943, described their approach: “From the beginning some customs that are ordinarily observed in CPS had to be modified to avoid imposing a pattern on Forest Service men who also had a set of customs well established in Forest Service traditions. As Ben Franklin once said, “When a carpenter wishes to fit two boards he frequently shaves a little of off [sic] each.” Both CPS men and Forest Service men found that some “shaving” was necessary. . . . We emphasized the necessity for respecting the judgment of each individual, and in this we believe we have been quite successful.” 26 While the inconspicuous nature of the camp’s religious practices was atypical of the CPS program, it best addressed the spiritual needs of the camp while still allowing all the men involved in the smokejumper program to feel comfortable.

Noteworthy for their religious devotion, the CPS smokejumpers were also characterized by their intelligence. It was no accident that the men who became smokejumpers were smart. Intelligence, education, and the ability to solve problems quickly were all criteria that the Forest Service used to evaluate applicants. 27 Each year, over half of the COs at the camp had some level of college education. 28 Given the natural ability of the men, it is not surprising that Roy Wenger described this as the most
intelligent group with whom he ever worked. It was a strong compliment from a man who had completed his doctorate just before the war and later taught at Kent State University.

Like many soldiers, several of the smokejumpers were in the middle of their higher education when the draft was implemented. Men in CPS were fortunate that they had opportunities to further their education during the war, both formally and informally. In addition to their extensive smokejumper training, COs attended lectures given by Forest Service officials on topics such as fire control, USFS forestry activities, and the agency’s overall mission. Smokejumpers at side camps that had access to electricity and a movie projector viewed educational videos on firefighting and forestry. The Forest Service also collaborated with Montana State University to allow COs stationed near Missoula during the 1943–44 winter season to take a forestry class; twenty-two COs completed the course.

Other educational opportunities were not specifically job-related. A Cornell University professor visiting the Moose Creek spike camp taught math classes for the men during his stay. Men at several side camps had the opportunity to take weekly classes on electricity and radio repair. Leather craft kits circulated among the camps, allowing the men to learn and practice leather techniques. In an example of self-education, the COs experimented in establishing co-operatives, pooling their resources to create a camp store, initiate a camp banking system, and perhaps most creatively, raise a camp pig.

Finally, the men had access to books and magazines through the camp library, which circulated materials among the side camps. If a certain topic interested them, the
COs could suggest books for the library to acquire.37 Because funds for purchasing books were limited, the camp was fortunate to have access to the Missoula County Public Library and the Montana State University Library, both of which generously agreed to lend books to the smokejumpers.38

Education was generally a casual, leisurely activity in the first seasons at Camp 103, but, as victory in Europe sparked talk of demobilization in the camp, education was emphasized as a component of post-war job preparation. Camp administrators began to encourage the men to take vocational training. In an effort to promote correspondence courses, the MCC offered to cover up to a third of the cost. The generous offer was advertised in the Static Line under the headline “Foo on Harvard! Foo on Yale! Getcher Learnin’ thru the Mail!”39

Many men had been taking casual flight training from the pilots who flew for the camps.40 Wishing to complete the instruction and obtain their pilot’s licenses, a group of men pooled their savings and purchased a Taylorcraft airplane with a sixty-five horsepower engine and radio equipment. Frank Wiebe—who had been promoted from educational director to camp director in November 1944 when Roy Wenger took an administrative position in the MCC—arranged for the transfer of a certified flight instructor in the fall of 1945. The new plane and instructor allowed several men to log sufficient hours to obtain their licenses.41

In many ways, the intellectual and spiritual aspects of life at the CPS smokejumper camp were connected to the greater goal of fostering a social-justice community. Varying in religious and educational backgrounds, the men of Camp 103 had one commonality—the belief that war was immoral. Lectures, camp discussions, camp
mobilization efforts, and even the reunions that the CPS smokejumpers would hold after the camp disbanded—all of these activities focused heavily on issues of pacifism and social justice in wartime.\textsuperscript{42} The men at Camp 103 were committed to nonresistance, but it was still a frequent topic of discussion and debate. Confronted with a war as popular as World War II, being fought against a man as repugnant as Adolf Hitler, the young pacifists were forced to consider the implications and effectiveness of their position.\textsuperscript{43} Visitors to the camp included pacifists of local and national prominence, such Tucker Smith, a national labor leader and college professor, and Joseph Kinsey Howard, an outspoken Montana journalist.\textsuperscript{44} Another speaker, Dr. J. Holmes Smith, had recently worked with Gandhi in India and spoke on the effectiveness of nonviolent resistance.\textsuperscript{45} By incorporating discussions on pacifism into daily life at Camp 103, the CPS experience reinforced the smokejumpers' belief that humans should model themselves after Christ and live peacefully and cooperatively with their neighbors.

The effects of war were also widely discussed by the COs. Many of the speakers who visited the camp were involved in MCC relief work in Europe, both after World War I and during World War II.\textsuperscript{46} Hoping to encourage CPS men to volunteer after the war, the MCC began to incorporate relief work into camp education.\textsuperscript{47} Men at Camp 103 donated money to a Puerto Rican relief fund, held camp discussions on hunger in war-torn Europe, and fasted for a day to raise awareness of starvation in India.\textsuperscript{48} Relief work was important to the peace sects because it offered a positive way for members to demonstrate their love for human beings.\textsuperscript{49}

Opposition to peacetime conscription was an obvious cause for the smokejumpers to embrace. Toward the end of the war, Congress began to hold hearings on peacetime
conscription. The COs wrote letters to Congress urging against a repeat of Burke-Wadsworth.\textsuperscript{50} By this time, several of the men had married, and their wives lived together in Missoula. These women formed the “Camp 103 Auxiliary” and began a massive letter-writing campaign opposing the draft.\textsuperscript{51} Three smokejumpers went so far as to walk out of the camp in protest of conscription, an action for which they would later be prosecuted and put in jail.\textsuperscript{52}

While the CPS smokejumper community offered a forum for discussions of social justice that generally served to reinforce the beliefs of the COs, war and conscription did have an undeniable effect on the young pacifists. Almost all of the men in CPS were too young to remember World War I, so their faith in their beliefs had never been challenged. In an anonymous submission to the camp poetry contest, one CO described the transformation from naivety to skepticism in his poem entitled “The Tired Liberal”:

\begin{verbatim}
In the ancient nineteen thirties,
Before Civilian Public Service,
I was young and idealistic;
I was filled with social doctrines,

. . . . . . . . . . . .
Cast my vote for Norman Thomas,
Put my cash in sundry co-ops,
Talked them up to all who’d listen;

. . . . . . . . . . . .
I discussed the poor share-cropper;
I deplored the profit motive;
Loved the horny-handed worker;
Despised the soul-less corporation.
Every negro was my brother.

. . . . . . . . . . . .

But now my mental epidermis
Is scarred by years of rude revealing;
Skeptical I’ve grown, and doubtful
Of any one panacea.
Still I hold to social doctrines,
\end{verbatim}
Still I keep the old-time habits.
But I can't seem to recapture
Any of the old cock-sureness.

And I'm content with little vict'ries
Over entrenched greed and evil.
I've lost faith in drastic shake-ups;
Content I've grown with inching progress.
What the heck has happened to me?55

"The Tired Liberal" was chosen as the winner of the poetry contest both because it was only entry and because "more than any other entry it reveal[ed] the hopes, the fears, the inward longing of the tortured 20th century soul."54

Some men at Camp 103 were concerned that the smokejumpers were disconnected from the pacifist movement. In a sense this problem was unavoidable. The men were spread throughout the Northwest, many in remote side camps that could only be reached by plane. As component of camp administration, the MCC and the NSBRO sent pacifist speakers to CPS camps throughout the country. Due to the sprawling organization of Camp 103, many of these visitors bypassed the camp completely. Those who did come generally stopped at the camp headquarters and, occasionally, nearby side camps in Region 1. The camps in Regions 4 and 6 were often ignored; the implication was that peace activism had to be organized entirely by the COs. In a busy fire season, it was often easy for the men to let their commitment to nonresistance become secondary to smokejumping.55

The disillusionment felt by smokejumpers at Camp 103 should not be ignored. But the camp must also be viewed in the context of the entire CPS experiment. Compared to other COs, the smokejumpers were extremely fortunate: by and large they enjoyed
their lives, created a cohesive religious and socio-political community, found their work rewarding, and earned the respect of those around them through the labor they performed. In these ways, the CPS smokejumper experience was unparalleled. For conscientious objectors looking to perform "work of national importance," smokejumping represented a model for Civilian Public Service.
CHAPTER V
SMOKEJUMPING AS A MODEL FOR CIVILIAN PUBLIC SERVICE

Had it not been for the initiative of conscientious objectors looking for more meaningful work in Civilian Public Service, the CPS smokejumper camp would not have been established. The Forest Service obviously profited from the cheap, efficient labor the COs provided; the experience was also beneficially unique for the smokejumpers. Most COs found the work rewarding in itself—it was difficult, glamorous, and elite. But, through their labor, the COs also gleaned respect from Forest Service officials and gratitude from the communities they served. Perhaps they were not all aware of it, but the CPS smokejumpers had discovered work that could serve as what American philosopher William James termed “the moral equivalent of war.”

Throughout the country, CPS men faced a large degree of hostility for their beliefs. COs were stereotyped as cowards and draft dodgers. They faced derision from Selective Service officials and were discouraged by the inflexible administration of some CPS camps. From the beginning, Forest Service officials treated the COs more humanely. Upon arriving in the camp, Roy Wenger found the USFS officials to be accommodating and professional.\(^1\) Impressed by their willingness to cooperate with him, Wenger wrote, “It is a pleasure to work with the Forestry officials here. They are intelligent and considerate in their approach to the problems arising in camp.”\(^2\)
Although Forest Service officials were outwardly civil, privately some disapproved of the agency’s collaboration with conscientious objectors. The children of many USFS men had been drafted and were serving in the military; it was upsetting for these fathers to see young men from the same generation as their sons who had not been sent to fight. Some Forest Service personnel tended to be less civil than the supervisors. They expressed the opinion that working with COs was unpatriotic and were reluctant to cooperate with the program. Cooley, who considered joining the army when he heard the “conchies” were coming, described the USFS employees’ initial hostility: “... Some felt that conscientious objectors should not eat at the same table in the cookhouse with our regular employees. One man got up in the cookhouse at the Ninemile Remount Station and said that anyone who would eat at the same table with a conscientious [sic] objector was not very damn patriotic. Others felt that the CPS should be treated like dogs and at the same time expected them to give 100 percent effort. One of the packers, shoeing horses, tried to catch a CPS recruit’s head in a sliding door.”

While some men remained unwavering in their negative opinion of conscientious objectors throughout the camp’s existence, after the Forest Service employees and the COs began to work side by side, overall attitudes began to shift. The fact that the COs chose smokejumping implied that they were not afraid of hard work. It also demonstrated their willingness to risk their lives in service of their country, undermining the stereotype that COs were unpatriotic. Often working beyond the eight-hour requirement, the COs repeatedly exhibited their strong work ethic to Forest Service officials. Wenger described an excellent example of the camp work ethic in the 1943 season: “A good example of the spirit of cooperation in our camp is evident this week. We have two men on crutches
recuperating. They have become somewhat restive being around the camps so long, so our foreman has taken them along to bale hay. One stands on his crutches on one side of the baler and sticks the wires into the bales, the other on his crutches twists them together on the other side. The foreman gets a great kick out of this and so do the injured men. Also, you can imagine the effect which this has on the sceptical packers down at the Ranger Station.6 Beyond offering an opportunity for COs to prove their dedication, labor also created a commonality between the COs and the USFS men. After the COs had been on their first jump, they shared an addiction to smokejumping that could serve as a topic of discussion.7 Because they often spent workdays together on projects, it was simply easier for the COs and non-COs to treat each other civilly. On fires, where the work was more difficult and dangerous, it was necessary for the men to get along well. An issue of the Static Line emphasized the need for cooperation and openness on the firelines, warning, "Don’t expect everyone to hate your g[u]ts. Some people are willing to speak to you. We are not a sub-race, and at fires there are no class distinctions."8

Relations with Forest Service employees were not perfect, and the COs were not able to change the opinions of some men no matter how hard they worked. But the degree of respect that the men received—especially from USFS supervisors—helped them to feel more like employees than indentured servants. It probably also accounted for the men’s willingness to perform strenuous labor for scant pay. When the smokejumpers later reflected on their CPS experience, some of them could remember incidents with Forest Service employees who did not like COs; more of them could remember USFS men who treated them like friends and equals, and it is telling that these were the USFS men the COs remembered by name.9
COs often encountered hostility from surrounding communities, so much so that the men simply assumed they would be shunned by the towns near the side camps. Some of the side camps were buried in the wilderness where the men had little contact with civilization, but the Region 1 camps were scattered around the regional headquarters in Missoula and the Redwood Ranger Station was located within walking distance of the town of Cave Junction, Oregon. The COs generally had positive experiences in both of these towns, and they were surprised by the warm welcomes extended to them.

The COs formed initial relationships in the communities through local churches, which welcomed the men to worship and socialize. Although some members of the congregations may have been skeptical of the COs at first, it was hard to ignore the genuine, good-natured attitudes the men displayed. One Sunday evening, after speaking to a group of Methodist high school students about the Mennonites, CPS, and conscription, Roy Wenger was approached by a young man who explained “that he didn’t understand how a draft board could tell when a man was really conscientious, but that he had been observing our men closely when they came to church and that they all seemed very sincere.”

It was easier for the COs to form relationships with young female churchgoers. Camp parties with religious groups in Missoula turned into unofficial dating services, and a number of men met their future wives at Camp 103 parties. In Cave Junction, the men did not hold camp parties, but they did frequently attend community dances. Given the shortage of single young men, some of the girls at the dances were very taken with the COs. These flirtations stimulated rancor in one Cave Junction native, a physically handicapped young man nicknamed “Logger” who could not attract the attention of the
women away from the smokejumpers.13 Extremely vocal in his objections to the “conchies” fraternizing with local girls, Logger convinced a small group of Cave Junction men to threaten the COs at an American Legion dance. The smokejumpers left quietly to avoid a brawl, although the general sympathies among the dancegoers seemed to favor the COs.14

Wenger and the Forest Service officials did not know how to address the situation, but in the end, it fixed itself. After the incident at the dance, the smokejumpers received a fire call. Shortly after takeoff, the plane engine stalled. The pilot was able to safely land the plane and work on the engine, but he decided to take a test run before transporting the men to the fires. The plane climbed into the air, but the engine cut out again. This time the plane plummeted to the ground, crashing and killing the pilot. Devastated by what they had witnessed, the COs still needed to suppress the fire. An army plane transported them to the blaze and they were able to control it. The incident was highly publicized and the Cave Junction community expressed deep gratitude to the smokejumpers.15 An article in the local “newspaper more or less ended, ‘We’re thankful that we got these Forest Service men to put out the fires.’”16 After that, the COs were always welcome at dances.

Protecting the national forests from fire gave the COs a certain status and level of respect in the surrounding communities.17 But the men were not simply firefighters; they were smokejumpers, and a certain amount of glamour and mystique had surrounded the experiment since its inception. The national attraction to smokejumping increased in the war years as the program established itself throughout the Northwest. Articles in national magazines such as *Colliers*, *Popular Mechanics*, and *Esquire* lauded the program’s
success (although they usually failed to mention that the majority of smokejumpers were COs). Local media also covered the smokejumper program. But the COs achieved heroic status when Margaret Bean of the *Spokane Spokesman Review* wrote one of the most positive articles about COs published during World War II. Bean adulated:

“Possibly their courage to fight for their convictions, an infinitesimal minority against an overwhelming majority, is responsible for their volunteering for this most daredevil of all jobs, that of the smoke jumper. For certainly it is a rugged job, if there ever was one, both in training and in practice.”

Many COs felt that the praise was overly lavish, but the article became so popular that several newspapers around the country republished it after it originally appeared on June 17, 1945. Regardless of the veracity of Bean’s article, it was encouraging for the men to see their efforts celebrated in print.

To facilitate good relationships with the surrounding communities, the COs emphasized public relations efforts and public outreach. The smokejumpers performed exhibition jumps at the university for the Missoula community. They were also asked to jump at the local rodeo in Winthrop, Washington. Men at Ninemile, Missoula, and Moose Creek volunteered at a local nursery in Missoula. They painted the fence, built a sandbox for the children, and made toys in their spare time between fires. COs stationed in Glacier National Park in 1945 entertained local ranchers by throwing genuine southern hoe-downs. Through small acts such as these, Camp 103 COs slowly became members of the communities rather just than visitors.

Perhaps the most important form of community outreach was the labor the COs performed when they were on furlough from the camp. Every year, CPS men were allowed to take thirty days of furlough. Because the smokejumpers were constantly on
call during the summer, many of the men at Camp 103 took their furloughs in the fall when they could help local farmers with harvest. Wartime demand on food production and the labor shortage caused by conscription left many farmers desperate for workers. The COs harvested apples and potatoes for farmers in the Bitterroot Valley, work which was beneficial to all parties involved.\textsuperscript{24} Although they were performing a valuable service to the farmers, the smokejumpers were extremely fortunate to receive remuneration. The farm-labor shortage in other parts of the country prompted the SSS to allocate CPS man-hours for the harvest. The farmers paid for the labor, but the money went directly to the Federal Treasury—yet another example of the relative freedom that the smokejumpers enjoyed in contrast to other CPS men.\textsuperscript{25}

The respect the COs earned as smokejumpers in many ways defined the CPS experience for them. Men requested work as smokejumpers because they felt that the work they were doing was a waste of time, mere busywork to keep them occupied until the war was over.\textsuperscript{26} The young men yearned for an opportunity to prove themselves. Some simply wanted to demonstrate their patriotism. They felt a moral responsibility to do important work for their country.\textsuperscript{27} Other COs needed to prove their virility. They were young and strong, but they had not gone to fight in the war. Young men conscripted into the armed forces had the opportunity to demonstrate their valor in war, but the desire for dangerous, challenging work was not limited to soldiers.\textsuperscript{28} The COs were pacifists, but they were also young American men who had been raised in a society that valued ruggedness and bravery. Popular opinion of conscientious objectors challenged their manliness, and they were determined to prove society wrong.\textsuperscript{29} Philip Stanley plainly stated the desire for acceptance: "We had a very popular war going on. We were very
unpopular. We had to prove ourselves. We had to prove we weren’t yellow. We weren’t scared. We wanted to do something that was important besides clear trails. I think it’s very basic. Very simple. We had to prove our manhood.”

Stanley’s description of the need to prove oneself as a basic desire emphasized the fact that the attitude was deeply rooted in American culture. Before the first World War had broken out, philosopher William James had described the important connection between manly virtues and war in his 1910 essay, “The Moral Equivalent of War.” Offering both a critique of the pacifist movement and an indictment of the militarist culture, James suggested that Americans had erred in supposing that pacifism and manliness stood in diametric opposition. The American militarist culture suggested that war was a noble test of the human spirit and fostered cherished national virtues like patriotism, heroism, innovation, wealth, and physical health. The peace movement, in contrast, offered, as an alternative, what James referred to as the “pleasure economy”—a life that was characterized as soft and weak. Pragmatist that he was, James suggested that pacifism could succeed if it appealed to militarism by offering a vigorous alternative to war. The “moral equivalent of war” could preserve manly virtues while still providing for a peaceful world. Rather than conscripting the country’s youth into the military, James proposed conscription into an army against nature. Nature was a cold, dangerous enemy that made life painful for many people. By “fighting” nature, young men could improve people’s lives and establish their machismo.

Fire historian Stephen Pyne has described wildland firefighting as the job that best fits James’s description of the moral equivalent of war. Roy Wenger—who had been reading and discussing James’s essay in academic circles before the war broke out—felt
that smokejumping served this purpose for young COs. Smokejumping was dangerous; the physical work on a fire was extremely demanding, sometimes lasting for up to twenty hours. Revealingly, many smokejumpers reflecting on their experience described the work in terms that echoed James—they listed energy, determination, daring, cooperation, and discipline as essential smokejumper qualities.

Even if the men were not cognizant of the fact that they were engaged in war against nature, the dangerous work unquestionably contributed to camp morale, as Wenger noted in a letter to the MCC: “I read recently that John Foster Dulles recommends that each person should have a hobby in which he risks his life regularly. Maybe it is these opportunities that keep our men so perpetually cheerful and happy during the summer.”

Invigorated by danger, the men were also pleased that they had found “work of national importance” to perform for their country. But it is interesting that the COs failed to critically evaluate the reason that their labor was so important. The Forest Service was established to protect the national forests for a variety of uses; during the CPS years, however, the agency was focused on preserving national timber so that it could be used in the war machine. Perhaps the smokejumpers could justify this indirect contribution to the war effort because they believed so strongly in conservation. It is also possible that the COs gave up the effort to detach themselves from the war when the CPS program was placed under the supervision of the Selective Service System. Regardless, this ideological conflict did not seem to trouble the men at Camp 103. The COs were satisfied that they had found what they were searching for in smokejumping. From the perspectives of men...
who sought work that would benefit their country and legitimize their cause, Camp 103 was an overwhelming success.
EPILOGUE

In the summer of 1945, the CPS smokejumpers were not focused exclusively on the busy fire season. Victory in Europe that May sparked the hope that the SSS would soon begin demobilization of the Civilian Public Service program. As early as June, rumors were circulating around Camp 103 that fourteen hundred COs would be released within the next year.¹ Although the smokejumpers enjoyed their work, they were eager to return to their lives and families. In preparation for the post-war years, the MCC began to promote relief work opportunities in Europe and made vague promises of education funding for COs who had been in Mennonite-administered camps.²

The issue of demobilization was a sensitive one for Selective Service officials. Administratively, it would have been better to release the men from the CPS camps and focus on military demobilization. However, the Selective Service confronted intense public pressure to slow Civilian Public Service demobilization so that returning veterans would have the best job opportunities.³

While the Selective Service faced demands to keep COs, the Forest Service needed to get rid of them. Region 1 had already received numerous applications from veterans to do winter project work. Between the immense CPS smokejumper force and the wave of incoming vets, the Forest Service simply could not provide enough jobs. That fall, the organization made the decision to close Camp 103 to make room for returning
soldiers. On January 15, 1945, Frank Wiebe—now the former director of Camp 103—transferred out of the camp.

At first it was unclear whether the Forest Service would welcome the CPS smokejumpers back as regular employees in the next fire season. A handful of men at Camp 103 had expressed interest in staying on. Although some officials at the Missoula office wanted to allow the experienced CPS men to return, they left the choice to Earl Cooley. Basing his judgment on the fact that experienced COs would be in a position of authority over returning veterans—a situation that posed dangerous potential for squad disunity—Cooley decided that Region 1 would not take COs back in 1946. It was a choice that he struggled with at the time and would question years later. The lack of experienced men in 1946 caused problems for the smokejumper crew. Many of the veterans felt entitled to a government salary for their service in the war; they were not interested in the vigorous work involved in smokejumping.

In the end, Cooley’s decision probably had little effect on the CPS smokejumpers. The overwhelming majority did not want to continue with smokejumping. They were eager to get back to the farm or college or whatever else they had been doing when they were conscripted. Regions 4 and 6 did not receive the glut of applications that Region 1 did, so they allowed COs to return to their smokejumper programs (by this time, both regions had developed training programs separate from that held in Region 1). Opportunities to jump in other regions accommodated the handful COs who wished to continue smokejumping.

The final issue of the Static Line, published after Camp 103 had dissolved, tried to summarize the CPS smokejumper experience. The paper appropriately described the
camp as one of contrasts: the smokejumpers were industrious, but they failed to focus enough attention on social issues; they performed dangerous, valuable work on fires, but they were often stuck with easy, boring project work in between; they came from every imaginable background, but they got along like they were brothers. Primarily, the men were characterized by their desires to do significant work and prove their courage—the article concluded that both these goals were admirably accomplished.10

The Static Line included a word of appreciation to the Forest Service men and the community of Missoula for the hospitality the camp received. It also printed a letter from the Regional Forester thanking the COs for their efforts:

The CPS camp in Region One is being disbanded. Before its members become too widely scattered, I would like to express to them the appreciation of the Forest Service for the fine assistance they gave throughout this emergency and the contribution they have made to forest conservation. . . .

Despite these [harsh fire] conditions, Region One came through with a record of which every participant may justly be proud. We had dangerous fires and a great number of them. Even so, our total area of burned forest at the close of the season was small. Such an accomplishment was made possible by the splendid action of our airborne firemen, the smokejumpers. . . . To them goes a large share of the credit for a nationally important job well done.11

Although it had limitations, generally Camp 103 was a model for Civilian Public Service. The work there was satisfactory to the conscientious objectors and important to the Forest Service and the nation. The men of Camp 103 proved that COs could object to a nation’s militarism and still show love and respect for the country and its citizens.
NOTES

Chapter I


3 Brock, Freedom from Violence, 4–6, 7.


5 For a complete discussion of the development of the Brethren, Anabaptists, Mennonites, and Hutterites, as well as the spread of their influence throughout Europe, see Brock, Freedom from Violence, 25–171.

6 Ibid., 201.

7 Ibid., 200–209, 211.


14 Keim and Stoltzfus, Politics of Conscience, 36.

15 Ibid., 38–39, 46–47.

16 Ibid., 48–50.


Chapter II

1 Wittner, Rebels against War, 3.

2 Chatfield, with Kliedman, American Peace Movement, 74.

3 Ibid., 75.


5 Ibid., 62–64, 65.

6 Albert N. Keim, The CPS Story: An Illustrated History of Civilian Public Service (Intercourse, Penn.: Good Books, 1990), 14; Keim and Stoltzfus, Politics of Conscience, 71.

7 Keim, CPS Story, 15.

8 Keim and Stoltzfus, Politics of Conscience, 91.

9 Ibid., 94–100, 104–5; Brock and Socknat, eds., Challenge to Mars, 233–34; Keim, CPS Story, 20–22.

11 Keim, CPS Story, 28; Brock and Socknat, Challenge to Mars, 235.

12 Keim, CPS Story, 29–31. Keim suggests that the HPCs agreed to take on this enormous financial burden because they did not want to subject the program to Congressional scrutiny.

13 Ibid., 31.

14 Ibid., 30–32, 34.


17 Steen, U.S. Forest Service, 90, 95.


19 Pyne, Fire in America, 270.

20 Ibid.; Steen, U.S. Forest Service, 188.


22 Pyne, Fire in America, 275–77, 362–64.


26 Ibid., 21–25, 30.
27 Ibid., 35.

28 Ibid., 42.


31 Cooley, Trimotor and Trail, 51; Pyne, Fire in America, 373.

Chapter III

1 Roy Wenger to Henry A. Fast, Seeley Lake, Mont., 5 May 1943, “Camp #103, Director, 1943” folder, file 10, Camp 103, Civilian Public Service Records, Mennonite Historical Archives, Goshen, Indiana (hereafter Camp 103, CPS Records, MHA); Phifer, ed., Smoke Jumper, 21–23. Hole inspection was particularly important in the early days of smokejumping when the parachutes were made from silk, a favorite snack of grasshoppers. Later the parachutes were constructed from nylon, eliminating the damage inflicted by these insects.


3 Missoula (Mont.) Load Line, May 1943.


5 Cooley, Trimotor and Trail, 36.

6 Missoula (Mont.) Load Line, May 1943.

7 Ibid., September 1943.

8 Missoula (Mont.) Load Line, June 1943.

10 Missoula (Mont.) Load Line, June 1943.

11 Phifer, ed., Smoke Jumper, 9; Missoula (Mont.) Load Line, June 1944.

12 Ibid.

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14 Roy Wenger to Albert Gaeddert, Huson, Mont., 3 December 1943, “Camp #103, Director, 1944” folder, file 16, Camp 103, CPS Records, MHA.

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16 Roy Wenger to Henry A. Fast, Huson, Mont., 27 July 1943, “Camp #103, Director, 1943” folder, file 10, Camp 103, CPS Records, MHA.

17 Roy Wenger to H. Ernest Bennett, Seeley Lake, Mont., 14 June 1943, “Camp #103, Director, 1943” folder, file 10, Camp 103, CPS Records, MHA; Joseph C. Osborne, interview by Dan Hall, transcript, Missoula, Mont., 22 July 1984, OH 133-82, SOHP, UM.

18 Aubrey L. Garber, interview by Roxanne Farwell, transcript, Missoula, Mont., 21 July 1984, OH 133-39, SOHP, UM.

19 Missoula (Mont.) Static Line, 19 August 1944.

20 Missoula (Mont.) Load Line, June 1943.

21 Earl Cooley, interview by Dan Hall, transcript, 30 May 1984, OH 133-20, SOHP, UM.

22 Missoula (Mont.) Load Line, November 1943.

23 Dave Flaccus, interview by Roxanne Farwell, transcript, Missoula, Mont., 10 July 1984, OH 133-36, SOHP, UM; Roy Wenger, interview by Roxanne Farwell, transcript, Missoula, Montana, 19 September 1984, OH 133-113, SOHP, UM.

24 Roy Wenger to Henry A. Fast, Huson, Mont., 27 July 1943, “Camp #103, Director, 1943” folder, file 10, Camp 103, CPS Records, MHA.

25 Ibid.; Flaccus, interview; Cooley, Trimotor and Trail, 50.
26 Cooley, Trimotor and Trail, 50.

27 Wenger, interview by Farwell.

28 Ibid.; Osborne, interview; Roy Wenger to H. Ernest Bennett, Seeley Lake, Mont., 12 May 1943, “Camp #103, Director, 1943” folder, file 10, Camp 103, CPS Records, MHA.

29 Missoula (Mont.) Load Line, July 1944.

30 Cooley, Trimotor and Trail, 60; Garber, interview.

31 Cooley, Trimotor and Trail, 57. The Forest Service started the season with about 235 trainees, but not all of these men successfully completed training. The total number of men who jumped on fires that season was closer to 150.

32 Ibid., 57, 61.

33 Ibid., 56; Pyne, Fire in America, 373; Missoula (Mont.) Static Line, 2 February, 14 July 1945.

34 Cooley, Trimotor and Trail, 57.

35 Missoula (Mont.) Static Line, 31 July 1945; Arthur Wiebe to Irvin B. Horss, Missoula, Mont., 27 July 1945, “Camp #103, Director, 1945” folder, file 23, Camp 103, CPS Records, MHA. “Smokechaser” is the nickname for a ground-crew firefighter. On many fires, smokechasers would be deployed at the same time as the smokejumpers. Smokejumpers had the advantage of transportation, so they would arrive at the fire first and dig line around it. The ground crew would arrive anywhere from a few hours to a few days later and finish mop-up on the fire. Sometimes the Forest Service would use the men at Camp 103 as a ground crew if the size or proximity of the fire did not warrant transportation by plane.

36 Flaccus, interview.

37 David B. Kauffman, interview by Jim Norgaard, transcript, Whitefish, Mont., 16 August 1984, OH 133-54, SOHP, UM.

38 Wiebe to Horss, 27 July 1945; Arthur Weibe to Roy Wenger, Missoula, Mont., 27 July 1945, file 23, Camp 103, CPS Records, MHA.
39 Missoula (Mont.) Daily Missoulian, 21 June 1945; Weibe to Wenger, 27 July 1945.

40 Wenger, interview by Farwell.

41 Wilmer Carlsen, interview by Roxanne Farwell, transcript, 29 August 1984, OH 133-13, SOHP, UM; Cooley, Trimotor and Trail, 55–56.

42 Cooley, Trimotor and Trail, 53; Earl Cooley, interview by Dan Hall, transcript, 30 May 1984, OH 133-21, SOHP, UM.

43 Roy Wenger to Henry A. Fast, Huson, Mont., 5 August 1943, “Camp #103, Director, 1943” folder, file 10, Camp 103, CPS Records, MHA; Seeley Lake newsletter, “Camp #103, Missoula, Newsletters and Fire Jump Reports” folder, file 15, Camp 103, CPS Records, MHA.

44 Roy Wenger to Henry A. Fast, Huson, Mont., 26 August 1943, “Camp #103, Director, 1943” folder, file 10, Camp 103, CPS Records, MHA.

45 Roy Wenger to Albert Gaeddert, Huson, Mont., 30 September 1943, “Camp #103, Director, 1943” folder, file 10, Camp 103, CPS Records, MHA; Wenger, interview by Farwell.

46 Missoula (Mont.) Load Line, 8 December 1944; Missoula (Mont.) Static Line, 19 March 1945.

47 Garber, interview.

48 Cooley, interview, OH 133-21.

49 Ibid.

50 Pyne, Fire in America, 373.


Chapter IV

1 Missoula (Mont.) Static Line, 17 June 1944.

2 Ibid., 22 July 1944.
3 Ibid., 11 June 1945.

4 Missoula (Mont.) Load Line. July 1943; Cooley, interview, OH 133-20.

5 Missoula (Mont.) Static Line. 15 July 1944.

6 F. K. Utterback diary, 14–17, 19–23 July 1943, “Camp #103, Missoula, Diary” folder, file 15, Camp 103, CPS Records, MHA.

7 Missoula (Mont.) Load Line. February 1944.

8 Missoula (Mont.) Static Line, 15 July 1944, 11 June 1945; Garber, interview.

9 Missoula (Mont.) Static Line. 9, 17 June 1944, 23 June 1945. Although there is no evidence to indicate that the competition was unfriendly, it is difficult to imagine the smokechasers—who disliked smokejumpers in the first place and were not overly friendly to COs—taking their frequent losses to the CPS smokejumpers well.

10 Missoula (Mont.) Static Line. 8 December 1944, 6 February 1945.

11 Ibid., 31 July, 14 August 1944; Missoula (Mont.) Load Line. October, November 1943.

12 Missoula (Mont.) Static Line. 15 July 1944.

13 Missoula (Mont.) Static Line. 31 July 1944; Utterback diary, 28 July, 1 August 1943.

14 Missoula (Mont.) Static Line. 1 January, 6 February 1945.

15 Utterback diary, 28 August 1943.

16 Roy Wenger to Henry A. Fast, Seeley Lake, Mont., 7 June 1943, “Camp #103, Director, 1943” folder, file 10, Camp 103, CPS Records, MHA.

17 Ibid.; Tedford P. Lewis, interview by Roxanne Farwell, transcript, Missoula, Mont., 26 September 1984, OH 133-59, SOHP, UM.

19 Wenger to Fast, 11 May 1943; Kauffman, interview; Carlsen, interview, OH 133-13; John Gregory, interview by Sandra Carroll, transcript, Missoula, Mont., 24 July 1984, OH 133-42, SOHP, UM.

20 Roy Wenger to Orie Miller, Huson, Mont., 29 September 1943, “Camp #103, Director, 1943” folder, file 10, Camp 103, CPS Records, MHA.

21 Utterback diary, 29 August 1943; Missoula (Mont.) Static Line, 27 June 1944; Missoula (Mont.) Static Line, 23 January 1945.

22 Roy Wenger to Albert Gaeddert, Huson, Mont., 22 May 1944, “Camp #103, Director, 1944” folder, file 16, Camp 103, CPS Records, MHA.

23 Wenger, interview by Farwell.

24 Missoula (Mont.) Static Line, 10 November 1945; Roy Wenger to Albert Gaeddert, Huson, Mont., 18 March 1944, “Camp #103, Director, 1944” folder, file 16, Camp 103, CPS Records, MHA.

25 Wenger to Gaeddert, 18 March 1944; Missoula (Mont.) Load Line, August-September 1944.


27 “Application for Assignment in U.S. Forest Service Smoke-Jumper Organization, Season of 1943,” “Camp #103, Director, 1943” folder, file 10, Camp 103, CPS Records, MHA.

28 Missoula (Mont.) Static Line, 15 July 1944.

29 Wenger, interview by Farwell.

30 Missoula (Mont.) Load Line, June 1944.

31 Missoula (Mont.) Static Line, 6 February 1945.

32 Missoula (Mont.) Load Line, February, June 1944.

33 Missoula (Mont.) Static Line, 19 August 1944.

34 Ibid., 17 June 1944.
The Mennonites were especially emphatic in promoting what they viewed as positive positions. Opposition to conscription and war was a negative position. Although pacifism was an important part of the Mennonite tradition, Mennonites believed that focusing support for social justice rather than opposition to war would help their position gain followers in the non-Mennonite community. Keim and Stoltzfus, Politics of Conscience, 74.
Chapter V

1 Roy Wenger to Henry A. Fast, Missoula, Mont., 19 April 1943, “Camp #103, Director, 1943” folder, file 10, Camp 103, CPS Records, MHA.

2 Roy Wenger to Henry A. Fast, Seeley Lake, Mont., 13 May 1943, “Camp #103, Director, 1943” folder, file 10, Camp 103, CPS Records, MHA.

3 Cooley, Trimotor and Trail, 51.

4 Cooley, interview, OH 133-21.

5 Kauffman, interview.

6 Wenger to Gaeddert, 30 September 1943.

7 Missoula (Mont.) Load Line, November 1943.

8 Missoula (Mont.) Static Line, 19 August 1944.

9 Garber, interview; Flaccus, interview; Lewis, interview; Osborne, interview; Wenger, interview. Almost all of the COs included in the University of Montana’s Smokejumper Oral History Project named Earl Cooley as a Forest Service official who treated them kindly and showed concern for their safety. In fact, Cooley was so popular among the COs that he was invited to their camp reunions. Kauffman, interview.

10 Missoula (Mont.) Load Line, November 1943.
11 Ibid.; Wenger, interview by Farwell.

12 Wenger to Gaeddert, 18 March 1844.

13 Wenger, interview by Farwell; Roy Wenger to Albert Gaeddert, Huson, Mont., 26 July 1944, “Camp #103, Director, 1944” folder, file 16, Camp 103, CPS Records, MHA.

14 Missoula (Mont.) Static Line, 14 August 1944.

15 Ibid.; Wenger to Gaeddert, 26 July 1944.

16 Wenger, interview by Farwell.

17 Wenger to Gaeddert, 30 September 1943.

18 Missoula (Mont.) Static Line, 23 January 1943.

19 Spokane (Wash.) Spokesman Review, 17 June 1945

20 Missoula (Mont.) Static Line, 31 July 1945.

21 Missoula (Mont.) Static Line, 17 June 1944, 14 July 1945.

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23 Ibid., 23 June 1945.

24 Missoula (Mont.) Load Line, August-September 1944.

25 Keim, CPS Story, 55–57.

26 Cooley, interview, OH 133-21; Missoula (Mont.) Load Line, July 1944.

27 Flaccus, interview; Gregory, interview; Kauffman, interview.

28 Gregory, interview.

29 Ibid.; Garber, interview.

30 Stanley, interview.

32 Ibid., 9.

33 Ibid., 13–14.

34 Ibid.

35 Pyne, Fire in America, 237.

36 Wenger, interview by Farwell.

37 Flaccus, interview; Missoula (Mont.) Load Line, September 1943.

38 Cooley, interview, OH 133-20; Carlsen, interview; Garber, interview; Wenger, interview.

39 Roy Wenger to Albert Gaeddert and Rufus Franz, Huson, Mont., 12 September 1944, “Camp #103, Director, 1944” folder, file 16, Camp 103, CPS Records, MHA.

40 Cooley, Trimotor and Trail, 35; Steen, U.S. Forest Service, 246–47.

41 Carlsen, interview; Osborne, interview; Missoula (Mont.) Static Line, 27 June 1944, 1 January 1945.

Epilogue

1 Missoula (Mont.) Static Line, 29 May 1945.

2 Ibid., 31 July, 20 September, 11 October 1945.

3 Ibid., 11 October 1945.

4 Ibid., 10 November, 1 December 1945.

5 Ibid., 26 February 1946.

6 Cooley, interview, OH 133-21; Cooley, Trimotor and Trail, 65.

7 Cooley, interview, OH 133-21.
8 Carlsen, interview; Stanley, interview.

9 Missoula (Mont.) Static Line, 1 December 1945; Cooley, interview, OH 133-21.

10 Missoula (Mont.) Static Line, 26 January 1946.

11 Ibid.
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