The Real Super Heroes:

The Triumph and Tragedy of the Civilian Conservation Corps

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Introduction

Have you ever been to a State or National park? If you have, then you have most likely seen the nice scenery. Most likely that the scenery you looked at was put there by the Civilian Conservation Corps, or C.C.C. The C.C.C. was an environmental protection organization that was created during the Great Depression by President Franklin Roosevelt in the late 1930s. The reason he made the C.C.C. was to help lower the high unemployment rate and beautify our national parks as we know them today. But with great victory comes great sacrifice, as Theodore Roosevelt said, and that was true when more than 40 C.C.C. members died working to make the United States beautiful.

Background

What is the C.C.C? The C.C.C. is a group of young men between the ages of 17 and 28-years-old, and their jobs were to beautify the country’s parks and stop wildfires. The pay for an enrollee was $30, and $25 was sent back to their family. Along with pay, they also got shelter, food, and education. Some memorable alumni of C.C.C. include Actors Raymond Burr and Walter Matthau, baseball player Stan Musial, and the first man to fly faster than sound, Chuck Yeager. Even through the Civilian Conservation Corps fought wildfires, some of the more famous actions they did was put over 3 billion trees in the ground, and construct roads and shelters at over 800 parks. At the start of the program, on the day the Act took effect, they had over 300,000 men working at over 1,400 camps. Along with those men were 88,000 Native Americans, African Americans were also allowed in, but were put at separate camps from others. Women were not allowed to join the C.C.C.
**Triumph**

Some of the most amazing things the Civilian Conservation Corps did was they planted 3 billion trees, which is half of the nations planted trees. They also fixed and built new park buildings, bridges, monuments, trails, and roads. Some of the more memorable places that the C.C.C. is Yellowstone National Park. The work that they did included making the trails around the geysers. They also had more than 24 camps at Bighorn National Forest in Wyoming. Along with these two parks, they also worked at Thermopolis and Guernsey. Some of the jobs they did at Thermopolis and Guernsey were hand-drill water fountains, built picnic shelters, in which they named Sitting Bull, Spotted Tail, and other Native American Chiefs. Camp F-15 was located in London, Kentucky Daniel Boone National Park, where they built an entire steel truss bridge! All together, the C.C.C. made 125,000 miles of road, nearly 47,000 bridges, 3,000 fire towers, and 86,000 miles of telephone wires. Along with 318,000 dam inspections, 8 million hours fighting fires, and planted over 3 billion trees. That is amazing!

**Here at Home**

Some of the places that the C.C.C. here in Wisconsin and around the midwest could include Granite Peak, where they made some of the old shed on the hill. One of the other places they worked is Cherokee Park, where they made a concrete dam. But starting with Granite Peak,

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the C.C.C. set up a camp of 250 men in July 1935. They started setting up walking paths, gazebos, and they widened the road. But, Walton Roehl, the head of the Chamber of Commerce, thought it would be nice to put up a ski hill, so they also built a T-bar lift and cleared the slopes for skiing, which opened a year later.⁴

**Tragedies**

But with all those victories came at a cost; At over 7600 reported accidents, over 40 of them were those of deaths.⁵Sixteen of the losses were from the Blackwater Forest Fire, at Blackwater National Park in Wyoming. The day before the fire, where was an electrical storm that struck a dry patch of forestry due to the lack of rain. So, when the lightning struck the patch, it was sent ablaze after a few minutes, but since the watchtower had a lack of communication, they could not tell firefighters about the fire. When the authorities were told, they called out the C.C.C. to deal with it. A day after the fire was reported, there were over 150 men fighting the fire; 50 of which were C.C.C. members. But reinforcements, or Ten Sleep, were not to be found, and when they reached the fire, it was nearly noon. After a quick meal, they were sent to the fire line, which was a canyon with steep slopes. When they got there, the wind direction changed and Clayton, Ten Sleep’s leader, and his men were trapped. At 5 in the afternoon, the fire was controlled, and they went to the canyon to find them. When they got there, they found Clayton and his men. All but one were dead and within 30 feet of each other. The one man who survived

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⁴ Rib Mountain History - Wisconsin DNR. (2014, October 17). Retrieved February 27, 2019, from https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/parks/name/ribmt/history.html
was Roy Bevens. He told their stories, and later, died at the hospital. They also renamed the place Clayton and is men died at Clayton’s Gulch (See Appendix I).⁶

One of the other notable accidents was Oliver Roaden died at Camp F-15, the camp that made the Iron Truss Bridge. Roaden was with 2 of his colleagues, Ernest Brock and Edgar Bowling, and the 3 of them were assigned to getting supplies across the Rockcastle River to work on the concrete supports. Before pushing off, they loaded up their supplies and some food for a another camp on the river. They also wondered if they could get the boat across the river due to the recent storms and the water level was higher, and the bridge site was about 130 feet above from a rapids. But Roaden was pretty sure that they would make it because Roaden was a strong swimmer. So at 8 in the morning, they pushed off and were on their way to the bridge. But on the way, the current took control of the boat and pushed it down river. They panicked, Roaden told Brock and Bowling to jump out, because he thought that a lighter boat would let him have more control. After a struggle, he jumped and tried swimming to shore, but was did not succeed and he died. (See Appendix II and III)⁷

Another one that will be discussed is the Emporium Forest Fire in Pennsylvania; Six men died there. What happened was this; the men were sent out by Hunts Run Camp at Emporium, where they went up the side of the mountain in multiple groups. That is when the fire overtook them. Gilbert Mohney was the first one to die, people suspect it is because he is larger and could

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not outrun the fire. Basil Bogush, Stephen Jacofsky, Ross Hollobaugh, and George Vogel successfully outran the fire by getting on some rocks, but fell off and badly burned themselves. Bogush died there, Jacofsky and Hollobaugh died the day after, and Vogel died a few days later. Jacob Boring, Andrew Stefphanic, and Howard May survived by running up the mountain top and huddling on top of a large rock, which later was named Survivor Rock in their honor. Word spread about the incident, and over 8000 C.C.C. members gave some money to build a memorial to the fallen firefighters and enrollees, now known as Memorial Springs. But Investigations were taken by the Cameron County Coroner, U.S. Army, and the District Attorney, and they all came out with results that point to staff of the Hunts Run Camp responsible for the 6 deaths.

**Lasting Effects**

But, in the light of all this bad is some good. The C.C.C. had multiple lasting effects to their actions. First of all, they made our country beautiful. If that is not amazing then what is? And even now people are able to see that beauty across the country. Secondly, if they didn’t fight the fires, who knows how long before it would have taken to put them out and at what cost? It would be catastrophic. We may even would be in higher debt or higher damages to surrounding cities. Also, after the Blackwater Forest Fire, the U.S.F.S. Division of Fire Control decided that the firefighters should be at the fire ASAP, so they funded parachute jumping exercises, and that is when the smokejumpers program officially began. Lastly, at the end of the C.C.C., America had joined World War II, and they needed men, and they found men with discipline, training,
and skill in the C.C.C. So, even if we were losing the idea of America being beautiful, America ended up being prepared for war. To sum it up, Roosevelt’s “Tree Army” became America’s War Army.¹⁰

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this can prove that the Civilian Conservation Corps was an effective group. They could fight fires, build buildings, and all of this allowed us to see all of what he see now. When Franklin Roosevelt allowed young men to fix national parks and earn money to send back to their family during the Great Depression, it was a great and unique idea. There was nothing like this anywhere else in the world. But this great achievement came with a bad sacrifice. Even though there was many great things that those boys did, 42 of them still died sacrificing their lives making our country great. So, the C.C.C. was a natural conservation group, but Franklin Roosevelt said it best. “no military training is involved and we are conserving not only our natural resources, but also our Human Resources.”

Appendix I

This is a map of the area that the Blackwater Forest Fire happened, including the area that Clayton and his men died.\textsuperscript{11}

Appendix II

This is the Telegram sent to Oliver Roaden’s parents informing them of their son’s death.  

Appendix III

This is a photo of where the authorities found Roaden’s body.\textsuperscript{13}

Annotated Bibliography


Rib Mountain History - Wisconsin DNR. (2014, October 17). Retrieved February 27, 2019, from https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/parks/name/ribmt/history.html


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