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THE COMMISSION ON TRAINING CAMP ACTIVITIES¹

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Chairman Commission on Training Camp Activities

A YEAR ago last summer, five thousand American troops were encamped just across the railroad tracks from Columbus, New Mexico, and every evening they used to come across the tracks to town, just as every soldier comes to town every time he gets a chance. There was absolutely nothing in that town that could in any way legitimately interest them. There were no moving-picture shows and no pool tables; there was no place where they could write letters or read, no place where they could purchase a newspaper or magazine. The only attractions in town were a few disreputable saloons and a red-light district; and those institutions were extensively patronized because there was absolutely nothing to compete with them. The American soldiers used to come across the railroad track in huge droves out of sheer loneliness, and resort to those institutions because there was nothing to take their place.

When the war broke out, in April 1917, Secretary Baker and the president made up their minds that that condition was going to be remedied if it could possibly be remedied. The Commission on Training Camp Activities represents the solicitude of the War Department in connection with the environment of the troops, and the desire of the War Department that all activities in connection with social organizations of the troops inside of the camps be closely co-ordinated. Finally, the commission represents the method of attack by the War Department upon the evils which are traditionally associated with camps and training centers.

The work of the commission has divided itself into two phases. In the first place, we are concerned in building up positive recreational facilities, to take the place of the things we are trying to drive out of business. It is not enough merely to set up "*Verboten*" signs along the roadside, to forbid troops doing this or that, or to pass laws forbidding the sale of liquor to soldiers in uniform. It is necessary to give the men something positive to take the place of

¹ Address at the meeting of the Academy of Political Science, December 15, 1917.

the things that we are trying to eliminate. The first and most important work of the Commission on Training Camp Activities is the building up of adequate recreational facilities.

Our first point of attack is inside the camps, and in that work we are relying primarily upon institutions which were already in existence when the war began. We do not desire to create any more additional machinery than is absolutely essential; hence, inside the camps, we are relying primarily upon such institutions as the Young Men's Christian Association, the Knights of Columbus, and the Jewish Board for Welfare Work.

I suppose you are familiar with the work of the Young Men's Christian Association. The secretary of the Y. M. C. A. has come to be the big brother of the troops in all the camps, and if any of you visit our camps, you will see what a tremendous part the Y. M. C. A. as an institution is playing in developing the morale of our troops. I could speak with equal praise of the work of the Knights of Columbus and the Jewish Board for Welfare Work. These three agencies inside our military camps are closely co-ordinated, and are working in the closest harmony.

At Camp Upton today the whole camp is covered with snow, buried in snow. The buildings where the men sleep have recently been cleared of pianos and all amusement facilities in order to give the men the required air space, and today there would be nothing for the men to do, and absolutely no place for them to go if it were not for the Young Men's Christian Association. The Y. M. C. A. is playing no unimportant part in winning the war, because in providing for the leisure-time activities of the troops, it is making a contented army, and an army is not a fighting army until it is a contented army.

We are relying not only on the Young Men's Christian Association, the Knights of Columbus and the Jewish Board for Welfare Work; we are relying also on the Young Women's Christian Association. Perhaps you know something of the unique institution which has come out of the Young Women's Christian Association. It is called the hostess house. We approved the erection of a hostess house at Plattsburg last spring—the first to be erected in the United States. Greeted with jeers at first by the regular army men, it proved its value at once, and it was not long before Washington began to be bombarded by requests for hostess houses. Now, in every one of the thirty-two great army camps in the United States—the sixteen national army camps and

the sixteen national guard camps—there are hostess houses, either erected or in process of erection. We shall never again have in the United States a military post or camp that does not contain a hostess house.

I suppose you know the function of the hostess house in camps. I had occasion last week to visit a new one just erected in Camp Meade. It is a big affair, with huge fireplaces, and provides facilities for the women visitors in camp to meet their men relatives and friends. In the old days they had to stand in the windy corners of the camp, or parade the streets; there was no place for them to go. Now they can go to a comfortable house, and in pleasant surroundings talk with their men friends and relatives. An institution of that kind keeps up the contentment and morale of the troops.

After all, our function is to surround these men, as far as possible, with the rational environment to which they have been accustomed. We cannot take men from their homes, their clubs, their social institutions, put them into a radically new environment without any of the social contacts to which they have been accustomed, and still expect to achieve the right kind of results. Our fundamental aim in all this work is to create a fighting machine. We never lose sight of that. You cannot have a fighting machine unless the men composing it are contented, and you cannot have men contented if you rob them of all the social contacts to which they have been accustomed. In providing the means of contact between the family and the men, the hostess house is thus occupying no small place in the winning of the war.

As I said before, we created no more machinery than necessary. The commission has supported existing organizations wherever possible; but in many cases it has had to undertake positive work on its own initiative. In the first place, we are building a well-equipped theater in every national army camp in the United States. The government is paying the entire expense, which will amount to \$500,000. We are booking the best Broadway attractions right through the camps, so that the men may have all that you get here in New York. Because we cannot guarantee the permanency of the national guard training camps, we did not feel justified in erecting the same kind of theater there that we are putting up in the national army training camps. We are, however, borrowing two Chautauqua tents for each national guard training camp; and these training camps will

have exactly the same booking circuit as the national army camps. So we shall have a circuit of forty-eight theaters run by the national government.

Why are we doing this? Because we have got to compete with the things that must be put out of business; because we have got to put something positive in the place of the things that for years have been traditionally associated with armies and army camps. These theatrical productions will occupy many a leisure hour in the afternoon and evening. At Camp Funston there are sixty thousand men at the present time. The nearest town has a population of three thousand. There was nothing when we first went there, except a dirty moving-picture show and a dirty restaurant. All the facilities that the town could possibly develop by itself would not begin to take care of the sixty thousand men in their leisure time. Therefore, we must provide just the sort of thing represented by these theaters.

We are developing not only theaters inside the camps, but also libraries. We asked the American Library Association to assume responsibility for putting up in every one of the thirty-two large camps a well-equipped library building for supplying the libraries with books, and for seeing that the books were widely distributed through the camps. The American Library Association most generously assumed this responsibility; it started out to get a million dollars, and before it stopped it had a million and a half. In every national army and national guard training camp at the present time there is either in process of erection or actually erected a well-equipped, modern library building, manned by a modern librarian and full of well-selected books. On the Mexican border the men wanted books about Mexico. Now the soldiers are beginning to demand books about France; they want to know what sort of a country they are going to. We want to give them all the books they want, and of the kind they want.

We are also developing educational facilities inside the camps. You would be surprised if you knew the limited education of some of the men who are drafted for service in our national army. They come down from the Kentucky or Tennessee mountains, unable to read or write. In the Syracuse camp there was a regiment of men who could not understand the commands given them; for they knew no English. In every camp in the United States we have had to start classes in English, spelling, reading, writing, and French. Over a hundred thousand soldiers in the United

States are studying the French language at the present time, in classes run under the direction of the Commission on Training Camp Activities. In this connection we are utilizing the educational machinery of the Y. M. C. A. and the university extension system. In every camp there are classes every evening, representing all subjects from spelling to electrical engineering. The camp has thus become a university for men who are trying to make up the deficiencies of their earlier education.

The French that we are teaching is not what I suppose you would call classic French; but if we can succeed in giving the men a vocabulary of six or seven hundred words, they can make themselves understood abroad, which is more than some of the men who have gone over thus far have been able to do. Their effectiveness as co-operating factors with our French Allies is going to be greatly increased by the French that they have gained in this country.

We are also greatly interested in developing athletic work inside the camps. To send a man out to dig a trench and to set him up in drill day after day, does not necessarily evolve a well-developed physical man. For the sake of such development, we have placed in every training camp in the United States an athletic director responsible to the commanding officer as his civilian aid.

This athletic director is assuming charge, not only of the physical development of the men, but of sports and games, in close co-operation with the athletic coaches of the Young Men's Christian Association. That work is immensely important in keeping the men sane and rational. It is not a rational environment they are going into over there, and it is not a sane kind of work they are going to do; these athletic activities have to be introduced for just that reason, so that the men can be kept on an even mental level. It is one of our most important tasks.

We are particularly interested in developing boxing, and have placed a boxing instructor in every camp. I have seen boxing lessons that include seven hundred men all at once, being directed by a man on a high stand—seven hundred boxing lessons going on at the same time. Boxing is intimately related to bayonet fighting. Our men must be good bayonet fighters, and they must therefore be good boxers. Boxing, besides, is a very clean sport, and one that can be carried on without any particular paraphernalia.

We are interested, too, in developing the singing of the army. We want to send to France a singing army. You cannot imagine the effect that songs have on the morale of the troops. In every national army and national guard camp, as well as in many of the smaller camps, we have accordingly placed a song coach. That innovation met with considerable opposition from some of our hard-headed old Indian fighters down in the War Department, but they are being converted. I wish you could hear the men sing in the army at the present time. I am bound to confess that it is the most popular thing we have tried thus far. The men are crazy about it, and the officers, too, because they see the effect on the spirit of the troops. The songs that these men sing are nothing classical; sometimes they can hardly be called exactly decent; but I don't care what the men sing, as long as they sing something. And yet the other day, down in a Southern camp, I heard twenty thousand men, led by six military bands, singing all together:

Mine eyes have seen the glory
Of the coming of the Lord,
He is trampling out the vineyard
Where the grapes of wrath are stored.

When you hear twenty thousand men singing that song in unison, you will realize what the coming of our troops to France is going to mean.

While we are developing the work inside the camps because it is necessary to keep the men rational, it is also necessary to establish a rational environment in the communities near the camp. The men constantly go to town, and the Commission on Training Camp Activities has undertaken the responsibility of developing the recreational facilities of every town in the vicinity of a military camp in the United States. In order to get the necessary machinery, we called on the Playground and Recreation Association of America, and they put their machinery at our disposal. Over a hundred and twenty towns are now being developed in this particular way.

That means that we have one hundred and twenty representatives of the commission in one hundred and twenty towns in the neighborhood of military camps. These men, first of all, have established a local committee, perhaps appointed by the mayor, and this local committee has taken upon itself the co-ordination of all the agencies in town—the churches, the lodges, the clubs,

the athletic associations—everything already there, so that the men when they go to town will find something pleasant to do, something they want to do.

The old idea that towns should make what they could out of the soldiers has been largely replaced by the idea that they should do what they can for the soldier. Thousands of soldiers are being entertained over Sunday in families in the vicinity of military camps. We have inaugurated all over the country a "take the soldier home to dinner" movement, so that the men will not be deprived absolutely of the home environment to which they have been accustomed.

This work is going to mean a permanent contribution to the towns where it has been carried on. Many of the towns in the South, for example, never had any experience whatever in community work, and they never had any cohesiveness so far as a community program was concerned. Those towns are being made over now; they are developing a social consciousness. I cannot help thinking that through this community work in the neighborhood of military camps, we are making a permanent addition to the life of the towns that will last long after our war camps have been forgotten.

So far I have been talking about the positive recreational forces we have introduced to take the place of the things we are trying to eliminate; but there is another side to our work. We are interested in protecting the troops directly from the evils to which they have been exposed for years and years. The troops on the Mexican border, for example, were surrounded by red-light districts, by saloons, by all the evils by which men could possibly be surrounded. The government took no steps in the matter, because the government never had taken any steps in such things.

At the very beginning of this present work, Congress passed a law which forbade the sale of liquor to soldiers and sailors in uniform, and which made it obligatory for the secretary of war to take all steps necessary to suppress prostitution in the neighborhood of military camps. That work devolved upon the Commission on Training Camp Activities. As a result of our work, thirty-seven red-light districts in thirty-seven cities have been eliminated, and scores of cities have been cleaned up because of the attitude of the War and Navy Departments. Even a city like New Orleans, which from a modern social point of view

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seemed almost hopeless so far as moral conditions were concerned, has been cleaned up; and all the cities in the neighborhood of military camps are now undergoing a process of continual scouring.

We are confronted with a special problem. These men are not enlisting voluntarily for service, but are being drafted, and we cannot afford to draft them into a demoralizing environment. They must be protected. It is a duty that we owe not only to the men themselves, but to their families when the men come back from overseas. The idea of the War Department is that these men should be returned to their homes just as clean and vigorous as when they went out. This war is going to be won on the basis of man power, and we cannot afford to lose a single man from any preventable cause.

We know something of the experience through which our allies have gone. In some cases as much as thirty-three and a third per cent of the men have been made ineffective through venereal disease. We cannot afford to have any condition of that kind in connection with American troops. As a matter of efficiency we must conserve the fighting vitality of every single unit. Looked at as a matter of efficiency, let alone morals, this work is justified. I am confident that the efforts which the president, the secretary of war, and the secretary of the navy have made, and the work that has been accomplished, will contribute materially to the efficiency of our fighting forces abroad.

The work of the Commission on Training Camp Activities, when it is summed up, comes to this: The great crusade upon which this nation has embarked, the great enterprise to which we have dedicated our lives and our sacred honor, must not be tarnished through any influence which we can prevent. One million and a half of our men are going out into this adventure in much the same spirit as that in which Oliver Cromwell's Ironsides went out; more may go. They must come back in that same spirit, victorious, and with no wounds except those gloriously won in honorable conflict.