

Caleb Frantz (left), a conscientious objector from Bethel, Pa., is an orderly in the Castener Hospital.



CONCHIES in PUERTO RICO

One of the three Civilian Public Service conscientious objectors are working in Puerto Rico.

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SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO—Whatever became of the conscientious objectors?

Some of the men who registered as conchies with their local Selective Service boards have been deferred because they are working in essential jobs. About 6,890 conchies have been interned and assigned to Civilian Public Service camps in the States. A handful—just 47—live and work in camps on Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, the only places outside the continental limits of the States where they may serve. By act of Congress, conscientious objectors may not be sent to foreign lands, but Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, although overseas, are territories of the U. S.

Some 2,000,000 people are crowded into Puerto Rico, the smallest island in the Greater Antilles necklace. To care for this vast population and treat the ailing, there are very few doctors, and many of these are now in the service. In some areas, as many as 4,000 Puerto Ricans depend on one physician; other communities do not even have one.

Conscientious objectors are helping to bring medical relief to hundreds of disease-ridden Puerto Ricans, and two of the conchies interned here have died while performing this kind of service.

Largest of the three Civilian Public Service camps in Puerto Rico is one called the Castener project. Located in the west-central portion of the island, it is a half day's journey from the capital and lies wedged among the mountains in the coffee region. There could hardly be a place more remote from the normal activities of the island and its people. A few conchies from the first group to arrive here have not been away from the camp in two years.

Here at the Castener project is a hospital they have erected. Though crude in many ways, it can accommodate 100 out-patients a day and about 25 bed patients. At least four major operations are performed each week. (The chief surgeon here is not a conscientious objector, although surgeons in the two other camps are.)

The work of the objectors has been an important contribution to the health of Puerto Rico; that is generally admitted by all concerned. Agustin Martínez de Andino, assistant regional administrator of the Puerto Rican Reconstruction Administration, has this to say:

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CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

"This is no time to glamorize young Americans who decline to fight for their country because war is against their moral principles, but the conscientious objectors are helping in a major engagement in America's back yard: a tough battle against disease."

The typical conchy at Castener is somewhere between 21 and 32 years old. He may come from Indiana, Michigan, Kansas, Ohio, Pennsylvania or Massachusetts, and he probably has a better than average education. Although unwilling to kill, he is ready for any kind of work, and in most cases is well trained.

His activities, since he was classified 4-E, have followed a pattern prescribed by the Selective Service System, the Department of Interior and the three religious organizations to which most conchies belong. These are the Mennonites, Quakers and Brethren.

Life at the Castener project is no bed of roses. Food is nourishing enough but far less inviting than Puerto Rican garrison menus. The cooks were accountants, laboratory technicians and electricians before they entered the camp. The table is often meatless, and the vegetables are home-grown at the camp.

There is little entertainment available because of the remoteness of the camp. A few ancient films are shown on the camp's 16-mm projector, and an annual Christmas dance is attended by co-eds from the University of Puerto Rico. Otherwise, life is a pretty long round of work, with duty rosters arranged on a system like the Army's.

You get plenty of time to think, and probably many of the objectors debate within themselves whether they are doing the right thing. One conchy in Puerto Rico changed his mind and enlisted, but was discharged soon after on a CDD.

In theory, at least, the conscientious objectors here are entitled to 2½ days of furlough a month, which can be accumulated and taken in a 30-day stretch at the end of a year. Only one man has chosen to accumulate his furlough time—he was a professor at the University of Puerto Rico for the 30 days. Some men pass up the chance for the briefer leaves because their wives are with them at the camp (they work as assistants in the camp hospital or as social workers). Still other conchies don't go on leave because they are busted.

By act of Congress, no appropriation may be made by the Federal government to pay conscientious objectors. The camps in the States and overseas are maintained with funds provided by the sponsoring religious groups as well as by private contributions.

So it is little wonder that the average conchy is broke; he is sweating out the duration on \$5 a month.

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