

Civilian Public Service and Seventh-day Adventists, 1941-1945

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On March 13, 1942, Seventh-day Adventist War Service Commission secretary, Carlyle B. Haynes wrote Mr. Jesse Chriss Hanson of Cheyenne, Wyoming, as follows:

Dear Brother Hanson:

Information has reached me from the National Service Board for Religious Objectors, which has mailed you a questionnaire lately, that you have been classified in Class IV-E, and are therefore subject to assignment to a civilian public service [sic] camp in the near future.¹

As expressed in his letter, Haynes was concerned that Hanson had been incorrectly classified through an error of the local draft board. He was anxious to confirm that 4-E was truly the classification Hanson desired and wanted to make sure Hanson understood the ramifications. Summarizing the Adventist Church's official position—noncombatant participation in the Army—he then continued in his usual plain-spoken manner:

You have been classified, however as being unwilling to do any service in the military forces of the nation, whether saving human life or anything else. . . It may be your personal principles, and if so, we want to protect you in it. It would be a help to us to know whether in making out your questionnaire you have lacked some information or have made it out wrongly, for in case you are wrongly classified we want to be in a position to help you to get rightly classified.²

Nine days later Hanson replied:

Dear Brother Haynes,

I recived [sic] your letter inquiring weather [sic] this classification is the proper one. I was put in class IV-E[.] It is the way I have always Believed[.] I sent the questionnaire

¹ Secretariat correspondence, Box 10477, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

² Ibid.

back and didn't fill it out and told them I was willing to go in the army in noncombatant service[.]

Sincerely your brother[,,]

Mr[.] Jesse Chriss Hanson³

Three days after this letter was written, Haynes replied—so quickly that he must have written his reply the same day he received Hanson's letter.

Dear Brother Hanson:

I have your note of March 22, letting me know that you are in Class IV-E because that is the way you have always believed, and saying that you had sent the questionnaire back without filling it out.

You add that you told the Selective Service Board that you were willing to go into the army in noncombatant service. If this latter is the case, and you are willing to go into the army in noncombatant service, then you do not belong in Class IV-E. You belong in Class I-A-O.

I think it would be advisable for you to go down to your Local Selective Service board and get this straightened out.

If I can be of any service to you, please let me know.

Sincerely your brother,

CBH⁴

There the correspondence pauses until July. Haynes was characteristically single-minded, direct, and straight to the point. Hanson's circular obtuseness must have been extremely frustrating to him. Not least because it was the sort of message that Haynes was required to reiterate an infinite number of times during World War II. He was adamant that unless a church member personally believed that joining the military in any capacity—even as a noncombatant—was wrong, he should be willing to enlist in the Army.

As of this writing, twenty-three of Haynes' form letters to these men classified as IV-E, whose names were forwarded to him by the National Service Board for Religious Objectors, have been located in his secretariat correspondence at the General Conference Archives. However, less

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

than half of this War Service Commission correspondence has been surveyed, so this number will grow.

I first became aware of Seventh-day Adventist conscientious objectors assigned to Civilian Public Service (CPS) camps during World War II when I read a history of Camp #21 located at Cascade Locks, Oregon. In the appendix, a list of the men assigned to this camp included their religious affiliation. Two Seventh-day Adventists worked at this site: Emil G. Anderson and Louis J. Beyreis.⁵ This discovery led me to the Mennonite Central Committee's comprehensive database of CPS men, or CPSers, which not only includes denominational affiliation but can also be searched by denomination.⁶ Searching the database uncovered the names of twenty-one Adventists in CPS. Removing duplicates between this database and the names found in Haynes' correspondence, generated a list of thirty-seven (and counting) potential Adventists in CPS. Now, I had a lot of questions: Who were these men? Were they truly Adventist church members? How had they ended up in CPS? What led to their choices contrary to advice from the War Service Commission?

Civilian Public Service⁷

If among Seventh-day Adventists memory of the Medical Cadet Corps is waning, memory of the Civilian Public Service program is practically non-existent. It is truly a hidden story, one that was perhaps to some extent intentionally buried and obscured by insufficient and misleading information.

Operating between 1941 and 1946, the CPS was the Historic Peace Church's solution to the problem of military service and conscientious objection. At first glance, it looked comparable to the Seventh-day Adventist Medical Cadet Corps. Both organizations originated out of discussions among academics; both were funded by their sponsoring denominations; and both sought to promote humanitarian service as an alternative to combatant service. That is where the similarities ended.

The Medical Cadet Corps was entirely operated and funded by Seventh-day Adventist entities. It voluntarily attempted to train young men to army standards in order to encourage their acceptance into the Army Medical Corps. Cadets voluntarily participated in the training before

⁵ Jeffrey Kovac, *Refusing War, Affirming Peace: A History of Civilian Public Service at Camp 21 at Cascade Locks* (Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Press, 2009), 159-160.

⁶ Mennonite Central Committee, "Find a CPSer," Civilian Public Service, 2015, accessed March 22, 2023, <https://civilianpublicservice.org/>.

⁷ This section is summarized from Albert N. Keim, *The CPS Story: An Illustrated History of Civilian Public Service* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1990).

they were drafted. Once enlisted, Adventist soldiers received the regular pay and benefits provided to all servicemen of their respective ranks. Thus, administratively there was nearly complete separation between the Medical Cadet Corps and the U. S. Army.

Administration of Civilian Public Service was much more convoluted, constructed of layers of bureaucracy. Although the brainchild of the Historic Peace Churches, CPS came under the administration of the Selective Service Administration at the executive level. Government agencies determined the projects that would be designated civilian public service, the Selective Service System decided who would be eligible for civilian public service by classifying them as IV-E, and Selective Service ratified assignments and reclassifications, and heard appeals. Ultimately 151 camps were set up in thirty-three states, in addition to Puerto Rico which sent a detachment to the U. S. Virgin Islands. However, the United States Government provided no compensation or benefits for CPSers—the men they compelled to serve.

Middle management was provided by the National Service Organization for Religious Objectors, which created the National Board for Civilian Service and appointed a CPS executive officer who reported, first, to Clarence Dykstra and later, General Lewis Hershey, director of the Selective Service. Daily operations at the local level were overseen by camp directors, usually members of the Historic Peace Churches, and work supervisors who were the full-time employees of the various agencies to which CPSers were assigned for work. These ranged from the Forest Service, Soil Conservation Service, and National Park Service to state mental health hospitals and a variety of other government agencies. The majority of the camps were operated either separately or jointly by the American Friends Service Committee, the Mennonite Central Committee, or the Brethren Service Committee, but a few were operated by the Disciples of Christ, the Methodist Commission on World Peace, the American Baptist Home Mission Society, and even directly by the Selective Service System. Some camps were designated for members of their operating denomination, others welcomed conscientious objectors from any church and even socialists. Financially, these camps were entirely supported by the operating denominations.

Although CPS successfully prevented courts martial of COs during World War II—any charges brought against COs were handled in civilian courts—Historic Peace Church leaders were dismayed at the control Selective Service maintained over a program which they had proposed and continued to fund. This was undoubtedly at the core of Haynes' objections to CPS, but there was one even more fundamental reason he objected, and it involved money.

Seventh-day Adventist and CPS

CPS was not covered in any significant way in Adventist periodicals during World War II,⁸ but Haynes was well aware of the program and its many challenges from his participation in the National Service Board for Religious Objectors' consultative council. Publicly, it was unity of position⁹ and the lack of financial compensation that Haynes consistently preached to deter Adventists from CPS. This excerpt from the *Review and Herald* of June 4, 1942 is an example:

It is quite apparent that much confusion continues to bewilder many of our people regarding the difference between conscientious objectors and noncombatants. I receive letters constantly containing clippings about conscientious-objector camps where conscientious objectors serve without pay and provide their own living, with questions regarding why Seventh-day Adventists are sent to these camps. The answer is: They are not sent to these camps. They are sent into the Army—and paid. Conscientious objectors are sent to conscientious objector camps, now called Civilian Public Service camps. Seventh-day Adventists are sent into the Army— assigned there to noncombatant units. Conscientious objectors are classified as 4-E men. Seventh-day Adventists are classified as 1-A-O men. Conscientious objectors fill out the same Form 47 that Seventh-day Adventists fill out, but conscientious objectors claim exemption from all military service, noncombatant as well as combatant. They will not go into the Army at all. Seventh-day Adventists claim exemption only from combatant service. They will go into the Army —to do noncombatant work. Each obtains what he claims—one goes into Civilian Public Service camps, the other into regular Army units to engage in noncombatant service. Seventh-day Adventists are not conscientious objectors, not pacifists, not war resisters, not antimilitarists; they are noncombatants.¹⁰

⁸ Searching the General Conference Archives or Adventist Digital Library for “Civilian Public Service” results in about thirty-five occurrences. However, this does not mean that the Civilian Public Service Program was covered by the Adventist Church in any comprehensive way. In fact, the exact opposite is true. In all thirty-five references, CPS is mentioned only incidentally. Of the thirty-five “hits,” sixteen are cross-publications of two articles in union conference papers in the United States in 1942 and 1948. Eleven articles and news notes were published after the CPS ended. Twenty of the references can be construed as disparaging the CPS. Only two items can be counted as presenting it in a somewhat positive light.

⁹ Hayne's insistent message of Adventist cooperation may have been shaped by the Bureau of Investigation examination he underwent during World War I. See Kevin Burton, (2019): “Enemies, Aliens, Socialists, Spies: The Bureau of Investigation's Surveillance of Seventh-day Adventism during World War I” (paper presented at the ninth triennial conference of the Association of Seventh-day Adventist Historians, Southwestern Adventist University, Keene, TX, May 17, 2019).

¹⁰ Carlyle B. Haynes, “Our Men in Camp and Field,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 4, 1942, 16 and 20.

What Haynes left unsaid: Attempts would be made to charge the General Conference for the room and board of Adventist members in CPS camps, a \$35-a-month maintenance fee to be paid by the CO or his church.¹¹ This brings us back to Hanson and July 19, 1942. On this date, Haynes once again had occasion to write Hanson, who was then working at CPS camp #31 in Placerville, California:

Dear Brother Hanson:

Each month the National Service board for Religious Objectors sends me an itemized account of the financial status of Seventh-day Adventist men in Civilian Public Service Camps. Your name is included among them, and I notice that up to May 31 the charges for your support have amounted to \$17.50, on which nothing has been paid to date.

Then comes the crux of the matter.

You will recognize, I am sure, that it is something of a source of embarrassment to us to be forced to realize month by month that charges for the support of Seventh-day Adventist men are having to be met by the Mennonites who are operating your camp. No provision has been made by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists to take care of items of this kind, because our denominational position is one which, if our men followed, they would not be in these camps at all, but doing noncombatant service in the army. Consequently it has seemed to us to be inconsistent to make financial arrangements for the support of men who have taken a position out of harmony with the denominational position.

Haynes goes on to ask Hanson to name the local church of which he is a member in order to ask this congregation to support Hanson. However, when Hanson replies, he simply informs Haynes that he is taking care of his own expenses himself.¹² The October 31, 1942, statement—the last statement filed in this folder from 1942—estimated Hanson's maintenance to date at \$157. 50, but someone had already contributed \$169 toward his support. There was no indication of who actually paid this sum.¹³

¹¹ "The Listening Post," *Youth's Instructor*, March 23, 1943, 16.

¹² Secretariat correspondence, Box 10477, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

¹³ Secretariat correspondence, Box 10479, "National Service Board for Religious Objectors," General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

Adventist CPSers

The major administrative differences between CPS and the MCC have already been mentioned. As its name implies, CPS emphasized civilian work that benefited the public, while the Adventist Church emphasized humanitarian work within the military. In fact, many CPSers were bored with the mundane tasks assigned them, work of apparent national unimportance when they had been promised “work of national importance.”¹⁴ A smaller, but still significant number, found it hard to provide free labor for government while they suffered derision from local community residents and their families at home suffered financial hardship. Those who were looking for a true “moral equivalent to war” wanted something to challenge their strength and courage. About 300 CPSers found it in the CPS smokejumper program, and the same can be said of those who worked in state hospitals for the mentally ill. A select few CPSers were able to receive a small stipend for special work assignments. The sponsoring churches also created hardship funds to provide money for needy families among the CPS men.

In the face of strong encouragement from the Adventist Church and definite problems with the CPS system, one wonders what the Adventist men who joined CPS were thinking. Much remains to be discovered, but there is enough information to form a composite profile.

Out of the twenty-one men identified as Seventh-day Adventist in the Mennonite Central Committee’s database, all but two worked in what would be considered blue-collar, manual labor occupations. The remaining two were a physician and a nurse. That no obituaries were published in Adventist periodicals for any of them suggests many of these men were either unrecognized within their congregations or left the denomination later in life. There is no evidence they attended Seventh-day Adventist schools—the primary conduit for directing Adventists to the Army Medical Corps. Nor did they live in metropolitan locations where regional Medical Cadet Corps groups were formed. Thus, they represent a group of Adventists only marginally connected to the corporate body of the denomination. In fact, evidence of later affiliation with the Adventist Church was found for only three of them.

Interestingly, out of this group, the nurse—Earl Eugene Thurngren—stayed with CPS for less than a month before successfully requesting reclassification as 1-A-O and transferring to the Army Medical Corps. Upon receiving Haynes’ initial form letter, Thurngren replied on October 15, 1943:

¹⁴ Albert N. Keim, *The CPS Story: An Illustrated History of Civilian Public Service* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1990), 39-57.

I wish to state that it is my own individual conscience which has prompted me to take my position; which has not been a recent turn-about but one I have held since the Selective Service Act was passed or shortly there-after.

I would like in a friendly way to correct your letter some what [sic] in that the Government has established camps, where full-maintenance and \$3.00 per month is provided and after 90 days one can apply for Special Project work of different kinds where full-maintenance and \$15.00 per month is provided.

I want to thank you for your desire to help me at this time to change my status but I believe I have chosen the right path.

Sincerely,
Earl Eugene Thurngren

P.S. I would like to add that I have stated a preference for the Government operated camps.¹⁵

Evidently the camp to which Thurngren was assigned was more primitive and less organized than he had anticipated. A month later, on November 18, 1943, he again wrote Haynes:

Dear Brother Haynes:

Just a word at this time to let you know that after my arrival at C.P.S. Camp 111 Mancos, Colorado early this month, I became much surprised and discouraged with the condition of the Camp and asked for a 1AO status which I have this date received.

My ideals were higher about my Country before than they are at present. However I have not lost sight of the soon coming Savior and of his many promises.

Your brother,
Earl E. Thurngren¹⁶

Much remains to be learned about Seventh-day Adventists in CPS during World War II. Of the additional sixteen names forwarded to Haynes in 1942 by the National Service Board of Religious Objectors, no response from them to Haynes has been discovered to date. However,

¹⁵ Secretariat correspondence, Box 10463, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

¹⁶ Ibid.

searching military records uncovered one who, like Thurngren, chose reclassification and noncombatant duty in the Army Medical Corps. Two more appear in the Mennonite Central Committee database, one with denomination listed as “none,” and the other identified with the Megiddo Mission. So, this once again calls into question the accuracy of bureaucratic records on several levels: Selective Service, the National Service Board for Religious Objectors, and Civilian Public Service. The research and verification process will be ongoing.

The most interesting aspect of this story, however, is its ability to answer the question, What if Seventh-day Adventists had not advocated noncombatant military service and developed the Seventh-day Adventist Medical Cadet Corps? Negating the need for speculation, Civilian Public Service provides a real picture of what the viable alternative would have been.

Sources

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