

Rethinking our Position

May 18, 1945

To the men of unit and wives:

Somahow or other I feel somewhat uneasy tonite after a number of things have been brought to my attention, and after hearing some of the complaints and swearing in the halls, reception room, and dormitory while others were trying to sleep. Let us stop right here and think for a moment, and I mean think! When reading this think of yourself and not of someone else. This is intended for everyone including myself.

Are we here merely to "sit it through" until our releases come? If you are one of these, this place would be better without you! We were sent here to serve wherever they put us. Who are we to tell the administration just where and when we want to work, and how to run this Institution. Selective Service has given the Superintendent authority to place us wherever we are needed. For good reason such as health, etc., we have a right to ask for a change, and I will be glad to help you. They have always been reasonable and accomodating in such cases. It is a difficult task to make out the board every day when the labor shortage is so severe, therefore, we as C.O.'s should not make it our duty to cuss at whoever makes out the board where we are to work, thus running their reputation down as far as possible. Yes, when it comes to asking favors--then they are good enough--yes, we even think they owe us favors after we have cussed about them. Is this logical and Christ like? Do we strengthen our peace testimony by such behavior? And then we are surprised that people talk about us! Don't you worry, they hear what is said behind their backs. Must we fly off the handel when something does not suit us to the T, or shall we wait a while and think about it before blowing off.

I have not up to this time been able to find out just why one C.O. would want to go on duty on a ward and tell either patients or other attendants questionable things about another one in our own group. You know good and well if you are guilty of this type of gossip which is our No. 1 enemy in our unit. This is the big factor destroying our unity, and we as a unit must insist that it be stopped. If we can't iron it out in our unit we will have to inform the M.C.C. about this matter and ask for advise and action. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves, but instead we run them down as much as possible attempting to raise ourselves thereby. Instead we should have the loving spirit and pray for our neighbor. Do we love these patients so much that we have to relate to them all our personal problems, and even the weaknesses of our neighbors of our own group? If so, we better start working on a parole for some of these patients so we can take them with us when we are released from here. You know we have to have someone in whom to confide! As soon as you tell them something of another person, they go right back and tell this party what you said. This has happened so often in the past, and we should have learned this by now. How can there be unity in our group when such exists---two C.O.s working against each other when they are to be peace-loving people. It gives us something to think about, and none of us should be self-righteous!

What can we do that is constructive? By making better use of our off hours by doing something which is beneficial for the future, we are doing something constructive. We have time now to work on something we may not have time for after those blue papers are given to us. In some other units where they work from 10 to 12 hours, men would be glad to have a few hours of the spare time we are getting. Ministers visiting the different units often remind us how good we actually have it compared to some of the units where they work long hours, and have bad living conditions. It is very easy to forget that we are still drafted assignees like all the boys in the camps.

I know our churches, ministers, and the Mennonite Central Committee would object to some of the things which have been going on, thus it becomes my duty, and it is expected of me to remind you to think twice before you act. As Christians we should be able to take reproof, and attempt to strengthen our witness here. The administration has confidence in us and we cannot afford to let them down by becoming lax in our work, and our attitude towards our work. This place is what we make it, therefore all of us should make it as pleasant as

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possible until we leave. May I kindly ask you to rethink your position as a Christian C.O. in this Institution.

With all love and respect,

John Ewert
Pr Rb