

# Basic Training for Homecoming

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**M**OST postwar planning focuses on international agreements, the re-conversion of industries, employment problems, and veterans compensation, with little regard to the human stuff involved in G. I. Joe.

But there are war-wives and mothers who are beginning to sense that when their own Joe comes marching home he will not be quite the same Joe they used to know before he learned commando tactics and dipped his hands in the blood of his fellowman. He has had, by his own admission, "a dirty job to do," and has proved that he is equal to it. Not that it was an easy task to harden the boy from Main Street and Broadway into the toughness that soldiering requires. It took months of discipline, lectures, drill, maneuvers, and actual battle. "You made me what I am today," he can readily say. Somehow, we do not want him to add, "I hope you're satisfied."

G. I. Joe is no less lovable than when he went away, nor has the fineness in him been destroyed. The men home on leave have more than established this truth. Yet we know them to be different by virtue of their new experiences. The scars of battle may have spared their bodies, but not their souls. They have been conditioned away from civilian life. They have been forced into the Procrustean bed of soldiery.

## Danger Ahead

On the one hand, they have suffered unnatural and unhealthy repressions. On the other, they are over-expressed in certain "instincts" civilization usually seeks to bridle. They have been taught to look on the immorality of taking a human life as temporary morality. Their nerves have been strained beyond what mortals have hitherto believed possible. In addition they have been subjected to a life that is sexually abnormal. How could they help being different from when we knew them? And what about these differences when they return home?

There is reason for some optimism about G. I. attitudes. Many horizons have been broadened. Certain provincialisms have been leveled. Some prejudices have been exploded. Appreciation for America in many instances has been deepened. The seriousness and immediacy of world problems have become a part of lives scarcely touched by them before. Raw youngsters have matured precipi-

tately. Much of that maturity will be an asset in the country's ledgers.

Nevertheless, we should remember the frenzied living of the Roaring Twenties as a grim warning, for its war etiology has been firmly established. We know from that period that the learnings and emotions engendered by war experience cannot be turned on and off with a spigot's precision.

The human spirit is a mechanism too delicate to withstand abuse. It calls for loving care, nurture, gentle and patient guidance. To such treatment it may respond. The soul is not trained to do back-somersaults. After all, even the body requires acclimatizing. Our boys serving in India were not given their "basic" in Alaska. We owe it to the serviceman to prepare him as best we can for civilian life, even as we spent thousands of dollars on him in getting him ready to fight.

Mustering out pay, educational opportunities, bonuses and pensions, even enlarged employment services, will not get at the heart of G. I. Joe's dilemma. That dilemma is himself. He has been made into a war man. He will not automatically revert into a peace man. To expect it is the sheerest stupidity, an error we cannot afford to repeat. We may not be able to nullify all the effects of war on his inner being, but we need not and must not dump him back, unceremoniously, into a way of life from which he has been alienated.

Here is a manpower reconversion job that requires the best thought our psychologists and educators can bring to bear. If we are in earnest when we protest our intention to build a better postwar America as a peace loving civilization, we should be ready to spend twice as much money conditioning G. I. Joe for the new domestic scene as we laid out in preparation for foxholes and hedgerows.

## Basic Training

Actually the cost may be a mere fraction of this amount. The full program must be left to experts for elaboration, but it could probably be somewhat in the nature of a basic training course. There is bound to be a lapse for many a G. I. between V-Day and the day he comes marching home. Yet, when his war job is over, drilling and his whole military schedule will be more irksome than when

there was an incentive attached. At such a time basic training for civilian life can serve the double purpose of solving a morale problem for the military and helping to reconvert soldiers into citizens, family members, and peaceable human beings.

Such a program might include:

1. Orientation classes to hold up a mirror to the G. I. psyche and help the men see the personal challenge involved in transforming themselves into civilian usefulness and the achievement of personal happiness.
2. A presentation, in terms the man can appreciate, of the contrast between the ethics of the warrior and of the civilian, emphasizing the peacetime application of American ideals and the place of the family in our social order.
3. Relaxation of military drill and the rigorous routine of service life in the months immediately preceding mustering out, accompanied by large scale recreation programs.
4. A vocational aptitude test for every serviceman, not to be filed away in some dossier, but issued directly to him as a report he can use in making future employment adjustments.
5. Aid in the practical problem of job-getting or the choosing of a vocation.

What is called for are camps (we are already hearing about "separation centers"\*) especially equipped and staffed for a particular job. Some of the military branches can supply part of the personnel, especially in the recreation and vocational guidance fields. The remaining instruction should be offered by trained civilians.

An alternative to such a program is a callous avoidance of responsibility for averting the Rip-Roaring Fifties.

The program is not a panacea. Education will not "take" with many of its pupils. Personal disasters will still eventualize. But perhaps we can reduce them to a negligible minimum if we see this problem as clearly as we did another when Pearl Harbor was attacked, and if we approach it with the same vigor and intelligence.

\* See "The Problems of Homecoming," by Louis L. Bennett, *Survey Midmonthly*, September 1944.

**W**HEN the new Congress takes over on January 6, its first piece of business will be the revisions of the Social Security Act. Both parties are now committed to the program and, no matter how the elections turn out, it will be impossible for the seventy-ninth Congress to avoid taking action. Senator Wagner and Representative Dingell are both up for reelection, so it is impossible, until after November, to say just whose name will be identified with the new bill. There is Senator Murray, of course, whose term does not expire until 1949, but if it is a Republican Congress the chances are that any bill he introduced would be ignored in favor of one sponsored by a Republican. It is, however, fairly predictable that the bill will be, more or less, the Wagner-Murray-Dingell bill. That measure followed the recommendations of the Social Security Board, with a few added flourishes, and it is hard to conceive of any program that would be vastly different and yet accomplish the ends now publicly approved by both parties.

The chances that the seventy-eighth Congress will take up the Wagner-Murray-Dingell bill and put it through before January are slim. The bill has never had a hearing and such a hearing would require, at the very least, six weeks. It could be done, of course, but there is enough opposition in both House and Senate to hold it up another six weeks or more after it got to the floor. However, it is reassuring to know that the bill, or its twin, is going to have its chance, and that in the near future.

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**THE WAR MOBILIZATION AND RECONVERSION Act of 1944** has been signed by the President, but "with reluctance." The President's objection to the new act is that it does not go far enough, particularly in reference to its "human" aspects. In a formal statement read at his press conference, he referred to deletions by Congress of provisions to prescribe federal standards for unemployment compensation, to expand the program to include federal employees, and to provide transportation costs to return migrant war workers to their homes, and he expressed hope that these deficiencies would be rectified promptly.

As the act now stands it does only three things:

Authorizes the establishment of an Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion, under which would go the Office of Contract Settlement, the Surplus War Property Administration, and the Re-

training and Reemployment Administration. The functions of the Retraining and Reemployment Administration are defined as "general supervision and direction of all existing executive agencies (except the Veterans Administration and the Administrator of Veterans Affairs) authorized by law relating to retraining, reemployment, vocational education, and vocational rehabilitation."

Authorizes loans to states if their unemployment compensation reserves become exhausted.

Authorizes loans to states for postwar planning.

Obviously the bill offers little in the way of a bulwark against postwar chaos. It is, moreover, administratively a muddle.

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**A COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND young people** in the newly created Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion is proposed by the Senate subcommittee on wartime health and education. The proposal comes as one of three recommendations to the Senate Committee on Education and Labor following the subcommittee's investigations in the field of juvenile delinquency. Other recommendations were that a central administrative authority arrange for fuller participation of children in home front war activities; and that a national publicity and educational policy be adopted on the question of the child.

The subcommittee found that although there are twelve agencies in the federal government performing special services for children, there is not one set up or authorized to provide the leadership and coordination needed in the field of delinquency prevention.

There is reported to be a feeling among the committee members that if any one of the older agencies were appointed to do the emergency job now needed, it might be too apt to go into long range planning although the situation demands immediate measures. Then, too, it is possible that the committee was anxious to avoid hurt feelings by not favoring any one particular agency over another.

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**A HOUSE BILL, HR 5291, INTRODUCED** by Representative Karl LeCompte of Iowa, to refreeze the social security tax at its present rate of one percent on employees, is before the House Ways and Means Committee and scheduled for early consideration. The measure will, probably, be reported and passed before

the automatic increase of the tax on January 1, though the refreezing of the tax is contrary to the advice of the Social Security Board. The board has repeatedly warned Congress that the end of the war, with thousands of oldsters leaving the labor market, may find the reserve fund inadequate.

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**THE HOUSE HAS PASSED AND SENT TO** the Senate a bill, HR 5386, amending the Selective Service Act to allow veterans ninety days, instead of forty, in which to make up their minds whether or not to go back to their old jobs. The Senate Committee on Military Affairs had prepared a similar bill, S.2145, but had taken no action on it. Immediately upon their return from their election holiday, the committee members have promised to report the House bill to the Senate floor. It is practically assured of passage.

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**THE TWELVE COLLEGE ADMINISTRATORS** working with the House Committee on Education on a study of higher education and the war have recommended that unemployed persons be allowed to go to school while receiving unemployment compensation benefits. Under the proposal, a student would be required to take a job if one were offered him in his particular field but, while waiting for an offer, he could go to school. A number of states now prohibit a student from receiving unemployment compensation benefits.

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**WITH ONLY ONE DISSENTING VOTE—** from Ellender of Louisiana—the Senate Committee on Education and Labor has presented a favorable report on the proposal to set up a permanent Fair Employment Practice Committee. The present FEPC operates under Executive Order and, as the report points out, "is without statutory power from Congress and cannot rely on the courts to enforce its orders."

The bill reported to the Senate, S.Con. Res.48, would:

Prohibit discrimination in government employment, and in private firms working on government contracts.

Permit the federal government to handle problems of racial discrimination in industries engaged in interstate commerce.

The report disclosed that, contrary to popular belief, discrimination is not confined to the deep South. Only 17 percent of the cases brought before the FEPC originated there.