Model Fathers’ Club

Chow call at Dads’ Club’s summer camp near Heidelberg for boys from six to 16. Club has 150 members. (US Army photos)

By BERNARD QUINN
Staff Writer, Public Information Division, EUCOM

WELL OVER A YEAR ago a group of American fathers on duty in military and civilian capacities with US Occupation Forces in Heidelberg, Germany, decided to join with each other in an attempt to promote some activities that would be conducive to the general welfare of American boys in Heidelberg and vicinity.

Because those fathers followed up their decision with some concerted action, there exists today in the land of the Rhine a unique organization known as the Heidelberg Military Post DADS’ Club — an activity as American as the Fourth of July.

The first group of its kind overseas, DADS’ Club is an outgrowth of a meeting held by fathers whose families were with them in the European Command, for the original gathering resulted in formation of the club.

Some results of subsequent, well-organized meetings were father-sponsored sightseeing trips through the countryside, social gatherings, father-and-son nights, concerts, handicraft competitions and exhibitions, gymnastic programs, and an extensive basketball tournament, the club’s outstanding sports activity during the winter. Besides those direct advantages to the sons and daughters the club movement provided an opportunity for the fathers, engaged in various occupation fields, to meet regularly, come to know each other, and work together toward the common goal of their children’s welfare.

The dads’ club of Heidelberg — headquarters city for the US Occupation Army — is now a full-fledged overseas veteran with a proud record of achievement. Most important of all, it has already sponsored a satisfied collection of American youngsters who, far from familiar scenes and chums, have found that they are receiving all assistance possible in promoting among themselves the principles of clean sports and fair play.

The most important and popular feature on the DADS’ Club roster last summer was the boys’ camp — planned, created and financed by the fathers. It was located in a forest clearing in the Odenwald mountains, close to historic Heidelberg, and the famous Heidelberg University. After considerable preparation, it opened for the season last June, and each succeeding week the score of US Army tents which made up the camp were filled to capacity. All entered into the camping spirit with unbounded enthusiasm, and by the end of the season every eligible boy in the Heidelberg area had been there for a two weeks’ stay, or had been a “repeater.” Later the Dads’ daughters spent two weeks at the camp.

A stroll through the camp during mid-morning, when the boys were lining up near the flagpole to start out for the swimming pool, brought reminders of hundreds of such camps scattered all over America, and containing the same types of young enthusiasts. Several husky counselors, on volunteer duty at the camp during vacation from the Heidelberg American High School, were standing by, watching over the boys.
The morning swimming session ended, everybody hustled on the return trip, because the next stopping place was the tent containing the camp’s dining room. Food at the camp — prepared by four experienced cooks from a nearby Army cooking school — was generally excellent, and there was always plenty of it.

Campers sterilized their Army mess-kits in boiling water before taking food into them, and washed their own utensils, as part of their training. Meals were served on basis of “take all you want, but eat all you take.”

Thursday night was visitors’ night, and parents and friends never disappointed the campers. Through visits, guests learned that the campers climbed into bed at 9.30 at night and rolled out at 7.30 a.m. sharp. In their waking hours they attended motion picture showings in the recreation tent, modeled with clay, patronized the craft shop and wearied themselves with baseball and other sports; they swam, fished, hiked and sat around campfires.

Before the 9.30 deadline at night some read on their bunks by light from power generated in the camp. If they had complaints they registered them in the camp with officials there, or with the DADS’ Club board of governors. A roster of American Dads — enlisted men, officers and civilians — was maintained at all times, and each man took his turn as “duty officer” to maintain responsible adult supervision on a 24-hour basis.

Important members of the camp’s permanent staff were the camp boy and girl counselors — high school students of excellent character and natural ability in youthful guidance who had previous counseling experience, or were active in Boy Scout or Girl Scout work in the United States. A German forester living in the vicinity of the camp gave the boys tips on lighting wood fires and how to know and understand wild life.

The camp closed each Saturday at noon and reopened at three the next afternoon, and through that weekend schedule the campers were afforded the opportunity to attend Sunday religious service with their families.

Facilities for the girls were generally the same during their camping weeks, with girl counselors on duty and in general charge.

The DADS’ Club and the camp which it created were successful ventures that contained the ingredients of character-building through proper guidance, good sportsmanship, and sufficient and varied activities to occupy young minds in strange environment. The club in its first full year of operation, through one interest, made it possible for several hundred American youngsters ranging from 10 to 17 years to pass part of their summer vacation in typical American fashion, thousands of miles from the land they called “home.”

Those same boys and girls were pleased with a recent announcement outlining the club’s plans. Included in it was the welcome news that the summer camp was so successful last year that plans are now underway to provide a bigger and better camp for sons and daughters this coming season.

+END