CHAPTER V
UNCLE SAM'S FIRST WAR GARDEN
HOW THE BOYS AT CAMP DIX WENT OVER THE TOP

WITH the mention of the word "war" there immediately flashes across the mind a vision of long lines of soldiers marching through streets crowded with flag-waving civilians; or of those same long lines drilling, wheeling, and maneuvering on the camp parade-ground; or of stern-faced fighters with bayonets fixed charging across a smoke-clouded field toward the enemy's positions. It was most appropriate and fitting, therefore, that the term "war garden" should come to be associated with actual soldiers.

It was at Camp Dix, New Jersey, that the first sure-enough war garden was planted. At that big army cantonment there was begun the first big undertaking in the United States whereby the American army started to help feed itself.

Early in the spring of 1918 the National War Garden Commission, coöperating with the conservation and reclamation division of the Quartermaster-General's office, effected the plans which promptly led to the planting of a four-hundred-acre war garden at Camp Dix, that city of 48,000 or more soldiers where men were being prepared for overseas duty. This was a demonstration garden which was not only the largest but also the most picturesque the country had seen. It was not
“NOW, BOYS, SHOW ‘EM HOW TO HARVEST!”

This is what Sergeant Noel, on the left, is saying to the bean pickers in the Camp Dix war garden, whose work is being inspected by Major General Scott, commanding officer, other army officials and a group of visitors. President Charles Lathrop Pack, of the National War Garden Commission, is standing by the side of General Scott. The young officer behind him is Lieut. John F. Bonner, in charge of the farm.
only great in size, but in the consequences that were to come from it. This important innovation in methods of supplying the quartermaster’s store with part of the food needed, not only had the backing of the officers in charge, but also received the hearty commendation of the Secretary of War. It proved of value in many ways.

At practically all the army camps, there were considerable amounts of land not required for actual military purposes. These plots varied from a few hundred to several thousand acres. There was, however, no fund available under the War Department or army appropriations which could be used for the purpose of placing this land under cultivation and carrying on the work.

At Camp Dix there were 400 acres inside the reservation which could be immediately utilized for food production. Colonel J. S. Fair, assistant to the Acting Quartermaster-General, and head of the conservation and reclamation division, helped to work out and gave his active support to the plan of planting a garden at this place. When it was found that the land could be used and that Lieutenant-Colonel Edmond Tompkins, then Camp Quartermaster, had the men available, the National War Garden Commission secured nine big motor-trucks and rushed over from Philadelphia, thirty miles distant, thirty plows and other garden tools, seeds, fertilizer, and other needed material. The final arrangements were completed on one day, and on the following day the supplies were on hand.

The Commission’s demonstration war garden at
Camp Dix was a success from the start. It furnished an inspiration and gave impetus to the work all over the United States; and soon similar plots growing “Food F. O. B. the Mess Tent Door” were under way in a number of other camps. Thousands of war gardeners redoubled their efforts because of the knowledge that the men in the American army were doing similar patriotic work. “Over the Top with the Boys at Camp Dix!” became a new slogan which aroused genuine enthusiasm and put new spirit into the back-yard and vacant-lot tillage.

After the Commission had provided the means for starting the project, Lieutenant-Colonel Tompkins placed it in the hands of Captain E. V. Champlin, conservation and reclamation officer of the camp, and the latter selected as farm officer Lieutenant John F. Bonner, an energetic young officer who was a graduate of an agricultural college and who had also enjoyed a practical farming experience.

Major-General Hugh L. Scott, commanding officer at Camp Dix, took a keen personal interest in the project. He made several trips of inspection over the gardens, accompanied on two of these occasions by Mrs. Scott, to see how the work was progressing and to encourage the young officers in charge. He expressed his appreciation to Captain Champlin and to Lieutenant Bonner, actively in charge of the farm enterprise, and to their assistants, for the excellent results they were obtaining. His interest caused the boys to work with an added will.
“POTATOES UP! FORWARD MARCH!”

Such was the order of the day at Camp Dix, New Jersey, when the boys began to gather the big harvest which they had raised in the 140-acre section of their war garden devoted to this important vegetable. Part of the land included in the cantonment had formerly been rich farming land. Several thousand bushels of potatoes were stored for winter use.
THE WAR GARDEN VICTORIOUS

One hundred and forty acres were planted to potatoes, both early and late varieties; seventy acres to beans; forty to corn; twelve to beets; twelve to onions; eight to cucumbers; five to tomatoes; one to cabbage; and other areas to a variety of vegetables. The land on which the camp was located had been farms, on which there were a number of orchards. These were cared for and the fruit gathered. In addition, about three hundred tons of hay were harvested. The garden even included an acre of broom-corn, which the supply officer in charge of purchasing brooms figured saved many a dollar. The boys, however, maintained that their reward from this particular corner of the garden came from the help rendered in “sweeping on to Berlin.”

Aside from the food produced, the Camp Dix war garden was of benefit in other ways. It afforded healthful outdoor work for convalescents and other men who were not physically fit for active military training, but who after a few weeks or months of this exercise were able to go back into the fighting ranks. Colonel F. B. Beauchamp, inspector of the southern command of the British army, who had come to the United States on a tour of inspection of the camps here, pointed out what this form of work was accomplishing for many men in the British army, and how thousands of them were being so benefited by the regular living in the camps and the life in the open that they were able to return to service on the battle-field.

In addition to using convalescents and men not physically capable of service overseas the camp garden
afforded opportunity for putting "conscientious objectors" and alien enemies to work at some useful non-combatant form of labor. Among the first 150 men assigned to the war-garden work at Camp Dix were a number of Germans and Austrians, two Turks, and representatives of other nationalities. Drafted men of this sort, having declared themselves unwilling to take up arms against their own countrymen, were almost without exception happy and contented in their work as food producers. In some cases alien prisoners were transported to army camps to till the gardens. The first lot was sent from Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, to Camp Devens, Massachusetts, for this purpose. At the camp, under guard, they cultivated a war garden of ninety acres. There were one hundred of these prisoners, most of whom had been taken from interned German vessels.

As a result of the immediate success of the Camp Dix project, plans were made for greatly extending this form of war gardening in 1919. The work had proved its worth as an adjunct to army life. A number of military men who had not approved of the plan at its inception were converted by the excellence of the results obtained and gave it their support. The experience gained in the first year, coupled with the greater demand which it was known that there would be for food, made it desirable that this scheme be carried out on a broad scale. It was realized that it would furnish much relief in supplying the army and the nation with food.
GATHERING THE POTATOES

This staple article formed the principal crop from the 400-acre war garden which was inaugurated at Camp Dix, New Jersey, by the National War Garden Commission in cooperation with the Quartermaster General's Office of the army. More than 5,000 bushels of the tubers were grown.
Shortly after the Camp Dix war garden was started, Secretary Baker gave the undertaking his hearty endorsement in the following letter addressed to the National War Garden Commission:

The War Department finds much satisfaction in the creation of war gardens at various army camps by the Conservation and Reclamation Division of the Quartermaster-General’s office. Food production at these camps has been the subject of some concern with the Department. The large areas of tillable land within many of the military reservations have been regarded as offering potential food production on a large scale, and I feel that the army is to be congratulated that the utilization of this space has now taken concrete form.

Camp war gardens will serve more than one useful purpose. The production of food at the mess door is of great importance in that it not only lessens the army’s demand on the usual sources of supply but eliminates transportation as well.

To the National War Garden Commission I extend the thanks of the Department for its quick response to the appeal of the Quartermaster-General’s office for coöperation. Not confining itself to mere compliance with the letter of the request, the Commission entered fully into its spirit. At a time when funds were not available through Government channels the Commission voluntarily provided seed, fertilizers, and equipment which made possible the establishment of a war garden of 300 acres or more at Camp Dix. For this generous contribution and for swift action to overcome the handicap of a late start I take pleasure in making this acknowledgment and in expressing the hope that the Camp Dix war garden of the National War Garden Commission will prove an unqualified success.
Thus, in teeming army camps and on isolated mountain-tops, on the wide reaches of the prairies and in sun-splashed openings in the dusky forests; beside roaring factories and in sequestered nooks on which deer and bear peer shyly from near-by leafy coverts, there have sprung up innumerable war gardens. In riding across the country one sees them beside the railroad right of way, in back yards, small and great, on lawns and in open fields, in every conceivable place and of every imaginable size—sees these living emblems that tell, as truly as the tiny Liberty Loan button on the coat-lapel, where the owner stands and what he stands for, because a war garden is a service badge of living green.
GOING OUT TO MEET THE CROP

As "the man who feeds the army" Col. J. W. McIntosh, chief of subsistence, was deeply interested in the demonstration war garden made by the soldiers at Camp Dix. His interest in the food supply prompted him to go into the fields at Camp Dix and the camera caught him as he helped Quartermaster Tompkins pick tomatoes. Col. McIntosh is at the left.