

Two of Original Job Corpsmen Look Back on Two Years at Gary

If experience is the best teacher, then two job corpsmen who were among the original enrollees at Gary Job Corps Center can best tell the progress of the center as it marks its second anniversary Friday.

"We've been here all the way," says Joe Martinez, 18, of San Angelo, Texas. "And we've seen a lot happen, and some changes," adds Leroy Mundy, 20, of Knoxville, Tenn.

The two were among the 228 youths who arrived at the vacated Army base on March 3, 1965. They arrived on a sprawling campus that was in the throes of rehabilitation and remodeling, and almost deserted compared to the bustling center of today.

Mundy had only one other boy in his dorm, and they stayed up most of that first night talking about what the Job Corps would be like.

"It looked like it might be pretty tough at first," Martinez said. It was.

Both referred to some "tough guys from Chicago who thought they might take over the place," but after several fights and other disturbances, the ones that had gangland tendencies and not willing to improve were shown the gate.

Better screening plus the brotherly attitude of such oldtimers as Leroy and Joe have reduced the troublemaker to nil.

"We don't get guys like that around here much anymore. If we do, and they don't improve pretty quick, they don't stay long," Leroy points out. The next to the youngest of 21 children, Leroy says a lot of changes have taken place in his life since he came to San Marcos two years ago.

Not only has he learned skills that will help him earn a respectable living, but he has gained a much-improved attitude while growing physically and mentally as a job corpsman.

A southern Negro who had to quit school in the 10th grade to help his family make a living, Leroy says "I must have applied for about 60 jobs before I got on as a short-order cook at the Holiday Inn."

"Back then I ran with a pretty tough crowd," he continues. "My first thought when I saw a Caucasian was to belt him up beside the head."

But after living in the same dorm with all sorts of guys, and eating with 'em and swimming with 'em—why I guess I may have more Caucasian and Latin friends than Negro now," Mundy laughs.

Swimming is something Leroy learned after he came to Gary, and he does it well enough now to come in first or second in all the intramural races. He gained from 155 lbs. to 165.

"I could hardly read when I came here," he adds "but now I read fine—I can pick up any book and read it."

Joe Martinez agrees that the Job Corps has helped him learn to get along with people. One of seven children, Joe moved from Mexico with his father and mother when eight years of age and spent a few years in the Rio Grande Valley where his father eked out a living on \$25 a week as a farm laborer.

Then the family learned about migratory work, and followed the crops north where they made a lot more money but found haphazard living conditions. Now the family is settled in San Angelo where Mr. Martinez has a permanent job. It was there, after dropping out of school in the 10th grade, that Joe got into the Job Corps.

As a member of the first class in auto mechanics, Joe recalls reporting for his first lesson "in a building with nothing but a bunch of old desks and airplane parts."

His class had to clean out the place, install the practice engines, and literally start from scratch to establish the fine auto mechanics course that now includes a number of different specialties.

Because he spent almost six months helping get the courses started, Joe will be staying on at Gary for at least three more months before he completes all the courses he wants to take.

Thus for he has taken basic auto mechanics, engine repair, general auto mechanics, and is now enrolled in both the transmission and differential course and the carburetion and tune-up course. When he finishes the latter two he will enroll in the brakes and front-end course and the auto air conditioning course before he graduates.

"This is real good training and I think I've learned a lot. But I realize I need a lot more experience on the job," Joe says.

Among the more significant changes Joe has seen in the past two years is in the downtown reception of Job Corpsmen. "At first you could tell that people were pretty cautious about us, but now we've made friends, the people in the stores know us, and we're a part of the town."

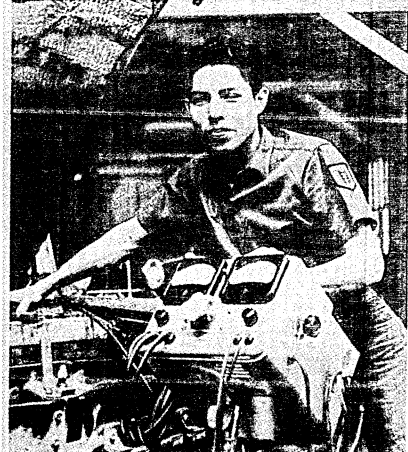
Concerning future plans, neither has definitely made up his mind.

Leroy has been offered a job as dorm director at Gary. "I may take it, but I'd really like to get out on a job. If I don't I'm afraid my drawing will get rusty."

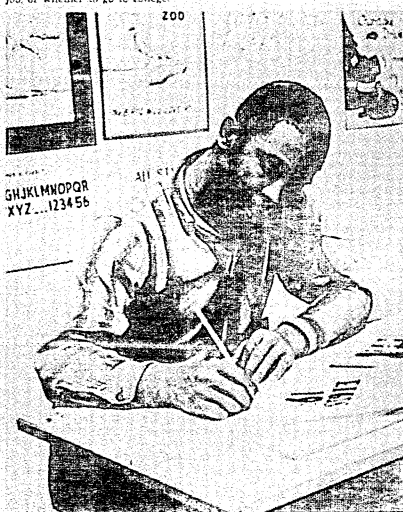
As for Joe, "Well, I'm 18 and classified 1-A," he smiles. "I haven't decided whether to enlist and try to get some more experience in a motor pool, whether to go home and try to get a job, or whether to go to college."

Joe, like many other school drop-outs, has passed his GED test, which gives him the equivalent to a high school diploma.

That they have a future is a major tribute to the Job Corps, both boys indicated in their interviews. It's evident that the past two years have meant much to Joe Martinez and Leroy Mundy.



JOE MARTINEZ learns to use some electronic auto equipment. "I didn't even know which hand tools were which when I started here two years ago," Joe says.



LEROY MUNDY prepares a silk screen layout in his commercial art course. He graduates Friday on the second anniversary of his stay at Gary Job Corps Center.