



Editorially speaking

CHRISTIAN LEADERS NEED TO BE 'READY'

The motto of the Royal Rangers—"Ready"—would be appropriate for all who wish to serve the Lord effectively.

There's a story about a cavalry sergeant to whom a young officer said, "Sergeant, pick me out a nice, gentle horse."

To which the sergeant replied, "Sir, have you ever ridden before?"

"No," the officer replied.

"Well then, Sir," said the sergeant, "here's just the animal for you. He's never been ridden before, Sir. You can both start together."

We would not compare the boys in a Royal Rangers outpost to a horse that's never been broken, but the story does bring out a point. Any man who attempts to lead a group of boys without first getting the proper training is asking for trouble.

In some places, churches have started Royal Rangers programs that soon fizzled out. In practically every case, the reason for failure, according to Glen Bonds, secretary of the Men's Department which sponsors Royal Rangers, was that the leaders were untrained.

The men had the idea they and the boys could learn together! It just doesn't work.

Royal Rangers is an excellent program and is amazingly successful wherever there are trained leaders.

That's why the national office has developed a very broad leadership training program. Not only are there numerous handbooks and other materials, plus an excellent cor-

respondence course for leaders, and a special leaders' periodical. There also is field training where leaders learn by doing.

For example, there are national canoe expeditions for leadership training. One expedition each year is in the sparkling wilderness waters of the Minnesota-Canada border area. The other is in the foreboding yet fascinating recesses of the Okefenokee, that vast swampland in lush, semitropical southern Georgia that has been set apart as a national wildlife refuge.

It was my privilege to accompany a group of Royal Rangers leaders on their canoe expedition in the Okefenokee last April. There were 18 men in nine canoes. Johnnie Barnes was expedition commander and Paul Stanek was planning coordinator. These men from the national office gave us topnotch leadership.

We spent the first day and night at Traders Hill near Folkston, Ga., getting ready. Expert canoeists taught us bow paddling, stern paddling, packing a canoe, launching it, landing, and portaging. At the beautiful St. Mary's River we practiced until we knew what to do if a canoe overturns—how to survive, how to rescue other canoeists, how to empty a submerged canoe, etc.

The next morning we took down the tents and packed the gear very early, as it was starting to rain. We drove through a heavy downpour as we headed for Stephen Foster Park, our embarkation point.

By the time we reached that point, the sun was shining. Then for

the next three days we enjoyed perfect weather as we paddled across the vast swampland of the Okefenokee. We had warm days, cool nights, the wind at our backs, and not a single mosquito bite.

Thanks to the advance training there were no mishaps. We carried ample supplies of drinking water, freeze-dried foods, and other necessities. Our leaders were ready for any emergency. When someone broke a paddle there was no problem—we had a spare.

The charm of this natural sanctuary defies description. The water trails twisted and turned, taking us sometimes among tall, moss-draped cypress trees, sometimes among thick reeds or bushes, and often across little lakes blanketed with lily pads.

Bordering the watercourses the vegetation of the swamp bays and fern bogs was crowded into a jungle mass that seemed impenetrable. Huge herons swooped above us while smaller birds such as wrens and purple martins flitted about. Snakes slithered nearby. Turtles and alligators basked on either bank. Raccoons came prowling when we camped at night and the still air was full of unfamiliar sounds.

Our canoes stayed fairly close together. To get separated would be risky in that primeval wilderness where trail markers are few and far between. As a precaution, each man had a whistle on a lanyard. If he should get in trouble, a blast of the whistle would bring the rest of the party to his side.