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Fort Knox and the **CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS** **1933-1942**



CCC enrollees exercising at Fort Knox
U.S. Army Military History Institute

CCC History

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was an unemployment relief program created in the 1930s. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected President of the United States in 1932 when the Great Depression was in full swing. Nearly 25% of the work force was unemployed, and young men were the hardest hit.

Roosevelt was known for his work relief programs as Governor of New York. Once in office as President of the United States, he set up programs to help people all over the United States. In March of 1933, Congress passed the Emergency Conservation Work Program bill, allowing Roosevelt to have unrestricted power to implement emergency programs. With this bill, he helped the nation survive the Great Depression.

Before this bill had even been passed, Roosevelt had his plans for the CCC drawn up. President Roosevelt wanted 250,000 young men and 25,000 veterans and Native Americans enrolled and in working camps by July 1, 1933. The Departments of War, Agriculture, Interior and Labor were to play a major role in the development and implementation of this program. The Department of Labor would process all the applications, the Departments of Agriculture and Interior would identify camp locations and determine the work for the enrollees, and the Department of War, more specifically the Army, would examine, train, transport and clothe the enrollees and supervise the camps. This workforce of nearly 300,000 men was nearly three times the size of the Army in the 1930s, which would test the mobilization abilities of the Army.

CCC camps existed from July 1933 until July 1942, when it was finally disbanded by the U.S. Congress. During that time approximately 3 million men were employed in the CCC camps, and millions of dollars were sent home to families each year. They accomplished amazing feats of work.

They built bridges, buildings, power lines, runways, trails, irrigation ditches and dams. They worked in stone quarries, built up stream banks, planted trees, cut firebreaks, re-vegetated range lands, set up wildlife shelters and feeders, and started many new conservation programs that we appreciate today. Some examples of the large magnitude of work the CCC men completed are as follows: built 8,304 foot bridges, set 877.5 miles of power lines, cleared 68,882.6 miles of fire breaks and laid 3,057,772 linear feet of irrigation pipelines. This is just a small sample of their work.

While most camps were located West in the National Parks, CCC camps were found all over the United States. In 1935, there were 155 camps in California, 55 in Texas, 37 in Kentucky, and 3 camps in Delaware, just to name a few.

Camps on Fort Knox

During the 1930s, Fort Knox was an induction center for the CCC enrollees. Train loads of racially segregated young men were sent to Fort Knox from West Virginia, Indiana, Ohio and Kentucky. The young men spent about 2 weeks at Fort Knox where they received their shots, clothing and were trained.

Fort Knox processed thousands of men each year throughout the 1930s. While stationed at Fort

Knox, the young men experienced their first taste of army life. One of the most common complaints about Fort Knox was its food.

After the two week induction was completed, the men were put on trains and sent to camps at various locations around the country. There were a few camps that remained on Fort Knox.

During the 1930s, Fort Knox was growing as an installation. It had recently been assigned the role of armor mechanized training. In order to accommodate all the new personnel, Fort Knox needed to develop quickly. Both the CCC and the WPA (Works Progress Administration), another work relief program created by President Roosevelt, assisted Fort Knox in this development.

Between 1934 and 1942, eight camps worked at Fort Knox. These camps consisted of an African-American military veterans camp, four African-American youth camps, two white youth camps, and one white military veterans and youth camp. These camps were assigned such tasks as improving forests, constructing fire breaks, building roads, working in the stone quarry, soil conservation, pest control, cooking, cleaning, and working in the motor pool as mechanics.

Other camps were established in this area. Camps were found at Rock Haven in 1939, and they helped build parts of Otter Creek Park. Leitchfield and Elizabethtown benefited from the work of the CCC camps, and Mammoth Cave had numerous camps building roads, bridges and buildings and replanting the forest.