

# “THEY WERE POOR, HUNGRY, AND THEY BUILT TO LAST”

## THE CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS



The era of the “Great Depression” began with the crash of the stock market in 1929. The economy of the United States changed dramatically. Americans were in peril; unprecedented numbers were jobless. President Franklin D. Roosevelt took office in 1933 with a mandate to put Americans back to work. Congress acted quickly and on March 31, 1933, passed the Emergency Conservation Work Act which established the Civilian Conservation Corps or CCC. Thousands of unemployed young men enrolled in the “peacetime army” to work against destruction and erosion of our natural resources. They were often referred to as the “Pick and Shovel Soldiers,” as the pick, shovel, and ax were the chief tools of the era.



CCC camp personnel in 1940 in Leeds, Utah.



Inside the CCC barracks.

Most of the enrollees came from the east but worked in the west where the majority of the work projects were located. The U. S. Army transported the recruits and took charge of their training. The Departments of Agriculture and Interior planned and organized the work projects. CCC camps were organized in all states, including the territories of Hawaii, Alaska, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

Through the CCC program, 3 million unemployed men gained meaningful work, hot meals, warm beds, and clean clothes. In addition to the “3 hots (meal) and a flop (bed),” the recruits received medical care and vocational training. It is estimated that 40,000 illiterate men learned to read and write. A corpsman earned a monthly wage of \$30, and \$25 of that wage was sent back to his family.

The men of the CCC changed the face of the country. They planted millions of trees, reclaimed thousands of acres of land, built endless miles of roads, and fought forest fires for millions of “man days.” They also built trails, fire towers, campgrounds, and bridges in countless national and state parks. Many of these works still stand today. The stonework of bridges and walls along trails and roads in Zion National Park is a local example of not only the durability of the work but also the aesthetic quality of the artisanship.

In less than 10 years, the CCC left an indelible mark on both our nation and the lives of the men of the CCC and their families. The CCC program ended in 1942 as the U.S. involvement in World War II began. Many of these same young men enlisted and went on to fight in the war. This generation of corpsman and veterans are now known as the “Greatest Generation.”



Inside the camp mess hall. The CCC recruit was said to typically gain 12 to 30 pounds during his enrollment.

### PROFILE OF A TYPICAL CCC RECRUIT

The CCC recruit was an unemployed male who ranged in age from 18 to 25 but was typically 18 years old. He had completed the eighth grade and had 3 to 4 family members dependent on his paycheck. He was commonly from a rural area in the eastern United States.

A special recruitment enrolled “LEMs” (local experienced men) who were local unemployed skilled laborers such as carpenters, electricians, lumbermen, miners, and masons. The “LEMs” were knowledgeable about the area and experienced and skilled workers. They served as project leaders, supervising the young unskilled CCC recruits who typically were not local.



Autographed photo of CCC men outside their wooden barracks.

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