

Lumberjacks in Uniform

The Canadian Forestry Corps had provided lumber for the First World War in the United Kingdom and on the Continent. The British looked again to Canada for assistance early in the Second World War as a German blockade was expected. Lumber was required for applications such as the creation of barracks, construction of ships, aircraft and factory facilities, road surfaces, railway ties and trench construction. Forestry troops would also clear the terrain for the construction of airfields.



A Canadian Forestry Corps (CFC) was created in May 1940 and twenty companies (approximately 200 men strong) were raised. Ten more companies were formed as the war progressed. Unlike the First World War, where forestry personnel did not receive military training beyond basic drill, these Second World War soldiers received five to seven months of training before embarking for the UK. This decision was made in June 1940 when a German invasion of UK was considered likely and forestry troops would form part of the defence.

By May 1941, 13 forestry companies were at work in Scotland. A CFC company was a self-contained community with soldiers capable of tasks far beyond forestry and including skills that ranged from black smithery and mechanical repair to snow clearance. Most forestry camps in UK were constructed from scratch yet logging operations were typically underway within 100 days of a company's arrival.

After the D-Day landings, some 130 timber rafts were floated across the English Channel to avoid the load on shipping. By the end of August 1944, ten companies had commenced operations on the Continent. They initially cut timber in the Cerisy Forest near St. Lo and later moved to the Westerloo Forest near Brussels. By end-October a total of six companies were assigned to the Ardennes Forest in the American Sector. During the German offensive in December, these companies were called out to hold the line when Allied reserves were stretched to the limit. In February 1945, the CFC was employed in the Reichswald and Hochwald in Germany until they ceased operations in November 1945.

Nearly 7000 all-ranks of the Forestry Corps saw service in the UK and Northwest Europe during the war. A total of 442,100,100 board feet of timber was cut in Scotland, England and France. If in two-by-fours, this amount of lumber would circle the earth 4 ½ times.