

All photos in this article (except as noted) are from the author's original manuscript and scrapbook. Top left: Sawmill on the Mortumier Estate, erected in the fall of 1917. Top right: Private First Class George S. Kephart, Serial No. 159442. Above left: French girl in sabots; American soldier with conversation book. Above right: Cover of Lindsey and McNally's souvenir history.

**Editor's Introduction:** On July 4, 1917, Charles E. Stanton, chief disbursing officer of the American Expeditionary Force in France, represented General Pershing at ceremonies in Paris before the tomb of Lafayette, hero of the American and French revolutions. That Pershing chose his disbursing officer to stand in his place was perhaps prophetic, for America's contribution to the Great War was to be a very material one. But Stanton's words best reflected the spirit of a nation determined to join in every way in the great crusade: "America has joined forces with the Allied Powers, and what we have of blood and treasure are yours. . . . And here and now in the presence of the illustrious dead we pledge our hearts and our honor in carrying this war to a successful issue. Lafayette, we are here."

# A FORESTER IN THE GREAT WAR: Reminiscences of Company E, 10th Engineers, in France

by George S. Kephart

In 1919 Eugene L. Lindsey and Frank S. McNally "compiled and published" a booklet, *Company "E" and 1st Detachment, 10th Engineers in France*. For those who may have forgotten, the 10th Engineers (Forestry), later absorbed into the 20th, was a logging and sawmill unit that produced lumber and other wood products for the American Expeditionary Force during the First World War. Lindsey, who had been captain of Company E, and McNally, sergeant first class in its 1st Detachment, recorded the history of one company of the regiment as a souvenir for their comrades. In this account I offer excerpts from their text as reference points from which to relate some experiences of Private First Class George S. Kephart, Serial Number 159442, who was one little cog of a tiny gear in that gargantuan machine, the 20th Engineers (Forestry).

Soon after the entry of the United States into the World War, the need for a regiment of trained lumbermen was apparent. . . . With this end in view, the call was sent out from the Forest Service at Washington in May 1917, for practical lumbermen and foresters to join a regiment designated . . . as the 10th Engineers.

In May, when the first call went out, I was a senior in the School of Forestry at Cornell University. But some of us had already left school and were enlisted in the naval reserves, stationed at Newport, Rhode Island. Recruiting officers had assured

America did sacrifice both blood and treasure to make the world safe for democracy. By the scores of thousands, young men and women offered themselves to the cause, many contributing their lives. Many more of them struggled to pour America's resources and skills and boundless vitality into a contest that had degenerated into the bloodiest, most tragic kind of stalemate. The thousands who bore arms against the enemy and the many thousands more who labored behind the lines did surely provide the strength and energy that carried the Allies to victory. Among them were George S. Kephart and more than 30,000 Americans in France who fueled the war with that most mundane of commodities, wood.

In relating his adventures in the Great War, perhaps Kephart tells the stories of all. His account is a per-

sonal one of the forestry units in the American Army. Even more, it reflects the usually unheralded devotion of the majority of all modern armies — those without whose labors wars and victories would not be possible. When Stanton said that "we" were there, he meant George Kephart and his comrades fully as much as those who bore arms.

In recording his reminiscences of military service, Kephart includes substantial quotations from a souvenir history of his unit prepared by E. L. Lindsey and F. S. McNally, *COMPANY "E" AND 1ST DETACHMENT, 10TH ENGINEERS IN FRANCE (1919)*. These quotations are presented in bold type, minor changes having been made for readability.

us that the reserves would man a "mosquito fleet," to sweep German submarines from the seas.

We reserve seamen first heard of the 10th Engineers, through newspaper accounts, sometime in July. By then my enthusiasm for the navy was thoroughly dampened, for I seemed doomed to permanent assignment as the master of a crew (one man and myself) operating a small motorboat ferry between the naval training station and the town wharf in Newport. With the impertinence and impatience of youth, several of us bombarded the commanding officer with requests for transfer to the forestry regiment. On August 13 I clutched a paper that read, "George S. Kephart . . . a Boatswain's Mate 3c (Provisional) this date has been discharged from the UNITED STATES NAVAL RESERVE FORCE, Class 4 by reason of joining the 10th Regiment Engineers (Forest)."

Early in July the recruits for the new regiment were assembling at the different regular army forts and barracks the country over, and later sent to Camp American University at Washington, D. C. . . . On August 8th, 1917, the new barracks assigned to Company E . . . were formally opened. From that date on the members of this company continued to arrive.

On August 14 I reported to Fort Slocum, the army post near New Rochelle, New York. There it was my good fortune that the post had exhausted its supply of army uniforms in anything approaching my size (five feet, seven inches), so I was sent on to American University, still in my

navy uniform, which made me a temporary object of curiosity to enlisted men and officers alike. Thus, a touch of the unusual attended my induction into the army, which was matched by another minor incident when I was mustered out some eighteen months later. I was among the last men required to fill the roster of Company E, subsequent arrivals being assigned to Company F. Since there were apparently no musicians in our company, I was selected at random to be the company bugler and received a bugle as badge of office. Our other equipment was mostly of Spanish-American War vintage — chokebore pants with canvas leggings, long overcoats, wide-brimmed hats, ancient mess kits, pup tents and blanket rolls slung horseshoe-style across our chests, and Krag rifles without ammunition.

Military instruction was continued and the men equipped for overseas service the remainder of that month and the first part of September.

Neither the instructors nor their pupils had any dedicated interest in military instruction, so it never got beyond mediocre performance of squads right and left, to the rear march, platoons right and left, and so on. On the last day of drill we paraded in a final demonstration of our limited skills.

On September 8 military and civilian dignitaries formally reviewed the 10th Engineers as we proudly marched down an unmemorable stretch of Pennsylvania Avenue, band playing and flags waving. We had been instructed to execute "eyes



Men of the 20th Engineers (Forestry) wait for their turn at the hot water in Washington, D. C., 1917.

U. S. Forest Service



right" on passing the reviewing stand. So it was quite a letdown when we turned into a side street and learned that the review was ended. Someone forgot, or we did not hear, the command — we had marched right by the reviewing stand without noticing it.

On the afternoon of Sunday, September 9th, 1917, the two battalions forming the 10th Engineers marched from Camp American University, fully equipped in heavy marching order, to Rossllyn, [Virginia,] where they entrained for Jersey City. On arrival at the terminal the following morning, the regiment was immediately ferried across the Hudson River to the Cunard Line Piers at West 14th Street, New York, and shortly before noon embarked on the S. S. CARPATHIA.

The *Carpathia* was well known as the first ship to reach the location where the *Titanic* sank in 1912. As with all ships converted to troop transport, we were jammed tightly below decks, with triple-tier bunks and miserable ventilation. There was massive crowding topside during the daylight hours.

Later in the day, the 2nd Engineers boarded the same ship and about six o'clock that evening, September 10th, 1917, the CARPATHIA . . . sailed from New York for Halifax, at which port she arrived the morning of September 13th. From that date until the 21st, the CARPATHIA remained in Halifax Harbor awaiting the arrival of the various ships that were to make up the convoy.

The nine days in Halifax Harbor dragged monotonously on and on. We were anchored so far from shore that the city appeared only as a cluster of buildings, and movement on the streets was barely visible to the naked eye. Commissioned officers of the two regiments were granted shore leave one evening, but we enlisted men were held on board. Each morning we would scan the harbor to see if more ships had arrived. The big moment was when three ships steamed in, many days out of Australia, jammed with Aussie troops. That brought the convoy to full strength, and we sailed the next day.

Late in the afternoon of the 21st, the convoy, consisting of some fourteen ships, . . . started on the trip across the Atlantic to which all had been looking forward so long.

The convoy's maximum speed was governed by that of the slowest ship, a hulking freighter, so our streamlined *Carpathia* fretted along like a spirited horse held tightly in check. To avoid leaving a trail of floating debris, which could lead a submarine to its prey, garbage and other waste were held aboard all day, adding to the heavy smell of closely packed men. After dark all ships dropped their waste at the same time, as the convoy went full speed ahead on a changed course. No lights were displayed at night.

We were drilled in "abandon ship" and were told that any signal, by ship's whistle or display

of lights, would be the real thing. So, one very foggy night we froze when whistles sounded off in sharp blasts and search lights began to play on the water. An orderly evacuation topside began but was canceled as promptly as the confusion permitted. Another ship of the convoy had suddenly appeared out of the fog on collision course with the *Carpathia*, and our captain had taken the only possible corrective action. Some months later another shipload of recruits for the 20th Engineers was torpedoed and sunk off the coast of Ireland, and the *Carpathia* eventually suffered a similar fate.

The ten-day crossing was an uncomfortable but lazy time for the troops aboard. The extended holdover at Halifax had drawn heavily on the ship's subsistence supplies. In the final days of passage some fish and other foods were a bit over-ripe, and drinking water took on an oily taste, suggesting that levels in the storage tanks were very low.

There was great excitement on October 1st, the day before landing, when heavy clouds of smoke came up over the horizon and, suddenly, a small fleet of British destroyer-escorts swarmed up to provide further protection for this most dangerous part of the crossing. Here the convoy was dispersed, with each ship heading for its designated port. A destroyer came alongside the *Carpathia*, using semaphore signals to give the ship's destination and the course to be followed. I had learned semaphore while at Newport and was thrilled to read the message, "Your course to Glasgow is. . ."

Early on October 2nd, 1917, land was sighted and the CARPATHIA entered the Firth of Clyde about 10 A.M., proceeding up the River Clyde to Glasgow, at which city the steamer docked about 2 P.M. The enthusiastic reception accorded the troops as the ship sailed up the Clyde will never be forgotten by those present, as these were the first American soldiers to sail up that river.

The first glimmer of dawn revealed the dim outlines of land, which closed in on both sides as we steamed slowly up the Firth of Clyde. The vivid green hillsides and the towns nestled along the shore formed a welcome picture that remains sharp in my memory. The waterway narrowed rapidly, and our ship grew larger by comparison until it appeared too large to negotiate the restricted channel. It seemed as if we could reach out to grasp the hands of those on shore who, increasingly, gathered in welcoming crowds.

The *Carpathia* stopped briefly at what seemed to be the absolute dead end of navigable waters — probably the head of the Firth of Clyde. Then it continued, very slowly, up the Clyde River, lined solidly on both sides with shipyards, their shipways pointing downstream to permit launching in such narrow quarters. Here our reception became clamorous as men and women shipyard workers deserted their jobs briefly to gaze on this,

their first visible evidence that a fresh ally was coming to help their war-weary nation.

About 5 P.M. that day, the 10th Engineers disembarked and left Glasgow later in the evening by rail for Southampton, . . . [arrived] about noon, October 3, . . . then marched to the rest camp on the commons — a short distance outside the city.

Later, I learned that Hessian troops, hired by King George III to fight his rebellious colonists, had used this same rest camp from 1776 to 1780.

On the night of October 6th, after having boarded the side-wheeler LA MARGUARITE, the regiment left Southampton making a very fast trip across the English Channel, arriving at Le Havre about four o'clock the following morning. [The men] disembarked about eight o'clock and marched to Rest Camp No. 2, British Section. . . .

It was a cocky and talkative 10th Regiment of Engineers that lined up on the pier at Le Havre. We had braved the submarine-infested Atlantic, had received a heroes' welcome in Glasgow, had been spared the horror of air raids in Southampton, and had negotiated the English Channel without encountering a submarine. Now we were actually in France, ready to do our bit for the cause.

That evening . . . the regiment marched to one of the railroad stations in Le Havre, where the men had their first experience with the French "side-door Pullmans."

With mild curiosity we watched a detail of British doctors and nurses stroll out and take assigned places along the railhead on the opposite side of our platform. A train backed in slowly, each car clearly marked with big red crosses. Then the wounded were taken off, for reshipment to England. Some heavily bandaged men were walk-



ing or limping, but most were carried on stretchers. It was a long train, with many, many wounded, and the 10th Engineers fell silent.

The side-door Pullmans were the famous French boxcars, "Hommes 32-40 — Chevaux 8" — the immortal "Forty-and-Eight." When transporting men, the cars had straight-backed benches fixed against each side. If sitting on them became intolerable, one could stand and jostle around with the other standees or curl up on the straw-covered floor and risk being stepped on. We could also stretch our legs outside the car during the long and frequent intervals when we were side-tracked.



British destroyer-escorts picked up the Allied convoy on October 1, 1917, and ushered individual ships to designated ports. The regiment was transported from Le Havre to Nevers via French boxcars — the immortal "Forty-and-eight."

The long train carrying the whole regiment . . . proceeded . . . to the city of Nevers, . . . arriving there early in the morning of October 9th, 1917.

By the route taken it is perhaps 250-300 miles from Le Havre to Nevers, but it took us nearly thirty-six hours for the journey — an average speed of less than ten miles an hour.

The regiment remained at Nevers for about three weeks, establishing camp just a short distance from the city in pyramidal tents. During this period drills were continued and various fatigue duties performed, such as constructing barracks and unloading the equipment and machinery for the regiment's operations as it arrived.

Nevers is located in the dead center of France, on the Loire River. Our stay was a time of almost continual rain, and our tent city became a morass of thin mud. We were granted frequent passes



Pole operations at Mortumier, 1917.

into town, where first priority was the purchase of an English-French conversation book, followed by an investment in delousing ointment and a trip to the public bathhouse.

Nevers was the only place where my status as company bugler was recognized. The regimental bugler was a man of some proficiency and considerable compassion. Each morning, as duty assignments were being made, he would assemble all company buglers for instruction, march us a safe distance from camp, and find as dry and comfortable a roadside spot as possible. He would bugle his bugle, we would try to imitate him, and then we would settle down to pass the day, with one or another giving an occasional toot as evidence of our devotion to duty.

At Nevers, Company E was split into two detachments and assigned to two operations, one in Central France at Gien (Loiret), and the other, 100 miles northeast of Nevers at Vanvey (Cote d'Or). . . . On October 25th, the 1st Detachment left Nevers, en-training in the evening with eighty men, two officers, and two men of the Medical Department. . . . Arriving at Gien (Loiret) on October 26th, 1917, the men were quartered in the French barracks until the last of the month. . . . On the 27th, forty men started putting in the siding at the mill site which was located close to the P. L. M. R. R. [Paris-Lyons-Mediterranee Railroad]. . . . The siding was completed on October 20th. . . . The detachment was then moved out and a tent camp established on the Mortumier Estate [about five miles north of Gien].

The majority of the men comprising the 1st Detachment were from the Far West, but in all twenty-nine states were represented: eight Eastern, four Southern, nine Middle Western, and eight Far Western. Montana with sixteen men led, while Washington was next with thirteen. Practically all the members of this company were experienced woodsmen and sawmill men, while a small proportion were professional foresters.

On November 2nd, a road crew was started, and work began also in clearing off the mill site and digging a well for the mill's water supply.

Attempts to develop a dug well at the mill were unsuccessful, and the problem was eventually solved by pumping water three-quarters of a mile through a one-and-one-quarter-inch pipe. The camp's water supply problem was solved by hauling it in large milk cans, on a two-wheel, horse-drawn cart, from a well at the estate's main house. In all other respects the main house and its immediate surroundings were strictly off limits for the enlisted men. The commissioned officers were welcomed, of course.

On November 4th, pole cutting was started with a crew of ten men which was later increased to fifteen. The next week a crew began cutting logs.

The forest of the Mortumier Estate must have amazed and amused those of our lumberjacks from the western states, where they had worked among the giant trees of virgin forests. The Mortumier forest was a plantation, on level ground, of Scotch pine with some mixture of Austrian (or maritime?) pine. The trees were closely spaced, perhaps in the hope of developing straight trunks on the normally crooked Scotch pines. I do not recall the age of the plantation, but most of the trees were less than twelve inches in diameter. Two-man crosscut saws and axes were our falling tools, so the trees went down like wheat before the scythe, under vigorous attack by two-man crews from the big-tree country.

Poles were hauled with escort wagons, the first shipment being made on November 16th, of two cars. On the 20th a logging truck was rigged up by using four front wheels of an escort wagon with which log hauling was begun.

Logging was done with difficulty, logging trucks not having arrived, so that four sets of "big wheels" were ordered made. It was desired to get ten-and-a-half-foot wheels, but two meters was the largest that the French could make. While comparatively small, these wheels gave very good service up to one-half-mile hauls.

Mill parts started coming in, a piece at a time, early in November. The engine and boiler furnished for this operation was a second-hand affair, the mill being a Lane No. 1, 10 M [thousand board feet] capacity.

On Thanksgiving Day, November 29th, 1917, at 9:30 A.M., the first log was put through the mill, making the first lumber produced in France by an American unit with American machinery.

Before the mill overcame its startup problems, a mountain of logs rose to overtop the mill buildings. But when full production was achieved, the mountain dissolved like snow under a warm sun. The small logs raced through the mill, and transportation between the woods and mill, averaging perhaps two miles, again became a limiting factor.



The latter part of January, an A. E. Co. three-ton truck was received which proved highly useful in logging [and] was at its best on hard roads, but in mud was not to be compared with the F. W. D. trucks. During April, three F. W. D. three-ton trucks were received. They gave excellent service and stood up well under hard conditions. A White 5-7-ton tractor truck received early in May was used to advantage.

As the mountain of logs diminished, it was replaced by an equally impressive mountain of sawdust that also dwarfed the buildings. The apparent waste represented by the sawdust was the cause of heated debate between our officers and



the French foresters who made periodic official inspections. However, the military's demand for lumber overcame the thrifty French scruples. Slabs and edgings were shipped as firewood, the supply of which never caught up with the needs of the American forces.

In all this activity places were found for Private Kephart and the two other technically trained but inexperienced foresters of the company. The bugle was never used, mess call being sounded on the traditional triangle of logging camps. We novice foresters were handed calipers, printed instructions, and tally books and became log scalers, measuring the logs in cubic meters and the firewood in steres, instead of in board feet and cords.

The winter was said to be unusually bad for that region, but the tents were quite comfortable, in fact when floored and boarded up four feet high, they were more satisfactory than the wooden barracks, such as were erected in the Doubs camps. . . . Camp conditions were very good and there was but very little sickness. . . . A YMCA tent, in the charge of a secretary and containing a piano, library, and games, was a material factor in providing recreation. A baseball diamond was made and a number of games played with outside nines.



Log loading at Mortumier, 1918. Above: Kephart's bunk at Mortumier Camp, 1918.

The tents were, indeed, very comfortable, being the standard army squad tents, designed to hold eight men each. As to health, there may be recalled the severe epidemic of influenza that struck in late 1918. The epidemic was very mild in our part of France, but we Americans observed faithfully the flu preventative practiced by the French — frequent doses of coffee laced with cognac.

There was another athletic diversion when the Union Sportif de Montargis, some fifteen miles north of camp, challenged us to a rugby match. The less said about the results the better, except that we destroyed much of their aggressive spirit in the second half by staging a halftime demonstration of American-style football, with great emphasis on brutal bodily contact.

On July 4th, 1918, we put on a "camp talent" celebration, including songs, instrumental music, and feats of skill, to which the ladies of the estate's manor and their servants were invited. Captain Lindsey knew I had done some wrestling (120-pound class) in school, so he staged a wrestling match between the camp blacksmith and me. Skill triumphed over brawn, but I seriously doubt that the ladies derived any pleasure from watching two men, stripped to their long johns and chokebore pants, squirming around on an improvised mat.

Also to be remembered are the ten days in luxurious quarters at Aix-les-Bains in the French Alps, where the American Expeditionary Force maintained a rest camp.

Town passes to Gien were generally granted for Sunday, often including Saturday night. Truck transport was not provided, but we thought nothing of making the ten-mile round trip on foot. Gien is an ancient city, built on or near the site



Top: Gien (Loiret), 1917. Left: Wilbur with Lucile, Jeanne, and Mme. Mahé at Mortumier Camp, 1918. Right: Delivering laundry.

of Genabum, which was destroyed by Julius Caesar about the year 50 B. C. In 1918 there were still many buildings dating to the sixteenth century, but how many escaped the bombing of the Second World War, I do not know.

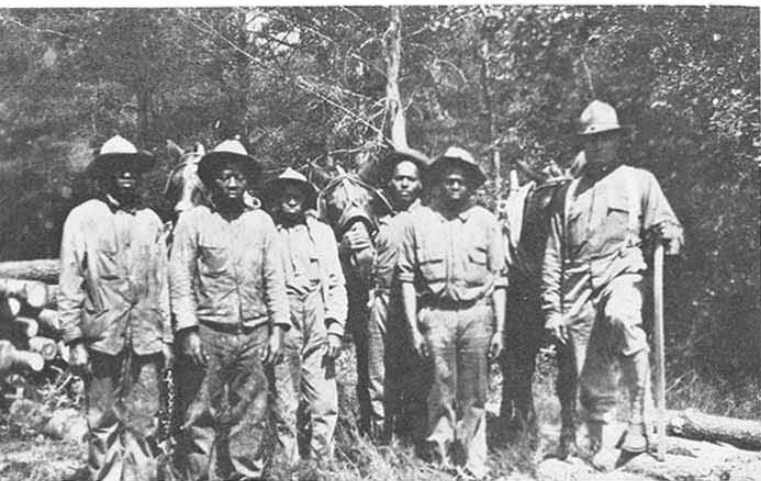
On our first town leave, the fate that rules men's lives took my buddy, Wilbur Hotchkiss, and me to a little stationery store in search of a better dictionary, and the store became our regular objective thereafter. Mme. Mahé, the proprietress, lived above the store with her little daughter, Suzanne, and her sister, Lucile. Lucile's best friend, Jeanne, lived across the street, and the six of us became good friends. The friendship between Lucile and Wilbur ripened, as they say, into love. One memorable day they were married at the city hall by the mayor, resplendent in broad sash and other badges of office, with an attending clerk in almost equally impressive attire. There were stacks of documents to be signed, many of them requiring my signature as best man. But what they said, or to what I obligated myself, I have not the faintest notion.

At war's end, Wilbur returned to the States with our company. He then went back to bring

Lucile to her new home and to a happy marriage, terminated only by his death many years later. Although we were good friends, no such romance developed between Jeanne and me. Mme. Mahé and I carried on an erratic correspondence for several years. It tapered off to an exchange of Christmas cards, and eventually we lost touch.

Passes were occasionally extended to include more distant towns, such as Orléans, Bourges, Auxerre, and others, and on our own initiative we sometimes "extended" our Gien passes to embrace the more distant towns. This is the beautiful valley of the Loire River, a short distance upstream from the best of the chateau country, and on the fringes of famous wine regions. The country had not been ravaged by war, so the towns, with their narrow cobbled streets, still had their Old World appeal. I still remember our first walk along one of the streets in Gien. There was the rattling sound of what we thought was a trotting horse drawing a cart. We stood close to the buildings to let it pass, but it was only two youngsters running in their wooden sabots. Sabots are little used in France today. As they disappear entirely, their clatter down the cobbled streets





A fuelwood crew of Company A, 503rd Engineers, Service Battalion, assigned to the Mortumier Estate.

will grow fainter, until it can be heard only by the sharp ears of memory.

The number of American troops in our area was so limited that we remained a mild curiosity to the residents, who, for the most part, welcomed us warmly. We were so far from the front lines that we heard no more than the muted thunder of the larger guns, when the wind was right. Nevertheless, the scars of war lay heavy on the land. There was the strange absence of men of military age, except for the ever-present amputees and other disabled soldiers, still in uniform. Resigned acceptance of war's toll was often apparent in the faces and actions of the women, children, and young men approaching military age.

On Christmas Day, 1917, the detachment was increased by the arrival of forty men from Company A, 503rd Engineers, Service Battalion. . . . On [the following] March 11, forty men of Company B, 507th Engineers, Service Battalion, were attached for duty and placed in a tent camp about one mile from the main camp. Of these, four were white, noncommissioned officers, the men being colored and principally from Texas.

Those were still the days of strict racial segregation in the armed forces. Since I was from the North, it was a novel experience for me whenever I went to the 507th's operation to measure the piles of firewood. The men followed the Deep South practice of laboring to the rhythm of singing, with one man taking the lead. A short, plaintive line of song by the leader was followed by the joined voices of all and the "whomp" as their axes descended in unison. They worked at a slow but steady beat, producing a surprisingly large volume of firewood.

One evening Captain Lindsey appeared at our tent and said, rather than asked, "You speak French, don't you."

"Not really," I replied. "I had two years of French in high school, six years ago."

"OK," he said, "you take the train to Paris tomorrow to pick up some cabbage plants. Get your travel orders at the office."

So I got to Paris, the mecca of all American soldiers, usually reached by going AWOL. It seems a high-level decision had been made that all nontransient units of the Services of Supply must establish "victory gardens." An American unit was established at Versailles to produce cabbage plants, onion sets, and the like for distribution to the victory gardeners. Notice had been received that our cabbages were ready to be picked up.

At the Paris station an American MP turned me over to a representative from the Versailles unit. He told me to be back at the station the next morning to receive the cabbages. That gave me an afternoon and overnight in Paris on my own. The next morning I met the gardener at the station, where he made all necessary arrangements for shipment of the cabbages on the next train. He handed me the bill of lading; the cabbages and I rode back to Gien on the same train, but with the former in the baggage car. I made sure they were put off at Gien, and the mess sergeant picked them up by truck the next day. I had accomplished my mission without speaking a word of French in behalf of my charges. Someone may read a meaning into the fact that the little hamlet nearest the Mortumier camp was Les Choux, "the cabbages." Whether the plants were thrown away or given to some Frenchman, I do not know. I know only that we never raised a victory garden. We were too busy getting out lumber.

On July 10th, Lieutenant Quinn, an American aviator, walked into camp and requested gasoline for his stranded aeroplane in which he had alighted in an open field about three miles from camp. Gasoline was furnished him and Quinn then gave an exhibition flight, after which he landed safely in a field close to camp.

It is almost impossible, today, to realize what a thrill this was to all of us. Mill and woods operations were shut down so we could all witness the spectacle. Comparatively few of us had ever seen an aircraft in flight, and even fewer had seen the dives, butterfly falls, rolls, and other maneuvers that Lieutenant Quinn performed for us in his light plane powered by a Liberty engine.

About this time the work at Mortumier was drawing rapidly to a close. On the 15th of August, 1918, twenty-seven men left on detached service for the new camp at Ciez-Couloutre [about thirty miles northeast of Nevers]. On the 19th of August, eight men followed; on the 20th, twenty-four men; on the 21st, ten men; and on the 22nd, [the officers] and ninety-five men of the 1st Detachment and thirty-five men of Company A, 503rd Engineers, Service Battalion, were established at the new operation.

The [Mortumier] mill was shut down at 4:00 P.M., August 20th, immediately dismantled and loaded on trucks and wagons, transported fifty miles overland to the new location, and reassembled and placed in operation . . . on August 26th.

The new installation incorporated several improvements, including a "Dutch oven" sawdust-fueled boiler, better mounting of the engine, insulation of steam lines, and so on.

The new mill, with its large-capacity log deck and log truck, the adequate supply of water close by, which was pumped to a tank adjoining the boiler, the gasoline electric light plant that provided ample illumination for efficient night work, the "cyclone" sawdust collector on the roof that fed the fuel by gravity to the "Dutch oven" — all were elements in the success of the new installation under conditions of logging that at times presented monumental difficulties.

On August 23rd, four men were transferred to the Motor Transport Corps, with three trucks, leaving one F. W. D. and White tractor to transport the cut lumber approximately three miles to the shipping yard at Ciez-Couloutre station. [The road from the mill to main road] held up until the first rains, when it became an impassable quagmire. The White tractor was then used for hauling rock from a stone pit near the station to construct a road that would stand up under the hauling from the mill. . . . About this time two I. H. [International Harvester] Co. Titan 15-30 oil-burning tractors were obtained and put into service, drawing the trailers from the mill to the main road, from where the trucks transported them to the station.

Logging at Ciez-Couloutre was very difficult owing to the scattered growth of the oak and the fact that it rained almost incessantly, making the roads more suitable for rafts than log wagons. Additional motor equipment, tractors, and trailers were received after the arrival of the organization at this operation.

The mill . . . was kept running night and day until the time the armistice was signed. The demand for fuelwood in the AEF had been increasing and Co. C, 321st Labor Battalion (colored), was assigned to help produce this class of stock. A narrow-gauge railroad was built to bring the fuelwood to the hard roads from which point it was hauled on motor trucks and trailers to the station. In October 1918, Battery C, 48th Artillery, C. A. C. [Coast Artillery Corps], just arrived from the States, was assigned to the operation for work in connection with the fuelwood operation. From the original 100 men, the operation had now grown to over 800 men. [The organization, under the capable direction of commissioned and noncommissioned officers,] made a combination, coupled with the spirit and loyalty of the men under them, that it would be hard to duplicate.

At Ciez-Couloutre, operations were quite different from those at Mortumier. Instead of a pine plantation, we were now operating in a municipally owned stand of hardwoods that had been managed for a long, but to me unknown, number of years as a coppice with standards. The cutting cycle was twenty-five years, and the tract was

accordingly subdivided into twenty-five well-defined *coupes* or compartments. For very many years the French had logged one *coupe* annually, clearcutting except for the reservation of selected trees (the "standards"), properly spaced and of the desired species and condition, which were reserved for cutting in the following second, third, fourth, or subsequent cycles. Thus each harvest yielded everything from firewood to poles and magnificent trees of large sawlog size, the latter being generally oaks. Utilization at each harvest had been practically 100 percent with the small branches and twigs being bound into faggots. Even the chips from the undercuts on large trees were often salvaged by the local farmers. It was a silvicultural system commonly practiced at that time in this part of central France.

Our operations changed the picture completely, as we swept through the stand taking everything regardless of age. We reduced the stand to zero age wherever our operations were completed, because any growth too small even for firewood was pretty well smashed down in getting out the sawlogs. Logging operations reached out ahead of the firewood cutting, to supply the mill, so most of the sawlogs were removed from the entire tract before operations were suspended with the signing of the armistice.

Shortly after we were settled at Ciez-Couloutre, two memoranda came through from 5th Battalion headquarters. The first relieved me and certain other men "from duty with their present Commanding Officers" and assigned us to "duty in connection with the acquisition of timber under the direction of 1st Lt. C. E. Dunston, Headquarters, Gien District, Forestry, Gien (Loiret)." The other, from Lieutenant Dunston to me, read:

1. The object of the forest reconnaissance which you are to make is to ascertain at the earliest possible date the location of desirable



Leaving Mortumier for Ciez-Couloutre, August 21, 1918.



Detail of woodlands about Couloutre.

timber for our operations. Your examinations should be sufficiently detailed to definitely locate desirable timber tracts and to supply a fairly accurate statement of the character of the stand, the range in sizes of the timber, factors affecting logging and a rough estimate of the available material.

2. It must be borne in mind that you are not authorized to discuss the question of purchase with forest owners. However you should endeavor to obtain as much information as possible regarding desirable forests through inquiries among local residents, guards, and régisseurs.

3. Forests will generally be found to contain several coupes or tracts of varying age or condition of stand. It will often be possible to locate these coupes on the Etat Major maps [scale 1:50,000]. Where this cannot be done a sketch map of the forest should be made showing the coupes. Reports should be submitted in accordance with the enclosed form.

4. The estimate of sawtimber should be made in cubic meters. The volume table in the scale book can be used for computing volumes. The estimate of small round products and poles (trees 5" to 8" in diameter)

should also be made in cubic meters. If the small stuff will be worked up into entanglement stakes, an estimate should be given of the number of pieces. Fuelwood should be estimated in steres. In case of coppice under standards forests, the approximate age of the coppice should be given. Coppice less than 15 years of age is cut only in exceptional instances. As a rule coppice is not cut younger than 18 years. The estimate of coppice can often be obtained from local guards. All estimates should be given per hectare (2½ acres). Under LOGGING give notes on slope (direction and steepness), ground (soft or hard, character of soil), interior roads (soft or hard).

5. Reports should be made to Lieut. Dunston as each forest is examined.

Thus began what was without doubt a choice assignment for a forester fresh out of college. These were the only instructions I received at first, so I began scouring the countryside close to camp, using a broken-down logging horse and saddle for transportation. Later I was furnished a heavy English bicycle and was permitted to lodge away from camp, the only requirement being that I report back to camp on weekends. From



time to time headquarters would send me a list of timber tracts to be examined, and the whole procedure followed easily.

Entirely aside from my enthusiasm for the work assignment, there was the human-interest adventure of being on my own among the French in a rural area where American soldiers were seldom seen. My command of the French language was woefully deficient, and my pronunciation was execrable. But, like many others, I learned how well communication with foreigners can be maintained with a conversation book, a dictionary, and sign language.

Shortly after we moved from Mortumier to Ciez-Couloutre, it became apparent to all that the big push toward victory was imminent. Some of our trucks and drivers were taken from us for other assignments. The mill was ordered to concentrate exclusively on producing road timbers, ties, duckboard material, and other front-line requirements. The call became increasingly urgent, and our whole outfit was fired with anticipation.

I was in camp late one afternoon when our mess sergeant came racing back from Donzy with word that an armistice had been arranged. He had evidently heard the news soon after it flashed over the telegraph, our only communication with the "outside." The mill whistle was tied down until our captain ordered it released and sent all men back to their jobs. Those who could get a pass that evening, or could sneak away, streamed into Donzy, where the whole place was hysterical.

The day after the armistice, I left camp again, spending the afternoon and night in the little town of Menou. Everyone was in a letdown state of mind after a release of pent-up emotions the night before. A young girl in the hotel lobby was going through the motions of ironing a big pile of sheets, using a collection of small hand irons. She was trying to heat the irons by propping them before a sawdust fire in the fireplace. The sawdust produced little heat, and each iron was well cooled off before she could clean off the sawdust soot. Finally, she gave up. The silence of the little group was broken by the hotel manager when she said, "For four years we have been saying, 'After the war we'll do this. And after the war we'll do that.' Now the war is over, but what do we really want to do — so many will not be coming home." It was a locality whose troops had been in some of the war's bloodiest engagements. There was a nearby hamlet, I was told, where not a man of military age would be returning. They had all been killed.

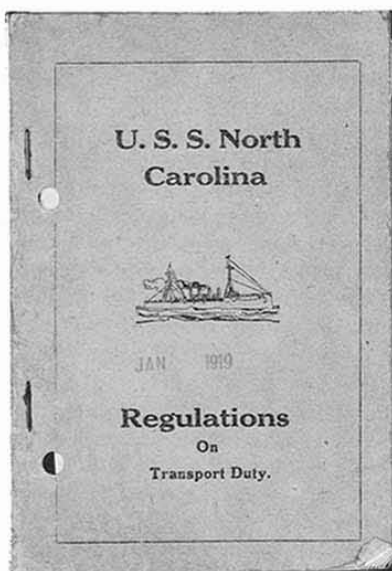
Despite the fact the armistice had been signed, the mill continued to run full blast one shift a day . . . right up to the night before [the 1st Detachment] left . . . Ciez-Couloutre and started on the first leg of the final trip toward that much-looked-for-place, home. On January 13th the 1st Detachment arrived at Brest and once more became part of Company E after a separation of more than a year.

The army unit in charge of the camp at Brest made a partially successful attempt to enforce military spit and polish among our ranks, but it did not come easily to us. Camp regulations were rigidly enforced, and new uniforms were issued. There were daily rumors that we would sail for home the next day, or the following week. Other rumors held that a final inspection would be made before embarkation, and so much as a hobnail missing from your shoe would be sufficient to hold you back from sailing.

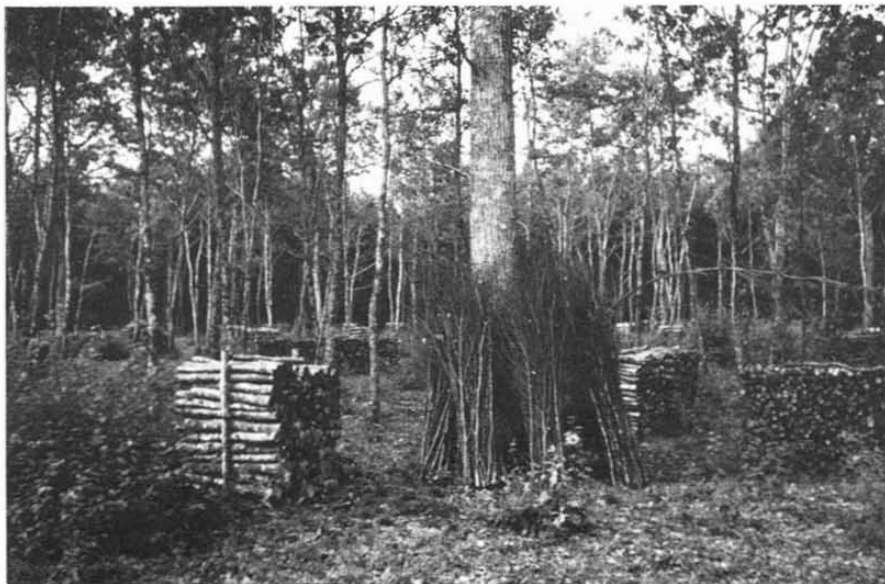
My recollections of the twenty-four days at Brest are otherwise limited to two nights of KP duty. I spent all of the first night peeling potatoes and the second night slicing bread. They were good details, however, because each night there were several meal breaks when we enjoyed the cookroom privilege of feasting on the choicest steaks in the larder.

On January 28th, 1919, Company E, together with [three other companies] . . . marched out of Camp Pontanezen down to Brest and embarked on the U. S. S. NORTH CAROLINA. [The cruiser] arrived in New York Harbor early in the morning of February 9th, 1919, exactly seventeen months having elapsed since the regiment left for overseas service from the same port. . . . [We were] fed everything that could be desired, by the various War Service Associations.

The troops were ferried around to Long Island City and later transported by rail to Camp Mills, from which point a few days later, small detachments began to leave for the various demobilization camps the country over and in a very few days the old companies and regiment had passed into history.



A souvenir from the return trip to the United States.



Coppice under standards, with firewood and faggots stacked for market. Photographed by the author in 1965, the same management was practiced in Ciez-Couloutre in 1918.

Strangely, one of the first novelties of our return was the chatter of youngsters who clustered around us. They sounded strange until we realized they were speaking English instead of French.

Some of us were sent to Camp Upton, farther out on Long Island, for demobilization. Here we went through a strictly supervised delousing shower, and all our clothes were subjected to hot steam delousing treatment. The sparkling new outfits in which we had left Brest had suffered enough on the sooty decks of the *North Carolina*. The steam treatment reduced them to a misshapen shambles that a tramp would be ashamed to wear. Nevertheless, our pleas for decent outfits in which to return home were turned down until a relenting supply sergeant finally issued new uniforms.

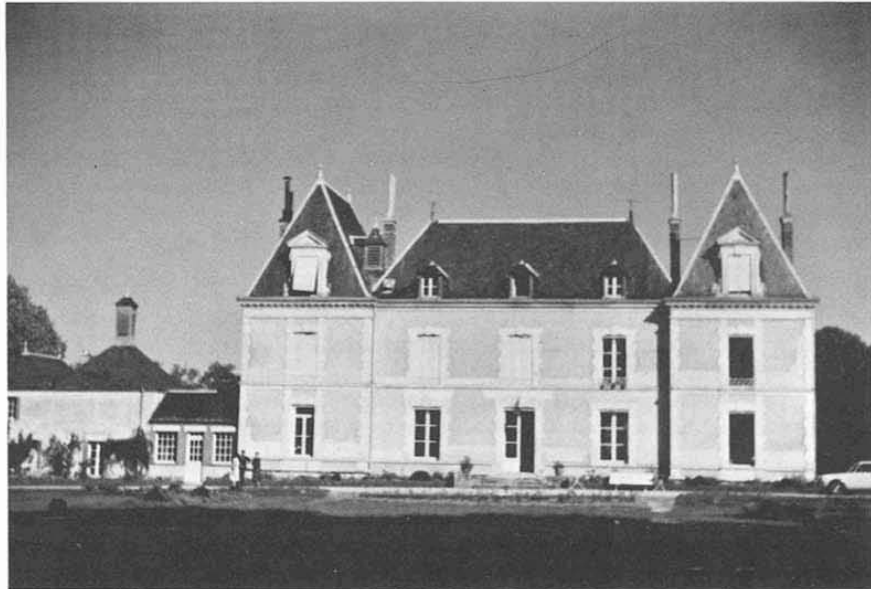
One does not usually enlist in the army while wearing a navy uniform, as I did. There was also a bit of the unusual in my discharge, for it may be said that I deserted. The evening before our discharge, I drew guard duty and with unloaded rifle stood guard all night at the unlocked door of the camp's jail, with four inmates serving light sentences for being AWOL. As the camp came to life the next morning, I could see my comrades being prepared for mustering out. My repeated calls for the corporal of the guard went unanswered, so when my friends started their march to the point of discharge, I handed the rifle to one of the prisoners and raced after them.

So now I hold an "Honorable Discharge from the United States Army." It reads, "George S. Kephart, 159442 Private 1st cl. Inf. unassnd (last assnd. 36th Co. 20th Engineers) . . . is hereby HONORABLY DISCHARGED from the military service of the UNITED STATES." It shows

that I was never a noncommissioned officer, was not qualified in marksmanship, and had no training in horsemanship. Under the caption "Battles, engagements, skirmishes, expeditions," there is the notation, "Served with 36th Co. 20th Engineers with A. E. F. in France from 9-2-17 to 2-9-19." That is a bit dismaying, for we of the 10th always took pride in that regiment. The discharge shows that my vocation was that of a student, that I received no wounds in service, and that my physical condition was good when discharged. It proclaims that I was single at the time, my character was excellent (with the added entry, "Service honest and faithful"), and had no AWOL or absence under General Orders 31/12 or 45/14. Apparently nobody missed me on the two days I was AWOL in Paris after the armistice. Not knowing what heinous crimes are covered by the two general orders, I am nonetheless pleased to know that I was innocent of them.

Shortly after returning home, I received a letter from a former classmate. His service battalion had been moved to our Ciez-Couloutre camp to saw down the stumps we had left. Since it was a coppice forest, the French had insisted that the better quality stumps be lowered to raw earth level, with the larger root swells adzed back still further, so sprouts would be promptly rooted in the ground.

In 1965 Mrs. Kephart and I rented a car to tour parts of central Europe. By correspondence before leaving home, we had arranged to meet with the French forestry officials stationed at Nevers, for I was anxious to see the results of our mismanagement of the coppice forest and, perhaps, its further mistreatment during the Second World War. We spent one wet day in the field with M. J.



Two views of the main house at Mortumier Estate in 1917 and in 1965.

Bernard, chief inspector of the Forest Service for the region, and his staff, all of whom were most interested and cooperative. However, the language barrier was but partially bridged by my high-school French and the equally frustrating English of a member of his staff. The Ciez-Couloutre forest, municipally owned in our day, had passed into private ownership. The system of coppice under standards was no longer being practiced, but the language barrier made it impossible for me to learn what form of management was being practiced. Happily, when making advance arrangements with Bernard, I had asked if he would have someone prepare a resume of the management since 1919, and it was given to me. But it was written in French, and I found translation on the spot to be impossible.

The amazing fact is that these men were well aware of the American army's fuelwood operations at this location in 1918-1919, but they had no record or knowledge of the sawmill. We went to several locations they believed might have been the mill site, and they were surprised when I located it. The reason for the problems we encountered with our muddy road from mill site to hard road then became readily apparent. There is a spring seepage just below the surface all along the gentle slope where the mill was located. The present owner has collected this seepage into a pond of clear, cold water in which he is growing watercress commercially.

Our hosts also took us to some of the towns I had known, including Chateaufort val-de-Bargis, where I gave the present owner of the hotel my receipt for food and lodging obtained when I was there almost precisely forty-seven years previously. We spent another two days at Gien and Mortumier. The main line of the P. L. M. rail-

road from Paris to Marseilles crosses the Loire River at Gien, so it was a prime target for bombing during the Second World War. All of the town near the railroad and highway bridges had been leveled and was later rebuilt in "modern" style. But the devastation had stopped just short of the city hall. It may be, therefore, that the documents I signed at the wedding of Lucile and Wilbur are still safely on file there. No. 1, rue Hotel de Ville, had also escaped the bombs, but it is no longer a stationery store. Mme. Mahé's name was not in the phone book, and her name was unfamiliar to those with whom I spoke.

At Mortumier we drove up the long approach to the main house and were welcomed by Mme. and Mlle. Bienaime. The estate had changed hands several times since 1918, and they had never heard of the 1st Detachment's operations. But there was no difficulty in locating the old campsite.

Monsieur Bienaime was spending most of his time in Paris, where he had some kind of business, but he was actively converting the estate into a shooting preserve. Pheasants and other upland game birds were everywhere. Ditches had been dug and filled with water throughout the former forest land, some of it still forested, to attract waterfowl. Our hostesses guided us over rough roads along the ditches and then took us through the entire house, even to the little attic rooms where the scenes they had painted on the walls seemed to take the rooms out through their narrow windows to become a part of the landscape.

Thus it was that I had the satisfaction of returning at least once to the area where Private First Class Kephart did his bit in the War To End All Wars. □