

THE INTERALLIED TIMBER SUPPLY

IN the summer of 1917 I was busy preparing lectures on forest management, since I had received a temporary appointment as professor at the Yale School of Forestry. We were settled for the summer at Fletcher, near Asheville, N. C. Late one afternoon I was called to the telephone to hear a wire from W. B. Greeley of the Forest Service. The telegram was an inquiry whether I would accept the position of Major in the United States Army, and sail immediately for France on the staff of the 10th Engineers, which was being organized to produce timber for the needs of the American Expeditionary Force.

Prior to the receipt of this telegram the question of enlisting as a volunteer had been debated. Now that an opportunity arose to really help as a specialist, there was no question as to the answer. So within two days my wife, a two months old baby and I were en route to Washington. I was to take the necessary physical and mental tests and be prepared to sail early in August.

These physical and mental tests were more or less perfunctory. Men with technical knowledge were required for the service. U. S. Army engineers recognized that they did not require men with military training, but men who knew timber conditions, who could purchase and operate timber in France for war purposes. They were very broad in conducting these tests. But I remember one amusing case where our greatest mill expert had only one eye. His friends said that he could do better work with one eye than most men with two; he could put up a complicated mill blindfolded. When it came to passing the physical test we hit a stumbling block. The regular army examiner finally blew up, and said with some heat: "If Napoleon came to this Board with one eye, we could not pass him, so don't bother any more about your mill expert!"

Things moved along quite rapidly, and finally arrangements were made for the Forestry Section to sail at 9:00 A. M. on the morning of August 7th. Although it was extremely urgent that we should sail immediately, some of us had not been able to locate

our commissions. I enlisted the services of a friend of mine, who kindly went to the War Department himself and found my commission. He brought it up to New York the morning of August 7th, so that we were able to go to the Hotel McAlpin and execute the necessary papers prior to sailing. On the way to the hotel he explained that he had had the greatest difficulty in finding the commission. It had been issued a few days previously. Finally he had gone to a room heaped with commissions and personally examined several hundred until he located mine. This is an illustration of the confusion into which the War Department was thrown, by having to expand so rapidly without suitable previous preparation.

As soon as I had executed the oath of office, it seemed as though my red tape troubles had been largely solved. But I was wrong. Not having had any army experience, I did not realize that, after an officer was appointed, the next step was to be ordered to active duty. This had been overlooked. It was not until two or three months later that a formal order was issued putting me on active duty. Yet during that time I had sailed for France and was engaged in duties which necessitated military rank. Although actually I was being carried on the payroll as a civilian engineer, I was in the uniform of a Major of Engineers, U. S. A.

On the trip over, the Forestry Section met twice a day. It fell to my duty to lecture to them on different aspects of French forests and forestry. This material, based on a year's study, had been rapidly assembled in lecture form during the ten days I was in Washington, and afterward was expanded into a book entitled "Studies in French Forestry."*

One afternoon, just as we were nearing the coast of France, we were rather startled by hearing our port guns firing. It broke up our game of chess quite completely. When we went on deck we found that an alleged submarine attack was being repelled. One of the naval gunners went so far as to say that he had seen the conning tower of the submarine and thought he had sunk it. Two years later, on the return voyage, a naval officer mentioned this attack in a lecture. He claimed that there had been no submarine, and that the different gun crews had been firing at ripples caused by the wake of the submarine chasers.

* *Studies in French Forestry*, John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1920.

We landed at St. Nazaire, at the mouth of the Loire, and left that same evening for Paris. We reported immediately to Major Henry S. Graves, who had come on ahead with Captain Barrington Moore as his aide. The Forestry Section, and in fact all the A. E. F. and S. O. S. administrative work, was in the process of organization. My own duties were explained. I was to buy standing timber, which later would be manufactured by the 10th Engineers and other engineering units, according to the United States Army specifications. One of the first forestry problems was whether the American army should join with the Allies in the joint timber purchasing and distributing committee which was already in operation.

We found the French war-worn and discouraged. The mere fact that they had already been engaged for more than three years was beginning to tell on their morale. They were particularly discouraged over the lack of success under General Nivelle. The civilian population, especially in provincial towns and villages, were almost disloyal to the Allied cause. I remember what a shock it was to hear a well-to-do peasant say: "You Americans have come over too late. France is already ruined and can never recover." In another village we were told that the war had lasted too long. "We French are tired and bled dry. We cannot win, so why not arrange an honorable peace while we can?" Even people in official positions were talking in this strain. An attaché of the Belgian Embassy talked against the war in the house of a French nobleman where I was dining, and alleged that nine-tenths of the Belgian population wanted the war to end. "We want peace and need it," he said. "What's the value of a technical victory if Belgium is completely ruined?"

On the other hand, so far as we could judge, the morale of the French army staff was excellent. A friend of mine, Commandant Hirsch, related a story about Joffre. The French Senate and Chamber of Deputies had removed to Bordeaux. All cabinet officers, including the Minister of War on whose staff my friend was then serving, had also left Paris. During the Battle of the Marne, Hirsch called up General Joffre on the long distance telephone: "How is the battle going, my General?"

Joffre replied: "Are you all comfortably settled in Bordeaux? I hope the heat is not excessive."

"But I am requested by the Minister of War to find out how the battle is going:

Again Joffre answered: "Are the Deputies in good spirits? The heat of Bordeaux, to which they are not accustomed, I hope does not affect their morale."

"My General, I must report to the Minister how the battle is going." To which Joffre finally replied: "*Pas mal, pas mal.*" This, it seems to me, illustrates the difference between the army morale and the civilian morale during critical periods of war.

The French peasants never could understand why so many healthy young Americans spent their war service miles away from the front. Their own fathers and brothers, much older men, lived in mud and amid scenes of death and destruction in the trenches. The excuse of the Forestry Section, safely anchored to the S. O. S., was that America had plenty of men, and that it was our policy to place technical men where they were most needed.

A good deal has been written regarding the alleged profiteering by the French. During two years' experience throughout various sections, my judgment is that much of the flagrant profiteering was done by foreigners, Spaniards and Italians, who were engaged in commerce in France. American gossip on this subject was greatly exaggerated. Partly because so few Americans really understood administrative methods; partly because, in a Latin country, it is customary to bargain for supplies rather than buy them at a fixed price. Local prices undoubtedly increased when American troops were stationed in a small village and bought up everything in sight. It was a perfectly natural case of an over-demand and a lack of supply. The American soldiers, with their large purchasing power, always demanded the best of everything.

At the close of the War it was frequently gossiped about that the American army had to buy their trenches. Curiously enough this was undoubtedly true in many instances. An American organization might be practicing bayonet attacks before going to the front, and have to dig trenches in a peasant's field. Somebody had to pay compensation to the French citizen for the damage done. It would have been obviously unfair for the French Army to pay any of the expenses of the American Army. We were entirely independent financially, and it was quite natural and just for the local American unit to pay such bills. When a regiment left a village, after having been encamped there for a considerable

period, no doubt it was often irritating to have bills presented for the most trivial charges. We had one regiment in the Côte d'Or which was asked to settle because its wagons splashed mud on the white-washed French houses along the village street. The bill was small, perhaps only a few francs, and yet it had to be paid. When the story was repeated, no doubt the details were magnified and twisted so that it seemed like an imposition.

In the purchase of timber we argued as follows. Many of the best locations for operating timber in France were either already occupied by Canadians, French or Belgians, or had been reserved from cutting by the French for reasons of policy. We expected a rapid and ever increasing demand, and felt that it was impossible to acquire too much standing timber. Since practically all timber land in France had been cut over, not once but a number of times, the question "Was logging feasible?" was already answered in the affirmative. I for one argued that every forest could be operated unless there were definite known obstacles. As a matter of fact, one fine body of timber in the Landes, near Mimizan, had been refused by the Canadians because of operating difficulties. This was successfully cut and manufactured by a company of our 10th Engineers, through a skillful use of water for floating. Our Allies were rather taken aback when they saw what they had overlooked.

An illustration of this picking and choosing of timber came up in the early Fall of 1917. A lieutenant, who had been a logging Engineer of the Forest Service on the Pacific Coast, was sent to examine a certain tract in the Côte d'Or. It was a rather mediocre "coppice under standards" forest of oak, beech, maple and hornbeam. When he returned with his report, we had a meeting of the staff to consider what action should be taken. The lieutenant indicated what portions of the forest had the most board feet per acre, and his recommendation to purchase only the best areas was approved by his superior officers. At the final conference, presided over by Col. Graves, I argued that if the war lasted for any length of time, we should need every scrap of timber we could acquire. If the war terminated sooner than we expected, we should not mind having extra timber. I argued also that when we put troops in to fell and saw this particular forest, the commanding officer would be certain to ask that we purchase the remaining portions, even though somewhat inferior, in order that he could continue operating at one point as long as possible. The

correct answer to this problem seemed absolutely clear without argument. But I recall that it was only with the greatest difficulty, and with the help of Col. Graves who saw the problem as I did, that I carried my point. I relate this instance because it illustrates the way in which some of our best officers were inclined to think of minor technical details, rather than of the main objective of our war operations.