

THE FOREST ENGINEERS

By LT.-COL. HENRY S. GRAVES

THE Forest Engineers performed a very important service in the war. For the first time in history, it was necessary to organize military forces specially trained and equipped for work in the forest, and when the call came the foresters and lumbermen responded eagerly. There was developed an organization of splendid efficiency—a fine body of experienced men, well officered. They adapted themselves quickly to the conditions under which they had to work, and met the burdens placed upon them with a fine spirit of self-sacrifice. They had many difficult conditions to meet and many obstacles to overcome, and they succeeded in their task. They richly deserve the praise which has consistently been bestowed upon them.

The first call for foresters and lumbermen came through a request made by General Bridges, of the British Mission, soon after we entered the war, for a thousand men to work in the woods behind the British lines. To meet this request, the War Department decided to organize an engineer regiment, and asked for assistance from foresters and lumbermen in the recruiting of the force. Col. J. A. Woodruff, of the Corps of Engineers, was given the command, and his work in organizing the 10th Engineers, and later in directing all the forestry forces in France, was of exceptional merit. He has already received well earned honors in France; and American foresters and lumbermen are unanimous in their praise of his work and his leadership.

The French government also made a request through Marshal Joffre for a thousand men to help in the forests behind the French lines. It became apparent, however, very soon after the arrival of General Pershing and his staff in France, that the requirements of our own army would necessitate the use of the first forestry troops for the American armies. It was necessary, therefore, to defer giving direct assistance to the British and French. Fortunately, it proved possible to fulfill our obligations to our allies in this matter before the end of the war.

The first division of the army reached France early in the summer of 1917. There was immediate need for lumber, not only for barracks but for a great variety of miscellaneous purposes. The assistance given us by the French and British before the Forest Engineers with their equipment could arrive and begin the manufacture of lumber was very substantial, and was given at a time when both the British and French armies needed for their own uses, while battles were going on, every bit of wood and timber they could possibly secure. It was, however, at best a lean time for the American armies until the Forest Engineers could begin sawing operations.

The first battalions of the Forest Engineers arrived in France early in October, 1917. They had some of their

woods equipment with them, but it was some months before their sawmill material and all of their logging and transport equipment arrived. Pending the arrival of this equipment, they found themselves in a difficult position. There was a great need for lumber for the armies, and though the forestry troops were at first inadequately equipped, were expected to produce it. It was an inspiration to see the way the troops adapted themselves to the conditions, put in their time efficiently, produced timber which could be used for various engineering purposes, and prepared the way for the quick manufacture of lumber when the mills should arrive.

When the equipment did arrive, all of the preliminary work in the careful selection of officers and men and in the preparatory work in France began immediately to count. Every man swung into line and gave his utmost strength to the task at hand, with the result that the small portable sawmills were made to produce quantities unknown before. What seemed insuperable obstacles in the matter of transportation were overcome, and the lumber was actually gotten to the armies in time to render service at critical periods.

An important part of undertaking was the acquisition of timber and the location of operations. The French and British representatives co-operated admirably in this matter, so that any possible competition between the Allies in the procuring of material and in prices was eliminated. The corps of men engaged in this work deserve a great deal of credit. Those in charge of the negotiations had a delicate task to perform in their relations with the Allied governments. The men in the field were carefully selected from among the foresters and logging engineers, and were successful in finding bodies of timber suitable for the armies' needs.

The high quality of the personnel of the Forest Engineers has been commented upon by every one familiar with the organization. To this fact and to the able leadership of the officers in charge is due the unqualified success of the work. To set apart the names of those to whom credit is due would be to take many a leaf from the regimental muster roll, from Colonel Woodruff and Lieutenant-Colonel Greeley, the two men who carried the chief burden of the enterprise; Colonel Mitchell, who organized the 20th; Lieutenant-Colonel Kelley and Johnson, at headquarters, and Lieutenant-Colonel Woolsey and Major Moore, who negotiated the purchases with the French, through a long list of officers and men. Those who participated in the forestry work in France may well be content with their record. The forestry and lumber fraternity is very proud of what they accomplished.