

# THE BIGGEST REGIMENT IN THE ARMY

by David A. Clary

**W**hen the United States entered the First World War in April 1917, a delegation of British officials went to Washington to work out the details of military cooperation. On their agenda was an incidental request for the loan of a "regiment of woodsmen" to provide lumber and firewood to British forces in France. Although the British eventually proved able to meet most of their own needs, and that American unit was never raised, the request led to the formation of forestry units in the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, American Expeditionary Force (AEF) in France.

For centuries, armies had included among their fighting units bodies of men, often called "pioneers," who cleared roads, prepared camps, provided firewood, and saw to many other aspects of campaigning. Every infantryman was a pioneer at times; a Roman legion could turn out with picks, axes, and shovels and construct a heavily fortified encampment in hours. But times change and with them the practical and logistical requirements of warfare.

The extensive construction, millions of men, and furious combat that comprised the Western Front in World War I consumed locally available resources within a relative instant. If two great armies were to maintain a mutual death grip over 400 miles for years on end, they must have their sustenance carted to them from elsewhere. They must form new kinds of military organizations — units specializing in highway construction, railroading, agriculture, shipping, chemicals, procurement, building construction, entertainment, conscription, training — the list seems endless. From growing rear echelons must flow food, ammunition, medicine, clothing, tools, weapons, mail, propaganda — and wood, for warmth, for cooking, for construction, to replace that lost through combat or shellfire or natural deterioration — wood by the ton, in an unceasing flow.

Upon the American declaration of war, the Allies projected a massive logistical buildup in France to support a war of attrition expected to last for several more years. They depended for strategic materials upon the resources and industrial might of the United States. They would also require enormous quantities of forest products, beyond what was needed at the front. Although the French would have preferred to import lumber from America and ease the strain on their own forests, they acknowledged that shipping space was too limited. The Allies agreed, then, that

American forestry units would work in France's carefully managed forests, producing materials in strict conformance with the principles of French forestry. A joint Allied commission would oversee the procurement, production, and allocation of forest products.

In June 1917 the American officers appointed to the commission and those assigned to locate and select timber, designate the sites for logging and sawmilling, and plan the production work, arrived in France. Among them were William B. Greeley, a future chief of the U. S. Forest Service, and Henry S. Graves, detailed for nine months from his post as chief of that agency. Their work was only part forestry. In great measure it was military diplomacy, for they engaged in the wrangles of the Allied commission, and in every practical way they had to work through and often under the supervision of various levels of French officialdom. Negotiations for the purchase of timber were left solely to the French foresters, who also approved all plans for harvesting and made frequent, rigorous inspections of American operations. As Greeley recalled in his memoirs:

*We had many arguments with the French foresters over cutting requirements and I found myself on the other side of the table from similar controversies with loggers back home. The Frenchmen were understanding and realistic — and mighty good woodsmen. But in issues between their established regime of timber culture and exigencies of Allied manpower or speed in getting wood to the front, the forest always won out. . . . A grizzled conservateur said with a fatherly smile, to a bunch of impatient Americans: "Our forests have fought several wars before this one."*

But the system worked well, producing enormous volumes of wood without major damage to the French forests. It was a lesson in conservation for a generation of American foresters and lumbermen.

While the French had consented to the use of their forests, the men and equipment for timber production were to come from the United States. As the advance teams laid the groundwork in France, the army with the assistance of the Forest Service, state foresters, and lumber trade associations recruited foresters and experienced loggers and millmen for the one regiment it was believed would be needed — the 10th Engineers (Forestry) under the command of Colonel James A. Woodruff. But before that unit had completed its training and sailed for France, increases in predicted wood requirements (the program called

for production of 12,000,000 board feet per month of sawn lumber and ties, 15,000 telephone and telegraph poles, 16,000 small poles and pickets, and 35,000 steres of fuelwood) necessitated the authorization of another regiment — this the 20th Engineers (Forestry), under Colonel W. A. Mitchell, and consisting of ten battalions of forestry troops, three highway battalions, and thirty-six engineers service companies assigned to forestry work. Recruiting for these and other units continued until the end of the war. Woodsmen thought unfit for service in the war zone would likely find themselves soldiers in a military logging camp in the Pacific Northwest, serving in the Spruce Production Division of the Aviation Section of the Signal Corps. The American lumber industry was waging total war.

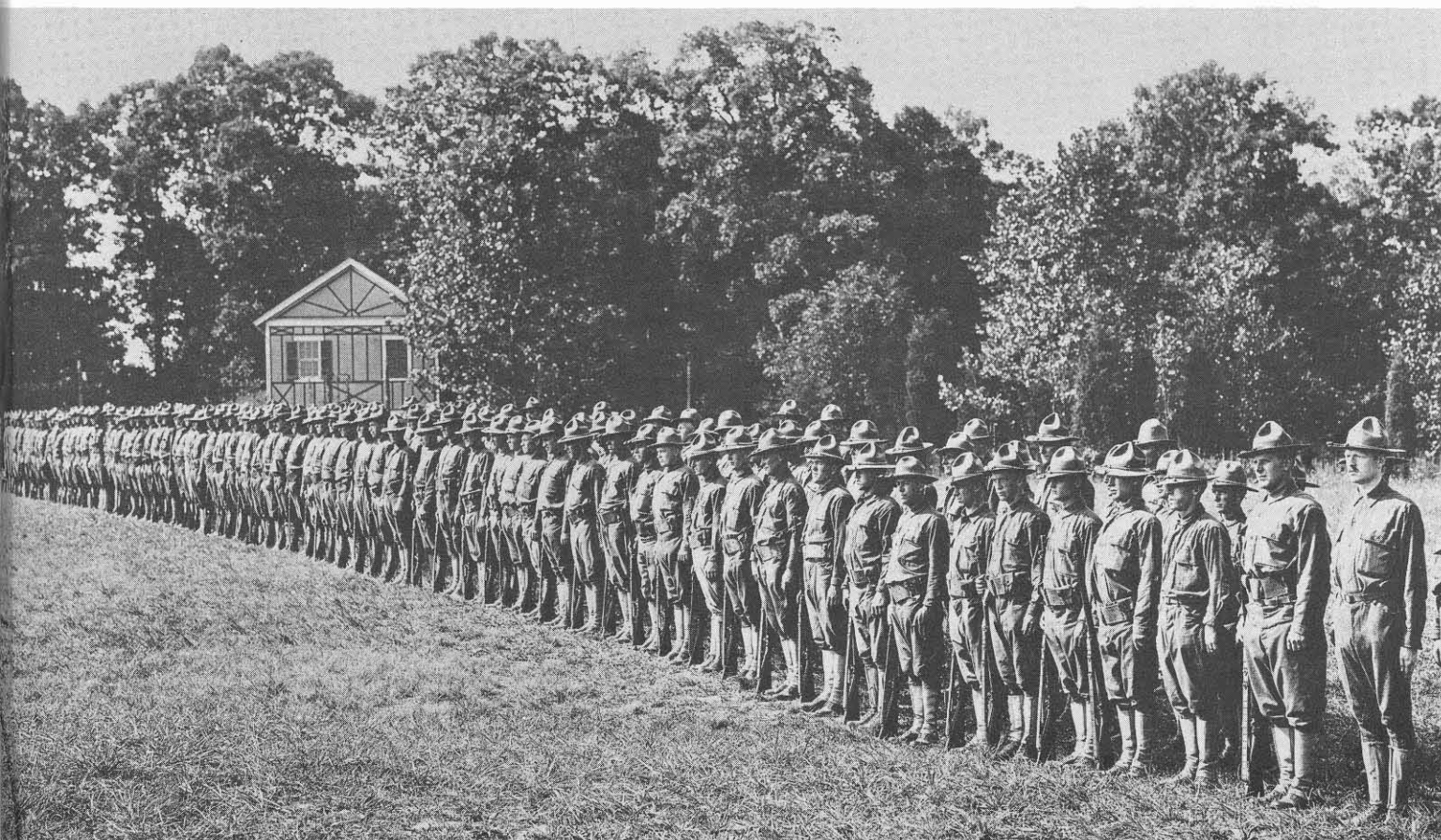
The 10th was in Europe by early October 1917 and separated into a number of detachments as-

signed to various parts of France. In its first months it was handicapped by a severe shortage of equipment. Logging began in early November; the first lumber was produced in borrowed French mills on November 25, and four days later appeared the first product of a wholly American operation. Despite various adversities, production increased steadily thereafter. Equipment shortages were resolved by July 1918, by which time the monthly program had been raised to 40 million feet of sawn lumber, with proportional increases in other products.

The size and complexity of the lumbering operations called for a number of changes in organization. By early 1918 forestry operations were directed by a Division of Construction and Forestry in the Services of Supply, headquartered at Tours and reporting to the Chief of Engineers, AEF. The deputy commander of the division,

Company F, 10th Engineers (Forestry), on review at the training camp at American University, Washington, D. C., 1917.

U. S. Forest Service



It is only just to these men that some of their unspectacular triumphs be recorded. Although coming from the forest and mountain regions of the United States and possessed of that adventurous turn of mind found in the best of soldiers, they were obliged to prove their mettle under very uninspiring circumstances. Working monotonously in quiet French forests, often very remote from the war, they still maintained a splendid morale. Having no contact with the enemy, they were denied the stimulus of combat and never knew the exhilaration of victory.

Historical Report of the Chief Engineer, . . .  
American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919 (1919), p. 384

## To France Immediately With the World's Biggest Regiment

An exceptional chance for men who want to serve their country in the French War zone—and go across at once—is offered by the Twentieth Engineers (Forest).

Men are invited to enlist for this service.

### Draft Age No Bar.

This invitation includes able-bodied white men of ages 18 to 40. Those subject to draft can be inducted into the Twentieth Engineers through their local boards. This makes it possible for men subject to draft to choose the Lumber and Forest Regiment as their place of service—where men of sawmill and woods experience may work at their own jobs.

### Pay of Enlisted Men.

The compensation will be the Regular Army pay. This is clear money, as the army furnishes all food and clothing. The pay ranges from \$96 a month for master engineer of a battalion to \$33 for a private.

Good men will be chosen at once to act as non-commissioned officers, with chance of further promotion for ability. The pay of a first sergeant or a sergeant first class is \$60. For supply sergeant, mess sergeant, stable sergeant and sergeant the pay is \$51.20.

### An Attractive Opportunity.

The men will work behind the lines in France. The regiment will be made

up of woodsmen and sawmill workers. Its duties will be to convert the French forests into railroad ties, bridge timbers, piling, telephone poles, trench planks, pit props and lumber for cantonments, hospitals, firewood, charcoal, etc.

Previous military training or experience is not necessary. The only requirement is that men should be skilled workers in the lines mentioned. The men will follow their regular occupations instead of having to go where the draft might send them.

### Men Are Much Needed.

To complete this regiment the War Department needs 3000 men. Will you be one of them?

### How To Enlist.

Men not subject to draft may enlist at any United States Recruiting Station. Men subject to draft may apply to their local boards, or application may be made through Major C. E. Clark, office of the Chief of Engineers, Room 25, War Department, Washington, D. C.

WIRE, WRITE OR MAIL THIS COUPON. Telegraph, write or fill out the form printed below, and address it to Major C. E. Clark, Office of the Chief of Engineers, Room 25, War Department, Washington, D. C.

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Address \_\_\_\_\_
3. Age \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Nationality \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Married or Single \_\_\_\_\_
6. Have you been called in draft? \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Will you enlist for the period of the war? \_\_\_\_\_
8. State briefly your working experience \_\_\_\_\_
9. What machinery can you operate? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Your present or former employer must certify to your qualifications by signing here \_\_\_\_\_

(Signature of Employer.)

(Employer's address for telegrams.)

## Enlist Now and Go to France Now

This Space Contributed by the American Forestry Association.

Recruitment announcement from AMERICAN FORESTRY 24 (February 1918): 117.

Woodruff, served also as the commander of the 20th Engineers and administered the program through fourteen battalion headquarters stationed around France. The continued growth and dispersal of operations after July 1918 threatened organizational chaos. In October 1918 the 10th and 20th Engineers (Forestry); the 41st, 42nd, and 43rd Engineers (Highway); and seven engineers service battalions were combined into the largest regiment in the American army, the 20th Engineers (Forestry), under Woodruff's command. In all, this giant regiment included the forty-nine engineers companies, twenty-eight engineers service companies, and fourteen battalion headquarters already in France, and recruit-

ment began (but was never completed) in the United States for an additional ninety-six companies and fifteen battalion headquarters to be dispatched to France posthaste. When the German army collapsed in November, Woodruff's regiment numbered over 20,000 officers and men, to which had been added since July over 10,000 quartermaster service troops detailed for firewood production. The 20th, as one observer noted, was "not a regiment, except in name, but a great manufacturing establishment." Its "main items of plant" included 282 sawmills, 1,850 logging wagons, 12,500 horses, 128 power tractors, 2,300 motor trucks and trailers, 400 miles of railroad track, 2,070 railroad logging cars, and 85 locomotives.

This remarkable force proved a source of amazement to knowledgeable military observers. Working in isolated, often dreary environments far from the scene of action, following an unvarying routine of work, the forestry units uniformly exceeded all expectations of production. In fact, their mills produced over three times their rated capacity. Their response to rush orders was often too enthusiastic, as every man redoubled his efforts. Early in the campaign a frantic demand for entanglement stakes was followed in several days by an equally frantic call for a halt, lest the troops at the front be buried in entanglement stakes. By the close of the last operations in May 1919 (production continued after the armistice to complete purchase contracts arranged previously), the woodsmen had produced 218,211,000 feet of lumber, 3,051,137 standard-gauge railroad ties, 954,667 small ties, 1,926,603 miscellaneous round products (over half entanglement stakes), 39,065 pieces of piling, 4,669 fagots and fascines, and 534,000 cords of fuelwood. The maximum cut in one month was 53 million board feet in October 1918. And it should be noted that the forestry troops were responsible for shipment as well as production of their output.

Like the railroad regiments, the forestry units conformed themselves only in part to the ways of the military. Operations were organized and conducted much as in logging camps and sawmills in the United States, the substitution of military rank for such titles as camp superintendent, woods boss, or mill boss making little difference. The men of the 20th did what they knew how to do best, and they worked harder at it than they ever had before. Wielding tools instead of rifles, running sawmills at the limits of mechanical endurance, sweating to make roads and railways fit to haul their product to shipping points, carrying it on their backs or pulling it with their own muscles when roads or equipment were wanting, the U. S. Army's woodsmen could point with pride to a remarkable record. As they returned home in 1919, they could feel with justification that, axes in hand, they had done much to bring the Allies to victory. □