

**June 13, 1918** - Southampton

**June 16, 1918** - Le Havre, France

**June 20, 1918** - Blois

**June 23, 1918** - Haute-Marne  
**George Samuel Lee Selby**  
**Co. A. 41st Eng'rs. A.E.F.**  
**Home Address: Blountville,**  
**Tennessee U.S.A.**

**March 5, 1918** - Arrived Liverpool,  
England.

**March 8, 1918** - Winchester, England

**March 9, 1918** - Entered Hospital

**April 6, 1918** - Highcliffe on-sea

**August 16, 1918** - Sunday, Crossed  
"No Man's Land". Germans had held  
for years. Horrible sight indeed.

**August 17, 1918** - Thursday, arrived  
Houécourt.

**August 19, 1918** - Rec'd. 18 yr page  
letter. Houécourt, France.

**August 26, 1918** - Wednesday, arrived at front. Saint Miheil sector.

**September 25, 1918** - Broke relation with C.Q.G. at Ménil-la-Tour, France.

**September 28, 1918** - In my dug out in Argonne Forest. Barron shot into another dug  
out. Caused an awful explosion. Killed himself. Almost killed Sgt. Webb. The jar hurt me  
and two others badly. The next day I was in the firing squad. He was buried in nice  
French Cemetery in Argonne.

**October 2, 1918** - Left Ippécourt. Passed through Jubécourt, Clermont & Les Islettes.  
Clermont nice town built around large hill. Beautiful place. Shot all to pieces.

**October 3, 1918** - Arrived Argonne Forest.



**October 6, 1918** - Peace began. Was at Ménil-la-Tour on night shift.

**October 8, 1918** - Night. 30th Division, under command of Gen. Lewis captured Brancourt and Premont. Hard cold rain most of night, Although they drove "Huns" over three miles.

**October 11, 1918** - Spent day in Toul. Had a real nice time. Went in ammunition plant where it was operated by girls.

**October 13, 1918** - Left Ménil-la-Tour.

**October 14, 1918** - Arrived Commercy.

**October 15, 1918** - Arrived Ippécourt. Saw many fine grape vineyards around side of mountains. Lost between in Ménil-la-Tour & Commercy.

### C.Q.G.

Birthday, July 19

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**November 20, 1918** - Got orders to pack up. Thinking we would sail toot sweet<sup>†</sup>. I bet Joe Pridgen 10 francs we wouldn't be in USA January 1st (Hope So)

**November 27, 1918** - Left Argonne Forest for Les Islettes. Sent there to look after 27 head of horses.

**Thanksgiving Day** - Rain all day. Only three of us together. Y.M.C.A man gave us candy. Had syrup, cabbage, and tomatoes for our dinner. We talked how happy we were, 'cause we were safe & well.

**November 30, 1918** - Left for Souilly with 40 horses. I was very sick most all day on road. Riding motor cycle.

**December 2, 1918** - Was feeling much better. The boys arrive to get wood moved. So we could leave when orders came. Was glad to get away from Les Islettes. Stopped at Clermont to see doctor. Made the trip alright.

**December 8, 1918** - Visited Verdun. Cathedral shot all to pieces. Not one horse\* left.

**December 9, 1918** - Left Souilly for Bains-les-Bains. Train left lot of boys on the road. We were on the road three days. Boys robbed train for barrels of beer. Had one



fine but hard time. We went to drilling in the rain. Most of boys drank five coffee\*. Orders came for the beer to go to Giromagny. I for one had to go. And I raised hell, 'cause I didn't care to go. Lt. made me go. Giromagny is in the Vosges Mountains. Fine place. Prettiest girls in all of France & plenty of them. I like the place more than all of the places I have ever been. I went around over the town and the foothills of the Alps. Can see over across the Rhine and into Switzerland on clear days. One of the healthiest & best places in France. All of the boys are having some fine old times. 11 kilos from Belfort.

**December 12, 1918** - One from Épinal around the station. This little dame. Very good to me. The prettiest little girl wrote Épinal for me at Giromagny.

**December 15, 1918** - West 8 miles from Bains-les-Bains Station to the woods. Moving steer wood. Boys all unhappy.

**December 25, 1918** - On Xmas we had our jolly good time. Fine dinner. All the beer we could possibly drink. We had our Xmas dinner at Fontenoy. Some nice little town.

**January 15, 1919** - I was put on M.P. duty at Baines & Fontenoy. The boys were so mean they had to have 4 M.P. over there.

**February 13, 1919** - 5:00 A.M. I had some fine old times up until we pulled up for Gray. The people all hated to give us up. We were loved by everyone. We pulled camp. Two days & one night on the road. We arrived twenty kilos from Gray. Out in the Forest. Muddy. Rainy. Everyone is disgusted and lonesome. No one knows anything of when we will be going home.

**February 15, 1919** - This is Sunday, Feb. 15th and I am lonesome as can be. Five of us boys to gather. Grimby\*, Shealey\*, Simpson, Reasonover\*, & myself. The teamsters are just arriving now. They had a long trip with the horses from Baines to Gray. I wrote my little wife last night. Have been looking at the babies photos today. I told my lovely wife I was well and happy but I have the hives\*.

**February 21, 1919** - We rec'd orders to leave Gray for Tours. We all are so glad we don't know what to do. Today is Sunday Saturday. George Washington's birthday. We are not doing anything except let the horses cover \_\_\_\_\_\*. The boys are so proud we are going to leave this awful, lonesome place. Everyone thinks we will.

**February 22, 1919** - Today one year ago we were at Belvoir, Va. Left 3 AM for America \_\_\_\*. Four days later we embarked for somewhere in France. The wind has been blowing all day. I have been in my little "rag house" thinking of my dear ones at home. I rec'd a letter today from a little French girl at Fontenoy. Jeanne Vouili\*. Monday night at 8:15, orders came to pack our barracks bags send them to station. Get everything ready to leave here at 3:00 AM.

**February 26, 1919** - One year ago from this date, we were marching away from American U. at D.C. to in trains, for somewhere. We knew not where. We thought we were going to France & we landed at Liverpool, Eng. Tonight, we have some orders. We are leaving Sauvigney-lès-Gray for Tours. We think. Although, we are hoping & trusting we are going to the states. This is a muddy, gloomy old place. Stayed here only 8 or 9 days. I only worked one day. Just sit around camp, and thought of my dear ones at home. I have been on sick report most of time. Headache & bad cold. Grimby\*, Shealey\*, Simpson, Reasonover\*, & myself stay together. We had some good joking times here. Some of our dear boys are under the clay that were with us this time one year ago. "They are planted in Eng. and Sunny France".

**February 27, 1919** - Arrived Tours. 3:00 A.M. On road three days. Orders are changed. Myers, Floyd, Jones, Simpson, Grimby\*, Fourism\*, Owens, myself are still aboard train compartment H. German car #1978. We are all tired & worn. Slept in close place on floor in racks. Any place we could find. No steam in the cars. We almost freeze at nights. Don't get much to eat. Everyone is trying to think we will soon be going home. It is hard to believe we are going to Southern France. Although we understand we have to go to some burnt forrest two hundred kilos from here. Surprised to come here this A.M. at 7:30.

**February 27, 1919** - Left Tours for Bléré 20 Kilos south of Tours. Nice camp. We went on trucks. Everyone liked the place. Stayed there about two weeks. Was ordered back to Tours to build Y.M.C.A. building. I worked one day in the casual camp then sent to Saint-Pierre-des-Corps to work French labor. Have gotten along nicely.

**March 11, 1919** - Tours, France.

**April 20, 1919** - Easter Sunday. Tours, France. This is Easter Sunday. I am now in the K.C. Just finished a letter to my wife. Am happy 'cause I think I will soon be on my way home. Tours is a large town. I have enjoyed myself very much here. Nice shows to go too.

**April 20, 1919** - On Monday at 22 Rue de Chinon, Tours, France. I find I was sick. Went to Dr. four or five times. Also hospital for test.

**April 26, 1919** - Dr. burned me. I am queasy, 'cause I think may go. Will soon start for home.

**May 1, 1919** - Is French big holiday. They take everything. Tear up things that belong to rich man. They celebrate for their own right. We have orders not to leave our camp until 6:30 P.M. 'cause they know the "yanks" would make short work of the Frenchman. The French are jealous of the Yanks. Perhaps there would be trouble. I have a bunch of colored troops working today. And it is raining as usual.

**May 28, 1919** - Wed. 1:00 P.M. Company formed to leave Tours. We were on the train seven hours. Landed at Le Mans. One of the dustiest places in France. About forty thousand men at Le Mans.

**July 1, 1919** - Sunday. We stood our final field inspection. We were hot and dusty when we finished. Was short two combs and fifteen yards of tape for dog tags. We now have orders to leave Le Mans Monday, July 2 for Brest. Everyone is happy.

**Notes:**

Vada 5 or 5 ½

Ollie, Gloves 6 ¾

Waist Size 38

Wagon: Gravel 15th \_\_\_\_\_ \*

Wagon: Gravel 6 C \_\_\_\_\_ \*

George S. L. Selby  
Blountville, Tennessee U.S.A

Mar.

Mar.

Ap April Blois

Argonne

**Newspaper Clipping:** One amusement for which no extra charge is made at the Isle of Wight is bathing. The charge, as in 1914, is still ?d.\* per person.

\* **Handwriting illegible**

† **Toot-Sweet** - Quickly; immediately. 'At the toot', at once. Corruption of the French 'tout de suite'. General. Corruption of the French. From 1917 (*OED*). Attested in numerous sources.

**Map:**

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?hl=en&authuser=0&mid=zHH8Meq8Az-8.kWJJzLztUlu8>

**Links:**

<http://www.20thengineers.com/ww1-bn13.html>

Form 1 **447** REGISTRATION CARD No. **127**

1 Name in full **George Samuel Le Selby** Age in yrs. **25**  
(Given name) (Family name)

2 Home address **Blountville Tenn**  
(No.) (Street) (City) (State)

3 Date of birth **Dec 7 1891**  
(Month) (Day) (Year)

4 Are you (1) a natural-born citizen, (2) a naturalized citizen, (3) an alien, (4) or have you declared your intention (specify which)? **Natural-born**

5 Where were you born? **Lexington Ky USA**  
(Town) (State) (Nation)

6 If not a citizen, of what country are you a citizen or subject?

7 What is your present trade, occupation, or office? **Farmer**

8 By whom employed? **Myself**

Where employed? **White Pine**

9 Have you a father, mother, wife, child under 12, or a sister or brother under 12, solely dependent on you for support (specify which)? **Wife & 2 children**

10 Married or single (which)? **Married** Race **Caucasian**  
(which) (specify which)

11 What military service have you had? Rank **None**; branch \_\_\_\_\_; years \_\_\_\_\_; Nation or State \_\_\_\_\_

12 Do you claim exemption from draft (specify grounds)?

I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.

**1095** **Sam Selby**  
(Signature or mark)

If person is of African descent, mark this census

REGISTRAR'S REPORT

1 Tall, medium, or short (specify which)? **Tall** Slender, medium, or stout (which)? **Medium**

2 Color of eyes **Blue** Color of hair **Brn** Bald? **No**

3 Has person lost arm, leg, hand, foot, or both eyes, or is he otherwise disabled (specify)? **No**

I certify that my answers are true, that the person registered has read his own answers, that I have witnessed his signature, and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows:

**J. H. [Signature]**  
(Signature of Registrar)

Precinct **5** **Farmers C.**

City or County **Duane Tenn**

State **Tennessee** **June 5, 1917**  
(Date of registration)

**41-1-37A**

One amusement for which no extra charge is made at the Isle of Wight is bathing. The charge, as in 1914, is still 3d. per person.

GEORGE SAMUEL LEE SELBY.

C. A. 1ST ENGRS.

A. E. F.

HOME ADD.

BLOUNTVILLE,

NEW TENNESSEE, U.S.A.

G.S. DAIRY.

Lion Pool Eng.  
MARCH 5-1918.  
Winchester Eng. March 8-18  
Intrud Hoop. March 9-18  
Highcliff on sea April 6-18  
South Hampton June 13-18  
Lahavet France " 16-18  
Blois " " 20-18  
St. Maure " " 23-18  
Dun. Aug. 17 arrived

Home Court  
WED. Aug. 26 - arrived at  
Front. St. Michel sector.  
Sunday Aug. 26-18. Crossed  
"70 miles land, Germans had  
held for years.  
Terrible sight indeed.

Oct. 6-1918, Peace began  
Was at Minel. Ca. - tower  
on night shift.  
Night of Oct 8-18.  
Night of 30th Division, under  
Command of Gen. Fournier  
Captured Blancourt and  
Tremont, had cold rain  
most of night, after they  
drove "home" over three miles  
Oct. 11-1918  
Spent day in Toul. Had real  
live time. War in ammunition  
plant. when it was operated  
by girls.  
Oct. 13 left Minel. Ca. - tower.  
Arrived, Commares Oct 14 -  
Arrived Epievart \* 15-1918  
Saw many fine traps (snipers)  
around hill of mounds.  
Lost better Minel. Ca. - tower  
& Commares.

C.O.G.  
Birth day, July 19 -  
Recd. 18 pages Little Aug. 19-18  
Home Court France.  
Brody relation with  
C.O.G. 25 Sept - 1918  
at Minel. Ca. - tower France.  
In my dug out in response  
first Barron shot me & a  
other dog out. Caused an  
over hot explosion, killed  
him self almost killed  
Sgt. Webb. The gas  
hurt me & two others  
badly. The next day I  
was in the firing squad  
we were buried in mine  
French cemetery in  
Arras.

Left Liverpool Oct. 2 - 1918  
found things Jobcourt,  
Claremont & Estelle,  
Claremont nice town built  
around large hill beautiful  
place. Shot all 8 pieces,  
joined Argonne Forest  
Oct 3th. Left out in  
rain, awful breeze in  
Argonne forest.

Nov. 20th. Got orders to  
pack up, shipping us water  
said not sweet.  
& bet for Bridger 10 francs  
we would sit in in USE  
Jan. 1st. (40th St)

Nov. 21. Left Argonne forest  
for Estelle. Sent there  
to look after 22 head of  
horses. Handing

day. Rain all day. Only this  
of us to gather. Y.M.C.A. man  
could get candy. had syrup  
Cabbages and tomato for  
our dinner. We talked and  
talked we were, once we were  
safe & well.

Nov. 30. Left for Soosley  
with 40 horses. I was very  
sick most all day, on road.  
riding into Goh. Dec. 2nd.  
was feeling much better.  
I was anxious to get word  
about so we could have our  
orders come. Was glad to  
get away from the sick.  
Stopped at Claremont to  
see Dr. Made the trip  
alright.

Dec. 8th - 1918  
Visited Verdun. A lot of  
shot all 10 pieces not one horse  
left. Dec. 9th. Left Soosley  
for Bains-les-Bains. train  
left lot of fog on the road  
We were on the road three  
days. Long robbed train for  
bundles of beer. Had one  
find but hard time.  
We went to drilling in  
the rain. Most of boys drank  
fire life.

Orders came for the man  
to go to Giromany  
I for one had to go. And  
I raised hell, cause I  
didn't care to go.

At. Made me go. Giromany  
in in the Vosges into fire  
place. practice into in all  
of France & plenty of  
them. I like the place  
more than all of the others  
I have ever been. I went  
around over the town  
and the foot hills of  
the Alps. Can see over  
across the Rhine and  
into Switzerland an  
other days. One of the  
healthiest & best places  
in France. All of the  
boys are having such  
fine old time. 4 miles  
from Belfort.



Dec. 12<sup>th</sup>.  
Drove from Epinal around  
the Station. Nice little  
place. Very good & nice.  
The prettiest little girl  
wrote Epinal for me at  
Quomagny.

15<sup>th</sup> Dec. Went 8 miles from  
Bain-les-Bains Station  
to the woods. Working steep  
wood. Boys all on happy.  
On Xmas we had our jolly  
good time fine drinks  
all the beer we could  
possibly drink. We  
had our Xmas Dinner at  
Fontenoy, some nice  
little towns.

Jan. 15-1919. Inca just  
over M.P. duty at Bain  
& Fontenoy. The boys  
were so merry they had  
to travel 4 M.P. over there  
I had some fine old  
kind of outfit we  
pulled up for Gray. The  
people all hated &  
quit 12 M.P. We were  
lucky by our own. We  
pulled camp Feb. 13  
5:00 A.M. Two days &  
one night on the road.  
We arrived twenty miles  
from Gray. Out in the  
Forest. muddy rainy

Every one is disgusted  
and homesick. No one  
I know any thing of  
when we will be going  
home. This is Feb.  
Sunday, Feb. 15. And I  
am homesick as ever to  
find of 12 boys to gather  
primly, Schally, Simpson  
Karnover & my self.  
The teamster are just  
arriving now. They  
had a long trip with  
the horses from Bain  
to Gray. I wrote my  
little wife last night.

After lunch looking at  
the babies photos & etc.  
I told my baby wife I  
was well and happy.  
Put 9 hours to sleep.  
Feb. 21. We had orders to  
leave Gray for Tross. We  
all are so glad we don't  
know what to do. Today  
is ~~Sunday~~ Saturday  
George Washington Birth  
Day. We are not doing  
any thing except let the  
horses cover mares. The  
boys are so happy we  
are going to leave their  
awful homesick place.  
Ever one thinks we will

To day and year ago we were  
at Belvoir Va. Left 3:00 pm. for  
America to. few days later  
we embarked for France  
when in France. The wind  
has been blowing all day, I  
have been in my little  
"cog house" thinking of my  
dear one at home. Fried.

a letter to day from  
a little French girl at  
Fontenay. Jeanne Vautin.

Monday night at 8:15; ordered  
Came to pack our little bags  
and then to station. Got  
everything ready to leave here  
at 3:00 A.M. One year ago  
from this date, we were  
marching away from  
American V. at D.C.

to in France, for some where  
we have not where we thought  
we were going to France. &  
we landed at Fives pool  
Aug. To night, we have some  
orders. We are leaving  
Lawrence - les - Gray.  
for Tours, we think.

Altho we are hoping &  
trusting we are going to the  
states. This is a wretchedly  
gloomy old place. Stayed  
here only 8 or 9 days. I  
only worked one day. just  
sit around camp, and  
thought of my dear one  
at home. I have been on  
sick report most of time.  
had ash & bad cold.  
Grimy, Shaky, unclean  
messmore & my self

stay to gather. We had some  
good looking times here.  
Some of our dear boys are  
under the clay, that were with  
us this time one year ago.  
"They are planted in Eng,  
and Spring France"  
Feb. 21. 1919.

Arrived Tours. 3:00 A.M. on  
road this day. Orders are changed.  
Tupper, T. Ross, Jones, Sampson,  
Grimy, Johnson, Adams, &  
my self are still aboard  
train compartment Fr. 200  
German Car. # 1978. We are  
at this & now. still in  
close place, on floor in each.  
any place we could find.  
We breathe in the car. We  
almost freeze at nights. don't  
get much to eat. even one  
is trying to think we will  
soon be going home. It is  
hard to believe we are  
going to Southern France.

Other we understand we have  
to go to some point just  
beyond the sea. This is on  
at 7:30

Left Tours Feb 24-19 for  
Blue 20 miles north of  
Tours. My camp, we went  
in trucks. ever are called  
the place. stayed there  
about two weeks. Now  
arrived back to Tours  
to build Y.M.C.A.  
building. Worked one  
day in the casual camp  
then sent to St. Paul  
de Corps & work French  
labor. Have gotten along  
nicely. This is easter  
Sunday. I am now in  
the N.C. just

finished a letter to my  
wife. Am happy. Care, &  
that I will soon be on  
my way home. Four in  
a large town. I have  
enjoyed my self very  
much here. This shows  
to go too.  
Easter Sunday, April  
20-1919 Gars France

May 1st. In French by  
hollow days they take some  
thing. Hear of things  
that belong to rich man.  
They celebrate for their  
own right. We had dinner  
not to leave on camp until  
6:30 PM. And they have

the "Yankee" word  
hardly about word of  
the Frenchman. They  
French are jealous of  
the Yankee. They  
They want to be  
I have a bunch of  
Colored people meeting  
to day. And it is  
raining in usual.  
May 28-9 Wed. 1:00 PM

Company formed  
to leave Paris. We  
were on the train some  
hours. Landed at  
St. Maurice. One of the  
distinct places

in France. About  
forty thousand men  
at the manor. On  
Sunday July 1st, we  
stood in a final field  
inspection. The weather  
hot and dusty when  
we finished were  
about ten comb  
and fifteen etc.  
of tape for log tape.  
We now have a duty  
to leave the manor  
Monday July 2 for  
Paris. Every one

is happy

22 rue de Chinon Tours.

On Monday April 20 - 1919  
At Tours France I find I  
was sick. Went to Dr. for 9  
five times. Also Hosp. for 24.  
April 26<sup>th</sup> Dr. found me. I am  
many, Course I think my Co.  
Will soon start for home.

Vada 3 or 3 1/2  
Oblu, glava. 6 3/4  
Waist size 38

Wagon, iron, 130 lb  
Wagon, gravel to 100 lb

George S. Selley  
Brentville  
Geneva

March 11 - 1919  
Geneva

W.P.  
Wagon, iron, 130 lb  
Wagon, gravel to 100 lb

## **The 41st Engineers (13th Battalion, 20th Engineers)**

**From the book "Twentieth Engineers - France 1917-1918-1919" by Alfred H. Davies**

Plans for the formation of an auxiliary battalion of the Twentieth Engineers were perfected in December, 1917, and organization was commenced at Camp American University, D. C, early in January. As planned, the duties of the new unit were principally the building of roads and bridges necessary for production and delivery of forest products. Recruits arriving at Washington were assigned, and executives appointed, with this scheme in view.

The unit was organized as a separate Regiment of Engineers, with four companies, and an authorized strength of 28 officers and 1024 men. Its training period was brief, and interspersed with construction duty at the new Camp Humphreys, Va., 20 miles south of Washington. The wind up of this period came Sunday, February 24th, 1918, when the outfit formed and started down Massachusetts Avenue for the waiting troop-train. Despite the usual military secrecy of the movement, a brigade of Washington damsels happened around, with a display of sentiment that would have justified the assumption that Hearst had put out a Special Edition on the event.

At 8 the morning of the 26th, the Regiment sailed from New York Harbor aboard the giant transport "Olympic' The third day out a convoy of three American chasers attached themselves. The trip proved exciting. On two occasions submarines were encountered. The first, March 1st, was supposedly sunk. The second, which attacked three days later, in plain view of the troops on deck, was sunk by a depth bomb.

The outfit landed at Liverpool March 5th, and entrained at once for the American rest camp at Winnaldown, Winchester. By unusual luck the men were accorded an opportunity to visit historic points about Winchester—the Cathedral and ancient Saxon ruins.

March 10th the journey was continued. Crossing the channel from Southampton, the 41st arrived at LeHavre, and went into rest camp for the second time. The next day they started into the unknown interior, crammed into the famed "Hommes 40s." After the usual jolts, the usual diet of bully beef and hardtack, the usual complaints over whose feet were on your chest the night before, and the usual pointless orders not to get out of the car. Headquarters arrived at the village of Bricon, in the province of Haute Marne, twenty miles from Chaumont G.H.Q.

For two weeks the detachment was the center of attraction for the inhabitants of Bricon, as they were the first Americans stationed there. By this time their permanent duties had been mapped out. The operation at Eclaron, Haute Marne, conducted by the 5th and 8th Companies, had assumed sufficient importance to be directed as a separate district, and 41st Headquarters was assigned to the new administration.

In the meantime Co. C. which was later styled the 40th Co. of the Twentieth Engineers, was also sent to Eclaron, and added to the working force of the camp. By this time the original plans for employment of the 41st as a road battalion had fallen through completely, and all its units had merged with older forestry establishments.

Co. A (the 38th Co.) was attached to the Second Battalion, Épinal District, and arrived April 8th at Chatenois, 10 miles east of Neufchateau, where they were at once added to the force of the 15th Co., logging and operating a French mill. From this time on to the Armistice the adventures of the 38th and 15th Companies were shared in common. 80 men of the 38th were sent to Hortes, 20 miles east of Langres to assist the 15th detachment operating a camp and native mill. A further mixed detail took over a French mill at Lamarche, Vosges, June 12th, and a smaller force opened a tie camp at Merrey, Haute Marne. Both camps were abandoned in August, and the forces moved to Gironcourt, where an American mill was built, with a capacity of ten thousand board feet.

Sweeping changes occurred August 28th, when the 38th and 15th were relieved from duty in the Central or Chatenois area of the Épinal District and moved to the First Army Area in the Toul sector. From this time on the duties of the outfit were of a mobile nature. All through the region, covered by the First and Second Army operations, small camps were run, in some cases supplemented by portable mills. The 38th were represented at most of the 14 camps, including three in the Argonne Forest.

It was during this period that the most tragic incident in the career of the company occurred. Captain Harry E. McPherson, who was in charge of the mill at Ippécourt, near Souilly, undertook a reconnaissance of newly-won ground with a view to moving camp forward as soon as the lines were advanced. Accompanied by Lieut. W. A. Fair, medical officer attached to the unit, and a Sergeant, the Captain traversed a clearing exposed to the enemy lines. A burst of machine gun fire opened, and the Captain fell mortally wounded. Lieut. Fair hurried to his assistance, regardless of the fusillade, and met death at his side. A determined stand by the Germans made the spot a no man's land for several days; when the ground was finally won the bodies had been interred, and their location could not be determined.

For Lieut. Fair's bravery he was awarded a posthumous Distinguished Service Cross—the only such decoration accorded a member of the Twentieth Engineers, and the only decoration awarded for other than executive service.

The memory of Captain McPherson and Lieut. Fair is revered by the veterans of the Company. The Captain had served with the 41st since its inception, and is remembered by those he led as a man of honor and ability.

Upon the cessation of fighting, the 38th was gradually brought together, and resumed company organization at Bains-les-Bains, Vosges, about the middle of December. Here they resumed routine work, and busied themselves at fuel production. Early in April they journeyed to Tours, and served for two months on miscellaneous assignments, including convoy duty. Early in June they moved on to LeMans, accompanied by the 39th (Co. B of the 41st), and sailed from St. Nazaire the 14th, on the transport "Texan," which also carried the 22nd Co., Eighth Battalion. They landed at Newport News the 26th.

The 39th Co. was attached throughout to the Dijon District, under the Third Battalion administration, in the Department of Cote d'Or. Immediately after striking inland from LeHavre, the outfit reported at Vanvey, to assist Co. E of the Tenth Engineers at that operation. Here they labored until the timber available was exhausted, in July, when the force removed to St. Julian, 8 miles north of Dijon. The mill was rapidly built—a 20,000 capacity McDonough—and logging started on a large scale. The strength of the operation was increased to 600 by the addition of

the 47th Co. Shortly after the Armistice the 36th Co., as E of the Tenth was now designated, left for home, and in April the 39th started westward, and rejoined the 38th Co.

Co. D (the 41st Co.), underwent a totally different course. From LeHavre they proceeded direct to the Landes region in the south, arriving at Pontenx March 15th, for duty with the First Battalion, Tenth Engineers. At first the unit was split up. Half the company joined the 33rd Co., assisting at their logging camp on Aureilhan River for a month, then transferring to the mill on the lake. Early in August the detachment was moved eastward to the hamlet of Sore, where they built a new mill.

In the meantime the other detachment had been detailed to reinforce the Bourricose detachment of the Tenth Engineers (32nd Co.) operating a 20,000 mill two miles east of Pontenx. September 14th the Bourricose camp was turned over to the 41st intact, and 32nd relieving the Sore outfit.

Though dangerously handy to the Burnt Area, the 41st drew a blank, and stayed on at their own camp until released from overseas duty in May. They sailed aboard the "K. I. Luckenbach," May 17th, and were mustered out at Camp Merritt early in June.

Headquarters Detachment conducted the Eclaron District until its abandonment, then shifted to St. Dizier, whence they started in May, 1919, for Brest and Home.

## **The Burned Area**

A natural consequence of the Armistice was the feeling that sailing orders were sure to come soon to the camps of the Twentieth Engineers, and many were the preparations—innocently hopeful preparations—for an early departure. Barrack bags were overhauled; surplus clothing turned in at the supply window; ring making took on a final spurt; and many a man wrote home to stop sending letters to him in France. Everybody was wondering what the delouser was like; what stuff would be barred from their baggage on the ship; and whether the guys that won the war — the M.P.'S—still infested the home towns. Projects in the woods were hurried to completion, the activity excelling anything on record except the feverish haste before the big offensives. It was noised about that the outfits would go home in the order they had come over, which meant at intervals of about weeks. And in some cases the men were led to believe that a certain date, a few weeks ahead, was to be The Day for them. The old Tenth Engineers were going, it was said, about the first of 1919 and of course the rest would follow very soon. Of course! In response to a telegram from Bordeaux three weeks after the Armistice, one company reported that it would be ready December 18th. It was; but it sailed for home half a year after the Armistice.

The worst was yet to come. The extensive road repair program was launched, with the Regiment included in the plans, and the Burned Area was added to the list of final jobs which were noted in a wet blanket letter distributed gratis among the camps by the Section Forestry officer. The letter came to be known as "The Knees of the Gods," and we came in time to realize that the exuberant and over-confident Twentieth Engineers of the days just following the Armistice were upon the knees of the military gods and were being mauled with a field shoe. The shoe had hobs in it, and each individual nail could be labelled appropriately with such words as "post-armistice construction," "disappointment," "road rock," "departure of the old Tenth," and "Burned Area." Verily, we were a bitter crowd in those days, but the blame



is found in the phrase, C'est la Guerre.

In December, 1918, the erstwhile stationary detachments of the Regiment began to move to other operations. Men had to go to the old Tenth camps, and as the outfits moved into the Big Burn their places often had to be taken by the transfer of other troops. And so the companies milled around, never knowing what the morn would bring forth. The Burned Area operation took definite form and company after company wallowed around there in the rain and mud, with guards to keep the men in the Area. About a million troops up north were drilling and playing ball, and it seemed as though the high authorities of the S. O. S., the men who had the power to start this large new operation after the war was over, could have mustered enough labor from the hundreds of thousands marking time to have cleaned up the Burn in 60 days. But no; the natives had set the fire; hundreds of available forest troops had not been used in fighting it; and it was therefore logical to compel the hard-working Twentieth, a two-chevron organization, to work there six months, was it not? It was not. Not at all logical, and not at all an act of kindness to a regiment that had never failed to do more than was expected of it, but the following historical sketch by Major Swift Berry shows the operation to have been considered as a military necessity and essential to the strategy of finance and liaison that marked the Regiment's withdrawal from France.

#### **(MAJOR BERRY'S STORY)**

During August, 1918, the Forest Section was actively pressing the French for more timber because additional forestry troops were being raised in the United States. The officer in charge of the location, acquisition, and measurement of all stumpage for the Twentieth Engineers in the Dax, Captieux, Pontenx. and Mimizan Districts was called to Headquarters and directed to secure enough additional timber for 12 and possibly 15 more companies in the Landes region.

The area in the communes of Pontenx and Lue and Parentis was burned about September 4 and 5, 1918. Some 30,000 or 40,000 of the trees burned at that time had previously been purchased and paid for by the A. E. F. for the operation at Bourricos, and possibly twice that many on the other side of the fire area had been similarly purchased for the Canadians. On the day after the fire the French military authorities wired to enquire what portion of the burn the A. E. F. would purchase and they requested that further purchase of green timber be held up until the burn was examined. The fire-killed trees were offered at a price of about 70% of that for green timber. Accordingly the area was examined; a line agreed upon between the Canadians and the A. E. F. giving about 50%, to each; and the French authorities were informed that the A. E. F. would take all of its portion of the tract having timber large enough to make ties. The tracts answering this requirement were examined on the ground with representatives of the French Engineers and they were designated on maps. Pressure was brought by the French military authorities to have us purchase the extensive areas of smaller trees for mine props, but we objected and they did not insist. The purchase of the burned area was at the time a good piece of business for the A. E. F. for these reasons: The burned timber was as good for early cutting as the green; we needed a large amount of timber immediately; the price was reasonable; and our good faith in taking the fire-killed timber made the French authorities very willing to continue requisitioning live timber for us.

Consequently, by September 10th or 15th, the French officials had notified the owners of all the tracts selected by us that they could not sell on the open market and that these tracts

were requisitioned for the A.E.F. Under the French military law the deal was to all intents closed at that time (two months before the Armistice) and according to agreements between the two Armies the A. E. F. was responsible for the timber from the time it agreed to take the tracts, which was done by letter in the usual manner. There remained only the measurement of the trees and the signing of the formal contracts between the owners and the French officials. The measurements all took place before November 1st and some of the contracts were signed before the Armistice and some after. But the A. E. F. was really in possession of the tracts two months before the Armistice.

On November 11th, the A.E.F. had on its hands in the Landes enough timber to supply the companies operating there, and 17 additional companies, until June, 1919. It was also obligated under contract to clean up the tops and limbs in the Mimizan district, and to do various other cleaning up jobs. Naturally the object was to close up with as little money loss and work as possible and negotiations were opened with French headquarters to this end. The French decision was that they badly needed timber for reconstruction; that they had not enough labor to cut it with; that, unless cut the coming winter, the burned timber would spoil; and that they would not release the A. E. F. from responsibility for the burned timber. They asked that as long as the U.S. forestry troops were kept in France they be used in working up the Pontenx and Captieux burns. They agreed to pay market prices for the lumber produced and to relieve the A. E. F. of loss on the green timber purchased for it and no longer required and of cleaning up in the Mimizan dunes and elsewhere.

Therefore, in order to reduce work and money obligations elsewhere; to save the economic loss of the burned timber; and to aid the French to some extent in reconstruction ; the Headquarters of the S. O. S. agreed with the French to rush mill construction in the burned areas, and to do what work was possible in manufacturing the timber, until it came time for each battalion to sail.

In judging the results of this decision conditions should be considered as they were then. The equipment used was in France and would have been sold to the French anyway at the same price. The cost of the construction incident to the burned area operations was only a fraction of what the loss would have been if we had been forced to sell the fire-killed timber on the open market, and also the green timber, all of which green timber was taken back by the French Government with no loss to the A. E. F. The French were furnished some material for reconstruction, though not as much as had been hoped. And none of the battalions that worked in the burn was delayed in sailing because of that fact. If they had not been there they would have been, of necessity, put at other work and would have taken their turn at embarkation just the same. This is proven by the fact that the first outfit released from the burn had to do a month's work near Brest, although its standing for embarkation was high.

The feeling of headquarters was that by having the men work in the burned areas they could be more comfortably housed; they would be doing the work that they came to France for and that they liked; they would not be scattered all over France on road repair work and other assignments under commanders who had no particular interest in them; and they would be kept together, with the best chance for early embarkation priority. Genuine hard luck was met with in regard to weather conditions. During the winter of 1917-1918 the weather had been such that work could have been done with comfort in the Pontenx-Lue burned area, whereas the winter of 1918-1919 was one of exceptional rain.

On the whole, the burned area operation cannot reasonably be considered a failure or an imposition. Had the men known the whole facts at the time their feeling would have been different, and had the weather been normal working in the burn until home-going orders came would have been better. The headquarters of the S. O. S. gave the word to start, and inasmuch as those involved were men of high rank and wide experience, with better jobs awaiting most of them in the States, the work was not undertaken to continue anyone in jobs in France. There was no idea of reward from the French involved, but of course there was a very natural tendency to play square with the French, whose cooperation in requisitioning timber for the Americans made it possible for the Twentieth Engineers to hand up an enviable record in supplying the A. E. F. with lumber. Efforts were made to get the original owners to take back the burned timber after the Armistice, but most of them refused to take back the dead timber at any price as they were in no position to cut it before it would spoil in June. Two very considerable areas were, however, taken back by the owners.

Standard gauge railroad two miles in length connected the Burn with the French mail line. In the burned tract the railroad branched three ways, with double loading tracks 1,300 feet long, twin mills and a camp at the end of each branch. As operations came to a close in other parts of France, material that no one needed was sent to the Pontenx Burn and at one time 75 cars of engineer material were waiting to be unloaded. The operation considered as a unit has been called the largest lumber plant ever constructed in Europe.

As time went on the activities and administration of the Regiment centered more and more around the Pontenx District. In April seventeen companies, two battalion headquarters, medical detachments and a bakery detachment were included in the district, most of these troops being in the Burn. Nearly every battalion at some time was represented in the Burned Area. Regimental Headquarters passed through Pontenx late in June and about a dozen men were still clinging to duty there in August.