RUNNING RECONNAISSANCE OF FRENCH MARITIME PINE FOR THE BRITISH ARMY.

By R. A. Fletcher ('20)

The best thing about this story is, it's true. All the dates, places, people and facts are real and can be verified upon examination. For that reason it may have a little more interest for those people who do not care particularly how a forest reconnaissance is run, but who might be interested to know how two Americans came to be attached with the British for ten months and what they did in that time.

My outfit, the 6th Battalion, 20th Engineers, Forestry, pulled into Castets the 13th of April, 1918, and immediately began the job of putting up a semi-permanent camp. I landed on the job of checking out lumber from a small French saw mill nearby, for the use of the battalion in building our own sawmills and for various other purposes. We were located in the British zone of timber operations and for that reason were more or less under British direction at least as far as logging went, but that I found out later.

Among other things which we had all been asked to do two or three times in the past was the jotting down on a card of whatever kind of work we had done or could do. One thing I put down was surveying, without the least idea at the time of what those few words would soon lead to.

It was the morning of April 26th and I was just on my way to the French mill when Capt. E. J. Gillouly stopped me casually and inquired if I had ever surveyed any timber. I answered in the affirmative and he said there might be a little work along that...
line in a few days. That was all there was said at the time and I went on over to check out lumber. However, the morning was only well started when the orderly came over and told me I was wanted at the office. Maj. F. S. Kellogg and Captain Gillouly were there and the first thing they asked was if I wanted to go out surveying for a few days with a British major, I said "sure" as any change from camp life was welcome. I was told to be ready traveling light, in fifteen minutes, and I was: about the only stuff I took along being my mess kit, soap, towel and shaving outfit. It was then I became acquainted with Maj. C. G. Toogood of the British Directorate of Forestry, his chauffeur, Geo. Hutchinson, and his Vauxhall car. The man who was to be my partner for several months then came on the scene, T. W. Love, a forester from Syracuse and also a member of my company. At the same time I met the interpreter, M. V. C. DeCourcelle, who had been with the major several months. Thus I came to know at once everyone I was going to work with, at least for a month or more. We didn’t hesitate after the introductions were over but stepped right in and began spinning the kilometers cut behind us at the rate of one a minute, soon leaving the camp far behind.

Neither Love nor I saw that camp again for over a month. We started right in on the job the very first day, stopping at the Major’s headquarters at Mimizan Plage for lunch and then making a quick drive up to Audenge to get in some work that afternoon. There was a Canadian company there then, beginning operations, so we ate right at the camp and with the aid of the C. O. did some quick work, as the timber for the most part was laid out in squares. By the next evening we had completed our data and “Hutchy” took us both to the little town on the beach (Plage means beach). As the maps were wanted in a hurry we didn’t wait for Sunday to get by but went right after them, finishing the tracing about one-thirty in the morning. That allowed it to get off on the early morning train for Paris where the blue prints were made, the major having no apparatus at that time.

So the jobs went and the weeks rolled by just like they were both on greased skids. A few days here and a few days there and back to old Mimizan Plage to make the maps and finish the details. At first we thought our work with Major Toogood was only going to be for a few weeks, but it wasn’t long before he told Love and I that there probably was six months of it ahead of us and maybe more than that. So we went for all our staff at Castets, and got most of it, and settled with the headquarters company of the 4th Battalion, 20th Engineers, who were also at Mimizan Plage.

The methods we used in surveying and mapping soon became very well standardized and were very simple in operation. Because of the custom of the country we used the metric system
only, in all our work. Our measuring was practically all by pacing and Love and I were soon able to step off meters with fine precision. One of us would take the reading of a line with a good hand compass and keep the book, and the other would pace it off in meters. The method of keeping the note-books was adopted from the major. The starting point was indicated by a cross at the center and bottom of the last page in a blank book, and a line was run upward about two inches and another cross made. The angle of the line shot was written along this little line in the book and at its end, on a level with the second cross, but near the edge of the page, were noted the number of meters. Thus each shot was added to the last, indicated by a line, with the degree and length always given, the pages being turned to the right beginning always at the bottom. A few words of description were put on each side of a line to indicate what bordered that boundary and by making the lines start at the bottom of the pages, they were always going in the same direction as the party was moving. Everyone used the same system so that when back in the office some other person than the one who wrote the notes could make the maps.

The map making itself was quite simple and easy also, only requiring care and accuracy all the time. The scale used was 1 over 10,000, a kilometer being thus represented by ten centi-
meters and ten meters by a millimeter. The lines were laid out by means of a T square and protractor with a little metric rule to measure and draw them by. The majority of the timber we surveyed and mapped was privately owned and often in very small parcels so, in an operation with a large number of proprietors, it often required great skill to get them all in correctly and to scale. But it had to be done, so it was.

Of course while doing this surveying (and later we made the maps too while on the job), we were usually living in small hotels or occasionally, when far removed from any village, in some one of the proprietor's houses. Thus we became well acquainted with some of the famous French cooking and I, for one, will certainly say it was most excellent. And the cooking was not all either, for in sharp contrast to the old army bunk after a hard day's work in the woods we had the privilege of those wonderfully soft French beds while out on the job.

But life was not all roses by any means, although we did eat and sleep well as a rule (and with the eating went a lot of wine). There was just lots of things "to take the joy out of life" and some were always present. One in particular, I remember, was a certain kind of bush with stiff branches, that had little yellow flowers in the spring, and produced the sharpest pointed spines ever made naturally. These spines grew thickly on these branches, were about an inch long, and went through any clothing except leather, and when they dried out in the fall they not only went through the clothing with a good stab but broke off at the base and stayed there. After walking through that stuff for a day one's knees looked like they had been pricked a few thousand times with needles. You can imagine how nice a week or two, or month or two, of it felt. Other things hard to get used to were the terrific heat there in the summer and the continual rains in the winter.

Now mix all this up in the proper proportion and you'll have our gay life for the ten months up to February 26, 1919. What did we do? We helped in or did all of the surveying, estimating and mapping for over twenty logging and milling operations of the British in the Landes region. Then after the armistice (which is another story) we went back over those areas which were being worked on and checked them again for the timber still standing. Would you know what we got out of it personally? Principally, a speaking acquaintance with the French language and a fair knowledge of the Maritime region of France and its resources.