



Soldiers in the Woods

Rod Crossley

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World War One expanded the use of airplanes from observation platforms to viable fighting machines. As the air war expanded, Allied aircraft manufacturers turned to America as a source of airplane lumber. Primarily, they sought Sitka spruce, a strong, lightweight wood found in the coastal rain forests of Oregon and Washington states. When the United States entered the war in 1917, the Pacific Northwest lumber industry was supplying the Allies with the majority of airplane-grade lumber. The U.S. Military Draft, beginning in May of 1917, caused a dramatic reduction of experienced personnel from the woods and mills, who could not easily be replaced. In August, violent labor strikes across the Pacific Northwest virtually shut down the lumber industry. To address these problems, the U.S. Army formed the Spruce Production Division. The Division was designed to provide for the labor needs of the lumber industry and to act as an armed deterrent against any further labor disruptions. The Division also formed the Loyal Legion of Loggers & Lumbermen union in order to address the severe labor unrest within the lumber industry. *Soldiers in the Woods* is the story of the U.S. Army's Spruce Production Division, and that of the men who worked in the forests and mills of the Pacific Northwest, producing enormous amounts of airplane-grade spruce lumber for the war effort.

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