

Patrol of the Forests

53
Federal troops will be employed in the national forests and elsewhere in the timber lands of the country in fighting forest fires, and with a strong force of disciplined men at work, there would seem to be hope that the flames which are wreaking so much destruction in the northwestern states will soon be brought under control.

In the employment of the soldiery for this extraordinary service there would appear to be a suggestion which if followed would in the future obviate much of the damage done periodically by fires in the forests, and that is that during the dry season from May to September, the soldiers, not otherwise employed, should be detailed for patrol duty in the forests, being charged with the detection of fires and their extinguishment before they gain headway.

Part of the drill of the soldiers of the permanent establishment should be in the science of fighting fires in the timber. Those who have had experience in this sort of work will agree that there is much dependent upon knowledge in the proper handling of a forest fire of considerable magnitude and that the experienced woodsman can accomplish much more than can the unpracticed man. The soldiers could be taught as a part of their work to cope with fires, and as they are trained in the habit of obedience to orders and are accustomed to the taking of risks, they could soon be made into the best set of fire fighters in the world.

The forest service never had enough men in its employ at any one time to cope successfully with the fires which annually sweep through the forests and the help that can be secured from outside is neither trained nor of sufficient quantity to successfully handle a fire of any considerable magnitude.

On the other hand, there is little real employment for the soldiery in times of peace, and with a strong, well organized force such as the army would afford, keeping close watch upon the forests, it stands to reason that fires could be easily controlled if they should start while at the same time, such service would do much to popularize the army because of the fact that in times of peace it is performing a distinct service to the nation.
