

THE PUSH

By

PAUL HOSMER

Newspaper man turned toward industry, Paul Hosmer has seen pine logging change from the days of horses and high wheels to 230 h.p. cats and all during this time he has produced a little gem of a house organ for Brooks-Scanlon, "Pine Echoes."

Paul is gifted with a needle-punch sense of humor and the ability to make loggers and lumber men something more than story book characters, something like people with human foibles. Many of his contributions to national magazines and sketches in "Pine Echoes" such as the one following are No. 1 select literature.

A sawmill is a place where lumber is cut from logs, contrary to the opinion of a number of uninformed people who still believe that lumber comes from a yard. Some years ago a mill that could cut 10,000 feet of lumber in a day was classed as a leading industry, but today even the ordinary sawmill will turn out from 200,000 to 600,000 feet each twenty-four hours. While a great many people don't realize it, the fact is the job of supplying enough logs to make that much lumber every day is quite a chore, and practically all the waking hours of one man, in between cruising trips, logging congresses, forest fires and other interruptions, is spent in looking after the details on the payroll as the Logging Superintendent. Around the woods he is referred to as the Push.

The logging superintendent is one of those men you read about in books, provided you read those kind of books, and is a master of a hundred and eight different trades and professions. He knows more about each one of them than the man who invented it, and has as

much influence around the outfit as a man with a case of Scotch at a session of the State legislature. He has to be able to lower a locomotive down a six percent grade with three cars of logs and no air; he has to be able to pace down two sides of a section and guess how many feet of logs there are in the middle of it, and if he guesses wrong he receives a dirty letter from the owner; he has to be able to design a new and heavier radiator plate for tractors after he finds that the one with which his fleet is equipped will not withstand the shock of being driven into a seven-foot fir stump without bending; he has to be able to advise the proper remedy for the haul-back team the morning after it has chewed the end out of the spare bag of oats; he has to be able to stand in the middle of a tamarack swamp in a state of partial eclipse, with a map in one hand and a compass in the other, and tell where to build a railroad that will stand up under a load of logs without costing the same per mile as the New York Central. He talks in larger figures than the treasurer of General Motors and can divide 875,000,000 feet by \$4.35 per-thousand in his head as easily as a garter snake sliding through a

puddle of red engine oil. He has paced down so many township lines that he counts automatically as he walks and his shoes go to pieces faster than a mail order tire.

The logging superintendent maintains a number of homes, domiciles and places to sleep. He has a town house where the wife and family live and which he visits occasionally and from time to time. He moves a bunk and a couple of blankets into the rear end of the timekeeper's shack at the headquarters camp and stays there whenever he is too tired to go home, or whenever he learns that the cook is having hotcakes and fresh pork sausage for breakfast. A tent, a cooking outfit, some extra blankets and a pair of snowshoes are kept ready for use in the company warehouse and these things constitute the luxury of his home life while on cruising trips or other punitive expeditions into the brush. At all other times his home is wherever his hat happens to be, which includes a number of most unique places. At various times his hat is liable to be seen bobbing around on the running board of an engine, flapping dolefully from the upper deck of a pine stump as he superintends the replacing of three wrecked logging flats on the track, or waving wildly in the mid-summer breeze as he deftly flags the steel gang speeder on a down grade and bums a ride into camp.

He goes about weighted down with eleven pounds of gadgets, doo-dads and thingumajigs cached around in various pockets in his clothes. Up in Washington the body of a logging

superintendent was once found hanging in the lower branches of a Douglas fir, where it had been carelessly flipped by a casual mainline, which yielded some fourteen pounds of odds and ends, amongst which were included a safety razor, three dozen matches, a box compass, one two-bit pipe, a belt axe, seven pieces of colored chalk, a ball of string, a handful of shingle nails, one second-hand cork, a trip block pin, six log scale books, a track bolt nut, and a plug of Climax.

While the logging superintendent is a 14-karat woodsman who has been logging ever since Babylon fell and Tyre was punctured, you will never guess it by looking at him. Camp foremen, timekeepers and other wage slaves maintain the traditions of the old time lumberjack in the way of dress, but the push is just as liable to appear alongside the jammer in a straw hat and a pair of tennis shoes as he is in a white collar and a pair of tin pants. There is nothing proud about him and he borrows chewing tobacco with equal readiness from the bullcook or the owner of the outfit. He is the possessor of the only charge account on the books of the camp commissary, where he gets his personal supplies such as shoes, clothes and gloves. The storekeeper personally makes up all losses due to shrinkage in stocks of peanuts, chocolate bars, hard candy and smoking tobacco.

His manner of speaking is large and indefinite and he talks of geographical points in the same obscure manner as Captain Byrd telling how he flew over the Pole. When the travelling agent for a saw company asks him in a

respectful tone how to find the fallers at Camp Six, the logging superintendent points haphazardly with his thumb in a general northerly direction and tells him the fallers are working right over there about a mile and if he will just follow that trail a short ways he will hear the trees falling. The chances are the fallers are three miles down the road and a mile and a half off the trail, but distances mean no more to a logging superintendent than fallen arches to an angler. The loading crew, he informs a cigaret salesman, are working on the spur which runs up into the NE-NE of Section 17, which is really quite exact, provided you are armed with a map and compass and were born in the woods to start with. The logging superintendent is oriented with the world from birth and can be blindfolded and tossed into the middle of a cedar swamp at midnight without disturbing his sense of direction. Looking calmly around him he will take a chew of tobacco, snap his suspenders three times and start off on a bee-line through the woods, and inside of three hours he will appear on the front steps of the cookhouse in time for breakfast. If it is one of the days when they are having hotcakes and fresh pork sausage he can beat that time by twenty minutes.

The logging superintendent suffers from two secret sorrows in life, both of which cause him some anxiety and loss of sleep. One of them is the log pond. It is his duty to see that the pond is kept full of logs in order that sawmill may never have to wait, and a certain polite, but exceedingly intense, rivalry is maintained between him and the mill boss. They go through life in a state of

armed neutrality. The mill boss only has one big ambition and that is that some day, in some way or other, something will happen to the logging department that will allow him to cut every log in the pond and have something to hold over the logging superintendent the rest of his life. The latter lives in the hope that he can keep a jump ahead of the sawmill and every morning on the way to the woods he drives by the pond to make sure that the mill boss hasn't slipped over an extra shift on him or added a couple of new band saws without telling him about it. If he finds that one of the trains failed to get in, due to a log falling off and jill-poking a couple of cars off the track, the logging superintendent pulls his hat down over his eyes, snaps his suspenders six times in succession, shoves the old car into high and takes out for the woods so fast that he dips sand with the back seat on every curve. Rushing about from camp to camp he urges his men to renewed efforts in the way of logging, with the result that that night sixty cars of logs go into town and fourteen of them have to stand on the sidetrack two days waiting for the pond to open up enough so they can be unloaded. The next morning, as he drives by the pond, the logging superintendent's eye lights up with satisfaction as he notices there is no water showing, so he drives contentedly into camp with nothing on his mind to worry about except the Forest Service, which is the second of his secret sorrows.

From the superintendent's viewpoint it is more or less discouraging to move in on Section 14 with six newly purchased cats only to discover that the

Forest Service does not allow caterpillar logging on that section. He gets a slight jump on the situation, however, through the fact that it is three days before the government inspector can order him off, due to the number of reports he has to make out before he can go into action. There is a certain amount of red tape which has to be gone through, and the push manages to load out thirty cars of logs before the inspector gives him the official grand bounce. Then the government man looks over the damage, adds a fine of two-bits a tree, a penalty for musing up the ground, a tax for cutting government timber without a permit, and multiplies the agreed stumpage price by two, after which he hands the bill to the logging superintendent with a leer. The latter moves his cats over onto Section 22, which he hadn't intended to log until next fall, makes a couple of dirty cracks in an undertone about government men, and goes back to town where he enters into an earnest conference with the Forest Supervisor. The Forest Supervisor listens calmly to the superintendent's arguments and finally remarks that, while he can't do anything about it himself, he will be glad to write a report of the incident to the District Forester and ask for instructions. Ten days later he receives a reply on Form 122-A-393BB, stating that while Section 14-32-19 seems to be free from blister rust, the Washington office has received a report that Section 15-32-19 is heavily infested with the pine beetle, and will the Supervisor please make a report on this disgraceful state of affairs.

Something appears to be haywire with the works, but on looking up his

files the Supervisor finds that Form 122-A-393BB is the wrong report blank, so he sends in another report calling attention to the error. Ten days later he receives blank form No. 1344-BF-1894XX-BVD, calling for a report on the matter of caterpillar logging on Section 14 in the right state, and the affair, having thus got started on the right track, is now officially and legally opened for discussion. Reports, cruising estimates, personal letters and blank forms fly back and forth across the country during the following three months and at last the logging superintendent receives an official notification to the effect that rats will not be allowed on Section 14. Receipt of this ultimatum tickles the superintendent so much that he bursts forth into uncontrollable paroxysms of laughter and hies himself to his bunk in the timekeeper's shack, where he gropes shakily around under his mattress and brings to light a small flask of snake bite medicine. He takes three hefty snorts in rapid succession and slowly regains his composure, after which he sits on the edge of the bed with his head in his hands and offers up a short but fervent prayer for all government officials, from the Chief Forester down to the buck privates.

Another thing that keeps him in a state of nervous tension when the forestry men are around is the fact that the government makes him pile and burn all brush and slashings. As soon as the logs are off the superintendent has to put in a crew of expert gardeners, fancy hairdressers and manicurists to carefully rake the ground, pile the brush neatly and sweep up all debris with a broom

and a dustpan, after which a crew of firemen burn the slashings on certain hours, days and weeks of the calendar as designated by the government. Added to the fact that he can only cut certain trees on a government section, the manicuring of the ground runs the superintendent's logging costs up another dollar and a half a thousand, which of course fills his soul with gladness and he is as pleased as a Chicago beer baron who has just been asked by his wife to feel around under the front porch and see what is making the noise like a clock ticking.

One outstanding idiosyncrasy of the logging superintendent is the fact that he insists a cruising trip is fun. Where he ever collected such an idea nobody knows, as every time he returns from one of these delightful excursions into the great outdoors he has to spend three days in bed resting up, and oftentimes it takes the compassman and cook a week to recover. Loaded down with 70 pounds of blankets, canned food, axes, note books, maps, waterbags, tin pails and a frying pan, he paces down section lines by the hour, counting trees, estimating stumpage, and fighting deer flies and mosquitoes with both hands as he scribbles the result of his guesses in a note book. He gets so used to counting paces that when the cook wakes him up the second morning out to ask whether he should make flapjacks for breakfast or open another can of beans, the only answer he gets is a mumbled "—twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four," as the superintendent rolls over and unconsciously slaps at an imaginary horsefly. He thinks nothing of hiking twelve miles through the brush with all

his possessions on his back and hung around his person. Two weeks later as the compassman and the cook rub liniment on each other's backs they are unanimous in agreeing that they don't think so much of it either.

There is only one thing about cruising that makes him mad and that is when, in answer to a glowing letter from some enthusiastic owner about a forty which is for sale cheap, he lopes across two pumice flats and climbs three mountains only to discover that, while it appears to be an excellent logging chance if there was any timber, the only thing growing on the place is a cluster of Indian Pink in the center and a family of skunks over on the east line.

For some obscure reason the logging superintendent's pet love is the camp telephone line. This modern convenience consists of a thread of light wire originally hung on saplings stretched between the main office and the camps, but which for the past several years has been squirming gracelessly along the railroad track, waving gently in the snowbrush or wriggling over the rimrock and down logs where it blew off the poles back in 1924. Occasionally a timekeeper, grown desperate over not being able to talk to his girl in town, dashes down the line and ties it together where a careless faller has dropped a tree across it, but it takes some such a crisis as this to make him do it. Nobody has ever yet been able to get the camp they think they are going to and it wouldn't do any good anyway as they couldn't hear anything if they did. The camp telephone is one of those things the logging superintendent is always going

to fix just as soon as he can get around to it, but in ten years he has never been able to remember it.

Only occasionally will the superintendent admit that there is anything the matter with the line, these rare instances usually occurring just after the Forestry Office has called up to ask what all that smoke is up around Camp Six. The superintendent takes down the telephone receiver and rings six times with the bell handle and waits expectantly for an answer. The first thing he hears is a slight buzzing sound something like a horsefly circling the field while looking for a good landing place, but this only lasts a moment, just as he is straining every nerve to catch the voice of the timekeeper which, in spite of previous experience he firmly expects to hear, another jolt of static knocks his ear drum a quarter of an inch out of line, and reminds him of a stevedore falling down a gangplank with a load of tin dishpans. This is followed by three loud squeals and a violent pop, which, bursting on his unprotected ear, causes him to see two pinwheels and a couple of Roman candles just as three brilliant red, white and green balls of fire descend from the ether and blow up directly back of his right eyeball.

In the midst of this pandemonium he hears snatches of what might be several excited voices floating in from afar and the logging superintendent shouts mightily into the phone. When the heavy artillery dies down for a moment he identifies one of the chorus as the voice of Yulius Yonson, of Camp Two, who appears to be in distress due to the failure of a rush order of

Copenhagen snuff to arrive on time. Another voice he recognizes as belonging to a certain Michael Gallagher, foreman at Camp Four. Michael is complaining, as usual, of the haywire machinery they send him. Still a third voice, calling frantically from Camp Three, proves to be one Tony Sorrentino of the section gang, who appears to be stuck some place with a gas speeder. The logging superintendent summons his self-control and listens while something like this explodes in his sore ear:

"Hey! Aye vant to know for vhy Aye don' get de tree box Copenhagen snoos-Hey, wotsa mat? I pusha da crank, I ringa da bell, I maka do biga longa leesen—an' them damn skiddin' tongs you been sendin' us ain't no good. They keep bustin' on—on de train an' she don' ban dar an' Aye go down to Camp Vun—an' I don't getta somebod'. I can'ta get da Casey-Jones to maka da begin—an' the blacksmith says he can't fix em no more. How'nhell am I goin' to do any logging—an' Aye see Mister Yones an' he don' have no Copenhagen—hey, wotsa dis, getta my foot offa da track? I no hava my foot on da track—Aye lose two gude men dis morning an' two more is goin' to qvit tonight—with a six cat show an' a haywire outfit—I maka da biga push wid da handle but it no maka da begin—Bay Yeesus, Aye got to have snoos. She ban hal of a vay to run loggin' camp. Aye bat you—Meester, pliz, wot I do, hey?-an' them chokers keep breakin' on a four-log hitch with a five-way butt hook-Bay Yiminy, Aye tal you—"

With a sigh the logging superintendent hangs up the receiver, mumbles something under his breath

about having to fix that thing just as soon as he can get around to it, and beats it for camp in the flivver to see about the smoke himself. He can crawl to the fire on his hands and knees with an anchor tied to each foot faster than he can find out anything over the telephone system, but he nevertheless retains a sublime faith in the line and knows that it will work all right if he could just remember to have it repaired.

But in spite of the trials and troubles of his life and the moral and mental turmoil into which he is plunged by glimpses of blue water in the log pond and blank forms from the Forestry Office, the logging superintendent manages to cling to life with an amazing tenacity and continues to dump logs into the pond with wild abandon. Every so often the mill foreman jumps on his neck with blood in his eye and breaks the news that a \$300 band saw almost got ruined yesterday through the fact that the starspangled roughnecks up in the woods left a spike in a log. The superintendent bites off another chew of Climax, snaps his suspenders a couple of times for luck, and wanders over to the unloading dock where the boom man is idly strolling about on the floating logs setting out fish lines. During the next few minutes he painstakingly points out to the boom man the folly of driving ten-inch boom spikes into logs to hold a ten-cent fish line when a shingle nail will do just as well, and anyway, if he has to use a boom spike, will he please remove it before the mill foreman has another hemorrhage, after which the matter of wrecked band saws is erased from his mind until such time as the mill foreman

ambushes him again and shows him a broken choker which the skidder crew was too tired to unravel from a butt log.

He takes up the matter of broken injectors with the master mechanic and together they sit in the shade of a logging flat making little scratches on an old brake shoe while discussing the probability of ever perfecting the 11x14 Diesel yarder to the point where it will run on axle grease. He makes an investigation into the pig situation at camp and discovers that two of them have the backache or some other household ailment, so he holds a consultation with the bullcook and advises the proper treatment. Then he rambles through the cookhouse in a desultory manner, pausing here and there to talk to a waitress, and emerges through the back door. Behind the root cellar he shakes himself like a cocker spaniel coming out from under a garden hose, and sheds part of a lemon cake, four cookies, two doughnuts and a piece of mince pie which were concealed under his coat. The most important thing, however, gained in his tour through the cookhouse is the information to the effect that tomorrow is the day for hotcakes and fresh pork sausage. As he sits on a pile of ties in back of the commissary munching on a doughnut, he decides that he is too tired to go back to town that night, thereby insuring for himself a ringside seat at the breakfast table.

While the daily life of the logging superintendent is not a tranquil one, it does have a compensating feature or two. When everything goes wrong and he gets so downhearted he can't even

talk to himself without quarreling he can always sit down at his telephone and try to call up somebody and he can always horn in on hotcakes and fresh pork sausage about three times a week, which is something, you will admit. Even a logging superintendent has his moments.