Paul Bunyan

When Wesley Everest came home from overseas and got his discharge from the army he went back to his old job of logging. His folks were of the old Kentucky and Tennessee stock of woodsmen and squirrelhunters who followed the trail blazed by Lewis and Clark into the rainy giant forests of the Pacific slope. In the army Everest was a sharpshooter, won a medal for a crack shot.

(Since the days of the homesteaders the western promoters and the politicians and lobbyists in Washington had been busy with the rainy giant forests of the Pacific slope, with the result that:

\[ 1,208,800,000,000 \]

\[ \text{square feet of standing timber, . . . enough standing timber} \]

\[ \text{to yield the planks necessary [over and above the manufacturing wastage] to make a floating bridge more than two feet thick and more than five miles wide from New York to Liverpool;} \]

wood for scaffolding, wood for jerrybuilding residential suburbs, billboards, wood for shacks and ships and shantytowns, pulp for tabloids, yellow journals, editorial pages, advertizing copy, mailorder catalogues, filingcards, army paperwork, handbills, flimsy.)

Wesley Everest was a logger like Paul Bunyan.
The lumberjacks, loggers, shingleweavers, sawmill workers were the helots of the timber empire; the I.W.W. put the idea of industrial democracy in Paul Bunyan’s head; wobbly organizers said the forests ought to belong to the whole people, said Paul Bunyan ought to be paid in real money instead of in company scrip, ought to have a decent place to dry his clothes, wet from the sweat of a day’s work in zero weather and snow, an eight hour day, clean bunkhouses, wholesome grub; when Paul Bunyan came back from making Europe safe for the democracy of the Big Four, he joined the lumberjack’s local to help make the Pacific slope safe for the workingstiffs. The wobblies were reds. Not a thing in this world Paul Bunyan’s as scared of.

(To be a red in the summer of 1919 was worse than being a hun or a pacifist in the summer of 1917.)

The timber owners, the sawmill and shinglekings were patriots; they’d won the war (in the course of which the price of lumber had gone up from $16 a thousand feet to $116; there are even cases where the government paid as high as $1200 a thousand for spruce); they set out to clean the reds out of the logging camps;

free American institutions must be preserved at any cost; so they formed the Employers Association and the Legion of Loyal Loggers, they made it worth their while for bunches of ex-soldiers to raid I.W.W. halls, lynch and beat up organizers, burn subversive literature.

On Memorial Day 1918 the boys of the American Legion in Centralia led by a group from the Chamber of Commerce wrecked the I.W.W. hall, beat up everybody they found in it, jailed some and piled the rest of the boys in a truck and dumped them over the county line, burned the papers and pamphlets and auctioned off the fittings for the Red Cross; the wobblies’ desk still stands in the Chamber of Commerce.

The loggers hired a new hall and the union kept on growing. Not a thing in this world Paul Bunyan’s as scared of.
Before Armistice Day, 1919, the town was full of rumors that on that day the hall would be raided for keeps. A young man of good family and pleasant manners, Warren O. Grimm, had been an officer with the American force in Siberia; that made him an authority on labor and Bolsheviks, so he was chosen by the business men to lead the 100% forces in the Citizens Protective League to put the fear of God into Paul Bunyan.

The first thing the brave patriots did was pick up a blind newsdealer and thrash him and drop him in a ditch across the county line.

The loggers consulted counsel and decided they had a right to defend their hall and themselves in case of a raid. Not a thing in this world Paul Bunyan’s as scared of.

Wesley Everest was a crack shot; Armistice Day he put on his uniform and filled his pockets with cartridges. Wesley Everest was not much of a talker; at a meeting in the Union Hall the Sunday before the raid, there’d been talk of the chance of a lynching bee; Wesley Everest had been walking up and down the aisle with his O.D. coat on over a suit of overalls, distributing literature and pamphlets; when the boys said they wouldn’t stand for another raid, he stopped in his tracks with the papers under his arm, rolled himself a brown-paper cigarette and smiled a funny quiet smile.

Armistice Day was raw and cold; the mist rolled in from Puget Sound and dripped from the dark boughs of the spruces and the shiny storefronts of the town. Warren O. Grimm commanded the Centralia section of the parade. The exsoldiers were in their uniforms. When the parade passed by the union hall without halting, the loggers inside breathed easier, but on the way back the parade halted in front of the hall. Somebody whistled through his fingers. Somebody yelled, “Let’s go . . . at ’em, boys.” They ran towards the wobbly hall. Three men crashed through the door. A rifle spoke. Rifles crackled on the hills back of the town, roared in the back of the hall.
Grimm and an exsoldier were hit.

The parade broke in disorder but the men with rifles formed again and rushed the hall. They found a few unarmed men hiding in an old icebox, a boy in uniform at the head of the stairs with his arms over his head.

Wesley Everest shot the magazine of his rifle out, dropped it and ran for the woods. As he ran he broke through the crowd in the back of the hall, held them off with a blue automatic, scaled a fence, doubled down an alley and through the back street. The mob followed. They dropped the coils of rope they had with them to lynch Britt Smith the I.W.W. secretary. It was Wesley Everest’s drawing them off that kept them from lynching Britt Smith right there.

Stopping once or twice to hold the mob off with some scattered shots, Wesley Everest ran for the river, started to wade across. Up to his waist in water he stopped and turned.

Wesley Everest turned to face the mob with a funny quiet smile on his face. He’d lost his hat and his hair dripped with water and sweat. They started to rush him.

“Stand back,” he shouted, “if there’s bulls in the crowd I’ll submit to arrest.”

The mob was at him. He shot from the hip four times, then his gun jammed. He tugged at the trigger, and taking cool aim shot the foremost of them dead. It was Dale Hubbard, another exsoldier, nephew of one of the big lumber men of Centralia.

Then he threw his empty gun away and fought with his fists. The mob had him. A man bashed his teeth in with the butt of a shotgun. Somebody brought a rope and they started to hang him. A woman elbowed through the crowd and pulled the rope off his neck.

“You haven’t the guts to hang a man in the daytime,” was what Wesley Everest said.

They took him to the jail and threw him on the floor of a cell. Meanwhile they were putting the other loggers through the third degree.

That night the city lights were turned off. A mob smashed in the outer door of the jail. “Don’t shoot, boys,
here's your man," said the guard. Wesley Everest met them on his feet, "Tell the boys I did my best," he whispered to the men in the other cells.

They took him off in a limousine to the Chehalis River bridge. As Wesley Everest lay stunned in the bottom of the car a Centralia business man cut his penis and testicles off with a razor. Wesley Everest gave a great scream of pain. Somebody has remembered that after a while he whispered, "For God's sake, men, shoot me . . . don't let me suffer like this." Then they hanged him from the bridge in the glare of the head-lights.

The coroner at his inquest thought it was a great joke.

He reported that Wesley Everest had broken out of jail and run to the Chehalis River bridge and tied a rope around his neck and jumped off, finding the rope too short he'd climbed back and fastened on a longer one, had jumped off again, broke his neck and shot himself full of holes.

They jammed the mangled wreckage into a packing box and buried it.

Nobody knows where they buried the body of Wesley Everest, but the six loggers they caught they buried in the Walla Walla Penitentiary.