

LITTLE KNOWN WAR AGENCY.

Certain it is that when James Macie Smithson, the noted English physicist who died more than 115 years ago, made his will and bequeathed \$600,000 to the United States for the establishment of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, he little realized that the institution which bears his name would some day become a war agency. Yet, such is the case, even tho it is little known in this field. Today the savants and scientists, the scholars and technicians of the Smithsonian who have for years been browsing to advance the cause of science and culture are making a definite contribution to victory.

HOW IT CAME ABOUT.

Every since the Smithsonian has existed, its funds both public and private have been used for research in the field of anthropology, biology, geology, botany and other fields of science. It's expeditions have gone to all corners of the earth to collect interesting specimens for study. They have studied the customs of little known people in the far-away corners of this planet.. They have examined the structure of the earth's surface and the rock formations to identify their age and to find clues to hidden deposits of critical minerals. They have explored the food resources of other nations and peoples and catalogued the plant and animal life. Sometimes, as they made their annual reports to Congress and came for their appropriations, the more practical minded legislators wondered whether the things they were doing were after all only of remote and academic interest. They often wondered whether the millions of items in the Smithsonian collections could have anything but a curious value.

THEN CAME THE WAR.

Then came global war which must be carried on in remote places. The conflict carried our troops to Africa and New Zealand, to Australia and the Solomons, to New Guinea and the Marshall Islands, to China and India to Burma and Indo-China and to other islands where lived strange peoples with strange customs. How could a soldier survive in these strange places if he became lost? What should he know about plant life and foods? What should he know about different kinds of wood in case he must build a boat? How and from what kind of wood might he build a life raft? What were the customs of these strange people? As these questions were asked, they were also answered. Ask the Smithsonian. Ask the scientists who have been exploring these remote places for several generations. Thus, more than 1300 requests of all kinds were addressed to the Smithsonian this last year by military and naval authorities for information that has a direct bearing on the war effort. Some of these could be answered quickly. On others, a vast amount of research was required. A series of studies were prepared known as "War Background Studies" of which 177,000 copies have been printed and distributed. Thus does this very modest public agency, which began with the bequest of an English physicist more than 115 years ago, quietly carry on and make its contribution to the war effort and ultimate victory.