

1945

"And I want you to know that ours was dangerous work," she added. "The people who worked with the bacteria of infectious diseases were as truly engaged in a dangerous and important a mission as if they were in combat."

In spite of preventive measures a high percentage of the workers became infected, but none died, she reported.

**Not Planned as Weapon.**

At no time did this country plan to use disease germs as an offensive weapon, Professor Downs stated. Great Britain, Canada and the United States co-operated closely on the project, she reported.

All of her work was not done at Camp Detrick. In March, 1944, she returned to K. U. for a time to set up a similar research project. Later Mrs. Tom Hamilton of Kansas City, Kansas, a graduate of the university with an A. B. and an M. A. degree in bacteriology, and wife of Dr. T. R. Hamilton, instructor in pathology at the K. U. Medical school, was put in charge of the project at the university and Professor Downs returned to Camp Detrick, July 1, 1944. She returned to the university again November 1 of that year making a monthly trip to Maryland until July 1, 1945, when she returned to Camp Detrick to stay until the project was terminated in October.

In charge of her project at the camp in Professor Downs's absence was Capt. L. L. Coriell of Detroit, who has his Ph.D. degree from K. U., and his M.D. degree from the university's School of Medicine.

Directing another project at Camp Detrick was Lieut. Winston Miller of Paola, Kas., who holds a Ph.D. in bacteriology and an M.D. degree from K. U. Associated with Lieutenant Miller was Lieut. William

# K. U. Professor Had Leading Part In Germ Race With Axis Nations

From August, 1943, to October, 1945, Cornelia Mitchell Downs of the Bacteriological Department Worked on Top Secret Project in Maryland.

LAWRENCE, KAS., Jan. 6.—A grim war story of germs, test tubes and sacrifice leading to knowledge which has advanced the treatment and prevention of disease fifty years, was told today by a professor of bacteriology at the University of Kansas.

She is Cornelia Mitchell Downs, professor of bacteriology who headed one section of the biological warfare project conducted at Camp Detrick, Frederick, Md., one of the "top secrets" of World War II.

Working with a crew of forty scientists and technicians in her department, Professor Downs was one of hundreds of specialists called from universities of the country in 1943 to meet the challenge of the Axis countries which were expected to attempt the spreading of infectious diseases among Allied nations.

**Joined Project in 1943.**

Leaving her teaching position at K. U. temporarily, she began work on this project in August, 1943. She continued as head of her section until October, 1945.

Keeping it a secret was difficult, Professor Downs admitted today. Only two other persons at the University of Kansas were "cleared" by the War department: Chancellor Deane W. Malott and Dr. Noble P. Sherwood, head of the department of bacteriology.

"But now that it is over," she said, "I am happy to be able to say that knowledge was gained about bacteria and how to fight it which not only put us ahead of the Axis but which has advanced the treatment and prevention of infectious diseases fifty years."

Bacteriologists, medical men, pathologists and chemists were brought together for the project. "It was a paradise of equipment and facilities," Professor Downs said. "We had every available tool and help from the War department. A great deal can be accomplished in concentrated work that couldn't be done in scattered laboratories all over the country. We considered our work just as important as that which led to the invention of the atomic bomb.

Tanner of Aurora, Ill., holding the same degrees from the university.

**Kansas Citian Also Served.**

Lieut. (jg) Barbara Owen of Kansas City, of the WAVES who relieved Mrs. Hamilton as director of the project on Mt. Oread in December, 1944, received her A.B. degree from the bacteriological department at K. U. Lieut. (jg) Mary Abts, WAVE of Iola, Kas., who was in charge of laboratory services for the project at Camp Detrick, also holds an A.B. degree from K. U. Luther Buchele, assistant instructor in bacteriology and a graduate of that department at K. U., later replaced Lieutenant Owen.

Dr. Kenneth Goodner of the Rockefeller Foundation was in charge of a division of the total project in 1943, leaving in October of that year to work in the yellow fever laboratory in Entebbe, Africa. He has his Masters degrees from the K. U. bacteriological department. Dr. Clara Nigg of New Brunswick, N. J., in charge of a section of the total project from July, 1943, to July, 1944, is also a graduate of the university with a Ph.D.

Miss Downs received her A.B., A.M. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Kansas and has taught bacteriology since 1917, becoming a full professor in 1935.