

## FRENCH RAILWAYS DURING THE WAR\*

ORGANIZATION and management of railways during the war are regulated in France by the law passed December 28th, 1888: According to Article 22 of this law, "In time of war, the control of the railways is entirely in the hands of the military authorities"; and so it was on August 2nd, 1914, all railway officials, from an engineer to a porter were mobilized, and ready at their respective posts. The large private companies and the board of directors of the Etat Railway, in whose hands the control of French railways is vested in times of peace, delegated their powers to the military authorities, merely reserving to themselves the technical supervision of the personnel. A special commission was appointed, consisting of two members; an officer of high rank (the military Commissioner) and an influential representative of the company (the technical Commissioner), to undertake collectively the general management of each different railway.

### Their Military Role

Ever since the outset of hostilities French railways have carried out, in an irreproachable manner, the important missions assigned to them at different times by the High Command, and the necessities of mobilization. On the Est Railway the transporting of troops and war material to the points of concentration was effected in a fortnight by 4,000 trains. Since then, notwithstanding the fact that part of the line has been occupied by the enemy, and some works destroyed in battles, or by bombardments, it is still open, and used for transport purposes, etc. The Nord Railway Line was able to save all the material hastily sent down southwards; 2,700 Belgian engines were brought back, while the armies fought heroically to stem the tide of German invasion, and hundreds of trains waited, till the last minute, in order to save the guns. Just before the battle of the Marne, the Nord Railway, uniting its efforts to those of the Est, enabled the different corps to be rapidly transferred from the extreme right to the extreme left of the army, and so ensure victory. On the Nord Railway Lines, which have been reduced from 3,840 kilometres to 1,976, as many as 114,000 military trains were run in 1915. Notwithstanding the fact that they are, comparatively speaking, situated at some distance from the war-zone, the other lines: Paris-Orléans, Paris-Lyon-Méditerranée, the Midi, and Etat Railways, have afforded equally valuable assistance during the period of mobilization; the three first provided for the transporting of men and munitions to the North, the last named, working in conjunction with the Nord Railway Line, ensured the transfer of troops from the West of France, also those of the British armies. Over these lines, considered as a whole, 17,000 train-loads of troops and 250 of siege artillery and ammunition were carried between August 5th and 26th, in 1914.

During the succeeding months, when the front was being extended towards the North Sea, 700,000 men were transported in more than 6,000 trains, over 228 kilometres of line. Later on, the rôle of the railways was changed by degrees according to the kind of operations in hand, though their importance was in no way lessened. They had to carry to the trenches in the North, into Italy, or to the ports available for supplying the armies at Salonika, reinforcements, foodstuffs and munitions—to bring back to the interior of the country civilian refugees, the wounded, repatriated persons and German prisoners; to trans-

port Indian, colonial and American troops, and ensure a postal service, comprising millions of letters and parcels with the armies. The necessities of national defence will not allow of our stating exactly to what extent their valiant self-sacrifice has been carried, how officials have fallen nobly at their posts and the splendid results obtained by close collaboration with our High Command at the battles of Verdun, in the Somme and Champagne, as well as at the time of renewal of fighting in the open, on the Western front, and the stopping of the Great German offensive in March, 1918. The French Government, desiring to acknowledge the valuable assistance given by railway officials, has had a great number of them specially mentioned—and rewarded for distinguished service. It also wished to bring under their country's notice the splendid behavior of the personnel of the Nord and Est Railways and on the army lines; Mr. Clemenceau, the Premier and Minister of War, gave the reasons for such a step in the following terms: "After having displayed from the very beginning of the war, the most splendid endurance, and energy in the fulfilment of duties particularly hard, the personnel (of the above railway companies) gave during the recent military operations and often under the most perilous circumstances, fresh proof of a spirit of self-sacrifice, and of admirable devotion to their country."

### From an Economic Point of View

Heavy military traffic, however, only hindered for a short space of time passenger traffic; and the goods transport service has, up to the present, always been able to meet the requirements of civilians in a satisfactory manner. A statement of the returns of the big railway companies enables us to realize the extent of the revival in the economic life of our country. If we examine it since 1914, we see that, setting aside the decrease, at the beginning of hostilities, the receipts have gradually been on the increase, almost rising to, in the case of certain lines not directly connected with military operations, the amount of normal receipts, in spite of a reduction in the length of the lines and a shortage of rolling stock. The following table, showing in millions of francs the large railway companies' returns from 1913 up to 1917, goes to prove this fact.

Railways.	1913.	1914.	1915.	1916.	1917.
Nord .....	336	268	111	125	137
Est .....	305	196	114	133	134
Paris-Lyon-Méditerranée ..	596	455	462	523	531
Paris-Orléans .....	308	244	256	283	301
Midi .....	147	117	122	125	138
Etat .....	324	262	278	296	296

It is as well to call attention to the fact that this rise—which is also noticeable during the same period with regard to receipts in connection with military affairs—does not prevent an important deficit, due to the enormous increase in the cost of running trains, resulting both from the rise in the price of coals, raw materials, labor, wear and tear of rolling stock, and the continual higher salaries, pensions and indemnities. In order to remedy, in a certain degree, the difficult situation into which the prolongation of such a state of things would have inevitably placed the French railway companies, and following the example of all the belligerent countries, parliament, on March 31, 1918, voted a general increase of 25 per cent. on all tariffs except for the army transport service and parcel-post rates. This extra percentage is to be taken off at the end of the sixth year after the cessation of hostilities.

Apart from these general remarks on French railways as a whole, it is interesting to get some idea, gathered

\*Bulletin issued by the Paris Chamber of Commerce, June, 1918.