

On the night of March 27th, 1885, I was roused from a comfortable slumber by the ringing of my telephone. Imagine my surprise when the commanding officer of my regiment ordered me to parade at 8 a.m. next day with my ambulance corps, prepared to leave for the North-west, where a rebellion of half-breeds and Indians had broken out. The rest of the night was spent in preparation and in hunting up my men. Our departure was postponed two days to enable arrangements for transport, and the like, to be made. On the morning of the 30th we left Toronto for the front. On April 1st we reached Ricotasing, the then end of the Canadian Pacific Railway's tracks, on the north shore of Lake Huron. A long gap of forty-two miles had now to be crossed in open sleighs during the night with a temperature of twenty degrees below zero. The snow was from four to five feet deep, the track through the forest narrow, and any deviation from the beaten path meant an upset in the dark. After an all night drive we arrived nearly perished with cold, at Camp Desolation. We camped in the snow at this place until April 3rd, without tents or cover save our blankets. One man went stark mad, removed all his clothing, and would have leaped into the fire had he not been prevented. On this date we embarked in open flat cars running on rails laid on the snow, which gave a serpentine movement to the train.

We ran 150 miles in this way, arriving at Port Munro late in the evening. On Easter Sunday, April 5th, we marched twenty miles across the ice to McKellar's bay, then again took "palace" flat cars for twelve miles to Jack Fish Bay, where the night was passed; next day we marched twenty-two miles to Winston, through snow and slush, then more "palace" cars to Nepigon, reaching there at 10 p.m. There still intervened fourteen miles between the ends of the track. It was intensely dark, cold and raining. All around was the gloomy primeval forest; between us and comfort lay a stretch of ice covered to the depth of a foot or more with slush and water. Plunging, struggling along arm in arm, the regiment advanced. Hour after hour the weary struggle proceeded and day was breaking when the head of the column debouched on terra firma again. Exhausted, the men threw themselves on the seats of cars and fell asleep instantly. The details of this march have never been published fully until now, and I think you will agree with me that it was a wonderful performance, especially when it is considered that the men were fresh from the counting house and shop and factory, without any preliminary training for the field.

You will ask what were the physical effects of such a trial of endurance? They were less serious than you might expect.