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The 58th Broad Gauge Operating Company (Canadians), Organization and Work Overseas.

By Captain A. H. Kendall, M.C., Officer Commanding the Company.

In July, 1916, a request was received by the Dominion Government from the British Colonial Secretary to recruit for service in France, a detachment of skilled railway operating troops. On Oct. 20, 1916, the Minister of Militia recommended that a section of these troops, to be known as No. 1 Section Skilled Railway Employees, be organized, consisting of three officers, and 266 other ranks. The recommendation was approved by the Privy Council on Oct. 31, 1916. In December, 1916, the Canadian Pacific management was asked by the Militia Department to recommend a commanding officer, and on Dec. 28, 1916, A. H. Kendall, Master Mechanic, Ontario District, C.P.R., Toronto, was appointed with the rank of captain. On Jan. 3, 1917, recruiting offices were opened at various places between Winnipeg and Halifax. The unit was mobilized at Guy St. Barracks, Montreal, and was over strength early in February.

On Feb. 27, 1917, the order was received to prepare to leave for overseas, and the unit left Bonaventure station, Montreal, Mar. 1, 1917, but on account of the severe winter weather prevailing at the time, did not arrive at Halifax until Mar. 4. The unit embarked the same day on the s.s. Ausonia, and after one of the roughest trips on record, arrived at Liverpool on Mar. 15. After disembarking the unit entrained immediately for Bordon Camp in Hampshire, the principal British Railway Troops' depot, and arrived there about midnight. The following day, Mar. 16, the unit entrained for Aldershot, Hampshire, where it was attached to the Royal Engineers, and quartered in Talavera barracks. During its stay at Aldershot the unit received a short military training. Shortly after arrival, notice was received that the unit had been renamed, and would thenceforth be known as No. 12 Canadian Light Railway Operating Company, but when the authorities were further informed as to the class of men composing the unit it was again changed to the 58th Broad Gauge Operating Company (Canadians).

On Apr. 16, 1917, the company was reviewed by the G.O.C. Aldershot Command, and the Officer Commanding Royal Engineers. The next day the company entrained for Southampton, and embarked on the s.s. Archimedes which left at dusk for Le Havre, France. On account of loose mines in the channel, and enemy submarine activities, the Archimedes was ordered back, and dropped anchor opposite Netley Hospital until the following evening. The company arrived at Le Havre on the morning of April 19, where it remained at No. 5 Rest Camp until April 22, and then entrained for Audruicq, the base depot of the Railway Operating Division, R.E.

While at Audruicq some of the n.c.o.'s and men were employed in the shops on locomotive repairs. Others were sent to Le Havre to assemble, and bring up, lo-

comotives. The running men made trips over the line, and were instructed in the rules for operating over the Nord Ry. of France, and British military lines. About the end of May, 1917, a 12 in gun on railway mountings, weighing 185 tons, was derailed at Audruicq, and after it had been off the rails for 50 hours, causing much inconvenience and delay to traffic, the 58th B.G.O.C. was ordered to re-rail it which was accomplished successfully in 4½ hours. Headquarters then decided that the company would remain intact, and work as a unit. Early in June, 1917, the unit, with R.E. reinforcements, proceeded to Merris, a newly constructed British railway depot, about 300 yards west of Strazeele (Nord) station,

to Petit Pont and Romarin.

The main locomotive depot was established at Merris with subdepots at Bailleul, Steenwerck and Berguette. At Merris the number of locomotives in charge increased from 15 to 40 of various types and makes, ranging from the type 25 (0-6-0) Belgian, with no brakes on the locomotive, and hand brakes and wooden brake shoes on the tender, to the 2-8-0 Baldwins. Amongst them were locomotives from the different railways in Great Britain, a few Belgians, Baldwins and Canadians. On account of having so many different makes, it was found difficult at times to secure the required spare parts, which were ordered from the transportation stores depot.

When Merris depot was opened, there were, of course, no facilities whatever for maintaining locomotives. There were no cinder or washout pits and no shelter for locomotives, which had to be repaired in the open in all kinds of weather. Until proper water facilities could be provided, a supply was maintained by means of Merryweather pumps, and a length or two of suction hose to the nearest ditch. Coal was ordered from headquarters, and received in train load lots from Dunkirk and Dieppe. On account of the urgent demand for equipment, coal trains were unloaded as soon as possible after arrival, on to the ground. In coaling a locomotive the coal had to be man handled on to a ramp, and again to the locomotive tender. Coal trains were unloaded mostly by Chinese coolies or German prisoners. Locomotives were also cleaned and coaled by this class of labor when available. Locomotives were washed out every 10 days, on account of the bad water. When not undergoing boiler repairs or being washed out, they were kept constantly under steam, and ready for use on short notice. When possible locomotives were double crewed, but when traffic was very heavy and men were scarce, it was necessary to pool them all.

When Merris depot was finally developed, it consisted of a two track locomotive shed, about 150 x 50 ft. with repair pits the full length. The sand dryer was combined with the incinerator. A concrete washout pit was built, also a locomotive store and locomotive dispatching office. A corrugated iron machine shop about 100 x 50 ft was put up and we were able to get the following machinery,—a 50 h.p. steam engine and boiler, 20 k.w.t. electric generator, 3 engine lathes, planer, milling machine, 2 drilling machines, tool grinder, and a 500 cu. ft. capacity air compressor. We also accumulated a reserve coal dump of 3,000 tons.

Merris exchange yard consisted of 16 tracks about 1,400 ft. long. The main control (dispatching) office, connected by telephone with all stations, was also located here. As the traffic to the Merris area was for Second Army, and traf-



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with 15 locomotives, 3 Merryweather pumps, an emergency stores, a tool van, and a small supply of coal. As the preparations for the Messines offensive were under way at the time, the unit was well initiated into railway operation under active service conditions from the first day. In the Merris area the unit gradually assumed control of and operated the double track lines from Hazebrouck to Armentieres, and from Hazebrouck to Berguette and the single track lines from Berguette to Estaires, Laventie and Armentieres; Hazebrouck to Merville; Berguette to Aire; Aire to Estres, Blanche, Bailleul to Wulverghem, Messines and Ploegstraat Road; Clapham Junction to Bruloose (Kemmel); Steenwerck to Neuve Eglise, and Steenwerck