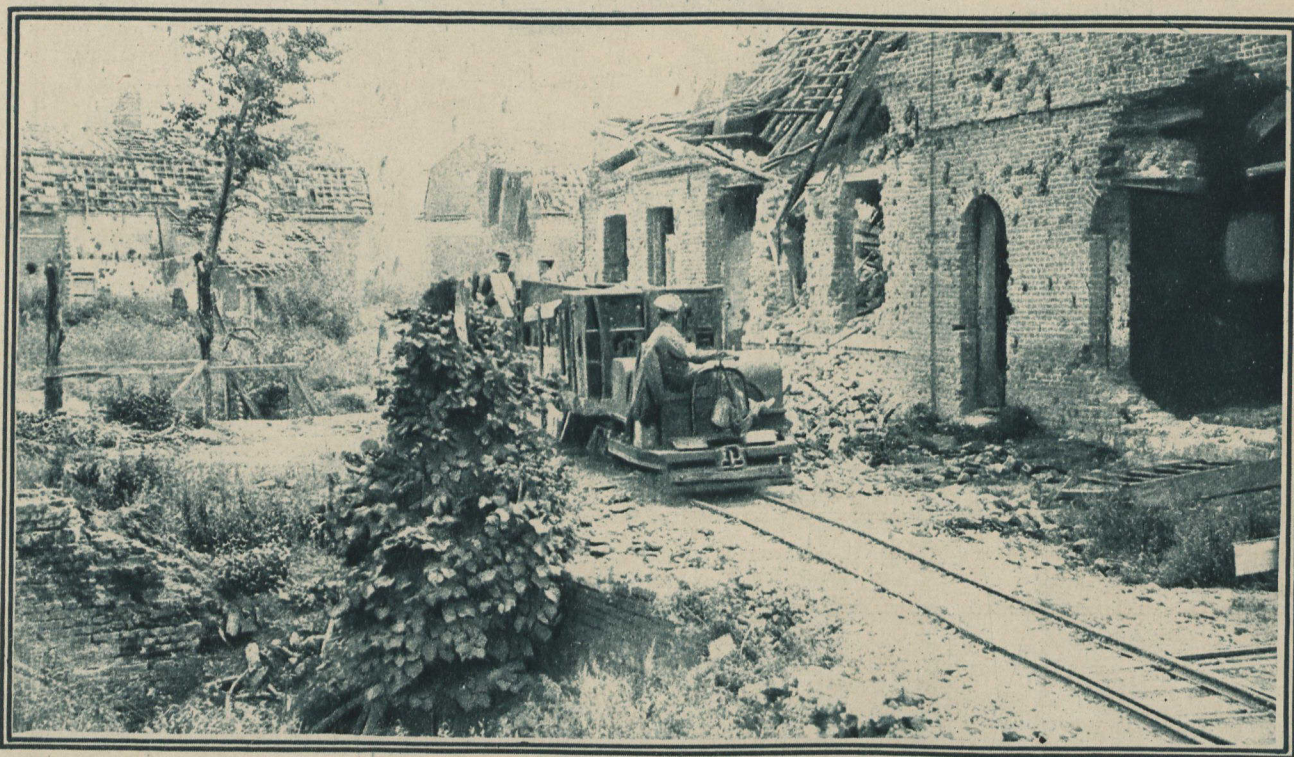


## TAKING THE TRAIN TO VICTORY (contd.)

place two working parties on a certain road; our batteries in the vicinity were being heavily shelled; it was impossible to work. At 9.30 p.m. the shelling ceased, and an attempt was made to start work, but before the party had laid down their equipment and taken up their tools heavy shelling resumed, this time setting fire to a farm near by containing ammunition. The flames illuminated the vicinity, making any attempt at work impossible, as the working parties were exposed to machine-gun fire from the enemy positions overlooking this section. At 3.12 a.m. the working party, who were on their way to camp, heard the terrific explosion that opened the Battle of Messines; the ground rocked and heaved for fully five seconds; every battery immediately opened fire in unison. Enemy retaliation became general at once; the road where the railway construction men had been working a few minutes before was swept by shrapnel and machine-gun fire. This was followed by a gas wave,

the natural sequel to our victory at Messines. In this sector very valuable railways were being built under trying circumstances. A school of instruction in light railway work was instituted; several battalions of Pioneers were camped together and were fully trained in the various functions of grading and tracklaying. This instructional work proved of immeasurable value when construction commenced. A material yard, with special facilities, was established in the forward area; specially constructed mechanical devices for rapid tracklaying were utilised; pioneer cars were designed and built; miles of assembled steel were prepared and stacked in the material yard, with culvert bridge and crossing material, matched switches, and special tools.

On July 31st, on both broad-gauge and narrow-gauge lines, the work of new construction began, the railway troops going over soon after the infantry. The survey, reconnaissance, and location parties went first; the



No ground is too rough or too broken to lay down these light railway tracks.

forcing the men to stand to with respirators; it passed over, and dawn broke; the night party worked their way back to camp amid the bursting shells, and a day party came out to keep the lines in running order.

Another company in the same battle a little farther south followed up the advance and reached the new support trenches with the grading as the trenches were being built. Considerable difficulty was experienced in building the line through, due to the numerous reinforced concrete dug-outs, pill-boxes, and abandoned trenches with which the country was covered. The twenty-four hours was divided into three eight-hour shifts, and the lines were graded and steel laid to the forward batteries before the guns were ready for action.

The romance of such work is the romance of strength and efficiency, somewhat akin to that which Kipling sees in the throbbing engine; it is also the romance of human courage enduring great hardships cheerfully.

The Ypres offensive which opened on July 31st was

grading parties followed; the culvert and bridge parties proceeded immediately to the place where the first culvert or bridge was to be put in. The track-laying party followed close up behind the grading party with the steel train. Behind them again came the rough lining and ballast party with a ballast train close up; and during all the subsequent offensives, until the final triumph of the Canadians at Passchendaele, the batteries have been supplied with ammunition over narrow-gauge lines; troops have been moved forward and the wounded have been brought back, and despite all difficulties of weather and the fury of enemy fire, all lines considered necessary have been built, and breaks have always been repaired.

This has only been accomplished by earnest and unrelenting toil. Despite inevitable losses, the patrols and repair gangs are out by day and by night; much has been performed and much endured; there have been many shining examples of courage and devotion. There are many tales of heroism to be recorded, and in such lies to-day the romance of railway construction.