

The weather was terrible, the shelling likewise, but by persistent efforts, the line was finally laid down as far as the Yser Canal. The last thousand feet of it, however, was blown to bits several times over, before anything further could be done. The battalion had most marvellous luck, or good fortune, and in getting from Elverdinghe to the Yser Canal at Boesinghe, its casualties were only 4 killed and 20 wounded. After a terrible artillery duel, lasting till Aug. 17, 1917, the battalion was able to build the bridge over the canal. The Canon farm siding on the line to Pilchem station was built under most trying circumstances and the officers and men took their lives in their hands every morning in going out to work. There was probably not a man in the battalion, who did not wonder how they could have such miraculous escapes, with so few casualties. The battalion's casualties east of the canal were 9 killed and 7 wounded. The artillery deserved great credit for their work in that area, and it was marvellous how the men and animals stood the strain. The punishment they took at the hands of the Boche was terrible.

During the winter of 1917-1918 the battalion was housed in Nissen huts and the men were very comfortable, they built the new Waanebeck yards, the Watou yard, and a number of artillery spurs, and re-ballasted and maintained the lines from Proven eastward. Headquarters were at International Corner, with A company nearby, B company at Nordhoek, C company at Eikhoek, and D company near Proven. On Mar. 10, 1918, the battalion was ordered to prepare to go to Egypt, to build railways and with some large bridges in prospect, and at once began to prepare for the trip. New equipment was ordered at once, packed and loaded on cars ready to proceed, via Taranto, Italy. The men were carefully picked over and medically examined and the battalion was brought up to strength again by drafts from every other battalion of the Canadian Railway Troops. But the trip to Egypt was not destined to be made. The Huns commenced shelling the back areas on Mar. 17, and while the battalion was loading its equipment on to cars at International Corner on the afternoon of Mar. 22, the track was broken on the main line in front of its living cars in six places, and it became so "hot" that everybody else had left the yard. It was found advisable to move about a mile west next day in order to complete the packing and loading in at least comparative safety.

On Mar. 23, 1918, the camp was all broken up and the battalion was ready to pull out. However, at 2 a.m. next day, the orders were cancelled and the battalion was ordered to Boves, just south-east of Amiens, to prepare trenches on a new line of defences. The 5th Army had given way and there was nothing else to do. Even harness for the battalion's transport had to be unpacked as well as its tools, but it left the same night for Amiens. The battalion detrained on Mar. 25 at Boves and its headquarters were at Thezy Glemont for three nights, after which it was ordered out again, and marched back to Bethencourt, doing 18 miles the first day and 10 miles the second day by 11 a.m. and then began at once to build trenches for a new line of defences, completing 33 miles of trenches before being ordered back to railway work again. The bombing of Amiens and the surrounding country was terrible, and everybody seemed to be

going west instead of east.

On Apr. 16, 1918, the battalion was ordered to proceed to Frevent, to build the new Frevent-Hesdin line, which was to have been used in case the Huns should cut our line at St. Pol. This at first was considered of great importance, but later developed into more or less of a peace time undertaking, which dragged on until August. On the line, however, there was one large bridge and subsequently some yards were put in. During this period the battalion made bomb-proof accommodations for the nursing sisters at Etaples, Boulogne, Outreau and Ligny, also for the W.A.A.C.'s at Montreuil (G.H.Q.) These had bomb proof covers, of from 25 to 30 ft. and the total accommodation would take care of about 1,000 of the women during unmerciful Hun raids.

During the early summer of 1918, when enemy bombing was at its height, the Wimereux viaduct, a 3-arch double track masonry viaduct, about 300 ft. long and 80 ft. high, on the Boulogne-Calais main line of the Nord Ry., was in very great danger. Numerous attempts had been made to destroy it by bombing, and its destruction would have cut off the main artery of supply for all Belgium and the northern allied front. The battalion was requested directly by the British authorities to undertake its reparation, in case of destruction by bombing, and to take steps to prevent its destruction, if found possible. The accompanying illustration shows the completed work. The timbers are all of 12 x 12 in. hard pine, and a solid steel floor or deck was made on the deck of the bridge by using slightly over a mile of steel railway rails. The work was greatly admired, not only by the British, but by the French Army authorities in Paris, where the scheme was unconditionally approved and endorsed. The Canadian Minister of Militia, General Mewburn and other notable Canadians, visited and reviewed the work during its construction. It is said to be undoubtedly the only work of the kind ever undertaken.

On Aug. 7, 1918, the officer commanding the battalion received a secret message to hold the battalion in readiness to proceed to the Amiens sector, as there were to be big things happening there very shortly. The work in hand was already completed and the battalion was practically standing-to. On Aug. 8 at 9 p.m., instructions were received to load up and proceed at once to Longeau, just east of Amiens and west of Villers-Brettonneux, and the battalion arrived there the next night at midnight. On arriving it was ascertained that the battalion was to assist the French in getting the line put into shape into Chaulnes. The Huns had blown up practically every rail in the track, and there were many nasty craters, besides they had not stopped shelling the area, and particularly the tracks. The 4th Battalion was working into Villers-Brettonneux and the 1st Battalion commenced about two miles east of there. It was a race with the Huns from that day till the day of the armistice, on Nov. 11, and the men did not have a Sunday off after getting into that area. By salvaging steel from the two lines taken over, it was possible to keep work going, but it was necessary to use new rails to close up the gap at Marcelcave on Aug. 12, which was the battalion's greatest day. It was very short of tools, but managed to get the tracks into Marcelcave by careful organization and handling of the men. On

the night of Aug. 13, the tracks were got into Rosieres. The battalion had managed to get the assistance of two battalions of Australian Pioneers who worked well. Men were scattered over the entire line and salvaged rails from the enemy dumps at Rosieres, and were pushed westward to meet the ones being laid from the west end eastward. The French were very much pleased with this day's performance. Rails were also salvaged from Rosieres for building the new decauville tranship yard at Les Buttes. It was impossible to go east of Rosieres at that time so the battalion took over the supply siding at Boves. Much ammunition had to be moved to permit going on with the work. In the meantime also it took on the building of bridges at Froissy and Bray.

On Aug. 29, 1918, the battalion commenced on the line into Chaulnes and moved camp to Rosieres on Aug. 30, to be close to the work. On Sept. 3 track was into Marcheipot and the yard was used immediately. On Sept. 8 track was into Brie, and the battalion's train moved to Omiecourt to again be closely in touch with the work. On Sept. 10 track was at the Somme Canal at Peronne, and work was commenced driving piles for the bridge. Trains ran into Peronne on Sept. 12, into Doingt on Sept. 13, into Tincourt on Sept. 14, and into Roisel on Sept. 16, four days ahead of the date set by General Rawlinson. Double tracking was finished to Peronne on Sept. 19. On Sept. 24 16 of the battalion were killed and 11 wounded in Roisel yard, on Oct. 8 double track was laid into Epehy and over the bridge north of that point. On Oct. 10 track was laid into Gouzeaucourt and into Marcoing on Oct. 19. The Canadian Overseas Railway Construction Corps had already finished from Marcoing to Wambaix and the battalion jumped in ahead of them and put the tracks into Busigny, through Cattinieres, Caudry and Bertry, also assisting the French in getting into Wassigny. The delayed action mines in this section made the work particularly hazardous, in one instance blowing the center portion completely out of the trains, and the bridge at Caudry was blown up after the tracks had been completed over it.

The 2nd Battalion was working between Wassigny and Le Cateau so the 1st Battalion again jumped ahead, taking the line from Le Cateau to Maubeuge, on which the bridge work was very heavy, particularly those east of Le Cateau, at Aulnoye, Hautmont, and Maubeuge. On this work, in two places, in a single half mile, were craters that amounted to 10,000 cu. yds. of earth in one of the very high fills. This line runs through Landrecies, Hachette, Halte, Sassegny, Aulnoye, Hautmont, Louvroil, Sous Le Bois, into Maubeuge and thence to Charleroi, through some of the richest manufacturing districts seen. From Aug., 1918, the battalion worked full steam, not slackening in the terrible pace till armistice day, after which it had Sundays off.

Reference has been made in the foregoing to the Frevent-Hesdin line built by the battalion. The trestle bridge shown in the accompanying illustration is near the Frevent end of the line, and although it contains over 150,000 f.b.m. of timber and there was a very considerable amount of excavation work for the foundations, it was actually built and ready for operation in seven days. The work was of great interest to the French engineers who visited it during construction to learn Canadian methods in bridge