

# Canadian Railway and Marine World

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## The Canadian Overseas Railway Construction Corps' Organization, and Service in Belgium and France.

In Feb., 1915, a request was made by the Militia Department at Ottawa to Lord Shaughnessy, then President of the C.P.R., to prepare details of establishment and equipment for a railway construction and repair unit, having a total approximate strength of 500 men, all ranks, for service in France. An outline of such an organization was prepared and submitted to the department and, with the exception of heavy standard gauge equipment, was approved by an order in council, on Mar. 11, 1915.

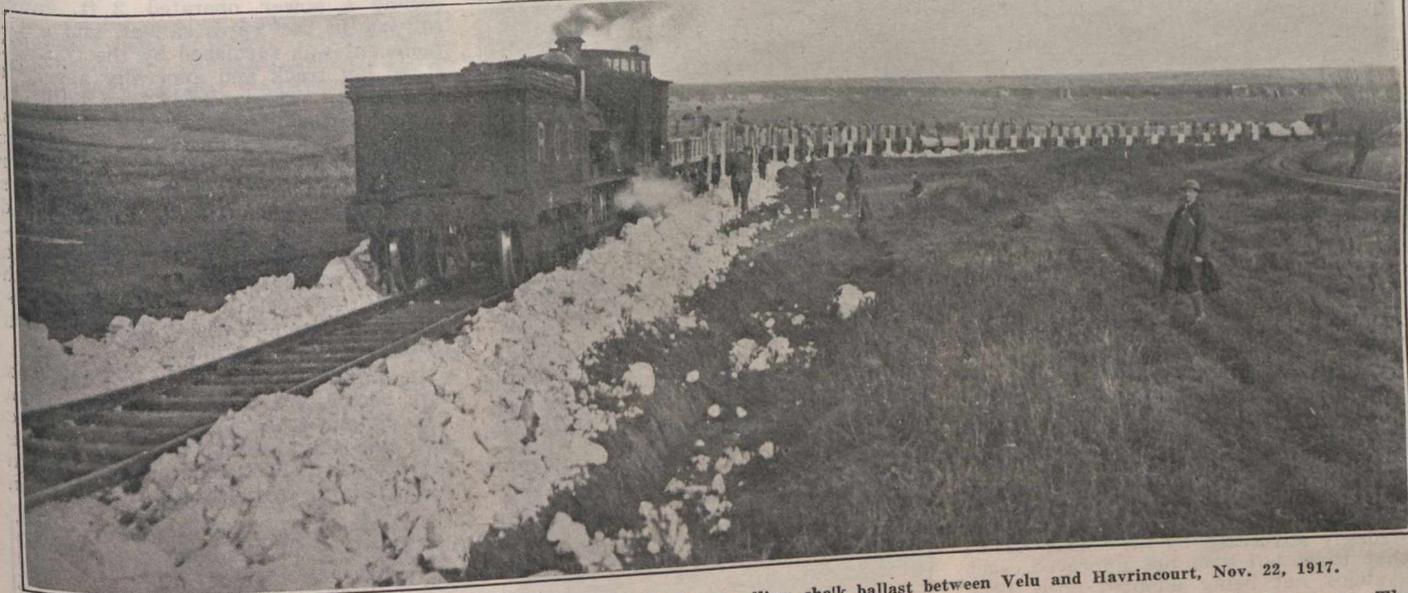
The C. P. R. management was then asked to appoint the officers and recruit the personnel for this

ing followed in great part by the large body of some 15,000 Canadian Railway Troops, which began to arrive in France during the latter part of 1916 and early part of 1917.

Recruiting was started Mar. 12, 1915, and was practically completed by May 1. Military training was carried on at St. John, unfortunately without Militia Department assistance, none being then available, until June 14, on which date, after inspections by the Minister of Militia and General Lessard, embarkation for England in the s.s. Herschel took place. After a very calm passage, the unit landed at Plymouth on June 25, and

thus usefully engaged throughout. After the strength of this base was entirely exhausted, further re-inforcements for the C.O.R.C.C. were supplied from the general reserve of Canadian Railway Troops, which was established in 1917.

On arrival at Calais, the C.O.R.C.C. proceeded to Alveringhem, Belgium, some six miles west of Dixmude, and took up billets in that vicinity. It was then attached to the 2nd and 5th Divisions of the Belgian Army, through the medium of the British Mission with the Belgian Army, for ordinary field engineering work, and engineer parties were also furnished for work with the naval siege gun



Canadian Overseas Railway Construction Corps' Ballast Train, handling chalk ballast between Velu and Havrincourt, Nov. 22, 1917.

organization. This work was undertaken, and as the information available, as to the requisite classes of men and equipment for such an organization, was at that time decidedly limited, authority was obtained to send an expert to France to report on conditions, and in the meantime recruiting was proceeded with. H. F. MacLean of the Cook Construction Co., undertook the mission to France, proceeding overseas in Mar., 1915, and returning in the latter part of May, with very complete and valuable information.

Headquarters were established at St. John, N.B., the C.P.R. providing barracks for the men in colonist cars there, no other accommodation being available. Recruiting was carried on through the agencies of the C.P.R. general superintendents from St. John to Vancouver, and eventually some 540 picked men were selected from a total of approximately 3,000 applicants.

The establishment eventually decided upon was as shown in the table attached and proved highly satisfactory for the work for which it was intended, be-

proceeded to Longmoor Camp, in the Aldershot district, which was then the headquarters of the British Railway Troops. Training was continued until Aug. 25, 1915, on which date, after an inspection by the King, the unit embarked for France via Southampton and Calais.

In Sept., 1915, authorization was given for the recruiting of a reserve base, consisting of two officers and 140 other ranks. This work was undertaken by F. L. Wanklyn, General Executive Assistant, C.P.R., honorary Lieutenant-Colonel of the corps, who, from its organization until demobilization, had charge of all Canadian matters pertaining to the unit, rendering most valuable assistance in the supply of men and equipment. Capt., now Major, Wellwood, returned from France to take charge of this base and took it to England, after which he rejoined the unit in France. While in England and until its strength was exhausted, the reserve base was employed on railway work at various points, including some considerable revisions and additions to yards at Newcastle, being

batteries then situated on the coast. The work in this vicinity consisted of the construction of reinforced concrete machine gun emplacements, observation towers, artillery emplacements, shell proof shelters, standard gauge railway mounted gun emplacements, 2 ft. gauge railways and trench train lines. A mechanical plant was also supplied and operated at Forthem for the transshipping of materials from barges to the light railway system.

In connection with this work the following points are of interest. Two concrete observation towers, some 30 ft. in height, were constructed in the shelter of old buildings, one in the Town of Newport, and the other some distance farther south, within 600 yards of the front line trenches, which, while somewhat battered by shellfire, served usefully as artillery observation posts for more than two years. The artillery emplacements constructed were of such a nature that they withstood successfully direct hits from 11 in. armor piercing shells, in one case a shell, striking directly in the embrasure, cut 4 ft. from the barrel of