

Canadian Railway and Marine World

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The First Battalion Canadian Railway Troops' Work in Belgium and France.

Canadian Railway and Marine World has been favored with the following information about the overseas work of the 1st Battalion Canadian Railway Troops, which was raised and commanded throughout by Lieut.-Col. Blair Ripley, who when selected for the work, was Engineer of Grade Separation, C.P.R., Toronto, and who has since been made a member of the Distinguished Service Order and also a Commander of the Order of the British Empire:—

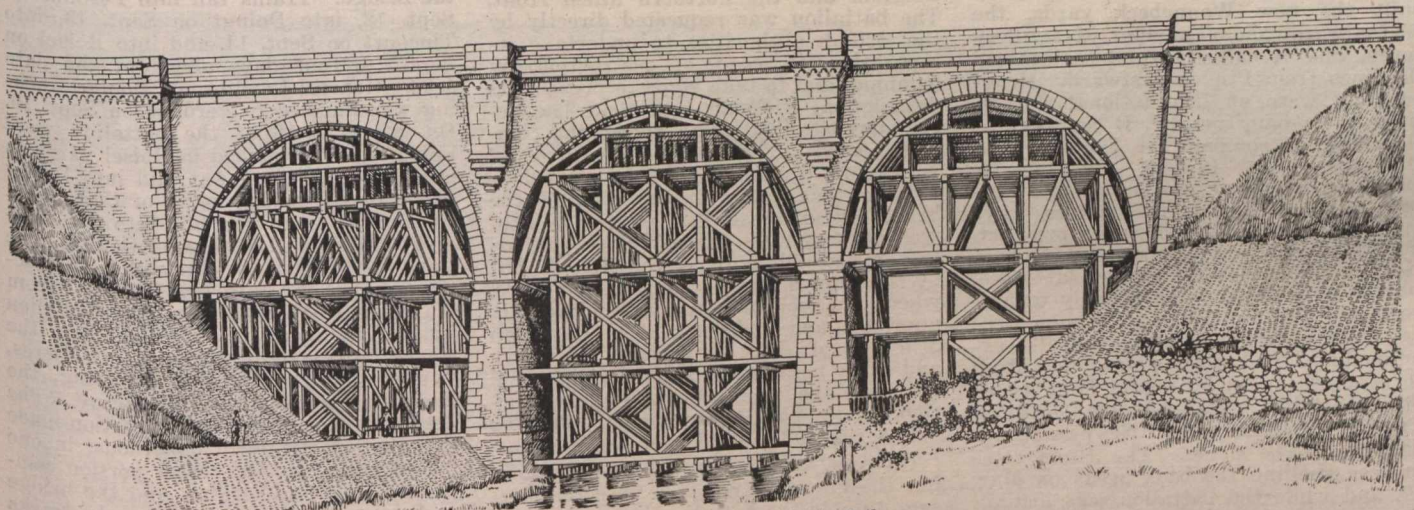
The battalion, which was recruited at various points throughout Canada, from Halifax to Vancouver, was mobilized at Valcartier, Que., left there Sept. 13, 1916, and went into camp at Witley, Eng., Sept. 24. During its stay in England, infantry training was carried on

new lines required in the forward areas. Subsequently new areas were again taken over from the French and maintenance and construction turned over to the battalion, but it had insufficient men for this extra work, and it was decided to make up six light railway construction companies of 350 men each. This was done by drawing from front line units the necessary number of skilled men and when the companies were completed they were placed under the battalion's jurisdiction. This made the total strength approximately 3,200 men. On the work just mentioned the battalion controlled over one half of the light railways on the British front at the time. The men suffered a great many hardships, those in Pozieres Jct., Combles, Leforest and

the British army, they seemed to feel honored by the work given them.

On Apr. 15, 1917 the battalion undertook the rebuilding of the double track line from Peronne to Roisel and on into Epehy. The line was completed to Roisel on Apr. 26. Roisel was still subjected to shelling, and the line into Epehy was not completed, because the Army Commander considered the battalion was too close to the Hindenburg line, and was causing too great an attraction, which was drawing fire unnecessarily. It, however, got within a mile of Epehy with the tracks.

On June 15, 1917, the battalion was ordered to cease work at Peronne and entrain for Dunkerque. We left Peronne at 6 a.m. on June 18 and at 5 p.m.



Wimereux Viaduct on Boulogne-Calais Railway.

Reinforced with heavy timbers, and provided with a steel floor, made up of two layers of steel railway rails, as a protection against enemy bombing. Designed and work carried out by First Battalion, Canadian Railway Troops.

and the necessary papers made out for proceeding to France. The battalion was subjected to a dental examination, and at the last moment it was found necessary to leave 160 men behind in England for treatment, the deficiency in strength being made up by a draft of men selected from the 127th Battalion.

The battalion entrained at Milford on Oct. 25, 1916, proceeded to Southampton, and sailed for Le Havre the same day. After a sojourn of three days at no. 1 rest camp at Le Havre, the battalion entrained for Aveluyom on the night of Oct. 28. The train was stopped at Albert and the unit taken back to Rouen and from there to Candas.

The battalion was given the task of putting in a water supply for the R.O.D. at Candas, and the double tracking of the line to Varennes. Subsequently the following work was added: A new yard at Candas and Varennes, with the maintenance from Candas to Beaussart and Colincamps. On Dec. 10, 1916, the battalion was ordered to proceed to Plateau, where decauville lines (23½ in. gauge) were being taken over from the French. Fortunately the battalion had sufficient personnel to maintain the then existing lines, to operate them, and to construct

Rancourt areas being housed in rudely constructed dugouts for safety against enemy shelling. They, however, had good fortune as far as casualties were concerned, and when they went again on to standard gauge work their killed and wounded were only two, although their camp at Plateau was shelled for three hours on Feb. 7, 1917 by 15 in. guns.

On Mar. 24, 1917 the battalion was hurriedly taken off the light railways to build a standard gauge line from Maricourt to Ferme Rouge, thence to Clery and into Peronne. Notwithstanding the terrible weather, the shelled area in which the line had to be constructed, the then great shortage of standard gauge working tools, they managed to have trains into the Quinconce spur and were supplying food to 20,000 troops on the night of Apr. 10, 1917, and this line was finally got into Peronne on Apr. 14, 1917. The line was 11 miles long with numerous small bridges and culverts. Peronne station and yard was found in a terribly wrecked condition. On the work just referred to, the Guards Division was placed at the battalions disposal as labor, and they worked in a way that merited the warmest enthusiasm and praise from everybody. Although they were the flower of

had completed the journey. It took 133 cars to make the move, although the mechanical transport had gone by road. The battalion camped at Rosendael station, about half a mile from the seashore at Malo-les-Bains, where a pleasant stay was made. The work there consisted of building a new deviation line from Coudekerque around Dunkerque to Rosendael. The men rather enjoyed the stay, as more or less of a holiday. During it, however, Dunkerque was shelled on several occasions by 16 in. naval guns; one shell making a direct hit on corps headquarters in the casino at Malo-les-Bains.

On July 21, 1917, the battalion was under instructions to proceed to International Corner, in Belgium, to prepare for some very hot work, the building of the line from Elverdinghe to Boesinghe, and thence over Pilchem Ridge to Lange-marck. On the morning of July 28, the men were taken out to commence work. This was the day of the big push and the feeling was very exhilarating, about 1,000 British shells were going out to every one of the enemy's coming in. Later on in the day the Huns put over a terrible barrage and little gain was made, no railway work being possible.