

TAKING THE TRAIN TO VICTORY

ROMANCE OF CANADIAN LIGHT RAILWAY CONSTRUCTION UNDER SHELL FIRE
IN FRANCE AND FLANDERS

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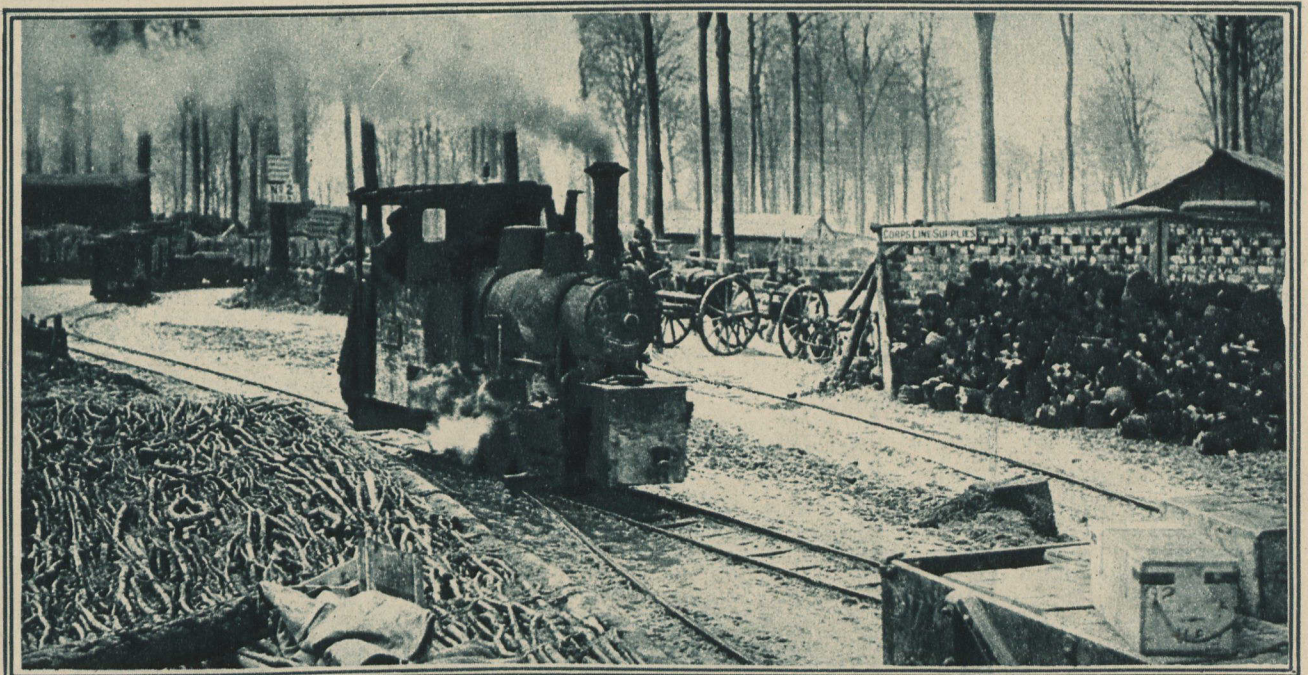
ROMANCE and adventure go hand in hand. There is much of both to be found in the history of railway construction in Canada—in the vision and insight of the Statesmen who dreamed of linking the two great oceans up; in the courage of the old pioneers, who explored the pathless wastes and the hidden places of the mountains; in the skilled and boundless energy of contractor and engineer; in the struggles of the survey party; in the glow of the camp fire. And now the experience of the Canadian railway pioneers has been called into use in the great adventure in France.

Strategy and mobility are closely co-related; it has always been so in war. It took us two years to learn that strategic railways were essential to a successful

entirely relied upon for ammunition and supplies. This will be vividly manifest to those who remember the solitary light railway line that ran to Pozières, and the interminable line of mules with ammunition packs proceeding slowly along the Bapaume road.

New ideas were adopted and strategic systems of light railways became imperative. An organisation for the construction of broad-gauge lines was already in existence; this was augmented, and certain battalions of Canadian railway troops were allotted to this service, and these, in conjunction with the R.E. Railway Construction Companies, undertook the task of pushing forward the broad-gauge railheads closer to the front line than had been done hitherto.

A directorate of light railways was also established at



If engines could be decorated this engine should receive the V.C. Over and over again it has made the most gallant trips up to the front line under extremely heavy fire. Canadian Railway Constructional Troops will drive their engines through any strafe that the enemy can put up.

advance. A distinguished civilian translated the lesson into action; the transportation services were reorganised; skilled Canadian railway construction men were asked for, and they came. The men who had built the triple roads of steel from Atlantic to Pacific were well inured to the chances and vicissitudes of the trail. They came from the woodlands of Ontario and the creeks of the Cariboo: from the prairie and the peaks, and the far snows of the Yukon—comrades in a sterner adventure still. To-day many thousand Canadian railway construction men work behind the British lines from St. Quentin to the sea. Thus has the romance of the construction camps of Canada been translated to the battlefields of France.

A year ago the new armies of Britain were pounding hard on the enemy's defences on the Somme; trench after trench was taken, position after position stormed; thus was the enemy's retreat, begun in February, forced upon him.

Hitherto animal and motor transport were almost

G.H.Q. The only permanent construction troops placed at the disposal of this directorate were Canadian railway troops. The work of construction was so urgent during the enemy's retreat that unskilled labour was always attached to them, consisting of pioneers, labour battalions, and on occasions infantry of the line. The weather was unimaginably vile, animal transport was practically impossible, and the roads were destroyed and impassable. Great difficulty was experienced on account of the wholesale destruction wrought by the enemy; the old tracks had been almost completely destroyed, hidden mines were laid, and in many cases deep craters had to be filled up. For this work the scrapers with which the construction troops were provided proved very useful. Generous provision was made for ordinary difficulties in the engineering supplies provided with their technical equipment. When these were not available the spoils of the battlefield were requisitioned. Triangle wiring posts were used as

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