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The Canadian Engineers' First Tramways Company's Work in France.

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Among all the various units engaged on railway work in France, the Canadian tramways companies did their share with the best, though their work is not very generally known and they are often confused with the "Railway Troops," which were army troops, while the tramways companies were throughout their history Canadian Corp Troops.

The 1st and 2nd Tramways Companies, Canadian Engineers, were among the few units which were authorized, formed, worked, and finally were demobilized in France, and never existed as units in any other place than the forward area. The early history of the first company from its inception in May, 1916, was briefly as follows: On May 19, 1916, the Composite Pioneer Company, Canadian Corps, was formed to construct and operate light railways in the Ypres sector and the personnel was drawn from the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Canadian Pioneer Battalions and the Canadian Overseas Railway Construction Corps, the total number being approximately 280, all ranks, under Capt. D. H. Williams; Major Goldie, D.S.O., being Field Engineer, and Major R. P. Rogers being Assistant Field Engineer.

The company built and operated about 14 miles of 60 c.m. track, and the first power for operating was two small locomotives salvaged from Dickebusch Lake. On Sept. 3, 1916, the company left Vlamertinghe and moved south to Albert, with the Canadian Corps, for the Somme battle, and did good work on the lines from Albert to Becourt Wood, and Pozieres, working with tractors up to Gordon dump, and from there the trains were taken forward by horse or mule power until sufficient ballast became available to make the track fit to use tractors forward of that point. The company left the Somme on Oct. 26, 1916, and returned to the Lens front, locating at the Bois-de-la-Haie, and extending the line, that already ran to Carency, forward to Souchez and across Zouave Valley to Dingwall tunnel at the west foot of Vimy Ridge. On the return from the Somme a section of the company, under Lieut. S. F. Workman, proceeded to Bois-de-Bray to form a second company, which eventually became the Canadian Engineers 2nd Tramways Company.

Before the Vimy show in April, 1917, the average daily tonnage hauled was about 125 tons, but after the taking of the ridge the tonnage steadily increased, when the new lines were pushed through.

Construction was carried on steadily throughout 1917, and the ground won in the battles of Vimy Ridge, Hill 65, Avion, and Hill 70, was covered with 60 c.m. tracks, so that by the end of the year, by which time the 2nd Tramways Co. was located to the north of the 1st Tramways Co., the Canadian front was better served by light railways than any

other sector on the British front, and all classes of traffic were handled.

About June, 1917, the transport of guns was inaugurated, and all sizes from 18 pr. to 8 in. Howitzers were moved; a number of batteries choosing positions which were entirely dependent on the tramways for getting in their guns, ammunition, and all other supplies.



Lieutenant and Adjutant F. E. Collinson.

After the battle of Vimy Ridge, the company's headquarters were located at Lens Junction, between Souchez and Ablain St. Nazaire, and remained there for over 15 months, and with the advantage of a permanent location the company got forward area railroading nearly to a peace basis; all tracks were heavily ballasted, steel renewed, road crossings fixed up, grades revised and the control system made thoroughly efficient, though the whole territory was exposed to shell fire at all times, and forward of Vimy Ridge, operation was only possible at nights.

The British system of handling trains on the single tracks was from a central control, similar to dispatching on Canadian railways, whereas the 1st Tramways Co.'s system in France was station to station control, similar to the English railway system of control from one signal cabin to the next.

Before the end of 1917, due in large measure to Major R. P. Rogers' energy

in getting business for the tramways, the company was handling close to 700 tons, and making over 2,000 ton miles daily.

Traffic was worked as far as the tramways' yards at Lens Junction by the Army Light Railway, with steam and from there the company worked it forward in army cars by tractor. The three types of tractor used were:

20 h.p. simplex, capable of handling.....15 tons
40 h.p. simplex, capable of handling.....30 tons
45 h.p. petrol electric, capable of handling..45 tons

The army cars generally were double bogie flats and gondolas, with a tare of 2½ tons and a capacity of 10 tons. In addition the company had for local traffic on its own lines a considerable number of small springless cars, capacity 1½ tons, and captured German cars with a capacity of 5 tons.

Troops movements were next undertaken, and the passenger traffic in the winter of 1917-1918 grew to considerable dimensions, and on a number of occasions, two battalions were moved close up to the front line and 2 battalions brought out in a night; and regular night trains were run to take working parties to and from their work on the defense lines; the regular schedule handling about 1,200 men nightly. Hospital trains were also run on a regular schedule from the forward dressing stations.

The company's organization at this time consisted of a headquarters at Lens Junction, including tractor repair sheds, blacksmiths and carpenters shops, quartermasters stores, etc., with the operating department, under the Chief Traffic Officer, also at headquarters. The construction department was divided into three sections, which were quartered at Whiz-Bang corner, in Lievin, in Cite de Caumont, Angres, and at Kootenay Camp, on the east face of Vimy Ridge. The two latter camps, though pretty well forward, were lucky locations, but at Whiz-Bang the section lived constantly alongside the infantry in support, and on two occasions practically the whole section became casualties, through shell fire. Trains could be operated as far as Lievin in daylight, and a considerable number of batteries on this line could be served by day, but forward of this and the whole of the territory south of Givenchy could only be served at night. The record for one night was 37 trains going forward from Lens Junction, and the average was about 25 trains.

In Nov., 1917, an establishment was authorized, and the company was given the name of No. 1 Section, Canadian Corps Tramways, but in Mar., 1918, a complete establishment was approved and the name changed to Canadian Engineers, 1st Tramways Company, all attached personnel was then transferred to the engineers, and the company brought up to establishment of 20 of-