1947

The saga of the 708 Railway Grand Division

Andrew Grant Gregory

Carroll Bateman

THE SAGA OF THE 708 RAILWAY GRAND DIVISION

BY

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"WILD BILL'S GANG"

FOREWORD

THERE is always a tendency to dramatize and glorify the subject and the individuals concerned in writing the history of a military unit, especially if the organization got within sound of gunfire. Further, the inclination to maximize the importance of the subject organization at the expense of minimizing the importance of others, is the general rule.

Notwithstanding, the author of this account of the activities of one such organization—the 708th Railway Grand Division—acknowledges the existence and importance of all army organizations. And this is not so much a history in the definitive sense of the word as it is a recollection of certain highlights of the organization's career.

I like to think it is a simple story of, by and for the members of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 708th RAILWAY GRAND DIVISION. In truth it is a story of a group of people, Americans all, who went to the European continent with a mission —the mission of supervising the operation of military railways, in a twenty-four-hour daily effort under combat conditions, to insure that supplies moved to combat troops in such a way that they were not "Too Little" or "Too Late."

It is a story for the kin and the friends of every man who served with us. It is a story for the twenty-eight different American railroads that schooled members of the organization in civilian life before the war began. It is a story of a broad cross-section of citizens—of men from the North, South, East and West, who were banded together by a common purpose and who developed a spirit of comradeship that was devoid of the petty eccentricities of sectionalism. As such, it is a story of America.

It is a story of good times and bad, of long days and nights of hard work, of buzz-bombs and shell fire; of loyalty, of devotion to duty and indomitable will to accomplish a mission. Also, it is a tribute to the individuals who played the roles of the story, a tribute to the men of the railway operating and shop battalions which compiled the incredible records credited to the Grand Division. It is a story which they may relate with pride.

To our loved ones, to the American railroads (especially the Baltimore and Ohio, which sponsored us), to all Americans who have heard, with a feeling of awe and nostalgia, the whistle of a locomotive racing down the line at night, we present this story, that you may relive those unforgettable days with us.

A. G. GREGORY
Major, T. C.

Amory, Mississippi
January, 1946

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For assistance in preparing this history, the author is grateful to the following organizations and individuals:

The War Department, for giving me the privilege of being a member of this splendid organization, in a position where I could observe the overall operations.

Colonel William S. Carr, for his inspiration and advice.

Lieutenant Colonels R. D. Fretwell and John S. Major and Major William H. Hathaway, for technical advice and information about the activities of their sections.

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Master Sergeant John E. Brundrett, Technical Sergeants Louis B. Hoelscher and Russell F. Wurst, Corporal Earl J. Lind and all draftsmen in the Engineer and Equipment Sections, who prepared maps and charts.

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Everyone in a swell gang, too numerous to name individually, who made the story.

—A. G. G.

HONORS AND DISTINCTIONS
WORLD WAR II

First Railway Grand Division of the Transportation Corps activated at New Orleans, La.

First Railway Grand Division to arrive in the European Theater of Operations.

First Railway Grand Division to function in the United Kingdom.

First military railway service unit to establish headquarters in Belgium.

First to operate trains into Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg and Germany.

First to operate U. S. A. Hospital Trains out of Holland, Belgium and Germany.

First to operate trains into Bremen, Germany, and into and out of the Port of Bremerhaven, the only port operated by U. S. Forces in Germany.

Delivered a record-breaking thirty trains of ammunition to General Patton's Third Army at Le Mans, France, in the drive for the liberation of Paris.

Awarded Meritorious Service Unit Plaque.

Awarded four bronze battle stars, for participation in four continental campaigns: Northern France, Ardennes, Rhineland and Central Germany.

CONTENTS

COMMANDING OFFICER

CHAPTER ONE

THE WAR OF COMMUNICATIONS

THE story of an army organization really never begins or ends. A good army organization is in a sense an ageless tradition, albeit an intangible thing, a number that takes root only in the hearts of its members and, nourished by true comradeship, grows to infinite proportions. Time, through the years, provides the chapters of the history.

This chapter begins in February, 1943, and closes in December, 1945. Thirty-four months—a flicker in the flame of Time—but a chapter crammed full of adventure and experiences of a lifetime for those of us who found a role in the list of characters.

But first let me tell you what kind of organization we were, why the army activated us and what our mission was with relation to the winning of the war. Before the war, most of us had chosen railroading as our vocation, working on railroads throughout the United States. Some of us were officials, some clerks, some shopmen, some trainmen, some signal men. And though some of us did not work for a railroad at all, we all were interested in rail transportation and were equipped with previous experience that could be utilized by a railway grand division.

During World War I there was a military railway organization functioning as a part of the Corps of Engineers, which constructed, maintained and operated railways in theaters of operations. All army units are based on what is known as a "Table of Organization," a list of job titles which limits both the number and ranks of officers and enlisted men. During peacetime, military railway organizations existed only on paper in this form. The Army had worked out agreements with major railroads in the U. S. whereby such companies "sponsor" a military railway organization in time of war.

The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad agreed to sponsor a railway grand division, and when war came that company entertained applications from its employees to enlist for army duty with the 708th Railway Grand Division. The Army set a date in February, 1943, for the officers of the organization to begin indoctrination training at Fort Slocum, New York. On April 6, 1943, the organization was

activated at the Army Service Forces Unit Training Center, New Orleans, Louisiana. It was then the responsibility of the army to fill vacancies still existing in the Table of Organization so that the unit would be at required strength during training and prior to embarking for overseas service.

The 708th was one of several "Railway Grand Divisions" activated by the army and "sponsored" by American railway companies. In addition to a number of Baltimore and Ohio employees who applied for military duty with the 708th, the organization during the summer of 1943 was filled out with qualified railroad men who were then in the armed forces and available for transfer.

What is a Railway Grand Division? In answering this question, let me remind you that only a few years ago practically all forms of army transportation were combined in the Army Transportation Corps, the youngest corps in our army. In general, army transportation embraces the movement of personnel and materiel and includes sea transport as well as land transport. Land transport includes movement by rail and highway. It was the rail movement with which we were concerned.

General Eisenhower, as Commanding General of the European Theater of Operations, was charged with the responsibility for all functions therein. Farther down the chain of command was a Chief of Transportation whose duty it was to coordinate all Army Transportation Corps functions. The Chief of Transportation, Major General Frank S. Ross, had a staff consisting of representatives of units engaged in marine operations, motor transport and military railways. The officer charged with the responsibility for operating and maintaining military railways was the Director General, Military Railway Service, Major General Carl R. Gray, Jr., who divided his forces (some 25,000 men) into two separate "Military Railway Services," each of which was commanded by an officer known as a "General Manager, Military Railway Service." In the European Theater of Operations, these were designated as the First and Second Military Railway Services. Our organization was a part of the "Second Military Railway Service," commanded by Brigadier General Clarence L. Burpee. His headquarters corresponded to the general offices of a major United States railroad.

Under General Burpee, the second echelon of command was the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Railway Grand Division, composed of a "General Superintendent" and his staff (25 officers; 56 enlisted men). Assigned to the Railway Grand Division were railway operating battalions and a railway shop battalion. The rail-

STAFF . .

Left: Lt. Col. Richard D. Fretwell (Exec.)

Right: Lt. Col. John S. Major (Supt. Equip.)

Left: Lt. Col. John B. Arter (Supt. Maint. of Way)

Right: Major William H. Hathaway (Gen'l Storekeeper)

Left: Lt. Col. Donald F. Harker (Stationmaster)

Right: Major George W. Padgett (Mechanical Engineer)

way operating battalion (normally 30 officers; 850 enlisted men) was the basic unit of the military railway service. It corresponded to an operating division on a domestic commercial railroad and was commanded by a "division superintendent." Limits of the division were determined by the length of main line, the number and location of branch lines, the density of traffic, and the terminal facilities. The railway operating battalion had the necessary personnel and equipment to maintain track and structures, to make running repairs to equipment and to operate trains and yards of a division.

The Commanding Cfficer of the battalion (Division Superintendent) reported to the General Superintendent of a grand division. Two or more railway operating battalions formed a grand division. Hence, the name for our organization—the 708th Railway Grand Division.

The mission of the military railway service (abbreviated to MRS) was to maintain and operate railroads in the theater of operations, providing prompt and dependable rail service as required by other branches of service. The mission of the General Manager, Second Military Railway Service, was to coordinate the functions of all MRS organizations in the area assigned to his command. The mission of the General Superintendent, Railway Grand Division, was to coordinate the functions of two or more railway operating and shop battalions. The mission of the Superintendent, Railway Operating Battalion, was to operate and maintain the division of railway assigned to his battalion. The mission of the General Shop Superintendent, Railway Shop Battalion, was to operate a railway shop or shops performing heavy repairs on locomotives and cars for the several railway operating battalions in its area.

We were essentially in the hauling business, but it was not as simple as that. We were also soldiers. We wore the uniform, we drew the pay. Enemy aerial bombs, buzz-bombs and bullets killed many of our number. However, as far as the army was concerned our reason for going to Europe was to haul. Our "customers" were the greatest armies ever put together, and it was our mission to see that the men who did the fighting got the ammunition to fight with and the food to keep them fighting.

On continental Europe it was our lot at different times to sustain the American First, Third, Seventh, Ninth and Fifteenth Armies and the Advance Section of the Communications Zone. In the main, our affection lies with the American First Army, for we served it most and for the longest period of time. After the St. Lo break-through in July, 1944, we followed the First Army with the

STAFF . .

Left: Major Andrew G. Gregory (Adjutant)

Right: Major Ray A. Garrigus (Master Mechanic)

Left: Major Herschel O. Hutson (Supt. Bridges and Buildings)

Right: Major Michael B. Murray (Stationmaster)

Left: Capt. James D. G. Collins (Catholic Chaplain)

Right: Capt. Julius L. Witzler (Stationmaster)

closest possible proximity, and during the Belgian Bulge, December, 1944, the Headquarters of the First Army moved behind us at Liege, Belgium. It was perhaps during this period that our jurisdiction accomplished its most noteworthy feats, although many other accomplishments rate as high.

The victory in World War II was not realized through the efforts of any heroic minority. Rather, the victory was attained through the collective efforts of our entire population. Accelerated and sustained production at home made possible the blasting of the enemy from the skies, and the ultimate fielding of armies in Europe and in the Pacific. With our brave airmen paving the way, our brave combat ground forces smashed the enemy in close combat. The Navy performed its mission in a spectacular fashion. Equally brave and resourceful, the service forces engaged in the War of Communications sustained the fighting men by keeping them supplied with vital ammunition, lubricants, clothing and food.

In comparison with the deeds of gallant air and ground force troops, and the attendant publicity given to them during the war, the role of the American Services of Supply may seem unspectacular and colorless. But those who served in forward areas realize how the combat and service forces were mixed together, often fighting side by side. There are "foot-sloggers" who served in the European Theater of Operations who will never forget the job done by the men who sustained them.

We were proud to serve "Fox Hole Joe" in the forward areas. He served gloriously and conscientiously and carried out his duties wherever the army directed, as we did ourselves. American team play at home and abroad turned the tide of victory.

There were three distinct phases of transportation after our armies invaded Europe through Normandy. First, there was the truck phase, in which supplies were pushed in right behind the fighting men, and put into temporary dumps near the beach. This soon expanded into long-haul trucking, known as the "Red Ball Express," which bridged the period of emergency while the armies were advancing and while the railroad lines were being put into condition.

The second was the railroad phase, during which, despite demolished bridges, inadequate equipment and destroyed tracks, the American railroading tradition established a new record for delivering the goods.

The third phase involved the utilization of the port of Antwerp, Belgium, which meant a tremendous improvement over the original "shoestring" method of supply from Western France, because Ant-

werp was of vast capacity and close to the enemy—at times too close. The MRS participated in both phases two and three.

We suppose, in the light of overall victory, that the role we played in the downfall of Hitler's Europe was secondary. But it was an important role, and in what follows we tell about our part in the "War of Communications."

Chaplain Collins Celebrates Mass at Liege

CHAPTER TWO

INTO ACTION

IN FEBRUARY, 1943, a group of civilian railroaders of the Baltimore and Ohio swapped mufti for khaki, and went into training at Fort Slocum, New York. With many railroad men from other American railroads, they were volunteers. Upon completion of the initial "military refresher course" they assembled at the Army Service Forces, Unit Training Center at New Orleans, La., where on April 6, 1943, HEADQUARTERS AND HEADQUARTERS COMPANY 708TH RAILWAY GRAND DIVISION, MILITARY RAILWAY SERVICE, TRANSPORTATION CORPS, sponsored by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, was activated. Later the unit picked up representatives of twenty-eight other American railroads.

The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and the railroad industry of America have ample reason to be proud of their representatives in the 708th Railway Grand Division, who experienced more combat activity than any other military railway service organization in history.

Subsequent to its activation in New Orleans, the 708th received basic military and technical training in the Army Service Forces, Unit Training Center during the summer of 1943. A cadre from military railway service headquarters at St. Paul, Minnesota, formed the nucleus of enlisted men. Coupled with this, a careful selection of enlisted men during the training period resulted in a grouping of perhaps the most talented and competent men in any railway grand division headquarters.

Little precedent had been established as to the actual "in the field" functioning of a railway grand division headquarters. It was known that the commanding officer was directly responsible for the maintenance and operation of military railways assigned to his jurisdiction by the Commanding General of a Military Railway Service. In the grand division headquarters was an administration section, together with four technical sections: Transportation, Engineering, Equipment, Stores.

The Transportation Section was responsible for the assembling, classifying, prompt handling and releasing of cars; the prompt dis-

Stores Section

Administration Section

Equipment Section

Engineering Section

patch and expeditious movement of trains; the tracing of car movements, the returning of empty cars and their distribution to loading points; and, finally, supervision over telegraph and telephone communications.

The Engineering Section was responsible for maintenance of track and roadway property, including bridges, culverts, buildings, coaling stations and water stations; maintenance of signals, control tower apparatus, interlocking plants, and track circuits; arrangements for water supply, including maintenance of all piping and mechanical appliances, reconnaissance of newly occupied territory and submission of reports.

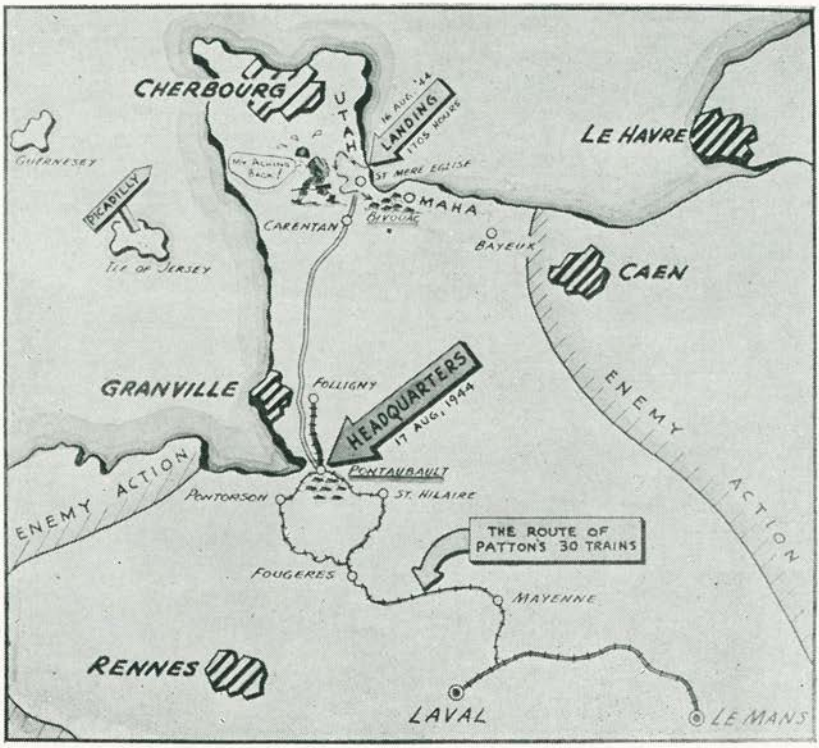
The Equipment Section was responsible for supervision over all railway repair shops; for proper maintenance of motive power and cars; for maintenance of shop machinery and mechanical equipment in buildings; for submission of reconnaissance reports on motive power and rolling stock in newly occupied territory.

The Stores Section was responsible for coordination of all supply requirements, for technical supervision over storekeepers and for maintaining adequate fuel reserves.

With these responsibilities in mind, the organization trained in New Orleans from April to early September, 1943. Staging for overseas movement at Camp Shanks, New York, in early September, the division sailed from New York harbor on the Queen Mary on September 20, arriving in Scotland five days later under a veil of secrecy.

The first station in England was Depot TC-201 in Hainault, Essex, a suburb of London. While there, the 708th supervised military railway activities at depots handling military supplies for the invasion. Its work included the erection of U. S. rolling stock, such as box cars, flat cars and gondolas, later ferried to the continent and used in France, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg and Germany.

On January 16, 1944, Colonel William S. Carr of the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad, originally head of the 729th Railway Operating Battalion, was assigned as Commanding Officer. It was Colonel Carr who led the 708th during the final invasion build-up in England, and during all of its combat operations in Europe. In the United Kingdom on D-Day (June 6, 1944) the 708th, with a jurisdiction that included England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, was busy helping empty the huge depots of the vast quantities of war materiel to be rushed to the invasion beaches to sustain the initial landings.

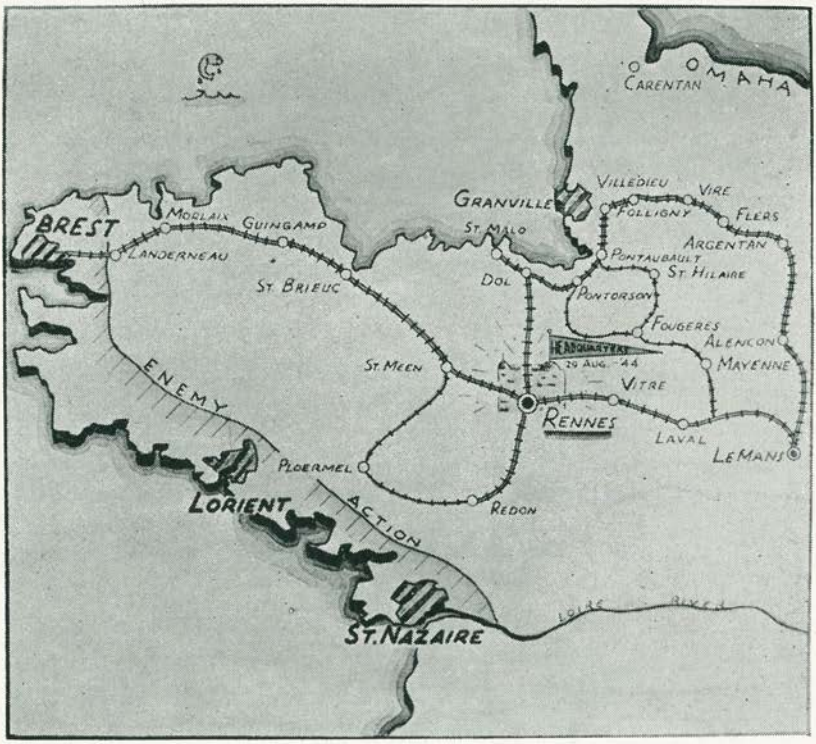


Lines Operated by the 708th, 17 to 28 August, 1944

The 708th landed on one of the original invasion beaches (Utah) in France on August 16, 1944, and followed the combat armies to the Elbe River in Germany, where the junction was realized with the Russians.

The first continental headquarters was at Pontaubault, France, where two operating battalions originally were assigned to the grand division. Faced at the very beginning with the task of moving thirty important trains to General Patton's Third Army at Le Mans, the division and the battalions demonstrated great adaptability to combat conditions. They moved more than the required number of trains from Folligny into Le Mans before the target hour.

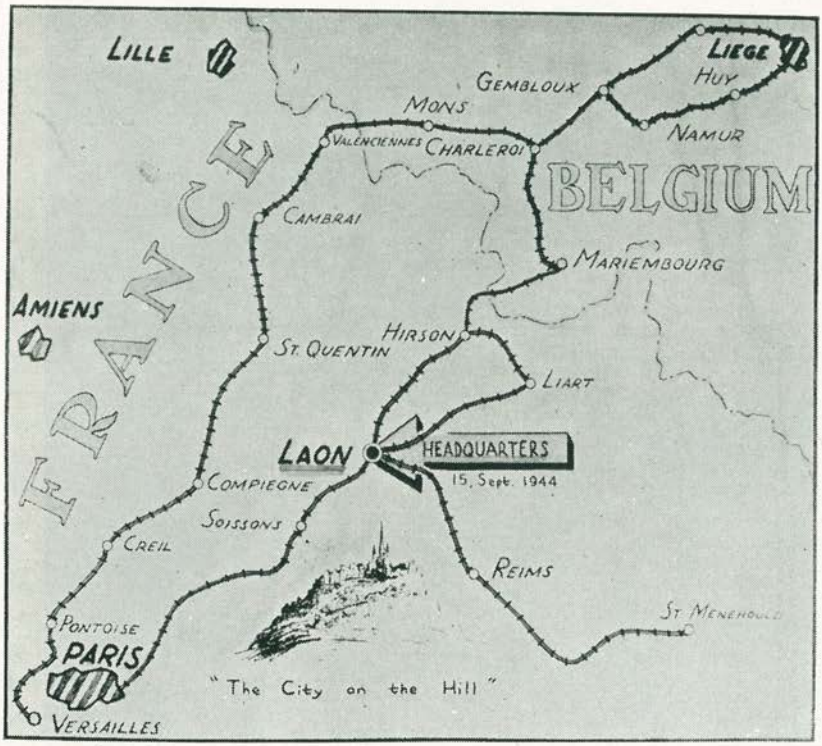
The tightly-knit continental railway network had been badly crippled by constant Allied air bombing, by German retrograde demolition activity, and by the more destructive treatment of combat forces in the height of ground struggles. The condition of the rail



Lines Operated by the 708th, 29 August to 14 September, 1944

network was decidedly incompatible with the immediate scheduling of trains of food and ammunition to the armies. The initial railroad line was single track only, more than half of it being poorly maintained lightweight-rail branch territory with steep grades, negligible communications and little operating equipment. Ingenious improvisation by the Corps of Engineers and the Military Railway Service, in collaboration with foreign railroad workers, rendered this original line of communication usable. It handled a traffic well beyond the former normal peacetime capability. Despite roving bands of uncaptured Germans, who often resorted to sniping, General Patton got more ammunition than he required. From that moment, the 708th Railway Grand Division had come into its own.

On August 29, the organization moved to Rennes, France, where four railway operating battalions and one railway shop battalion were assigned. At Rennes, the operating territory consisted of a loop from Folligny to Le Mans, returning via Rennes. During

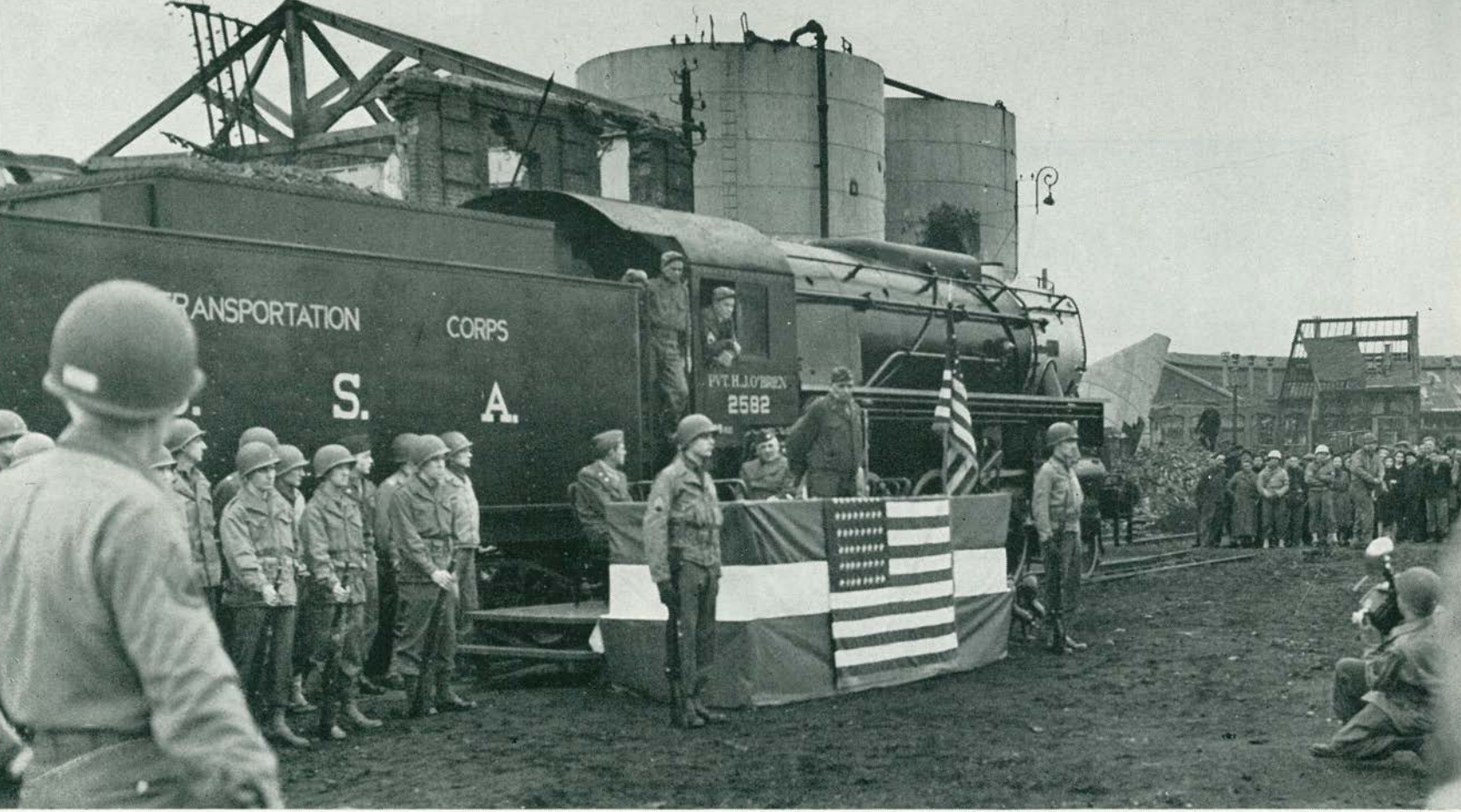


Lines Operated by the 708th, 15 September to 4 October, 1944

this time, much war materiel was moved by rail west to the Brest peninsula for a campaign of the Ninth U. S. Army, which had come directly from the U. S. A.

On September 15, 1944, passing through Paris without a pause, the 708th moved to Laon, two hundred miles east of Rennes, from where one of its operating battalions operated the first MRS train into Belgium. Forward rail operations in combat areas were continued, and on October 5 the Railway Grand Division moved to Liege. It thus became the first MRS unit to establish headquarters in Belgium.

Liege had been liberated on September 8, and our advance party followed the First U. S. Army into the city. It was at Liege that the 708th showed its mettle. For in Liege, the ability of the military railway service was put to its severest test in supplying the combat armies butting against Germany's Seigfried Line and west Rhine defenses. Liege was like the palm of a many-fingered rail net that stretched in all directions.



Major General Carl R. Gray, Jr., director general of Military Railway Service in the ETO, dedicates locomotive to Pvt. H. J. O'Brien, killed at Liege, Belgium

CHAPTER THREE

UNDER FIRE AT LIEGE

THE organization headquarters remained at Liege from October, 1944, to mid-April, 1945. For one week after its arrival on October 5, the organization supervised the operation of military railways from Paris to Liege, one of the longest jurisdictions ever delegated to a railway grand division, and at that time the longest. From mid-October on, the jurisdiction varied, owing to a fluid situation. At one time it included territory east of the Meuse River only, but at another period included territory east and west of the Meuse, as far back as Namur, Belgium.

On November 20, 1944, there began the first German V-1 attack against Liege, and records show that for a ten-day period 331 V-1s (buzz bombs) fell in the almost immediate vicinity of headquarters. Window glass was broken, the headquarters building was shaken on many occasions, and it was necessary for all personnel to sleep in air raid shelters. Ninety-seven per cent of the 82,700 dwellings in the Province of Liege were damaged or destroyed in this concentrated attack.

German V-bombs (or robot bombs) were used in force on only three cities in World War II. These were London, Antwerp and Liege. Official figures published by the Allies show that Liege had the greatest co-efficient of hits by area although it was the smallest of the three cities. At Liege, the grand division headquarters and its battalions went through an ordeal of prolonged hazard and won the acclaim of all who were familiar with their operations.

Under the head line, "708TH RAILWAY GRAND DIVISION WRITES EPIC PAGES DURING GREAT NAZI COUNTER-ATTACK," the Transportation Corps *Weekly News Letter*, official publication of the Office of the Chief of Transportation, at the time a classified "Secret" publication, in its issue of January 15, 1945, carried the following article:

"The mission of the 708th Railway Grand Division was clear—'To support the First and Ninth United States Armies in their progress into Germany along the northern line of communications.'

"The American First Army mauled through France, Belgium and southern Holland, and stalled around Aachen in mid-September.

Finally it took Aachen and began a slow but dogged yard-by-yard conquest of Western Germany.

"After smashing the Nazis on the Brest peninsula, the American Ninth Army dashed secretly across France and Belgium and established headquarters at Maastricht, Holland. It disposed its troops on a narrow front. The right flank bordered the left flank of the American First Army, and the left flank bordered the right flank of the British 21st Army group. The Ninth, too, dug in with slow, hard fighting.

"The lack of forward push in the tactical situation resulted in the establishment of an unprecedented number of tightly-knit railheads for both the Ninth and First Armies and the Advance Section, Communications Zone. For the months of November and December, 1944, jurisdiction of the 708th Railway Grand Division ranged, owing to various immediate and temporary situations, from territory east of the Meuse River only, to all territory east of the Meuse, and west of the Meuse back to Namur, Belgium.

"Headquarters and Headquarters Company were established in the Hotel du Chemin du Fer, Liege, Belgium, a 'brownstone,' five-story building situated directly across the street from the main (Guillemins) Liege railroad station. Liege, a great Allied communications hub, was the ideal location from the standpoint of accomplishing the mission. A sprawling, rambling, yet thickly populated area, Liege and its environs stretched for miles along the banks of the Meuse River. At the time of the arrival of this unit, on the 5th of October, 1944, Liege proper was practically unmarked by the scars of war except for a limited area along the immediate river front, which had been damaged by Allied bombing. Its foundries and mills hummed, and uptown stores displayed clothing, fruit, food and ice cream. Later, this incongruity was to fade.

"The months of November and December were marked by cloudy, dense, oft-foggy weather. In December snow came. Never deep, the snow carpeted the surrounding terrain for periods of as much as a week in length. There was much rain. However, operations were not seriously hampered by the weather.

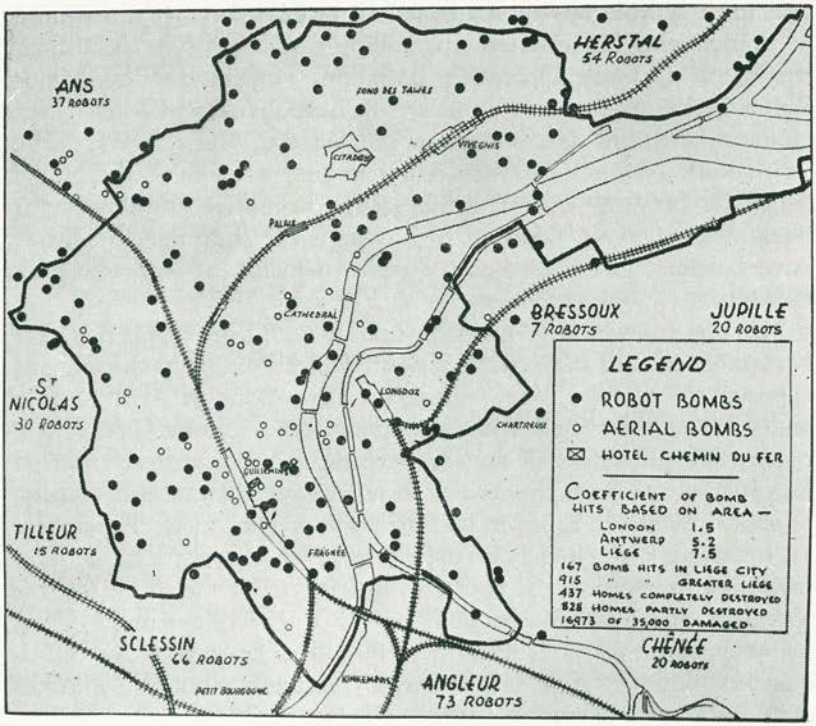
"The 740th Railway Operating Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Samuel H. Pulliam, also set up its headquarters in Liege and operated primarily east of the Meuse River. The 741st Railway Operating Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Laurence E. Thornton of the B&O's Chicago Terminal Railroad, arrived during November and December. It set up headquarters in Liege, and operated the line of communications from Namur to Liege. This battalion demonstrated adaptability to close front line

operation without having the benefit of prior experience in England or France with Continental-type rolling stock. Late in December, the 734th Railway Operating Battalion, commanded by Major Ralph E. Johnson, arrived and set up headquarters in Maastricht, Holland, with the mission of supporting the Ninth Army. The 755th Railway Shop Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Miles G. Stevens, operated the great locomotive installation at Namur, Belgium, in addition to having a car shop detachment at Ans, Belgium, and a locomotive repair detachment at Herbesthal, Belgium.

"It was an ordinary, murky workday in Liege. The day was November 20. In the early afternoon the sky suddenly cleared and exposed the sun for a few minutes. Operations at Ans, Renory and Kinkempois Yard and Guillemins were routine. At three-twenty-five the sound of an approaching V-1 was scarcely noticed except by a few who chanced a casual skyward glance endeavoring to spot the flaming robot in its trajectory over the city. Heretofore an occasional V-1 had pathed the sky always carrying its gutteral truck-like roar out of the sound of hearing. But the sound of this V-1 grew louder and louder, and finally it stopped altogether. Then its explosion rocked Guillemins valley and opened a few headquarters' doors. Some said it was an accident. But five minutes later there was a repetition of the explosion, and by three-thirty, two more V-1s had fallen in Liege. The first robomb siege of Liege was on. Several hits to rail installations caused minor damage. All personnel slept in shelters during the period. A warning system was initiated day and night through the medium of outside guards who listened for the approach of V-1s. All enlisted men from master sergeants to privates participated in this roster. In addition, V-2s were dropped occasionally within the city. The first siege ended at four-thirty, November 30.

"There was no V-1 activity again until December 15 when, obviously timed to coincide with the great Nazi counter-attack south of the city, the second siege began. Personnel were again forced to live in shelters. By Christmas, V-1s had marked the city of Liege with war damage resembling a prolonged artillery attack. The Luftwaffe became active over the city, strafing and bombing sometimes in considerable strength and at first with no opposition.

"During the enemy counter-attack the backhaul and the relocation of army supplies to safer areas required close figuring in the control of forward movements—the supplying of empties and the balancing of power. But the volume of traffic was never permitted to exceed the ability to accept and move all tonnage offered. Tech-



Bomb Pattern for Liege, Belgium

nical personnel were faced everlastingly with trying and extremely hazardous situations. Nevertheless, they rendered meritorious service in keeping railheads supplied with the necessary number of cars. The cooperation of Colonel Charles H. Blumenfeld, 25th Regulating Group, and Colonel Laurence R. Sexton, Regulating Group (Provisional), who headed the Rail Transportation Office functions for the Advance Section, Communications Zone, and for the First and Ninth Armies, respectively, was excellent and contributed much to the overall success of the military railway service operations sustaining the armies."

Mere words are highly inadequate to portray the terror and noise and death which all occur at the height of battle or bombing. In the two robomb sieges of Liege more than a thousand V-bombs fell and detonated in the city. Many combat men confined to Liege army hospitals begged to be returned to the front a few miles east to escape the terror of V-bombings.

Part of the drama is portrayed in the following. Shortly before midnight on December 22, a Nazi plane braving heavy flack swooped

low at the main railroad station and dropped bombs. One of the bombs made a direct hit on our headquarters building, knocking off the northeast corner and causing a deep crater. On December 24 an incident report from the 708th's Commanding Officer, Colonel Carr, told a similar story of stark realism to higher echelons in Brussels and Paris:

"At 1700 Dec 23rd 1944 hospital train 31 en route deadhead Kinkempois (Liege) to Verviers was strafed twice by enemy planes north of Pepinster. At 1145 Dec 24th enlisted men's billets 740th and 741st Rly Opn Bns bombed by enemy plane killing 8 men 741st wounding 3 of 740th and 2 of 741st who are in critical condition; slightly injured 40 more of both units. Buildings rendered uninhabitable and personnel transferred to box cars and cabooses. At 1415 Dec 24th enemy planes strafed convoy on highway near Kinkempois station and dropped bomb in rail yard. Six truck drivers killed, four soldiers 740th Rly Opn Bn wounded. Bomb struck tracks which were being repaired, tearing down communication wires. Four civilian trackmen killed. No delays. This city under heavy aerial fire past 48 hours especially since 6 AM today."

The Germans knew that every pound of rail freight for two American armies (the First and Ninth), and for all supporting troops east of the Meuse River, had to come through Liege across only one bridge. This fact alone was almost enough to cause the unprecedented V-1 attacks. Seldom has prolonged warfare been more indiscriminate and all-inclusive—affecting the civilian noncombatant population as much as, if not more than, the uniformed Allied soldiers. Nothing was untouched—every aspect of life suffered. With great loss of life and untold misery, civilian men, women and children and Allied military personnel were caught in the city of terror. Civilian and army hospitals, stores, dwellings, telephone offices, theaters and railroad yards, all suffered direct hits. The V-1s, traveling at terrific speed and with terrifying noise, would suddenly from a great height, cut off and dive into the city.

On Christmas night, 1944, personnel of the Railway Grand Division headquarters were assigned to outside guard duty to defend against a possible attack by German paratroopers, who had landed just outside the city. The 708th Railway Grand Division and its battalions refused to evacuate, staying on to control rail evacuation of supplies from periled areas, and moving in other supplies to U. S. combat forces fighting the enemy almost at the gates of Liege.

During this "Belgian Bulge" period, the task of evacuating supplies from periled areas to save capture by the enemy was as important as the need for the infantry to close with the Nazi horde in

German "Buzz-bomb" dives on Liege, Belgium

Damage from 100-pound Aerial bomb, 708th Headquarters, Liege, Belgium

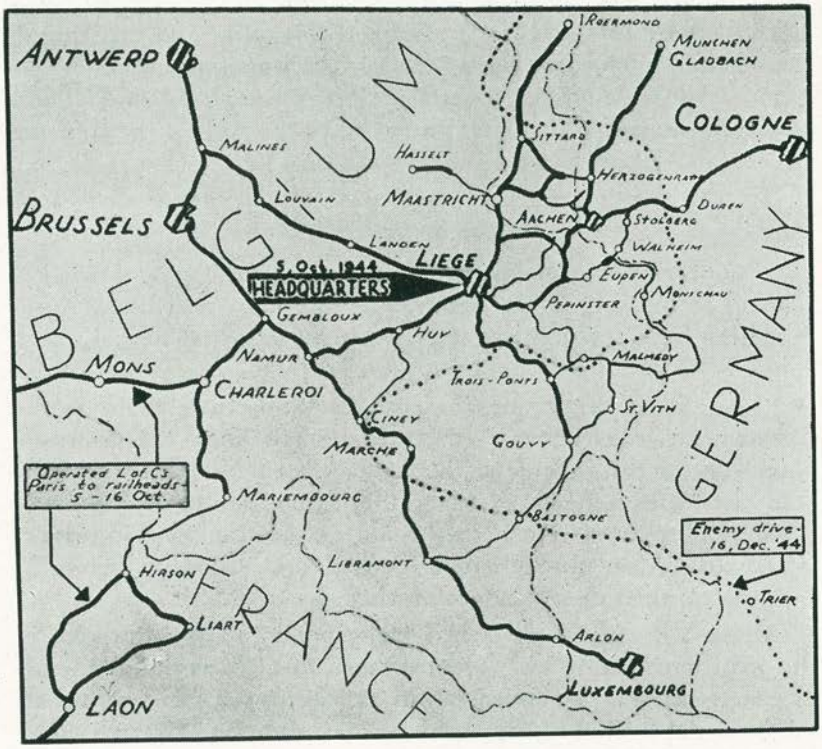
hand-to-hand combat in the snow. Had the enemy captured sufficient food supplies and gasoline to keep his tanks and men going, the outcome might have been different. Evacuation of supplies was begun when intelligence reports indicated a massing of German troops in the area which later proved to be the path of the counter-attack.

General Eisenhower later commented as follows, as quoted in the July 22, 1945, issue of the magazine *Yank:*

> "Q. From the enemy's viewpoint, which day and what event would you say constituted the last straw that broke the camel's back? When was it perfectly obvious that the jig was up?
>
> "A. From everything that we can find, from their own statements, they knew it—the professionals knew the jig was up—on the third day after the Rundstedt offensive had started in the Ardennes. They knew then that they could not go where they intended. If they could not get complete surprise and drive clear through to Liege and then drive on behind Antwerp, then there was not much they could do."

During V-1 sieges and enemy plane bombing, organizations of the 708th jurisdiction lost seventeen men in Liege as a direct result of enemy action. Wounded ran to as high as ten per cent in battalions. And all this happened to "non-fighting" outfits, a fact and feature which may open the eyes of those who thought that service troops did not suffer casualties.

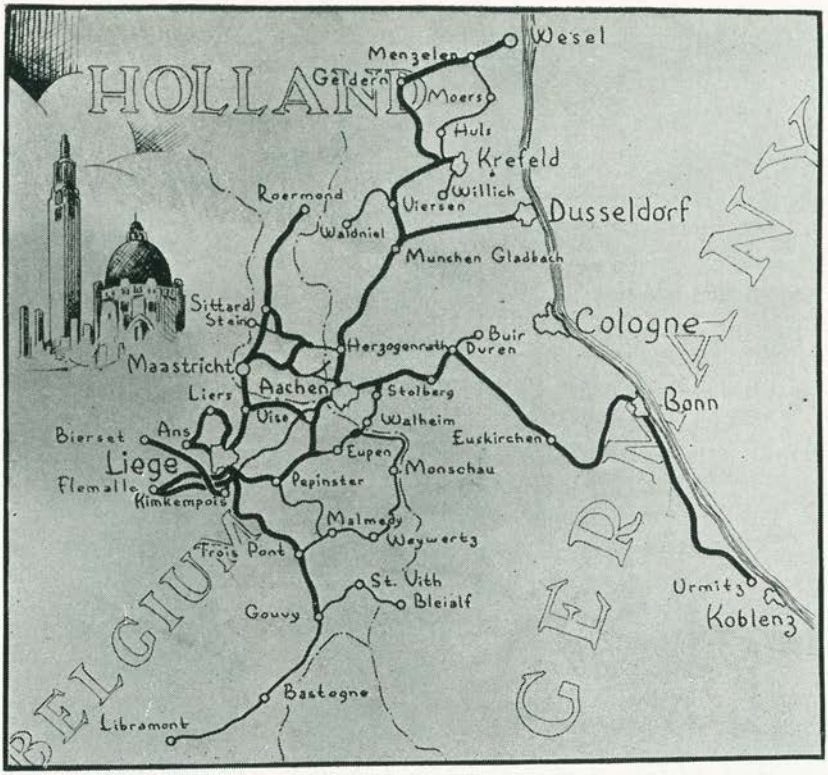
The battalions of the 708th during the Ardennes offensive evacuated 10,324 loaded freight cars, including gasoline, with a total of 134,312 net tons. They recorded a total of 26,120 train miles. At the same time supplies were moved to railheads still in operation, where ammunition was required to stop the enemy. In any final accounting of the "Battle of the Bulge," a crisis in the European conflict, these facts and figures must be considered. Little known or appreciated, except by the armies in the immediate area, these revelations mark one of the greatest chapters in military railway history. Almost legendary stories could be related of train crews evacuating supplies under the very nose of the enemy. Some, cut off and unable to get their trains out, had to escape through the snow-covered Ardennes, and many of the railway men joined combat units in the line along with other service troops caught in the area. Lieutenant J. B. Bernard, stationmaster of our headquarters, was almost trapped at Bastogne but managed to escape by jeep just before the terminal was encircled by the Germans.



Lines operated by the 708th, 5 October, 1944, to 30 January, 1945

In Liege, the problem of telephone communications for operation of trains was greatly minimized in comparison with difficulties experienced in France, principally because of the failure of our armies to drive forward with the speed they had demonstrated in France, the use of existing Belgian communications, and the extremely good work of battalion signal crews supervised by the 708th's Engineering Department. Night operations were difficult because of blackout restrictions, and particularly hazardous during the periods of enemy V-1 strafing and bombing activity. The language handicap was cut down through the use of interpreters and the ability of personnel to understand French more readily through their experience.

The backhaul and relocation of army supplies to safer areas during the enemy counter-attack required close figuring in the control of forward movements and supplying of empties. It was this operation that proved the 708th without peer in establishing a record of never experiencing a condition whereby lines of communication were tied up due to failure to move tonnage offered

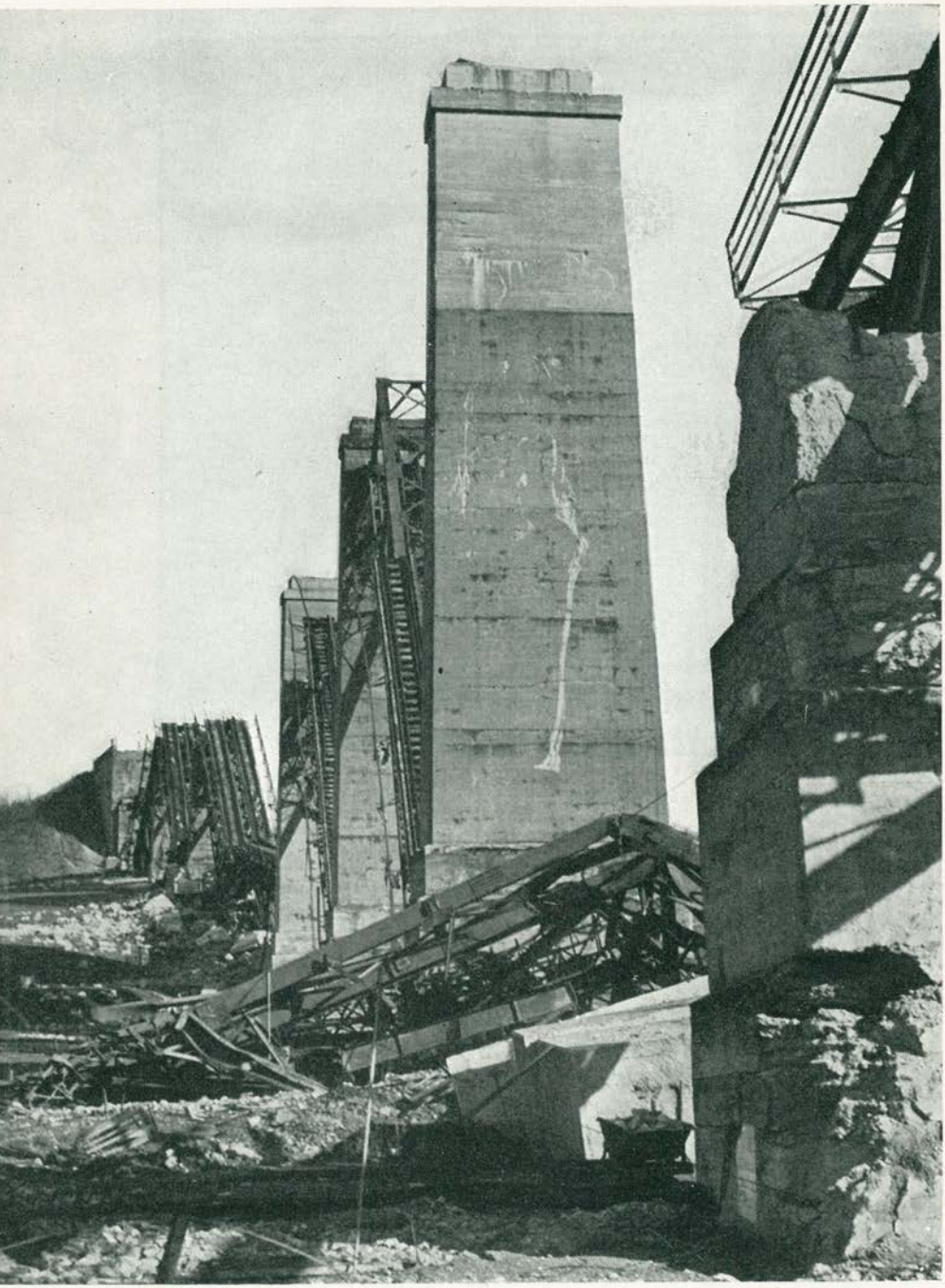


Lines operated by the 708th, 1 February to 15 April, 1945

by connecting railway units; that is, where failure to move tonnage was directly attributed to faulty judgment in handling of power and crews. Lieutenant Colonel Fretwell, Executive Officer and head of the Transportation Section, was mainly responsible for the overall coordination. His tireless efforts and wide technical knowledge contributed greatly to our success.

During the German counter-attack in December, 1944, not one unit of the 708th Railway Grand Division's jurisdiction backed up an inch, and not one ounce of supply entrusted to its charge was lost to the enemy.

An excerpt from the 13 January, 1945, report of a Liaison Officer attached to the 708th reads: "I have served with combat and service troops for a period of 30 years, and I have never seen an organization or unit possessed of such high morale and *esprit de corps* as exists in this organization. The work of this organization is carried on under extremely hazardous conditions occasioned by 24-hour bombing of the area."—Lt. Col. J. S. Drury, Cavalry, U.S.A.



Destroyed Railroad Bridge, Montzen, Belgium

CHAPTER FOUR

ON TO THE RHINE

AFTER the German Bulge was smashed by the U. S. combat forces, the inevitable Allied drive into Germany was ready late in February, 1945. Little by little the jurisdiction of the 708th inched eastward. Personnel of the battalions under the jurisdiction of the division operated the first Allied trains into Holland and Germany. In late February, the grand division territory east of Liege, alone, encompassed almost 600 miles of rail lines, most of which were over rugged, hilly terrain.

In February a total of 78 major railheads were served in the territory, this being perhaps the greatest number ever serviced by one division of military railway service in the history of warfare, certainly in a forward army area. These railheads were the unloading points for men and supplies for the First and Ninth Armies and the Advance Section of the Communications Zone. Rain or shine, sleet or snow, proximity to the front and enemy bombing and strafing to the contrary, every railhead was kept supplied with cars of material always equal to the armies' abilities to unload.

In the March 19, 1945, issue of the Transportation Corps *Weekly News Letter*, there was the following article by this author:

"Legend has it that the groundhog rouses every year on February 2nd and, seeing the sun, draws himself back into the confines of his hole. Not seeing the sun, he emerges from his hole and 'Spring is here,' or words to that effect. In many respects Headquarters and Headquarters Company 708th Railway Grand Division experienced a situation analagous to the groundhog. We roused ourselves from the *abri* (shelter) on or about February 2nd and failing to hear or observe buzzbombs descending upon Liege, emerged from the *abri* back into our now damaged and dust-debris covered quarters in the Hotel du Chemin du Fer, across the street from the main Liege railroad station which we refer to as 'Guillemins Valley.' You talk to local people in this vicinity and our own 'GV' is a legend within itself as 'The terrain most likely to receive a buzzbomb.' 'Buzzbombs' and 'The Bulge' are words that will long live in the memory of this organization as a chapter in 'The Unforgettable Days.'

"In January the German counter-offensive, 'The Belgian Bulge,' receded after almost unparalleled bloodshed both for the Nazis and ourselves. February saw the Allies along this northern line of communications regrouping and massing doughboys for the Rhine push—across the Roer, into Duren, Munchen Gladbach, Krefeld, and across the Rhine at Remagen Bridge.

"You have to look at a map to see our link in the elongated supply chain sustaining the doughboys now overlooking the Rhine into places like, for example, Dusseldorf, where the three bridges have been destroyed, victims of Nazi demolition. In this vicinity, which is near the First and Ninth Army boundary, our combat GI's hide from across-the-river observation, and in-between times our artillery and mortars play upon Dusseldorf while Hitler's men return almost round for round.

"But that is the front, that is the extremity of the advance and penetration into Germany. You must move farther west to get a glimpse of military railway service troops of the 708th Railway Grand Division jurisdiction. You move back only nine miles to Munchen Gladbach and you get your first eyeful of a GI locomotive and cars operating in a German railroad yard. Now you see the MRS front and the extremity of MRS operation into Germany.

"It is best now to put a pencil check mark on your map at Liege, in Belgium, for Liege is the hub, the nerve-center, the middle of the supply spider web as it were, feeding the railroad lines north, south, east and west and to the front. That is where Headquarters 708th Railway Grand Division is located. The individual units which accomplish the 'hauling' are the 734th, 740th and 741st Railway Operating Battalions and the 755th Railway Shop Battalion. The 138th Hospital Train Maintenance Unit provides crews for hospital trains. In these units are the engineers, firemen, brakemen, conductors, trackmen, machinists, telegraph operators and boilermakers—the GI's who do the work.

"At this juncture you must think of the ports at which men and materiel arrive on the continent. Among others there are Cherbourg, Le Havre and Antwerp. Unloaded from ships, the men and materiel move in the general direction of the fighting front. These are the men and this is the materiel that, along the northern line of communications, finds Liege the magnet which draws all to her environs. The two main lines of rail entry into Liege from the west are the lines from Antwerp and Namur.

"In February the jurisdiction of the 708th Railway Grand Division at Liege extended west as far as Louvain up the Antwerp line, and to Namur. And so, from the ports the men and materiel are

hauled by sister military railway service units and on to the 708th Railway Grand Division jurisdiction beginning at Namur and Louvain.

"Since September, 1944, thousands of tons of supplies have been stacked away in depots in the Liege area. Now they begin to fan out towards the fronts of the First and Ninth United States Armies. In February, Colonel William S. Carr, Commanding Officer, 708th Railway Grand Division, as General Superintendent in the civilian railroad analogy, looked to Lieutenant Colonel Samuel H. Pulliam's 740th Railway Operating Battalion to do his hauling to and from the First Army, and to Major Ralph E. Johnson's 734th Railway Operating Battalion to do his hauling to and from the Ninth Army. He looked, also, to Lieutenant Colonel Miles G. Stevens' 755th Railway Shop Battalion at Namur to do his repairing and overhauling of locomotives and rolling stock.

"Getting into statistics, the 708th Railway Grand Division territory east of Liege alone encompasses almost 600 miles of rail lines. The number of trains operated by the 740th Railway Operating Battalion averaged 75 to 90 each day; the 741st Railway Operating Battalion, 90 to 105 each day, and the 734th Railway Operating Battalion, 100 to 115 each day. An average of 1700 loaded freight cars of war materiel, including foodstuffs, were daily received from connecting railroad units in the West. A total of 35,000 net tons of materiel were daily handled through the railroad yards of Liege. This figure included an extensive coal movement out of Holland.

"On some days as many as nine hospital trains, nine troop trains and three prisoner-of-war trains were moved over rail lines of the jurisdiction. During the month (February) Aachen, Germany, was established as a hospital train loading point for wounded soldiers. This is also a 'first.'

"As of the end of the month, 82 locomotives, 4,718 box cars, 2,403 flat cars, 3,022 gondolas, 128 refrigerator cars and 192 tank cars have been captured and put into service by the 708th Railway Grand Division jurisdiction. In the late February push to the Rhine, thousands of cars and many locomotives were overrun by combat forces and soon will be put into service when tracks are rehabilitated. Railroad reconnaissance by members of this jurisdiction followed closely on the heels of the push. As the month ended the jurisdiction was rapidly expanding eastward into Germany. Soon the operations would move closer to Hitler's now not so far away Berlin."

An item in the Transportation Corps *Weekly News Letter* of April 2, 1945, read as follows:

"The picture is this. The 708th Railway Grand Division is located at Liege and has territorial limits from Liege following the First and Ninth United States Armies. Now is the most crucial time of the war. The final push has started. Here is what happened during the 24-hour period ending at 2359 o'clock March 22, 1945. The following cars were handled by the Grand Division and delivered to the armies:

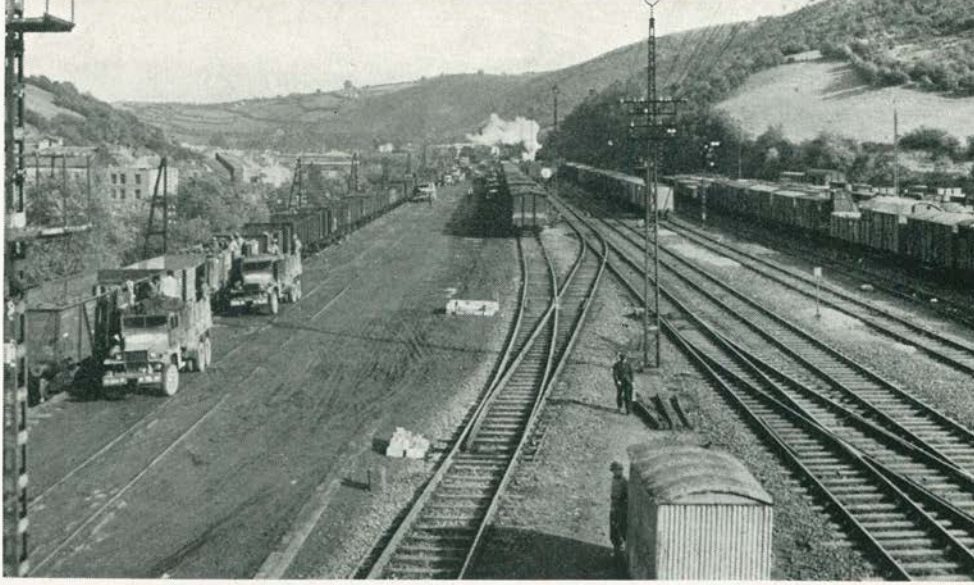
492 Class V (ammunition)
80 Rock
16 Mail
130 POL (Petroleum, oil and lubricants)
460 Engineer II & IV (bridge material)
240 Coal and coke
765 Quartermaster Class I (rations), II (clothing), IV (chairs, cots, etc.), Ordnance Class II (parts of vehicles), IV (vehicles)
89 Salvage
70 Jerricans

"This total of 2,342 loads represents a movement of 29,788 net tons. In addition, during the same period 3 deadhead passenger equipment trains, 8 troop trains, 2 prisoner-of-war trains, and 31 empty trains with 975 empties were handled. Practically all of this movement was over 352 miles of single and double trackage, 140 miles of which were Phase 1 (complete GI operation with no help), 40% of the total.

"This was the greatest movement to date by this Grand Division. And it came at a time when *only* the railroads could have sustained the push. Just study the break-down of what was handled. Those 460 cars of bridge material were long beams for Rhine bridges, and most of the beams were so long that it took three flat cars to carry them."

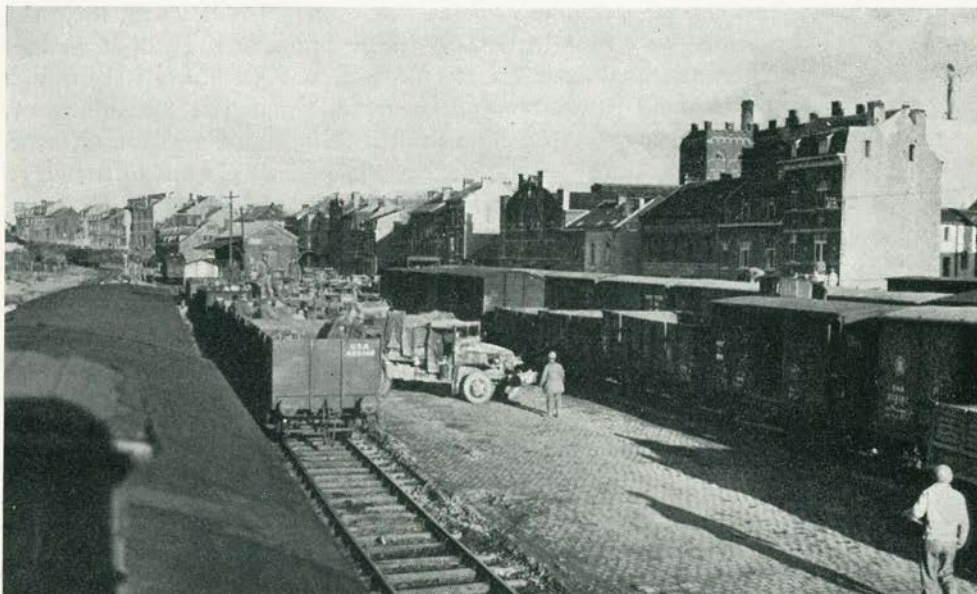
In connection with the crossing of the Roer and Rhine Rivers into the heart of Germany, the Transportation Corps *Weekly News Letter* of April 16, 1945, had this report, entitled "M.R.S. OVER THE RHINE":

"Not since St. Lo had anyone on the Western Front seen such havoc wrought upon continental cities, towns and hamlets. For weeks the American First and Ninth Armies had been massing troops along the west bank of Germany's Roer. In late February the Roer-Rhine push began. Before it began, the jurisdiction of the 708th Railway Grand Division, with headquarters at Liege, Belgium, extended east to the First U. S. Army territory, operated



708th Railhead at Pepinster, Belgium

708th Railhead at Trooz, Belgium



by the 740th Railway Operating Battalion, from Liege to Eschweiler and as far south as Trois Pont and St. Vith. North, in the Ninth U. S. Army territory, operated by the 734th Railway Operating Battalion, it extended from Liege to Herzogenrath in Germany, and Sittard in Holland. When the push started, both armies advanced with amazing speed, mauling everything in their path. Reconnaissance groups of Headquarters 708th Railway Grand Division and its battalions followed on the heels of the armies as closely as possible.

"The greatest question in the minds of military railway service people was, 'What will conditions be—how will the tracks and rail facilities be found?' Ever since the famous July, 1944, St. Lo break-through, military railway service along the northern line of communications had kept the armies supplied with a number of cars at forward railheads always equal to the ability of the handling forces to unload. Could the armies depend upon military railway service when they advanced as far as the Rhine? Could we give them the service they demanded and deserved?

"The Ninth Army advanced in a northeasterly direction from Holland and overran such cities as Munchen Gladbach, Viersen and Krefeld in Germany. Rail lines leading into these places were badly damaged, especially along the Roer River, where much fighting had taken place. However, the advance of the Ninth Army beyond the Roer was so swift that comparatively little damage to rail lines was found, excepting what had been done by Allied bombing. Typical of destruction found was the station at Munchen Gladbach. While the station had been devastated by Allied bombing, the main tracks and yards suffered little. Eight water columns in the station were found to be in operation and were put into immediate use by the first trains operated into the city.

"At Krefeld, 10 miles northeast of Munchen Gladbach, identical conditions were found to exist. Interlockings at Krefeld, as well as at Munchen Gladbach, are electric, and at both places were found to be in good condition and ready for immediate operations by military railway service. The Krefeld roundhouse was found to be intact except for the machine shop, which had been hit by artillery. German locomotives were immediately restencilled with U. S. Army markings by personnel of the 708th Railway Grand Division jurisdiction. Some were fired up and placed into immediate service. In all, some 22 locomotives were captured at Krefeld.

"At the Cologne-Nippes yard in First Army territory vast numbers of loaded and empty cars were found by reconnaissance parties.

These cars will be removed and placed into operation as trackage is put into service.

"The first record of MRS personnel to cross the Rhine in this sector is dated March 10, 1945. Personnel concerned were Lt. Col. John D. Drury, Liaison Officer, Headquarters Second MRS on detached service with Headquarters 708th Railway Grand Division; Captain Paul W. Pleasant, Chemical Engineer, Headquarters 708th Railway Grand Division. On a rail reconnaissance, this party, traveling in a jeep, crossed the Rhine using a pontoon bridge at Ling, Germany, at 0830 o'clock, March 10th, only three days after the initial Rhine crossing over the Remagen Bridge in the same area. Convoys were streaming across in a desperate effort to expand the bridgehead. The weather was foggy and all bridges were under constant fire.

"East of the Rhine the reconnaissance party discovered enemy trains made up and apparently ready to pull out, but which never rolled due to the fast moving First United States Army. In one sector of the railroad yards at Erpel they found trains and locomotives camouflaged so well that they were difficult to see with the naked eye. Complete trains of coal and many other valuable materials needed for the war were captured intact. Moving by jeep north toward Cologne on the east side of the Rhine the reconnaissance party covered approximately 10 miles and recrossed the river at Unkel, Germany, on another pontoon bridge.

"For the first 18 days of March, three operating battalions carried the hauling load. They were the 734th, the 740th, and the 741st, the latter being commanded by Lt. Colonel Laurence E. Thornton. In the middle of the month the 723rd Railway Operating Battalion joined the jurisdiction. Still later, the 729th Railway Operating Battalion became a part of the grand division. As usual, the 755th Railway Shop Battalion at Namur, Belgium, took care of all the heavy repairs. In addition, they operated a car shop at Ans, Belgium, and a locomotive detachment at Herbesthal, Belgium. The Grand Division was broken down into divisions operated by operating battalions as follows, effective 0001 Monday, March 19, 1945:

"723rd—Herzogenrath, Germany, inclusive, to Geldern, Germany, inclusive, via Munchen Gladbach, Viersen, Krefeld and Kempen. Munchen Gladbach to Dusseldorf. Herzogenrath to Aldenhoven. Headquarters at Munchen Gladbach, Germany.

"734th—Vise, Belgium, inclusive, to Roermond, Holland. Vise to Herbesthal, not inclusive, via Warsage, Maastricht to West Aachen, inclusive. Maastricht to Herzogenrath, not inclusive, via

708th Headquarters Officers, 2nd Anniversary, Belgium. Seated, Lt. Col. Fretwell, Capt. Grimes, Col. Carr, Capt. Plant, Lt. Colvin, Capt. Whitham. Standing, Chaplain Collins, Maj. Hathaway, Maj. Garrigus, Capt. Witzler, Maj. Hutson, Lt. Smith, Maj. Pleasant, Lt. Col. Major, Lt. Col. Arter, Maj. Murray, Capt. Drake, Lt. Col. Harker, Maj. Padgett, Maj. Gregory

Heerlen. Heerlen to Stein and Sittard. Simpleveld to Kerkrade. Headquarters at Maastricht, Holland.

"740th—Welkenraedt, inclusive, to Stolberg via Montzen and Walheim, thence Duren, Cologne and Euskirchen. Raeren to Weywertz, not inclusive. Headquarters at Aachen, Germany.

"741st—Ans to Kinkempois via high-grade route and Liers Loop. Bierset to Kinkempois. Flemalle Haute to Liege. Flemalle Haute to Vise, not inclusive. Kinkempois to Montzen, not inclusive, via Herve. Chenee to Welkenraedt, not inclusive, via Pepinster. Pepinster to Stavelot. Angleur to Weywertz, inclusive, via Rivage and Trois Pont. Headquarters at Liege, Belgium.

"729th—Superimposed on the 723rd Railway Operating Battalion. Headquarters at Krefeld, Germany."

CHAPTER FIVE

INTO GERMANY—AND VICTORY

ALTHOUGH we first went into Germany in September, 1944, it was not until April, 1945, that our headquarters moved into Germany. The war along the northern line of communications had moved over the Roer and the Rhine, and the American First, Ninth and Fifteenth Armies' tank columns and infantry prowled, roamed and rambled towards Berlin.

By mid-April the time was ripe for the Germany move. Already Lt. Colonel Samuel H. Pulliam's 740th Railway Operating Battalion had headquartered in Germany, at Aachen, the first military railway service unit along the northern line of communications to establish battalion headquarters in Germany. Its territory was stretching eastward, the First Army pulling and tugging it along like a winch connected to a rubber band. And so on April 16, Liege-Guillemins became a memory—Guillemins with its ice cream stand, its bustling Belgian activity, its sunbathed front, its milling crowds. The ultimate destination was Warburg, Germany, more than 300 miles east. But no one had heard of the place when we passed a sign on the German-Belgian border on the road from Liege to Aachen reading "NOW ENTERING GERMANY—DO NOT FRATERNIZE WITH GERMANS." Passing through Aachen, its torn remnants taking new life, we moved on one of the famous German Autobahns passing scenes of dead horses lying in front of carts they had been pulling.

The known destination was Bad Godesberg, Germany, the little city on the west bank of the Rhine between Bonn and Remagen. At Bad Godesberg, little war-damaged, remaining civilians puttered around in gardens bending, stooping, planting and occasionally weathering a rain of apple blossoms in the warm sunshine. It was a beautiful spring along the Rhine. For quarters we took a block of modern (1940) hedge-circled bungalows along a street made dim with shade when the sun beamed down brightly upon trees dressed in fresh spring foliage. The enlisted men's quarters and the officers and enlisted men's mess was in a three-story corner building at 53 Karl Finkelburg Strasse where, adjacent to the railroad tracks, lay

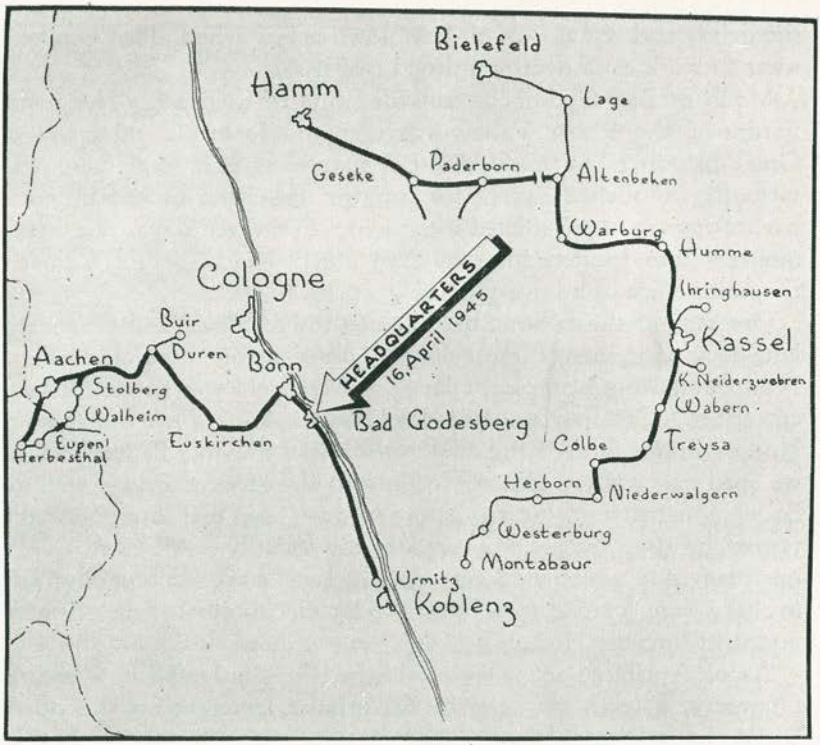
the debris and remains of girders blown askew when allied bombers went to work on a nearby railroad overpass.

Much of Bad Godesberg reminded one of England. The rustic nature of the Rhine Valley was comparable to the midlands of Great Britain. The main railroad station at Bad Godesberg was virtually untouched except for interior up-setting caused by combat troops who had billeted overnight. For three days, our headquarters was located in a modern stucco-like structure formerly the main office of a large plumbing works.

Our stay at the famous bath center where Hitler and Chamberlain decided in 1939 there would be peace in our time, and where Petain and King Leopold of Belgium were held war prisoners, was cut short. Crossing the Rhine at Bad Godesberg on the famous Hodges Bridge, one of the more substantial two-way Rhine bridges, we sped eastward. The approaches to the Hodges Bridge were of Bailey construction, but the entire bridge (1190 feet long) was supported by river barges recovered in the vicinity. All craft on the upstream side which had not already been sunk by bombing and artillery were scuttled to prevent the later possibility of dislodgment and drift into the Hodges Bridge.

As of April 19, 1945, we established headquarters at Warburg, Germany, a town of 3,000 in Westphalia, perched on the north bank of the Diemel River, 44 kilometers northwest of Kassel. We were still at Warburg when VE-Day came on May 8. The headquarters was located on what was formerly Adolph Hitler Street. The street soon became "Colonel Carr Street," the new sign tacked over the former one. In Warburg, German civilians strolled the streets (except between 8.30 PM and 6.30 AM) but did not pass the areas designated as a U. S. Army Zone by our headquarters. Taking over from the Headquarters of the VII Corps of the First Army, we were forced to wire off our area and institute 24-hour guard. On VE-Day Warburg's church bells rang long and loud, and a steady stream of Germans filed in and out of the churches. For quarters at Warburg we took over six buildings, one of which was the Hotel zum Desenberg, where twenty officers lived and in which were located the officers and enlisted men's messes.

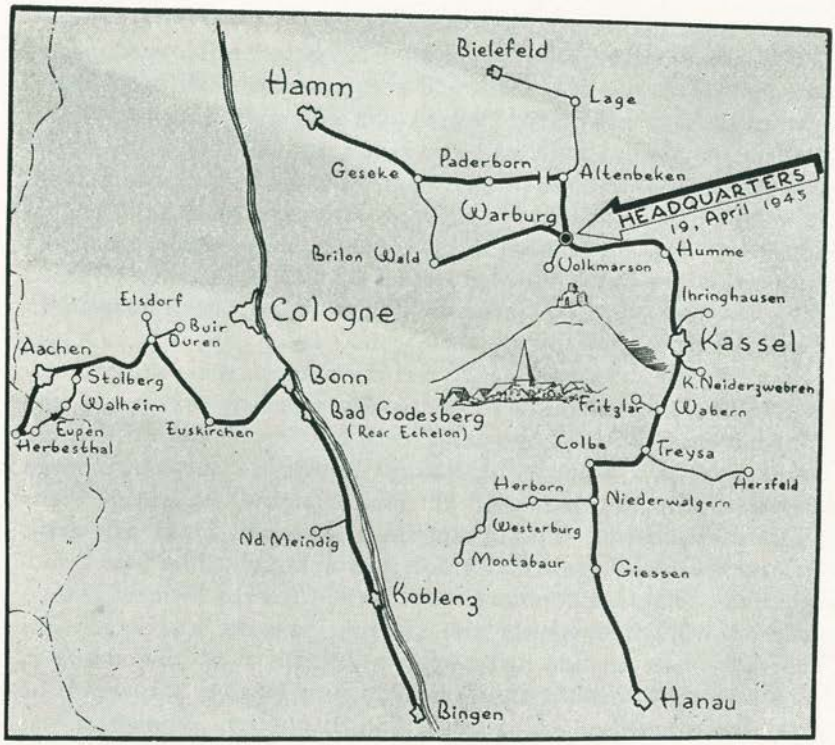
From mid-April until VE-Day the jurisdiction offered a situation quite unusual in military railway service. The 708th had no Rhine railroad bridge. We were in the unprecedented position of having one operating battalion completely isolated from the rest of the Grand Division territory. The 740th Railway Operating Battalion, which handled West Rhineside operations, hauled to the Coblenz area, where materiel was unloaded from rail cars, reloaded into



Lines Operated by 708th, 16 to 19 April, 1945

trucks, hauled by trucks to the east side of the Rhine and again reloaded into captured rail cars for movement by the 746th Railway Operating Battalion east. Later, the territory of the 740th Railway Operating Battalion was stretched from Coblenz to Mainz, the location of the south Rhine railroad bridge, and this battalion delivered the traffic to the 706th Railway Grand Division, which hauled it east of the Rhine to a point where it could again be delivered to us for handling to forward railheads.

Therefore, 708th Railway Grand Division operations were split in two. One operation was called West Rhine Operations, and the other, East Rhine Operations. West of the Rhine we had the First and Fifteenth Army railheads, ASCZ railheads and Ninth Air Force railheads. For the First Army there was Herbesthal, and Montzen, Belgium. In Germany, Stolberg, Sinzig, Brohl, Dusdorf, Weimanheim and Andernach. For the Fifteenth Army there was Herbesthal, Belgium, and in Germany, Buir, Vettweiss, Bubbenheim, Stolberg and Duren. The ASCZ had Herbesthal, Belgium,



Lines Operated by 708th, 20 April to 28 May, 1945

and in Germany, Stolberg and Duren, plus still another Belgian point, Raeren, on the German-Belgian Border. The Ninth Air Force had Zulpich and Bubbenheim in Germany. East of the Rhine, the First Army had Warburg, Allendorf, Marburg, Kassel, Neiderzwan and Ihringhausen.

At the outset, the complete operation in the Warburg area was accomplished through the use of captured German locomotives and cars. Near the end of April, a few U. S. A. locomotives began to show up. Main lines were found chock full of foreign rolling stock, both loaded and empty. The cars were of every imaginable ownership. The Germans had looted everything, and it was not uncommon to find a string of cars all from different countries, such as France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Holland, Hungary, Italy. The big job was to clear the main lines after the rehabilitation of tracks and clear the way for the army's tonnage to move through.

By this time, the First and Ninth Armies were at the Elbe River, waiting for the Russians to take Berlin and move on to the river

where the junction would be made. By May 1, 1945, it was obvious that the war would soon be over. Even before VE-Day, the commanding officer, Colonel Carr, had been in contact with Herr Bauer, former head of the Kassel District of German Railways, and had made arrangements for the Germans to take over maintenance and operation with American supervision. The day set for Herr Bauer to assume responsibility was May 8. However, he begged for two additional days' time to whip his organization together. Had the date stood, the 708th Railway Grand Division would have turned the railroads back to German maintenance and operation on VE-Day itself.

Turning the railroads over to the Germans required the Military Railway Service to outline to them what was required, that is, the tonnage demanded. The actual method of operation was left to the Germans. Railway Operating Battalions maintained train sheets showing operation of all military trains on the divisions operated by them. The master sheet showing all military trains en route on the Grand Division was maintained at our headquarters. Good cooperation was received from the former German railroad workers. As for the German railroad worker, it was generally observed that he was first a railroad man, second a German and third, a Nazi. Like railroad men all over the world, he was more interested in his work than in politics, although it was almost necessary that he become a member of the Nazi Party. However, this is no defense of his action, and is mentioned merely to note the attitude found by our headquarters.

The armies were amply supplied during April, and communications were improved. The battalions became better settled. Considering the tactical situation, we knew that soon the end of the line would be reached. After VE-Day we were sent to Wesermunde (Bremerhaven) to establish headquarters, and supervise the rail operations at the only German port to be used by the Americans in the German occupation. In addition we were to supervise the operation and maintenance of the railway line of communications leading from the port of Bremerhaven to the American Army of Occupation in south Germany.

All was not springtime and flowers. Out on the railroad where payloads were handled, crews fought an unsung, under-rated battle of their own, moving trains over freshly rehabilitated and unknown rights-of-way. Night operations, long the bugaboo of the GI locomotive engineers and firemen, particularly in the forward army areas, took their inevitable toll. Thus, a German 2-10-0 locomotive lay askew, clear off the track, at bridge KP 18.3 near

Kassel, Germany. A GI crew operating a foreign locomotive at night over strange right-of-way had been routed onto a track leading to a bridge where only the other track was in service. The result was that the locomotive went over the "deep end." Fortunately there were only three minor personal injuries.

Too much credit cannot be paid to the GI crews who fought the uncertainties of darkness in night operations from Cherbourg, France, to the forward railheads. There was no time to learn the terrain. They were given a train which had to reach a forward railhead at a target time. Ten minutes delay might mean the delay of a combat operation. These were men to add to the endless list of unsung heroes of the war.

The 708th set up headquarters at Wesermunde (twin city of Bremerhaven) on May 21, two operating and one railway shop battalion being assigned to operate the territory. The 722nd Railway Operation Battalion, with headquarters at Bremen, 55 kilometers south, was assigned to operate the Port of Bremerhaven and haul to Bremen south, where the tonnage would be received and moved by the 746th Railway Operating Battalion, headquartered at Kassel. At Kassel, in the great Henschel and Sons Locomotive Works, was the 757th Railway Shop Battalion.

When the redeployment program became active, there was a shift of battalions. Eventually the 722nd Railway Operating Battalion remained at Bremen, the 741st Railway Operating Battalion was moved to Hannover, the 734th Railway Operating Battalion to Kassel, and we also were assigned the 759th Railway Operating Battalion, which headquartered at Klein Auheim, near Frankfort, and the 766th Railway Shop Battalion, with headquarters at Frankfort (Kneid). The lines operated by the Grand Division in the last two stages of the European assignment amounted to 1,059 miles, most of which was double track.

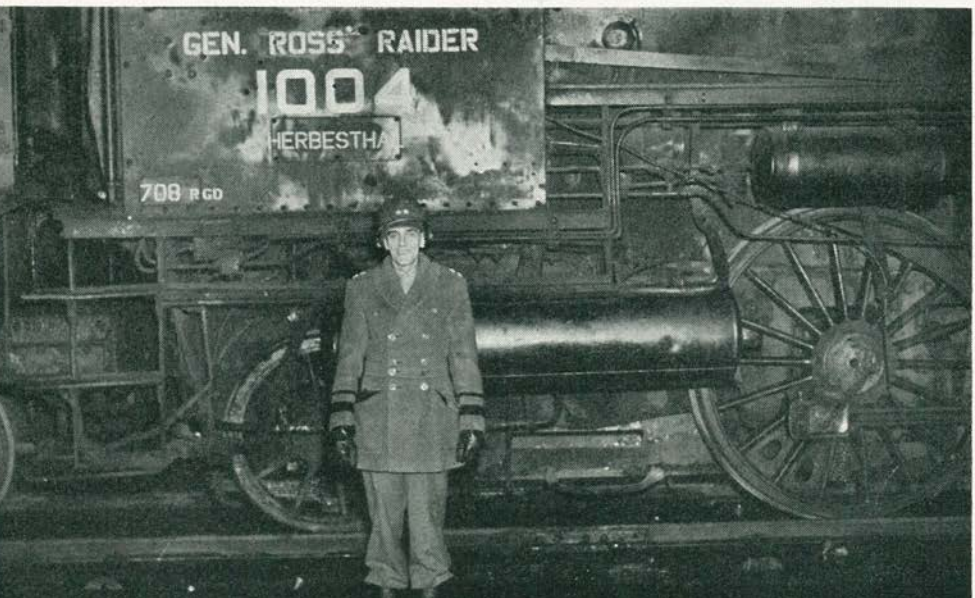
At Wesermunde we established headquarters in a six-story building which had been a German bank and insurance office. It was undamaged and stood directly across from the Wesermunde station. For officer quarters we took over two sections of a modern apartment building at 9 and 12 Hollernzollern Ring. The mess was established in the Cafe Roux, about two blocks from the office.

Wesermunde-Bremerhaven was found to be well devastated. Only one air attack had been made on the area, but the British bombing on the night of September 14, 1944, had played havoc. Incendiaries had burned out most German cities struck by Allied air bombing.

In Germany, the railways, under the State, were operated by Area Control. In our area the railways had been operated under an

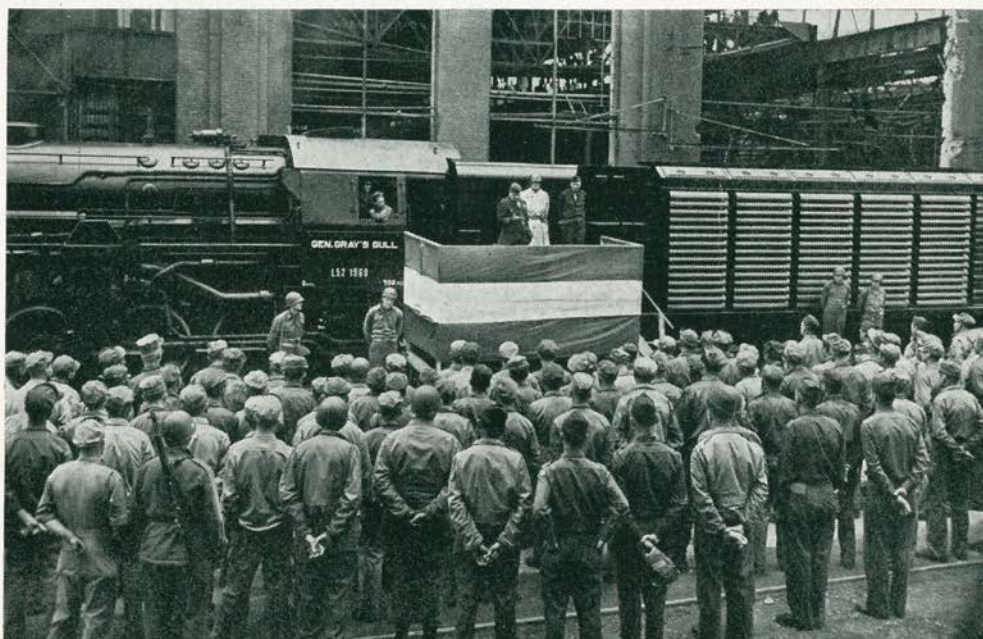
First scheduled passenger run, Bremerhaven to Frankfort (at Wesermunde)

Maj. Gen. Frank S. Ross at Bressoux, Belgium, with 708th locomotive named for him



First train into Bremerhaven, Germany, S.S. Europa in background

Christening of locomotive in honor of Maj. Gen. Carl R. Gray, Jr., at Kassel, Germany

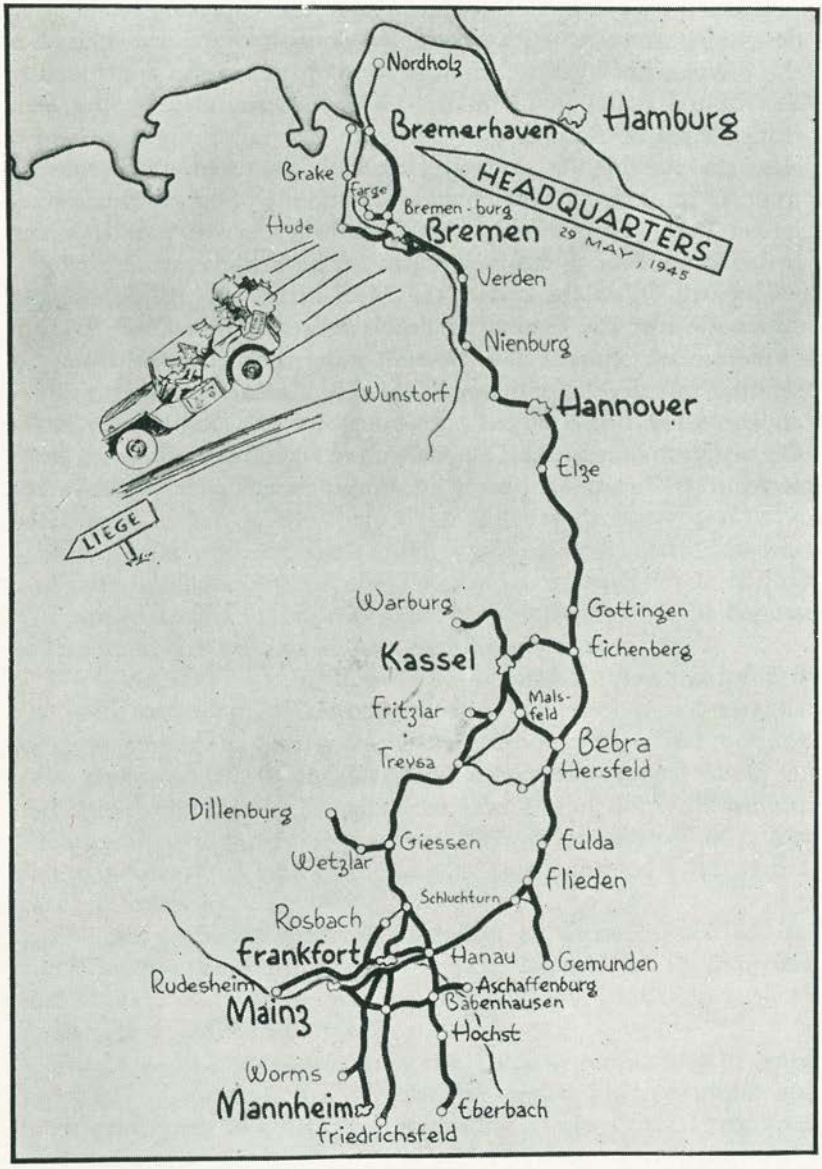


office known as the Hannover Reichbahndirektion. Farther south, the area was under the control of the Kassel Reichbahndirektion. Both Reichbahndirektions (German railways) operated as directed by the Military Railway Service. Full German crews were used. Presence of personnel of railway operation battalions was necessary only for supervisory and guard purposes.

From VE-Day on, the German railway organization increased not only in numbers but in efficiency. As of the end of June, 1945, more than 21,000 German workers were engaged in railway service on the American portion of the railway line of communication under the jurisdiction of the 708th Railway Grand Division. The method employed was simply that the German Reichbahndirektion was notified of the amount of military traffic to be moved. Railway Operating Battalion personnel were disposed along the railway line of communication to protect U. S. Military Railway Service interests. One U. S. Military Railway Service enlisted man was a part of each full German train crew. At no time did the Germans fail to meet the tonnage requirements of military railway service. Railway rolling stock was operated on pool basis, meaning that cars of any and all ownerships were indiscriminately utilized. Road operations were accomplished through the use of captured German locomotives. The use of U. S. A. locomotives was not required.

In Germany, the rehabilitation of railway lines was based on the opening only of such lines as would be necessary in the U. S. military interest. Other lines were left to the Germans. In our territory, adequate facilities existed for the proper servicing of locomotives, and all features incident to proper train operation were commensurate with the traffic handled. In some places (such as Kassel) Allied bombing had destroyed practically all facilities, yet a railway shop battalion (the 757th) was able to begin and continue operations in the Henschel Plants with minimum difficulty. In other places, facilities were intact. Extremely affected places were by-passed.

Long before the Port of Bremerhaven was officially opened and the first Liberty ships docked on June 23, 1945, the 708th Railway Grand Division was ready to handle discharged cargo. The "Europa," former German luxury liner captured intact in the Bremerhaven Port, was moved to drydock without incident and repairs were effected to place the liner in ocean-going condition for the redeployment program. The port was found to be full of mines, most of which were the magnetic type dropped by the British. Dredging began in the harbor; ship repair commenced at an accelerated rate. Three Liberty ships were unloaded in June, and ten more came in shortly after July 1. The Weser River was cleared from the North



Lines operated by 708th from 29 May to 31 October, 1945

Sea to Elsfleth. Bremen, as an inland port, was not opened until later in the summer. Of the tonnage received on the first three Liberty ships, approximately 12 fifty-car trains of supplies moved to the American Army of Occupation area in south Germany.

Since the Port of Bremerhaven and the City of Bremen were designated as an American Zone, the dime-sized area was known as the Bremen Enclave, the smallest zone of occupation controlled by any of the Allies in Germany. It was surrounded by the main British Area of Occupation. The principal railway mission was to clear the marshalling yards and tracks of captured enemy materiel to make room for the switching and handling of cars at the Bremerhaven Port. No serious Military Railway Service problems were incurred incident to any operations in the Enclave.

Early 1946 saw the end of the MRS in Europe. The necessary supervision of the German railways passed to the U. S. Military Government, which retained small units throughout Germany to see that military trains moved promptly and that no unauthorized civilian goods were moved out of U. S. zones. The MRS job in Germany was finished. Commensurate with the U. S. Army point system, MRS men were being currently repatriated and discharged.

CHAPTER SIX

THE OVER-ALL MRS-ETO PICTURE

THE picture had not been bright for the U. S. Military Railway Service troops on D-Day. For weeks and months every Allied newspaper had carried stories of enemy locomotives strafed, enemy bridges blown, enemy railway rolling stock destroyed, and enemy marshalling yards hit with hundreds of tons of heavy bombs. Would any bridges be left standing? Would there be any locomotives to move our tons of supplies? Would any railroad facilities be usable at all? These were only a few of the thousands of question marks which loomed before the Military Railway Service.

True, aerial reconnaissance had supplied some of the answers, but such intelligence was incomplete because ground forces had not yet landed in France to contribute to the destruction in combat. It was up to the MRS to be prepared for any eventuality.

While the attention of the world was focused upon the infantry, the tank corps and paratroopers, and how they would establish beachheads on the enemy shore, many thousands of railroad cars were prefabricated in the United States and shipped across the Atlantic to the United Kingdom for assembly by the U. S. Military Railway Service troops. These cars were of all classes—box, high side gondolas, low side gondolas, flat cars, tank cars, refrigerator cars and cabooses.

The first railway operating battalion to arrive in the United Kingdom was the 729th, in July of 1943. Months before that time, the Military Railway Service element, headed by Colonel N. A. Ryan and a staff, had been active.

The United Kingdom was to be the Allied storehouse for invasion supplies and war materiel. Overnight, depots for the storage and the processing of supplies began to dot the countryside. These areas were more often near large cities but sometimes isolated in the midlands. There were General Depots, which processed all types of materiel and supplies; Ordnance Depots, Quartermaster Depots, and Army Air Forces Depots. When American supply ships arrived at British ports—Liverpool, Cardiff, Barry, and others—their cargoes were unloaded at the docks, placed on British freight cars and moved to the depots. Each depot was an industrial center in itself.

Hotel du Chemin de Fer, the 708th Headquarters and billet at Liege, Belgium

The Liege or Guillemins Valley Railroad Station, Belgium

708th Headquarters Building at Rennes, France

708th Headquarters building at Warburg, Germany

It included warehouses and open storage areas. Within each depot was a railroad system with U. S. A. switch engines operated by U. S. MRS personnel. They handled cars delivered by British railways. Thus, it was the MRS mission not only to assemble the rolling stock for the continental invasion, but also to handle the switching of all cars in U. S. depots in England.

As the railway operating and shop battalions arrived in the United Kingdom they were split into groups and sent to the various depots. The switching jobs at depots provided personnel with experience on the intricacies of continental-type rolling stock. Continental rolling stock, averaging less than half the size of comparable cars on American railroads, differed from American rolling stock in one important respect. Whereas American cars are equipped with couplers at the ends of the cars, continental cars are equipped with hooks and chains, with "buffers" opposite the hook and chain.

By May, 1944, Military Railway Service detachments were located in twenty-three U. S. A. depots at Newbury-Thatcham, Boughton, Sudbury (Staffs), Ashchurch, Highbridge, Wem, Warton, Moreton-on-Lugg, Little Heath, Barry, Burton-on-Trent, Swindon, Histon, Westbury-Warminster, West Moors, Hedge End, Burtonwood, Doncaster, Wolverton, Lockerly Hall, Honeybourne, East Harling and Norton-Fitzwarren. On D-Day the jurisdiction of the 708th Railway Grand Division included all of these U. S. A. depots in the United Kingdom.

In May, 1944, rolling stock erection forces were operating at Hainault, Moreton-on-Lugg, Sudbury and Kings Newton. In May a total of 131,935 railroad cars were received at and dispatched from the U. S. A. depots. In addition, the MRS was called on to fit 188 Liberty ships and construct 388 LST's for transporting rolling stock across the channel and debarking troops.

A typical rolling stock erection point was at Hainault, Essex, a suburb of London, in the shops of the London Transport. A large storage depot was established nearby and several miles of track installed. Basic unit at Hainault was the 756th Railway Shop Battalion, with officers and enlisted men from various other units temporarily attached. Twenty-four hours a day, month after month, switch engines placed carloads of materiel and parts on the assembly lines. Underframes were laid on the floors, bottom side up—pedestals, springs, draw hooks, hand and air brakes, brake pipes and brake equipment applied and riveted into place. The frames were then turned over with cranes and placed on the wheels. Sides, ends, roofs were riveted, doors applied, the cars were painted and stencilled, journal boxes were packed, air brakes tested. Box cars

rolled off the assembly line just 45 minutes after the first piece had been placed on the floor. The time for other classes of cars varied. Forty-five minutes saw the completion of a caboose car and war flat, in addition to the box car. One hour and 20 minutes were required for a tank car. Three hours and 30 minutes for a refrigerator. Forty minutes for the low side gondola, and 23 minutes for a high side gondola.

Several officers of the Headquarters of the 708th Railway Grand Division were on the staff of the depot. Lieutenant Colonel Major was Deputy Depot Commander; Major Garrigus was in charge of the car assembly line; Captain Whitham was Depot Track Supervisor; First Lieutenant Smith was Provost Marshal, Air Raid and Fire Marshal. As Car Erection Superintendent, Major Garrigus was directly responsible for the assembly of 6,883 railway cars from January 1 to August 1, 1944.

It was found that the hand brake on U. S. A. rolling stock was not suitable to British operation, and the first cars were refused by the British railways for storage on their railway lines throughout the United Kingdom. Major Garrigus immediately went to work to redesign the hand brakes, and within record time he had designed a new type of brake acceptable to both British and U. S. Army military railway echelons. The brake he devised was adopted as standard, and the design spread all over the United Kingdom.

This fabrication progressed steadily despite enemy aerial activity and V-bombs. On D-Day every railroad siding in Southern England was filled to capacity with U. S. A. equipment for the continental invasion.

While the cars were being assembled, motive power was not forgotten. Hundreds of 2-8-0 road locomotives, 0-6-0 switchers, 380 HP and 650 HP Diesel locomotives were received from America and processed for service. Like the cars, the locomotives were received in "knocked down" form and had to be assembled. The main locomotive assembly point was at the Ebbw Shop of the Great Western Railroad at Newport, Wales. After assembly, most of the locomotives were stored in isolated areas of the Welsh mountains. Many were put into immediate use on the British railroads to assist in moving ever mounting piles of American equipment. All locomotives received were ready for use on D-Day.

On D-Day, the U. S. Army faced not only its greatest single offensive, but its greatest movement of supplies to support a combat operation. The toe-hold on the continent could be maintained only so long as materiel and supplies could be delivered into the hands of the forces closing with the enemy. The ability to land

men and materiel on the continent would determine the length of the war against Germany. One American observer arriving in England just before D-Day marvelled at the number of barrage balloons hoisted over the island as protection from V-bombs and strafing by low-flying enemy planes. A Londoner informed him the balloons were necessary to keep the island from sinking under the weight of American supplies.

D-Day finally came. With the securing of the beaches, the army railroaders went to work. When Cherbourg was taken, the rehabilitation of its railroad yards started. The first railroad troops to reach France, an advance party of the Second Military Railway Service, arrived on June 17th (D plus 11). Shops were cleared and a few French locomotives were found which could be put into service after repairs. Some of these locomotives had been constructed in the United States during the First World War and turned over to the French when the AEF had returned home. They had been used for twenty-three years by the French, then by the Germans and now finally were back in the hands of the original owners, still good for many years of service.

As the beachheads expanded and the armies pushed forward, the equipment which had been prepared in the United Kingdom was loaded on special ferries and moved across the channel. Locomotives with water in their boilers and coal on their tenders were lashed to the decks of Liberty ships so that they arrived in France ready for service. The railroad cars were loaded with equipment and supplies before being placed on ships to make their trip to the continent. The high side gondolas carried British coal on their trip across the channel, for coal was badly needed for locomotive fuel as the Germans had left very little for our use.

The first scheduled rail run in France was made from Cherbourg to Carentan on July 11, 1944. By the end of July, 333 American train runs had been made, 31,907 tons of freight had been carried and 4,524 passengers had been moved. Late July saw troop trains running from the beach landing points to Cherbourg, and on August 4th the first hospital train, improvised out of converted box cars, started the medical run between Lison and Cherbourg, carrying the wounded from the St. Lo sector.

As the armies pushed through Carentan, St. Lo and Avaranches, the railroads followed closely, but it was the motor transport, the "Red Ball Express," which accomplished most of the hauling at this time. By the time the U. S. Third Army had reached Le Mans, the Military Railway Service came into its own by delivering 30 important trains to that army in mid-August, 1944. The territory

U. S. Army Railroad Bridge over the Rhine at Wesel, Germany

708th Inspection party at Lehe, Bremerhaven, Germany

of the 708th Railway Grand Division now extended from Folligny to Le Mans.

At this juncture, the U. S. Army Transportation Corps had a "one-two" punch—it had both the "Red Ball" and the Military Railway Service. But for the railroads, there were still many bridges to be rebuilt, tracks to be relaid, yards to be cleared of debris from heavy bombings, and water and coaling facilities to be established. Displaying fortitude and ingenuity characteristic of the American railroader and of American engineering, the troops of the MRS and the Corps of Engineers buckled down to tiring, back-breaking work under combat conditions. They accomplished almost miraculous achievements. Branch lines, long unused and without maintenance for years, which had been spared in the general bombing pattern, became main lines of communication overnight, carrying ammunition and food to the front.

Despite the hazardous operation, despite enemy strafing and bombing, and despite a weak communications system, tonnage of an amount beyond the wildest dreams of the most experienced railroad men was hauled to places where the fighting men could use the food and ammunition minutes after it was unloaded at a forward railhead. Routes were long and circuitous and involved switch-backs, run-arounds and all the other bogies of railroad life. The war did not stop for darkness, and the trains went forward in blackout territory. The crews got aboard with a supply of K rations for themselves and kept going. They were operating over entirely strange and unknown railroads; many were on the road for weeks at a time. A few crews stationed at Cherbourg advanced through Avaranches, Pontaubault, Le Mans and into Paris before they could be relieved and returned to their parent railroad organization. No headlights or lanterns could be used. The smallest flicker of light invited a bullet from a sniper or strafing from a lurking German plane. But the trains kept rolling on, over the hastily filled bomb craters, over flimsy, temporary bridges, through the debris-filled marshalling yards and the rubble of destroyed villages and cities.

The armies pushed on through Rennes, Le Mans and on to Paris, and the railroaders kept pace. Soon French railroad workers were back in the shops, cleaning up the wreckage and repairing equipment left by the Germans which would be used to supplement the thousands of U. S. cars being ferried from England in a steady stream.

A U. S. Army railroad shop battalion was stationed at Cherbourg. This unit, the 757th, processed all rolling stock and locomo-

tives received from England and started everything that would roll eastward with vital supplies. From July, 1944, to April, 1945, this battalion at Cherbourg processed a total of 1,450 locomotives from England. In addition to locomotives, 19 cranes of 20- and 25-ton capacity were processed. Locomotives dispatched numbered 11,166; railroad cars repaired ran to 5,050. Coal unloaded ran to 49,472 tons; Diesel fuel unloaded ran to 886,370 gallons; railway supplies unloaded ran to 2,031 tons; railway supplies shipped ran to 1,399 tons. This work was not merely concerned with new material. It included the following heavy repairs: 35 broken locomotive cylinders welded; 9 new cylinders applied; 61 cut journals and renewed crown brass; 32 accident repairs; 2 changed wheels account damaged main pin; 39 engines had steam heat units applied; 31 had cellars modified; 248 had air pump drain pipes installed; and 68 had fusible plugs applied.

In mid-August, 1944, another shop battalion arrived on the continent, and this unit, the 755th, was stationed at Rennes, France, the capital of Brittany. Disabled locomotive power and rolling stock were sent to Cherbourg or Rennes, whichever was the closer.

The first railroad activities comprised the Phase 1 operation. This phase was carried out by the Military Railway Service alone. As the armies progressed and the civilian railroad men demonstrated their ability to take over work, Phase 2 came into operation. In this phase, the civilian and military railway men worked together in the actual operations—except that civilians were not required to haul tonnage to the forward railheads. Later, there was Phase 3, in which the civilian railroaders took over all operations under military supervision and control.

By the first of September, 1944, the American armies had entered Belgium, and the 708th Railway Grand Division was in hot pursuit of the combat men of the First U. S. Army. On September 17th the first MRS train rolled into Belgium, and a railhead was set up at Huy, between Namur and Liege. On this train was Lieutenant Colonel Samuel H. Pulliam, Commanding Officer of the 740th Railway Operating Battalion, who was responsible for the first MRS activity in Belgium. Colonel William S. Carr, Commanding Officer of the 708th Railway Grand Division, was then in Brussels establishing first contact with Belgian railway officials and gaining their full collaboration.

On October 5th, the 708th Railway Grand Division and the 740th Railway Operating Battalion, moved to Liege, Belgium. There was found the proof of the Military Railway Service's ability to keep the American First and Ninth Armies supplied. Every ounce

708th Headquarters Officers' Mess at Liege, Belgium

708th Headquarters Enlisted Men's Mess at Liege, Belgium

of rail freight from the French ports (and later Antwerp) had to move through Liege if destined for the First and Ninth Armies While the "front" raged a few miles to the east, the railroad yards of Liege became the nerve center of the supply line, and Liege was built up as the storehouse of the First and Ninth Armies. To the south, the 706th Railway Grand Division and its affiliated battalions followed the American Third Army.

During the race through France and into Belgium, the policy of the MRS had been to encourage French and Belgian railroad men to return to their jobs. They did so in droves, and every one was put to work. By the time the railroads reached Liege, the U. S. army supply life-line had reached incredible proportions and every man was needed.

Shortly after the fall of Aachen (35 kilometers east of Liege) in late October, 1944, the first MRS engine entered that railway yard. It was not until then that we began to get the first real look at German motive power. At Aachen, only seven locomotives were found, and four of these were originally of the U. S. A. 1917 vintage. The other three were of French origin. As the Germans retreated, even in their own country, they took their German power with them. None of the locomotives in Aachen were immediately serviceable, but one of the U. S. A. locomotives was reconditioned and put into service within a month. The others were dispatched to shops in Belgium for repairs.

At Krefeld, Rheydt and Munchen Gladbach (March 1945) the story was different. The advance of the Allied armies had been so rapid that the Germans did not have time to withdraw their motive power, with the result that well over 150 locomotives were taken at these places. Many of these locomotives were placed into immediate service. To our surprise, about 50 per cent of the locomotives taken were found to be not over five years old. Many had been constructed in 1939, 1940 and 1941; some as late as 1943. The Germans, too, had developed an "Austerity" type of their own, stripped of everything but the barest essentials and using many substitute metals. This was a 2-10-0 type locomotive, which we found to be a very efficient piece of machinery.

The Duren, Cologne and Eushkirchen yards were thoroughly destroyed and were of little use to us. Almost 5,000 cars of all description, many loaded, were found at Cologne. Only one armored locomotive was found, and that was at Rheydt. The entire locomotive from the back of the cab to the front of the smoke box was covered with a box-like armor plate $\frac{5}{8}$ of an inch thick. But,

practically all locomotives in use in the theater had the sides of the cabs well protected with 5/8-inch plates.

But all these places were west of the Rhine—and just as questions had existed before D-Day as to the condition of the railroad in France, the same questions existed with regard to area "East of the Rhine." To the amazement of MRS, it found conditions across the Rhine good, especially in respect to motive power and cars. The Germans had not neglected the maintenance of motive power to any great extent. The motive power found in running condition was sufficient to meet all of our military needs, although traffic had been curtailed considerably by the bombing of yards and rights-of-way. In all, several thousand locomotives were taken by the 708th Railway Grand Division east of the Rhine, and it was not necessary for the 708th to utilize any U. S. A. locomotives.

Railway operations were in full swing east of the Rhine long before any railroad bridges spanned that wide river barrier. Railroad troops crossed the river, set up headquarters at Marburg and operated with the captured locomotives and cars. War materiel was hauled to the west bank of the Rhine by train, unloaded into trucks, trucked across the river and reloaded into captured German cars on the east bank of the river.

At several locations, new locomotives were found well camouflaged and stored for future use. Investigation brought forth the information that they and many others in good condition had been stored as being surplus. From this it can be seen that as far as motive power was concerned, the German railroads were still in a good position. Thirty per cent of the German locomotives were of the saddle-back type. These have the tank over the boiler, eliminating the use of a tender. These were used for short freight and passenger runs.

The most common type of freight locomotive to be found was a three-cylinder 2-10-0, and next most common was the conventional two-cylinder 2-10-0. In the Kassel territory, many new condenser locomotives were found, some completed and some only partially so. Also, there was found one 2-8-2 passenger locomotive with two V-type cylinders over each pair of driving wheels. Two pairs of the cylinders were located on each side of the engine and connected directly to the driving wheels without the use of rods, thus driving each pair of wheels separately. No other information was available on this locomotive, and it was understood that it was the only one of its type ever constructed.

After VE-Day, the practice of returning German railroad men to work was vigorously followed. The German was found to be an

excellent railroad man, very cooperative, willing to work and needing only to be told what was desired. Later he was set to work running the German railways under U. S. Army supervision.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

IN THIS book, the author has not attempted to give a complete history of the Military Railway Service. And in a sense, the task of the author has been a painful one. Limitations of space have precluded the inclusion of many episodes, vignettes, descriptions and analyses. Consequently, most of the personnel concerned have had to remain anonymous.

War is not only a matter of facts and statistics. It is experience, and no others can quite understand that experience. The author has tried to tell the story of the war as it came to our organization—how it looked and felt, and what our activities were during the fighting. The splendid performance of the 708th reflected credit on all of our personnel rather than on any individual or small group of individuals. This book is intended primarily for personnel of our immediate headquarters, and I trust they will understand and forgive me for not including their individual chapters.

As an organization, we were small in number. It was the battalions that made up the strength of the Grand Division, at times exceeding 6,500 officers and enlisted men. Our commanding officer, Colonel Carr, was the finest leader we could have had. Of all the commanding officers in the Military Railway Service, none surpassed the genius, ability and energy of Colonel Carr. Certainly no commanding officer matched his force, his brisk, businesslike drive, his strenuous field activity. His aggressive spirit and inspirational manner were contagious. A natural leader, he had the knack of management, of eliciting the maximum ability from his associates. Perhaps his greatest asset was a quick, keen mind that fostered initiative—initiative in making on-the-spot decisions which often later became general army policy. His vigorous, untiring methods set the pace for the headquarters and the battalions, and under his leadership all of our fine achievements were developed. To Colonel Carr nothing was impossible. The results of operations by troops of his command proved that.

Being of small number, which fostered close association and comradeship, we experienced one of the rare treats of army life. Except for minor and well-spread changes, the organization remained

Lt. Col. John S. Major receives the Bronze Star at Wesermunde, Germany

Sergts. Melvin A. Hansen and Roland M. Wirt become lieutenants at Wesermunde, Germany

virtually intact throughout the entire tour of duty. And despite our smallness, we were self-sustaining; that is, we operated our own mess, post exchange, motor pool and every other aspect of organization activity. On some occasions, we called on our assigned battalions to furnish personnel in order that we might maintain this status. Many of these men were transferred to our headquarters when vacancies occurred.

While a railway grand division is analogous to a "regimental headquarters," the relation of its battalions is not exactly the same. The battalions of a regiment are fixed properties, that is, they remain in the regiment at all times.

In the Military Railway Service, battalions are assigned at will to railway grand divisions for technical and administrative control. All assignments were made by the General Manager, Military Railway Service, and were temporary in nature. When a grand division territory became too large, or the volume of traffic increased to where another battalion was necessary, the General Manager simply transferred a battalion from another grand division.

To the Headquarters of the 708th Railway Grand Division, all battalions were looked upon as a new member of the Grand Division team. In the United Kingdom the following battalions were assigned to the 708th Railway Grand Division:

OPERATING BATTALIONS

712, 717, 720, 733, 728, 729

SHOP BATTALIONS

755, 756, 757, 763

On the continent the following battalions were assigned at various times:

OPERATING BATTALIONS

712, 718, 722, 723, 724, 729, 734, 740, 741, 743, 744, 746

SHOP BATTALIONS

755, 757, 766

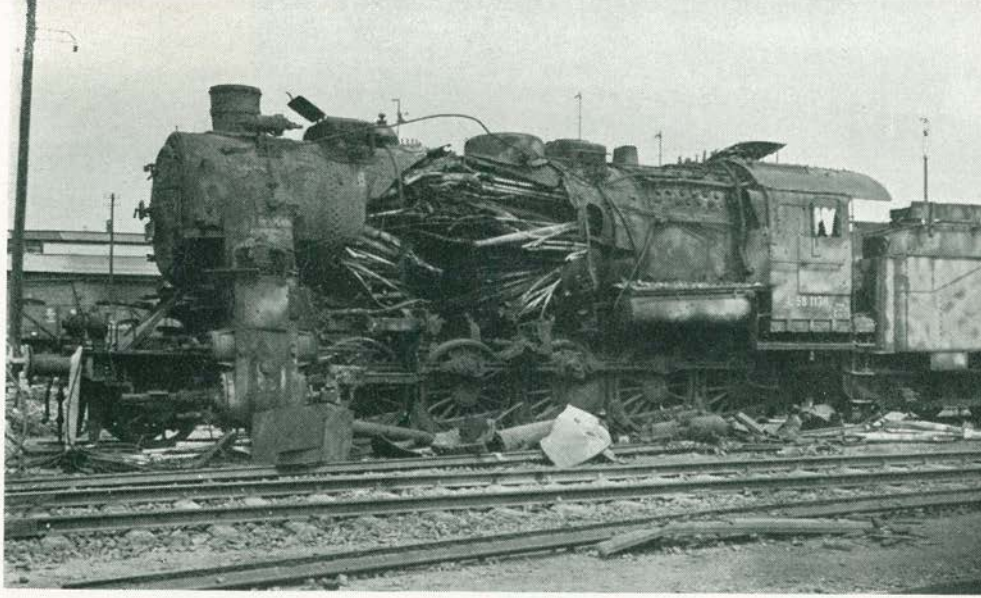
The battalions which saw most service with the 708th were:

OPERATING BATTALIONS

722, 734, 740, 741

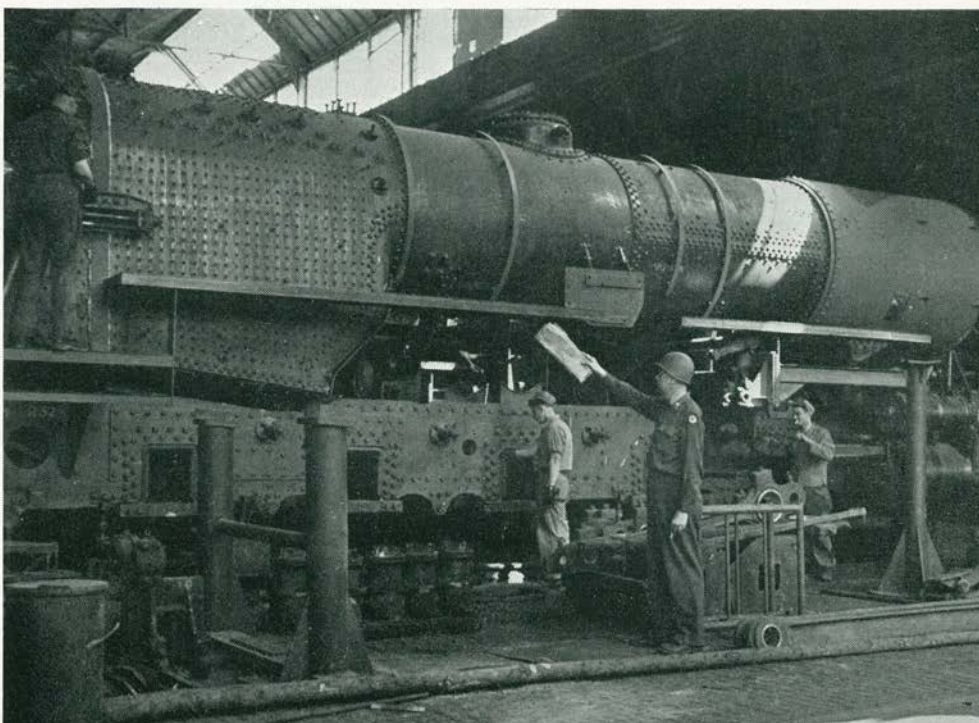
SHOP BATTALIONS

755, 757



A 708th locomotive damaged by German demolition

Another locomotive is repaired in the shops of the 757th Railway Shop Battalion at Kassel, Germany



SNAPSHOTS

Above: M/Sgt. J. E. Brundrett

Above: T/Sgt. M. J. Cooper

Right: T/4 J. T. Armstrong

Left: Mess personnel,
708th Headquarters,
Liege, Belgium

Right: T/4 R. A. Rightmier and the Scottish girl he married overseas

Left: Capt. F. H. Drake

Below: M/Sgt. M. H. Hansen, Jr.

Below: T/Sgt. F. A. Pearce

These battalions ranked at the top in MRS accomplishments in the ETO. From Mayenne to the Rhine, the 740th Railway Operating Battalion was the spearhead following the First Army. It was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Samuel H. Pulliam, a vigorous, fearless soldier, who, like his men, thrived on a tough job. It was sponsored by the C & O Railroad, of which Colonel Pulliam is an official.

The 734th Railway Operating Battalion, sponsored by the Southern Pacific Railroad and commanded by Major (later Lieutenant Colonel) Ralph E. Johnson (of the SP), sustained the Ninth Army for months at Maastricht, Holland, and later moved to Kassel, Germany. A keen, straight-forward leader, Colonel Johnson and his battalion arrived during the Belgian Bulge and demonstrated great adaptability.

The 722nd Railway Operating Battalion pioneered operations in the Kassel area, operated the first train into Bremen and handled the Port of Bremerhaven. Sponsored by the Seaboard Airline Railway and commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Curtis A. McRee, an official of the same line, the 722nd, inspired by Colonel McRee's untiring efforts, compiled an enviable record, particularly in the Namur, Belgium, area during the Battle of the Bulge.

The 741st Railway Operating Battalion played a key part in Liege operations, and later moved to Hanover, Germany. Led by Lieutenant Colonel Laurence E. Thornton, an aggressive, diligent commanding officer, the 741st accomplished many great feats and suffered many casualties in Liege.

The 755th Railway Shop Battalion, after operating the Rennes Shop, moved to Namur, where it serviced power at the greatest undamaged railroad shops in Belgium. It also operated a car shop at Ans, and had a locomotive detachment at Herbesthal, Belgium. Sponsored by the Southern Railroad, the 755th was outstanding. It was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Miles G. Stevens, of the same company, an ingenious and capable leader.

The 757th Railway Shop Battalion concluded operations in Cherbourg in April, 1945, and moved to Kassel, Germany, where it performed an excellent job at the Henschel and Sons Locomotive Works. It was sponsored by the Milwaukee Railroad, and was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John W. Moe of the same line. Colonel Moe, a shrewd, competent mechanical man, had a way of welding his men together into an unbeatable combination.

All of these battalions as a team working under the technical and administrative supervision of the 708th Railway Grand Division performed the deeds that made this story possible.

We are proud of the records compiled by the various battalions of our Grand Division. We think the job they did was terrific. Yet over and above the recorded achievements is the spirit of team play and comradeship that remains in our memory.

This chapter in the story of our 708th is concluded. But in our hearts, the experience shall live as a permanent shrine to all those who suffered and died that liberty and the principles upon which our country was founded may be perpetuated.

APPENDIX

ROSTER OF PERSONNEL

SHORTLY after VJ-Day, a roster was prepared, showing the name, rank and home address of all personnel who served in the 708th headquarters. Some of the men did not serve as long as others, but all are included as members of the family. The roster may have some errors; however, it is as complete as possible, and is shown below for the information of those who may be interested:

Name	Position	Last Known Rank	Last Reported Address
Alexander, Rowan P.	Stationmaster	Maj.	Chippewa Trail Medford Lakes, N. J.
Allrid, Edward L.	Clerk	T/4	1221 Hartford Ave. Atlanta, Ga.
Amsbury, Robert F.	File Clerk	T/5	Rossiter Hotel Los Angeles, Calif.
Armstrong, John T.	Driver for Commanding Officer.	T/4	221 S. Carnegie Ave. Connellsville, Pa.
Arter, John B.	Maintenance of Way Superintendent	Lt. Col.	242 East Fourth St. Salem, Ohio
Autio, Pentti	Cook	T/5	390 Water St. Quincy, Mass.
Baker, Walter G.	Signalman	T/Sgt.	Four Oaks, N. C.
Barnett, James E.	Mechanic	T/4	RFD No. 2 Walhonding, Ohio
Barta, Victor E.	Radioman	Corp.	Lavina, Mont.
Bear, Clayton F.	Clerk	Sgt.	52 Douglas St. St. Paul, Minn.
Berg, Albert C.	Fuel Agent	Capt.	Asst. to Vice President Great Northern Railway St. Paul, Minn.
Bernard, Joseph B.	Stationmaster	Capt.	Dean Apts., Sedalia, Mo.
Blees, Edward J.	Driver	Pfc.	Rt. 2, Deer Park, Wis.
Boham, Robert G.	Clerk	Pvt.	2315 Margaret St. Columbus, Ohio
Boland, Harold A.	Draftsman	T/4	1390 E. Wheeling Ave. Cambridge, Ohio

Boyd, Clarence F.	First Sergeant	1st Sgt.	1917 9th Ave., W Seattle, Wash.
Brown, Robert C.	Assistant Superintendent, Car Service	Lt. Col.	c/o B & O RR Buffalo, N. Y.
Brundrett, John E.	Chief Draftsman Engineering Dept.	M/Sgt.	654 Kenneth Ave. St. Paul, Minn.
Burkley, George W.	Master Mechanic	Capt.	2647 Pancoast Ave. Cincinnati, Ohio
Bushway, Harold G.	Clerk Transportation	T/4	1440 Webb Ave., Apt. 7 Detroit, Mich.
Buzdikian, Bernard	Chief Radioman	T/3	Judith Gap, Mont.
Carr, William S.	Commanding Officer.	Col.	8 Verndale Rd. Milton, Mass.
Carte, Lewis C., Jr.	Clerk Transportation	Pfc.	2241 Marianna St. Weelsburg, W. Va.
Chura, Andrew	Driver	T/5	4529 Logan Denver, Colo.
Coffman, Roy H.	Stationmaster	Capt.	c/o B & O RR Indianapolis, Ind.
Collins, James D. G.	Chaplain (Catholic).	Capt.	59 Crest St. West Roxbury, Mass.
Colvin, Ora K.	Company Commander	1st Lt.	Manila, Ky.
Cooper, Marvin J.	Bridge Inspector	T/Sgt.	311 W. Main St. Crawfordsville, Ind.
Coverdale, Rodney B.	Cook	T/4	Trinway, Ohio
Davidson, Albert	Radioman	Pfc.	1158 49th St. Brooklyn, N. Y.
Drake, Frank H.	Signal Superintendent	Capt.	50 Vaughn St., Jackson, Ohio
Evans, Marshall C.	Driver	T/5	Rt. 1, River Road Johns Island, N. C.
Fell, Harry	Clerk	Pvt.	2119 Shelleross St. Philadelphia, Pa.
Fenton, Kenneth G.	Telephone Operator.	Pvt.	716 Winchell St., S. E. Grand Rapids, Mich.
Ferguson, William J.	Secretary to Commanding Officer.	T/3	5325 Washington St. Downers Grove, Ill.
Fox, William R.	Clerk	T/5	156 2nd St. Addyston, Ohio
Fretwell, Richard D.	Executive Officer	Lt. Col.	413 W. Quincy St. Pittsburgh, Kan.
Garrigus, Ray A.	Master Mechanic	Maj.	37 Hileman Apts. New Castle, Pa.

Geach, Harry G.	Clerk	T/5	4653 W. Addison St. Chicago, Ill.
Gregory, Andrew G.	Adjutant	Maj.	Box 164, Amory, Miss.
Grimes, William L.	Stationmaster	Capt.	612 N. Mesa St. El Paso, Tex.
Groetsch, John B.	Chaplain Assistant	T/5	Green Isle, Minn.
Hadl, Luther E.	Clerk	Pvt.	Malvern, Kan.
Hamilton, Cleo B.	Clerk	Pfc.	Box 217, Argonia, Kan.
Hansen, Marvin H., Jr.	Sergeant Major	M/Sgt.	3252 S. Fremont Ave. Apt. 3, Minneapolis, Minn.
Hanson, Melvin A.	Fuel Agent	2nd Lt.	210 7th St. North Hudson, Wis.
Harding, Henry R., Sr.	Stationmaster	Capt.	3214 W. Baltimore St. Baltimore, Md.
Hardy, Richard E.	Assistant Cook	T/5	8 Winter St. Plymouth, N. H.
Harker, Donald F.	Stationmaster	Lt. Col.	804 Creighton Ave. Dayton, Ohio
Harper, Donald B.	Clerk, Transportation	T/4	1021 Wilson Ave. St. Paul, Minn.
Hathaway, William H.	General Storekeeper	Maj.	80 Day Avenue Newark, Ohio
Hedgpeth, James F.	Telephone Operator	Pvt.	General Delivery Okay, Okla.
Herrick, Newell F.	Stationmaster	1st Lt.	East Greenbush, N. Y.
Hoelscher, Louis B.	Draftsman	T/Sgt.	431 Charles Ave. St. Paul, Minn.
Hollman, John H.	Driver	Corp.	Meridian, Miss.
Hotchkiss, Walter J.	Commanding Officer	Lt. Col.	1301 Castle St. Ottumwa, Iowa
Howard, Charles L.	Mechanic	T/4	407 S. Kinsey St. Carrollton, Mo.
Hoyt, Herbert B.	Maintenance of Way Superintendent	Col.	c/o B & O RR Punxsutawney, Pa.
Humphreys, Marvin W.	File Clerk and Personnel Sergeant	T/4	3940 Grove Ave. Norwood, Ohio
Hutson, Herschel O.	Bridges and Buildings Superintendent	Maj.	4202 Barrington Rd. Baltimore, Md.
Jackson, Milton E.	Driver	T/5	1134 E. Wilson Glendale, Calif.
Jensen, Ralph O.	Commanding officer	Lt. Col.	1009 S. 4th Ave. Maywood, Ill.
Johnston, James H.	Switchboard Opr.	T/5	692 Macalester St. St. Paul, Minn.

Kelm, Robert D.	Driver	T/5	4729 Young Ave. Indianapolis, Ind.
Kennedy, Frank B.	Water Chemist	T/3	418 Jerome Lane Route No. 1 East St. Louis, Ill.
Kirchbaum, Irving	Chaplain (Catholic)	Capt.	Brooklyn, N. Y.
Kirk, Robert G.	Clerk	Pvt.	Lyons, Ind.
Kitchen, Harry C.	Clerk, Transportation	T/4	442 Ashland Ave. Detroit, Mich.
Koch, Fred A.	Clerk	Pvt.	46 Elmwood Ave. Buffalo, N. Y.
Krauth, Kenneth J.	Stenographer	T/3	6154 Newport Ave. Chicago, Ill.
Lacinski, Casimer E.	Driver	T/5	2748 W. 24th St. Chicago, Ill.
Legate, Dolton D.	Driver	Pvt.	Rt. 3, Clarksville, Tenn.
Levowich, Bernard	Machinist and Photographer	T/Sgt.	69 McLellan Dorchester, Mass.
Lind, Earl J.	Draftsman	T/5	306 W. Curtice St. St. Paul, Minn.
Lutz, Jack B.	Driver and Motor Sergeant	T/4	Brewster, Ohio
Major, John S.	Superintendent Equipment	Lt. Col.	4 Savoy St., Oakwood Hts., Staten Island, N.Y.
Malone, Martin C.	Draftsman	T/4	2144 Highland Ave. Birmingham, Ala.
Martegani, Louis J.	Cooks Helper	T/5	745 N. 1st St. Rockford, Ill.
McCrary, Thomas W.	Master Car Builder	Capt.	Monroe Ave. Ronceverte, W. Va.
McInerny, Richard J.	Stationmaster	Capt.	2107 26th Ave., North Minneapolis, Minn.
McLean, Leo F.	Stationmaster	1st Lt.	Philadelphia, Pa.
Meehan, John M.	Clerk	Pfc.	9437 159th St. Jamaica, N. Y.
Melquist, Pershing F.	Mess Sergeant	S/Sgt.	102 Sr. 4th St. Marshall, Minn.
Moore, Harold E.	Stationmaster	1st Lt.	40 Arch St. Springfield, Mass.
Morrow, Sylvester L.	Stationmaster	Capt.	c/o B & O RR Dayton, Ohio
Mosvick, Stanford W.	Chief Clerk Equipment Dept	T/3	2 Eleventh Ave., N. W. Minot, N. D.
Moutray, Joseph A.	Driver	Pfc.	Stoutsville, Mo.
Murray, Michael B.	Stationmaster	Maj.	127 Jackson Ave. Clarksburg, W. Va.

O'Hearn, Roderick A.	Clerk Transportation	T/4	1905 N. E. Clackamas Portland, Ore.
Otto, Raymond C.	Sergeant Major	T/Sgt.	211 Ninth St., N. E. Washington, D. C.
Padgett, George W.	Mechanical Engineer.	Capt.	2700 Strathmore Ave. Baltimore 14, Md.
Pantaleoni, Guido V.	Clerk-Stenographer	T/4	95 Live Oak Ave. Fairfax, Calif.
Pearce, Francis A.	Draftsman and Photographer	T/Sgt.	2612 N. Fairhill St. Philadelphia, Pa.
Phillips, Romano R.	Cook	T/4	833 W. Grand Ave. Chicago, Ill.
Plant, James W.	Stationmaster	Capt.	127 S. Crawford St. Thomasville, Ga.
Pleasant, Paul W.	Chemical Engineer	Maj.	1128 N. 10th St. Lafayette, Ind.
Poirier, Eugene W.	Storekeeper	M/Sgt.	1661 Carroll Ave. St. Paul, Minn.
Polley, John S.	Radioman	T/5	P. O. Box 295 Reinbeck, Iowa
Puckett, Lawrence P.	Driver	T/5	Jesup, Ga.
Purcell, Warren J.	Clerk	Pvt.	3305 Emerson St. Fort Worth, Texas
Qualls, Eugene L.	Driver	Pfc.	Rt. 1—Box 192-A Eminclaw, Wash.
Quinn, John J.	Signalman	T/Sgt.	Main St., Trumansburg, N. Y.
Riehle, Melven D.	Clerk	T/5	Box 66, LaCrosse, Ind.
Rightmier, Roy A.	Cook	T/4	Route 2, Box 571 Klamath Falls, Ore.
Russell, Dale K.	Clerk	T/5	Boardman, Ore.
Russo, Alexander J.	Radioman	T/4	84-73 129 St. Richmond Hill, L.I., N.Y.
Salamone, Joe P.	Clerk	Pvt.	3567 E. 116th St. Cleveland, Ohio
Savage, Merle F.	Stationmaster	Maj.	37 College St. Battle Creek, Mich.
Schultz, John M.	Supply Sergeant	T/3	87 Broadway Newburgh, N. Y.
Seavy, J. L.	Clerk Transportation Dept.	S/Sgt.	6524 Chansler Ave. Bell, Calif.
Sedding, George H.	Chief Clerk Transportation Dept.	M/Sgt.	1521 Silver St. Jacksonville, Fla.
Shrewsbury, Melvin H.	Stationmaster	Capt.	c/o B & O RR Parkersburg, W. Va.

Shultis, Donald A.	Driver	Pfc	3422 Hermosa Ave. Hermosa Beach, Calif.
Slaughter, Gunthery A.	Cook	T/4	Rt. 1, Glenfallen, Va.
Smith, Jack B.	Water Service Supt	1st Lt.	1225 Marengo Ave. S. Pasadena, Calif.
Smith, James C.	Clerk	T/Sgt.	2031 N. 50th St. Omaha, Neb.
Smith, James L.	Stationmaster	1st Lt.	500 S. Church St. Monroe, S. C.
Stage, Cecil C.	Stationmaster	Capt.	514 Hall Ave. Dayton, Ohio
Stetter, Reginald	Clerk Transportation Dept.	T/4	6530 S. Drexel Ave. Chicago, Ill.
Stuart, Kenneth G.	Cook	T/5	505 Glenwood Ave. Anderson, S. C.
Townsend, Waller A.	Cook	T/4	RR 1, Yosemite, Ky.
Vess, William H.	Driver	Pfc	Lepanto, Ark.
Wadkins, Fahy E.	Switchboard Opr	Corp.	Phillips, Neb.
Weber, Melbourne J.	Mail Clerk	T/5	227 S. Audubon Rd. Indianapolis, Ind.
Weissman, Saul H.	Supply Sergeant	T/4	748 Mellon St. Pittsburgh, Pa.
West, Andrew J.	Driver	T/5	556 Ogram St. Jacksonville, Fla.
White, Carl F.	Executive Officer	Lt. Col.	220 Virginia Ave. B & O RR, Indianapolis, Ind.
Whitham, Woodrow C.	Track Supervisor	Capt.	614 N. Fifth St. Savannah, Ill.
Wight, Clarence L.	Draftsman	T/3	1411 S. 57th St. Tacoma, Wash.
Wirt, Roland M.	Stationmaster	2nd Lt.	655 McNary St. West Salem, Ore.
Witzler, Julius L.	Stationmaster	Capt.	Perrysburg, Ohio
Wolff, Leo B.	File Clerk	T/4	99 Newfield St. East Orange, N. J.
Wurst, Russell F.	Draftsman	T/Sgt.	449 Lafond Ave. St. Paul, Minn.
Yelle, Rufus J.	Driver	Pfc	Moores Forks, N. Y.

THE AUTHOR

ANDREW GRANT GREGORY was born on March 26, 1918, at Fort Smith, Arkansas, the son of a conductor of the Frisco Railroad. It was natural for him to turn to railroading, and so he, too, when he became of age, went to work for the Frisco Railroad, first in the Transportation Department and later in the Claim Department.

Meanwhile, he studied law at Cumberland University. Nine months before Pearl Harbor, he volunteered for army duty and began service as a private in the Infantry. He later went to the Engineer Officer Candidate School at Fort Belvoir, Va., winning his commission as a second lieutenant in August, 1942. He was promoted to first lieutenant in July, 1943, to captain in June, 1944, and to major in December, 1945. He served as the adjutant of 708th Headquarters while it was in the States and during its entire tour of duty overseas. He was awarded the Bronze Star Medal and the Certificate of Merit.

Upon returning to the States in 1945, he went back to work for the Frisco Railroad, and is assigned to the office of the trainmaster-roadmaster at Amory, Mississippi. This history was written after his return.

He is married, but has no children.

Gregory, Andrew Grant
4 mss

THE SAGA OF THE 708 Gregory