

The manufacturing facilities of the railway workshops are being used increasingly for the production of war materials, and a wide diversity of munitions, ranging from universal carriers, beaverettes, Bren-gun carriers, trench mortars, and casings for bombs to such smaller items as camp-kitchen utensils, are being produced on an ever-increasing scale. Nearly one thousand of the workshops staff of skilled artisans and technicians are now exclusively engaged on munitions work. Many of these members are working long hours daily and at week-ends in order that defence orders may be fulfilled to schedule.

The transport of troops and their equipment during the year has thrown a heavy burden on the Department's operating plant and resources and has aggravated an already very difficult staffing position. During the twelve months under review no less than 2,176 special trains were made available for the conveyance of approximately 1,250,000 members of the armed forces. These special trains were provided without the necessity of cancelling or curtailing any of the regular time-table services available to the public and were scheduled during a year of record freight traffic, much of it being primary produce for overseas despatch which required rapid rail transport to main ports in order to keep shipping moving during the still critical stages of the battle of the oceans.

Associated with the movement of troops by rail has been the provision of meals, the Department's catering services having been extensively availed of to provide set meals and light counter refreshments to members of the armed forces undertaking journeys by rail. The result was the highest revenue in the history of the catering branch of the Service and a great strain on a staff depleted by war conditions.

In addition to the services rendered by members of the railways staff in connection with the foregoing activities, a total of 5,935 employees have been released for service with the armed forces, while a further 141 have been loaned to outside organizations engaged on works of national importance.

Further depletion of the staff establishment may be anticipated as the war continues, additional personnel being released for military service from time to time. Appeals by the Department for the retention in their civil occupation of trained personnel have been reduced to a minimum consistent with the urgent need for maintaining railway supply and transport services. Large numbers of temporary male workers, also women, and in recent months retired railwaymen, have been recruited to replace those members of the staff who are now serving with the defence forces. A recent innovation has been the employment of women on portering duties, an experiment which has given satisfactory results and is now being extended to all main railway centres.

Because of the necessity for conserving paper-supplies, the usual extensive review of the Department's operations has been omitted on this occasion. While to the members of the community generally the significance and extent of the railways' services in this time of national crisis can only be conjectured, it is probably true to say there is universal recognition and appreciation throughout the Dominion that, both directly and indirectly, the railways are making a most impressive and vital contribution towards the defence of our country.

CONCLUSION.

In conclusion, I desire to record my keen appreciation of the manner in which the General Manager, Mr. E. Casey; the Assistant General Manager, Mr. J. Sawers; together with the executive officers and all sections of the staff have responded to the onerous demands made upon them in connection with the prosecution of the national war effort during the most trying as well as the most successful twelve months of the railways' existence. I would like also to mention that at no time have the men of the railway service been more loyal and worked to better advantage and that the relationships between the Minister, the Management, and the employees are thoroughly harmonious.