

WHEELS OF WAR



Railroads have played a part in every U.S. war since 1860. During the Civil War, World Wars I and II, the Gulf War, and even today, railroads transported soldiers and everything they needed, from tanks to uniforms.

After railroads appeared in the United States in the early 1830s, it was not long before the military recognized their strategic importance. Barely 60 years had passed since the American War of Independence in 1776 and less than 30 since the war with Great Britain in 1812. National safety was on the country's mind. By 1838, Major General Edmund P. Gaines developed the first comprehensive plan for the military's use of railroads, including several rail corridors providing easy access to the entire U.S.



Why Railroads?

No other form of transportation can carry so much, so far, with so little!

Railroads might seem vulnerable – they follow a fixed path impossible to disguise, and their moving parts are always visible – but this has proven untrue.

In 1956, General James A. Van Fleet said, "Damage caused by enemy bombardment, demolition, or sabotage does not differ greatly from ravages of fire, flood, landslide, earthquake, and other natural causes which railroaders are [already] accustomed to dealing with. "

This durability and ability to quickly recover by mobilizing an internal specialized workforce put railroads at the center of wartime infrastructure.

Keep ‘em Rolling – the American Civil War and a New Transportation



The American Civil War (1861-1865)

The Civil War is often referred to as the “first railroad war,” as railroads became vitally important to both Confederate and Union troops. Railroads, relatively new technology at the time, could quickly move troops and supplies and had the unique capability of carrying guns and artillery. But the North and the South had very different rail networks.

Northern Railroads	Southern Railroads
Under government control from the war’s beginning	Under private control – the Confederate government didn’t institute a railroad policy assisting in the war effort until 1863
Controlled 20,000 miles of track	Controlled 9,000 miles of track
Connected all major population centers	Radiated out from agricultural centers to waterways or the coast
Access to industries producing rails and equipment	Imported all rails and equipment, making it difficult to repair and rebuild damaged railroad

Our Hat’s in the Ring for Victory – A Network in its Infancy

In the first decades of the 20th century, car travel was in its infancy and roads and highways were still being created. What was in place was a massive rail network connecting cities and small towns. Most people travelled by rail between cities, and almost all goods were shipped by rail to busy coastal ports. The home front for American railroads during both World Wars was transporting vast amounts of troops, military equipment and supplies from United States bases and factories to coastal ports.

During World War II (1941-1945), U.S. railroads accounted for 90 percent of military freight movements and almost 100 percent of military travel. Troops, equipment and supplies crisscrossed the nation from coast to coast.

Railroads are the Backbone of Offense – Government Control

- On April 15, 1861, just days after the first shots rang out at Fort Sumter; President Lincoln seized control of Northern railroads on January 31, 1862.

- The National Defense Act, passed June 3, 1916, included provisions for commissioning men into an Officers' Reserve Corps and enlisting men with special experience into an Enlisted Reserve Corps to cover the Army's various branches.
- On December 26, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson signed the proclamation giving the federal government control of railroad operations under the authority of the Federal Possession and Control Act, signed into law in January

When WWI ended in armistice, there was still debate about returning the railroads to private control. Some advocates wanted increased government oversight, which finally resulted in the creation of the Transportation Act of 1920. This Act aided in the development of a cohesive system, the Interstate Commerce Commission, gaining "more authority over railroads." However, even this level of ongoing control would not be adequate for the complicated war effort in WWII.

Over There, Over There! – World War I & World War II

Both World War I and II railroad efforts tremendously impacted the war overseas, but they were two very different experiences for the soldier railroaders. During WWI, the Military Railway Service (MRS) was created and operated by the Corps of Engineers, with Army officers commanding the regiments. Professional railroaders were commissioned officers and served on the MRS abroad only at the regimental level. When the U.S. entered WWII in 1941, this type of organization was considered



inadequate for the railroads' increased role in the war effort. Professional railroaders were enlisted in Railway Operating Battalions, organized like civilian railroad operations. Starting with one battalion in 1941 largely dedicated to training, more were created under the Affiliation Plan when the U.S. officially entered WWII in 1941, and activation efforts abroad began.

Without a doubt, railroads were a critical element to efforts abroad for both WWI and WWII, but the impact was different. During WWI, motor transport and aerial bombardment were in their infancy; without railroad operations, effective supply efforts and communications over such a large theater of war would have been difficult, if not impossible. During WWI, railroads hauled more than 3.4 million tons of goods, mobilized over 83,000 men for the MRS and largely operated on the European continent. WWII efforts intensified. The MRS' reorganization into Railway Operating Battalions used the soldier

railroaders' unique knowledge to efficiently operate thousands of miles of railroad on five continents! This highly specialized know-how proved vital to the Allied victory abroad.

They Can Do It! – Hiring Women & Minorities During Wartime



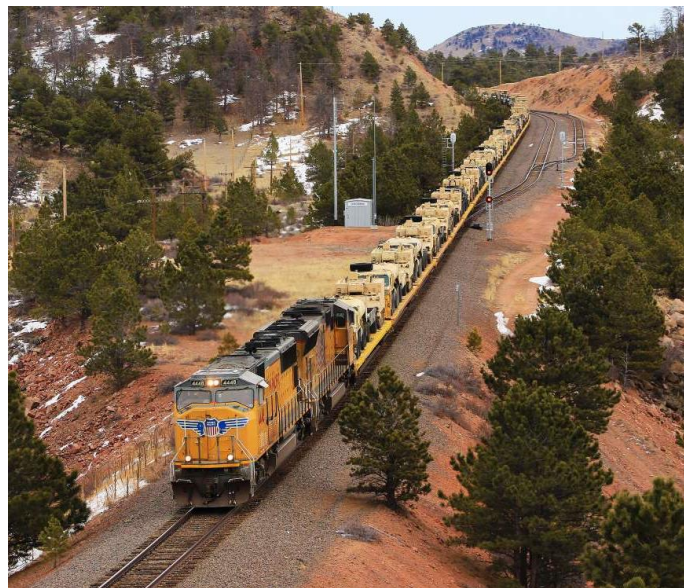
During wartime, women and minorities were relied upon to fill the labor shortage as men were called to the front lines. During WWII, 350,000 men joined the war effort, but despite this massive effort to support the military, railroads saw their employment numbers rise with thousands of women and minorities joining the workforce.

The railroads' minority employment also grew during times of war. From 1942-1964, the Bracero Program brought Mexican men to the U.S. to fill labor shortages. These men filled labor contracts, including with the railroads, earning significantly

more than they would in Mexico. Although the program gained prominence during WWII, Mexican labor was relied upon for railroad work as early as the 1880s when railroads expanded west. From 1942-1965, 4.6 million contracts were signed, making the Bracero Program the largest U.S. contract labor program in history.

Keep the Home Fires Burning - Gulf War and Beyond

Railroads continued impacting war efforts throughout the 20th century. In the 1970's-1980's, railroads in Iraq were vital to the economy. They aided the transport of oil, grains and steel, and played a vital role in Saddam Hussein's military efforts. With the U.S. invasion in 1994 during the first Gulf War, the strategic destruction of a railroad repair factory prevented the Iraqi military from quick movement via railroad. In 2003, with another Iraq war, the U.S. avoided destruction of the railroads; and after Hussein was overthrown, railroads played a critical role moving military supplies and humanitarian relief.



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