

CAMP BORDEN IN 1944

BY WILLIAM HOOD

Reading Jack Knowles's article on Camp Borden passenger trains in the April 1991 issue of the Newsletter prompted me to jot down a few of my recollections of the facilities at Borden and the events leading up to them at the time I was stationed there.

I joined the army in May of 1944, and after a brief stay of a week at the Canadian National Exhibition grounds for indoctrination into the armed forces way of life (i.e., sleeping on steel double bunk beds in Horse Palace stalls), we were shipped off by the Canadian Pacific Railway to Peterborough for basic training.

Peterborough was a fairly interesting city in 1944, with quite a number of trains both passing through and originating in the city on both the Canadian Pacific and Canadian National Railways, and I spent as much spare time as I had stopping by the stations to observe the trains. There were always two wooden coaches parked on a siding just east of the CPR station. Sometimes they would disappear for a day and then reappear to take up their appointed position on the siding. I eventually found out that they were used to move troops out from Peterborough after they had completed their basic training.

When we had spent two months completing our basic training we were told one night that we would be moving out the next morning for advanced training at Camp Borden. At 5:00 that morning, several platoons of soldiers were assembled on the parade square in full marching order with back packs and kit bags, and we proceeded up George Street to the CPR station. There I found my two wooden friends had been coupled to the rear of a train standing in the station. The train turned out to be No. 601, a daily except Sunday local from Peterborough to Toronto, scheduled to leave at 7:10 a.m. and to arrive in Toronto at 9:15 a.m. We were all loaded onto the two cars and we settled down for the leisurely trip to Toronto.

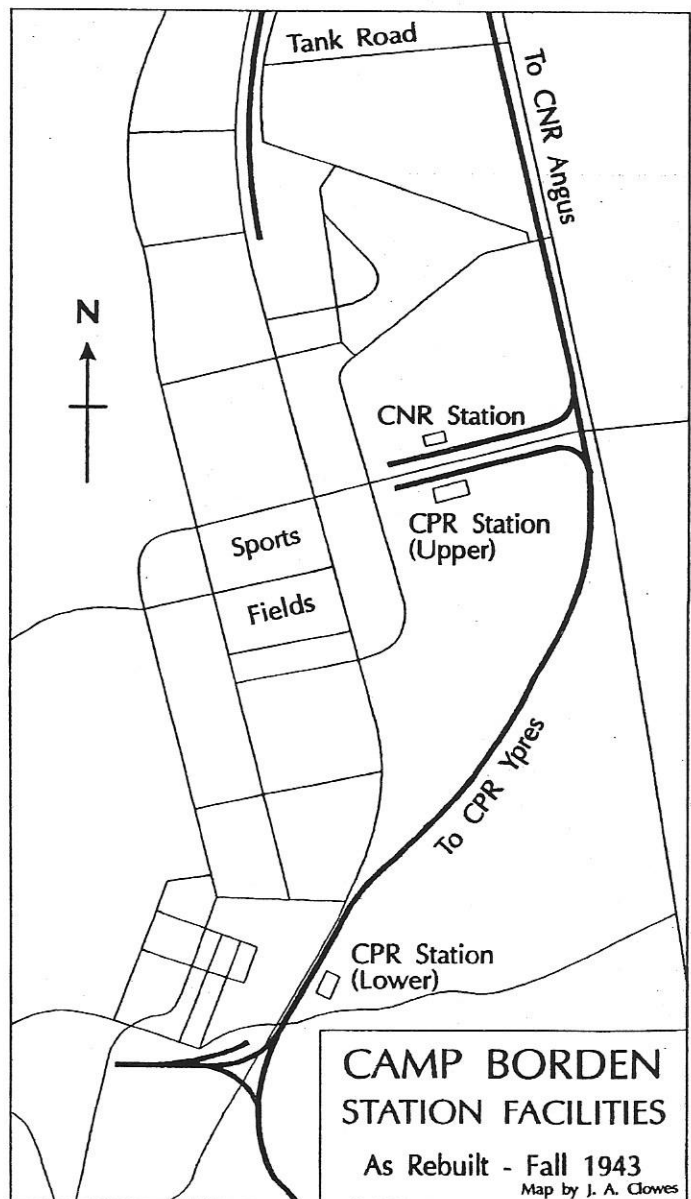
On arriving at Toronto Union Station we were told to unload quickly and crossed the platform to where another train was standing, with three wooden coaches on the rear. We were loaded onto the rear two cars. This was CPR train No. 25, a daily except Sunday run from Toronto to Sudbury, scheduled to depart at 9:20 a.m. and to arrive in Sudbury at 5:55 p.m. This train is shown in the June 25, 1944, schedule as having a through coach from Toronto to Camp Borden, which turned out to be the third wooden coach on the end, ahead of our two special cars.

No. 25 departed Toronto and we proceeded on the next leg of our journey. Two hours later, the train arrived at the Ypres wye at 11:20 a.m. The three cars on the end of the train were cut off on the main line between the two legs of the wye, and the remainder of the train continued on to Sudbury. At this point, an ancient D4g 4-6-0 which had been waiting on the south leg of the wye pulled out onto the main line and coupled up, nose first, to our three cars. We were then pulled back clear of the south-leg switch, the switch was lined up for the wye, and we were on our way for the last 4.5 miles of our journey. I can still recall hearing the mournful drawn-out whistle of the little 4-6-0 blowing for the grade crossings as it pushed the cars along. Fifteen minutes later we arrived at the south Camp Borden station by the R.C.A.F. barracks, presumably to let some passengers off the coach from Toronto, after which the train continued on for the last mile to the north station.

We finally pulled up in front of the CPR station where I

had my first glimpse of the famous Camp Borden I had heard and read so much about. There was a large paved area where we got off, roughly 100 feet wide, with the CPR tracks on the south side and the Canadian National tracks on the north side. The station facilities were completely different. The CNR station was a single-storey building with a small passenger waiting room and a baggage room. The Canadian Pacific station, however, was a large two-storey structure with ample passenger and baggage areas. I later found out the reason for this difference in size.

What I will call the Camp Borden "main line" ran along the east side of the camp, about a thousand feet or so from the station area. Both railways had a spur branching off the "main line" into their respective stations, the CNR coming in from the north and the CPR from the south (see map). As has already been mentioned, the CPR line connected with the rest of the system at Ypres, while the Canadian National ran north to Angus where it connected with the Meaford-Collingwood line



to Allandale (Barrie). These stations had not been built when Jack Knowles was at Borden. Another UCRS member, Dick Vincent, was at Borden in the fall of 1943, and he states that work was just being started on the buildings when he left, so that when I arrived there in the middle of July 1944 the stations were still quite new.

Now for the difference in the size of the stations. As Jack remarked in his article, every second Friday noon there was a mass exodus from the camp as most servicemen were granted a weekend pass good until Sunday night. As most men wanted the most direct way to Toronto, they chose the CPR, so there was always a 12 or 14 car train of steel coaches waiting at the station. This train usually had a Hudson on the head end, either a standard or a Royal Hudson. The station staff were kept busy selling military tickets prior to train time. The CNR train on the other side at its station, however, consisted of three or four wooden cars pulled by a light Pacific. This train was used mostly by servicemen wanting connections to other CNR trains. The only times I ever saw a large train on the National side was when a draft of troops was being shipped out to the east coast, at which time there would be anywhere from 10 to 15 steel colonist cars lined up, as mentioned in Jack's story.

Sunday evening, at the conclusion of the weekend pass, the return train was scheduled to depart Toronto Union at 11:30 p.m. However, in contrast to the steel cars leaving Borden on Friday, the return train was usually made up of wooden coaches with gas lighting. This was all well and good, since the dim lighting let the troops have a bit of sleep on the way back to the barracks. Depending on how quickly the train was able to clear the Toronto yards, we usually arrived back in Borden around 2:00 a.m. On the return trip the train did not back into Borden, but proceeded directly in, engine first, to save time, after which it would back out the 4.5 miles to Ypres.

I had an opportunity to use the through coach to Toronto on two occasions. In September of 1944 I was transferred to Kingston for a specialised course. We boarded the coach at the north station at 1:15 p.m. with the D4g at the head end and proceeded to the north leg of the wye at Ypres to await the arrival of southbound No. 26 from Sudbury. When the train came to a stop at 1:45, we were coupled on the rear and were soon on our way to Toronto. When we returned to Borden in November the trip was made in reverse, with the through car being picked up at the wye and pushed back to the camp.

I was soon to say goodbye to Camp Borden. Just after New Year's Day, 1945, a large draft, including myself, was assembled and we headed out to Camp Debart, Nova Scotia, on one of the colonist car-equipped Canadian National troop trains. This was the last I ever saw of Camp Borden in that familiar configuration.

In 1957 the through coach to Camp Borden (by then listed in the timetables as N.A.C. - Not Air Conditioned) was dropped from the schedule and replaced by a through RDC service, trains No. 309 northbound and No. 310 southbound. On Saturday, April 15, 1959, I decided to visit the camp again, and so travelled on car 9110 to Borden. The RDC just went as far as the south station, arriving there at 1:15 p.m., even though the north station was still listed. However, the north station was dropped from the listing effective with the April 24, 1960, timetable. October 29, 1961, saw the service into Borden eliminated from the schedule altogether, and subsequent timetables simply showed Alliston with "Camp Borden" in italicised letters beside.

I have not been to Camp Borden since that 1959 trip, so I do not know how the facilities changed after that. Perhaps some other member could add a follow-up. ■

NEWS FROM NEW HAMPSHIRE

In September 1984, Guilford Transportation Industries (GTI), operated the last work extra from St. Johnsbury, Vermont, to Rigby Yard in Portland, Maine, over the Mountain Division of the former Maine Central Railroad (MEC). The railroad through Crawford Notch in New Hampshire's White Mountains, once the Maine Central's western outlet to its Canadian Pacific Railway connection at St. Johnsbury, Vermont, was downgraded and subsequently abandoned after GTI rerouted traffic over the Boston and Maine and Delaware and Hudson Railroads.

Since then, the eastern part of the Mountain Division has become overgrown with weeds, bushes, and second-growth trees. At least two landslides, one major washout, and a fallen boulder currently obstruct the track through Crawford Notch. Until recently, there seemed to be little possibility that this very scenic line would ever see trains again.

Then on April 5, 1991, William Hunscher, a local businessman, announced that he would purchase from GTI 23 miles of the line from Bartlett, New Hampshire, through Crawford North, to Bretton Woods, near Fabyans, New Hampshire.

Mr. Hunscher added that he hoped to have diesel-powered trains of classic coaches running on a two-hour round trip between Bartlett and Fabyans by June 1992. He did not offer any hope that a restored steam locomotive might be brought to the new Mountain Division railroad soon.

Mr. Hunscher was one of a group of private investors who negotiated unsuccessfully last year to buy the Conway Scenic Railroad of North Conway, New Hampshire. The CSRR has a connection with the former Maine Central's Mountain Division at Intervale, New Hampshire, 9.1 miles south of Bartlett.

Mr. Hunscher and GTI reportedly agreed separately on trackage rights over the ex-MEC from Fabyans west to Whitefield, New Hampshire, and a connection with the New Hampshire and Vermont Railroad, onward to Gilman, New Hampshire, and St. Johnsbury, Vermont, the latter railroad currently operated by the Lamoille Valley Railroad Corporation.

No announcement was made regarding the purchase price for the 26 miles of mountain railroad through Crawford Notch nor of Mr. Hunscher's financial arrangements.

GTI said it would begin formal abandonment procedures for the Mountain Division soon and anticipated that this would take 30 to 60 days. Last year, GTI notified towns along the former MEC line from Westbrook, Maine, to Whitefield, New Hampshire, that abandonment of the Mountain Division was intended. While the state of New Hampshire has first refusal to purchase abandoned rail rights in the state, New Hampshire State Transportation Commissioner Charles O'Leary said the state would waive this right in favour of Mr. Hunscher's project.

GTI president David Fink said that his corporation had been trying to find a way to preserve the Mountain Division since the cessation of rail service in 1984 and hoped that the purchase and sale agreement and completion of abandonment proceedings would clear the way for restoration of rail passenger service through Crawford Notch.

While the agreement with GTI includes the remaining buildings in the Bartlett area, there is no indication that the buildings and yards would be developed as a base operations. It was recognised that a zoning variance would be necessary from the Town of Bartlett, since the former MEC yard area is now designated as a residential area.

-Sandy Worthen, with reports from H. Arnold Wilder, Manchester Union-Leader, Conway Sun, Carroll County Reporter