

UCRS 50th ANNIVERSARY FEATURE

PASSENGER TRAINS AT CAMP BORDEN

BY JACK KNOWLES

Mention in the January 1991 Newsletter that CP Rail has received permission to abandon 3.21 miles of the Base Borden spur recalls the use made of that line in World War II. The spur branched off the MacTier Subdivision at Ypres and ran into the southeast part of the built-up portion of Camp Borden where there was a wye, with one line continuing west into the Royal Canadian Air Force lands at the south end of Borden, and the other line continuing north along the east edge of the army's built-up part of Borden to an end-on junction with the Canadian National Railways track coming in from Angus, the village located just outside the north edge of the military reserve.

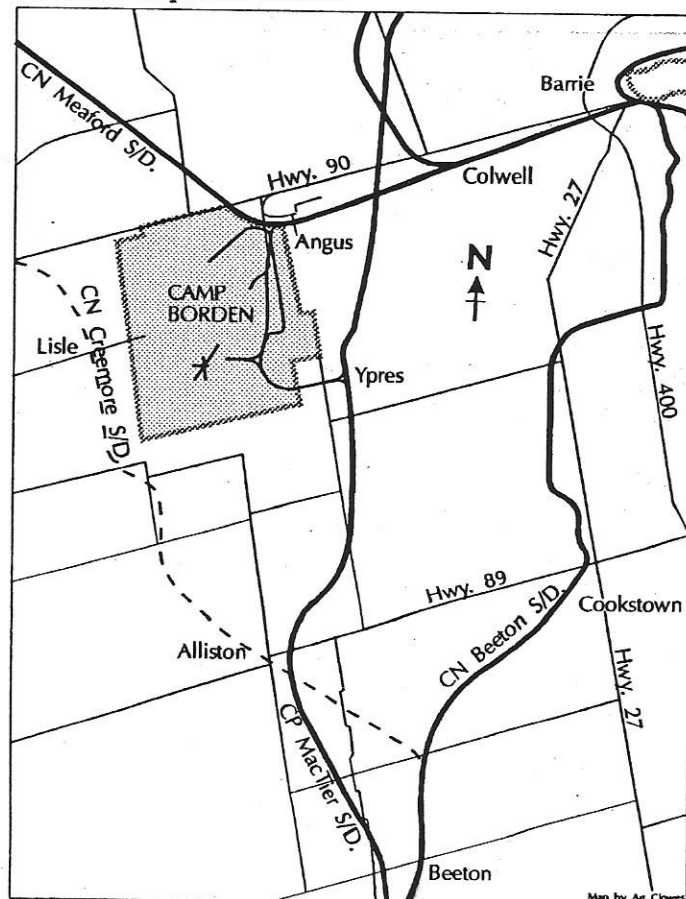
Camp Borden, then with the population of a small city, consisted mostly of one-storey frame buildings: barrack huts, officers' quarters, mess halls, military schools, and administration buildings, with a few larger buildings for RCAF or Ordnance use. Like most military reservations, Borden is on a sandy area unsatisfactory for agriculture. The military units were advanced training centres. Their trainees usually received a weekend leave pass every second weekend. With gasoline rationing for private automobiles after the spring 1942 and interurban bus lines restricted by wartime law to selling tickets for 40 miles or less, there was a substantial Friday midday exodus by rail from the camp every weekend with return late Sunday night. The troops chose their own routings and were sold reduced rate tickets. CPR got the bulk of the business, having the more direct route to Toronto. CNR did operate one leave train, but it was used mostly by troops making CNR connections.

Canadian Pacific's Camp Borden station consisted of two wooden express cars on a short piece of isolated track, with the car undersides closed in with planking from sills to ground level and broad stairways leading up to some of the large side doors. (Photo in January 1942 *Railroad Magazine*, page 129.) It was about midway up the line on the east side of Borden, and the CNR station was a few hundred yards further north, so that the two railways' leave trains loaded back to back on the same track. To serve the south end of Borden, CP had an additional stop called Bog Road, which had a roomy shed for a waiting shelter. The southeast part of the military reserve contained a wooded bog, and the stop was named after a minor east-west road running through the area. The CP track through the bog was on a good roadbed which was paralleled a stone's throw away to the northeast by an abandoned old roadbed. Probably the original roadbed had an unsatisfactory foundation, perhaps corduroy (logs laid crosswise in the bog with much brush thrown on top to hold the ballast). Bill Hood recalls going for route marches on the abandoned roadbed.

CP leave trains usually consisted of heavyweight steel coaches hauled by a 4-6-2. Occasionally steel colonist cars were used. As there was no other food service on such trains, the news vendor did a good business in confections. To do Camp Borden freight switching, CP assigned a D4g class 4-6-0 which tied up at night at the wye, where there were a water tower and a small coal pile. To provide connections on weekdays with passenger trains 25 and 26 on the MacTier Subdivision, the 4-6-0 galloped out to Ypres with a wooden combine. Also, Essa

station on Highway 90 was a brief bus ride from Borden. (This was CP's nearest station to Barrie.)

The return leave movement late Sunday evening occurred at a time when the lower concourse of Toronto Union Station was jammed with all kinds of other departing passengers and their friends seeing them off. The resulting congestion of people was so great that barriers were installed at the top of the ramp from the main hall to the lower concourse and only persons holding a valid ticket were allowed to pass. Thus family and friends had to bid farewell to their travellers in the main hall. The return leave trains usually departed right on the advertised but then stood for perhaps an hour out in the yard before passing the bottleneck under the Bathurst Street bridge. I recall making Sunday evening trips behind 4-6-2 No. 2400. After the stop at West Toronto station the servicemen settled down for some sleep until after wheels clattering over the CNR diamond at Alliston announced that Borden was not far away. Soon the troops detrained in their great numbers and dispersed through the dark camp, handing in their leave passes at their unit guard houses and reaching their barracks about 0300 hours for some additional sleep before reveille.



Troops who had completed their training were housed in barracks in the east-central part of the camp. When they departed in large drafts for east coast transit camps or on other overnight trips, the trains of either railway were composed of steel colonist cars without bedding or attendants. The cars were rather plain sleepers with self-service cooking facilities in one

end. These cars had been disused for their original purpose since the beginning of the 1930s depression, and I recall seeing some of them with a few broken windows and very shabby paint, and an a siding up on the north edge of the old high line embankment just west of Spadina Avenue in Toronto. One 1930s depression era use was for hauling the unemployed young men from eastern cities who travelled to the prairie each year at harvest time to manually bring in the grain crops. Also, a few cars were equipped with window bars for handling transfers of penitentiary inmates.

When troops on draft marched to a train burdened with all their kit on their backs ("full marching order"), they were preceded by a military band, not an everyday occurrence. Having no railway bedding and only one issue field blanket, the soldiers on draft trains at night used their greatcoats in place of blankets. Harold Hartley has provided us with a description of a troop movement by rail in his "Reminiscences of a Military Railway Man," January 1989 Newsletter. I have made further brief comments on troop trains in a letter in the October 1989 issue of *Railfan and Railroad* magazine.

In fairness, it should be reported that conditions were improved when the troops came home after World War II in 1945. CN had refurbished the colonist cars inside with green fabric upholstery in place of leather or leatherette. This was the era when woodwork made dark by numerous coats of varnish was covered with light green paint. Bedding was by then being provided, and CN lettered the car exteriors "Armed Forces Sleeper." This lettering was later removed as colonist cars saw a further period of use hauling British and other war brides from east coast ports. Colonists cars had on occasion substituted for day coaches in general public service during the busiest wartime periods and for awhile after the end of the war. (In the 1950s some of these cars were made into combines to replace the wooden cars still running on branch-line mixed trains).

Canadian National Railways did not need to keep a locomotive at Camp Borden, as the large Allandale roundhouse was only a few miles away in what is now south Barrie. As previously mentioned, CN's access to Borden was from Angus, on the Allandale-Collingwood-Meaford branch. CN's Camp Borden station consisted of wooden baggage cars 8398 and 8369 set on an isolated short piece of track west of the main track. Living accommodation for the station staff was wooden colonist car 2674 nearby on a separate isolated piece of track east of the main track.

CNR avoided running weekday passenger shuttle trains by issuing transportation coupons good on Travers Coach Lines (the Barrie Camp Borden civilian operator) to passengers holding CNR tickets with Camp Borden or Angus destination. When I arrived in Camp Borden, TCL was operating six well worn buses numbered 3300, 5100, 5300, 6000, 6300, 6406. It transpired that Harry Travers had been a CNR fireman, and had numbered his buses after some of his favourite CNR (and GTW) steam locomotive classes.

Lisle station on CN's Beeton-Collingwood branch was close to the west road entrance into the Camp Borden lands, but the mixed train on that minor branch played no real part in serving the camp, as Lisle was quite remote from the built-up part of Borden.

CNR occasionally operated on a Sunday the "Sweethearts' Special," a passenger round trip from Toronto to give wives, girl friends and other family the opportunity to visit Camp Borden and view its facilities. One such train which I saw was double-headed by 4-6-2s 5303 and 5591.

Later in the war, station facilities of both railways were completely changed, with the line up the east side of the Camp being relocated eastward about 1,000 yards on an entirely new alignment through previously undeveloped land. Each railway had a station spur curving westwards through about 90 degrees from the new line, so that the two railways' leave trains now loaded side by side facing east instead of back to back facing north and south. Both railways then had proper station buildings.

CP Rail's rusty Base Borden spur of recent years, blocked with long strings of stored boxcars, gave little hint of its busy past.

NEWS OF THE MIDLAND AND COLDWATER RAILWAY PROJECT

An organisation has been formed, under the name of the Midland and Coldwater Railway Company Limited (January 1991 Newsletter), to attempt to obtain the Canadian National line between those points for passenger and freight service. CN is applying to abandon its Midland Subdivision between Midland and Uthoff, eight miles west of the junction with the Newmarket Subdivision at Orillia. The M&C is, apparently, not interested in the section between Uthoff and Coldwater.

Coldwater and Midland are 17 miles apart. Coldwater is the point where the CN Midland Subdivision connects with the CP Port McNicoll Subdivision, a short distance from its junction with the main north-south MacTier Subdivision at Medonté. Midland is a community of 10 000, located on Georgian Bay. Rail traffic outbound has recently taken a sharp decline, since several grain elevators were closed. Passenger service ended on this line in October 1958.

In common with other proposed and existing short lines, the M&C proponents evidently believe that the line could be successfully operated as an independent line, which would not be subject to CN's present operating costs. One of the company's directors is UCRS member Tom Barber, of Midland.

In their recent newsletter, the M&C report that they have received confirmation from the Ontario Ministry of Transportation that MTO will fund a feasibility study for the concept of an industrial and tourism railway on the Midland Subdivision. Meetings have been held and proposals are being called by the provincial Rail Office for a complete engineering analysis. This will include examination of the line, including structures such as bridges, consideration of upgrading, equipment and facilities, and the costs of operation. The report is due by April 1, 1991, for use by M&C in establishing a business plan and approach for capitalisation of the project.

The Board of Directors has authorised the issuance of 50 founder's shares of stock in the company, and a number of these have been bought by interested persons.

Assistance has been received from the North Simcoe Development Corporation, and the corporate office of the M&C is located at North Simcoe's address in Midland. It has been stated by M&C that abandonment of the line would result in a major increase of annoying truck traffic on Midland's streets.

M&C has been given reasonable assurance by MTO that the overpass of Highway 69 over the Midland Subdivision will not be eliminated to force the closure of the railway line. Current indications are that this bridge will remain, when highway widening takes place within the next few years.

-John D. Thompson