

THE BALTIMORE and OHIO RAILROAD
in the CIVIL WAR

Let us turn back to an April day about 80 years ago, and imagine ourselves at Appomattox Court House, about to witness the surrender of the Confederate Army to the Federals. The staff officers of both the Grand Army of the Republic, and the army of the Confederate States of America were assembled awaiting the meeting of General Lee and General Grant.

Now to most readers, the story from this point is commonly accepted fact. Lee surrendered his army, his arms, and his equipment to Grant, so the history goes. However, according to some of the stories which I have gathered in sections of the country where I have spent much time, General Lee never surrendered to General Grant. Lee immaculately attired in Confederate full dress, met Grant, the latter wearing a sloppy Union field uniform, and General Lee, thinking Grant to be the butler, handed him his sword. The foregoing is based on heresay, and not on historical fact, and for that reason, I am

desirous of not being quoted. On the other hand, regardless of which version of the ending of the war the reader prefers, the fact remains that the exchange of the sword ended four years bitter struggle and conflict of the War Between the States.

Any student of American history will readily agree that there is a multitude of reasons and causes of this war offered by the historians and other authorities, however, since I profess no exceptional knowledge of the cause, I will simply ignore any and all motives which may have precipitated the conflict.

Regardless of the causes, or effects of this war, there is one conclusion which can definitely be made as a result of the struggle. This war was the first one in which railroads were used as a means of transportation of troops and materials, and the first war where the telegraph aided speedy communication. From the use of this new, quicker means of transportation, the absolute feasibility and necessity of rapid troop movement was shown, No greater proof of this statement is needed than the events of the past three years of war.

The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad had the distinction of being not only the first railroad, but also the main railroad to take part in the Civil War. The years following its founding were uneventful. Frederick was reached in 1832; Harpers Ferry, in 1834; Washington, in 1835; and finally, in 1853, almost twenty-five years after the first

ground breaking, the Baltimore and Ohio reached its first objective: the Ohio River, at Wheeling. Two years after reaching Wheeling, trains were going from Baltimore through to Cincinnati. This was the end of expansion for some time, for the next years were very hard and trying ones for the new road.

On October 17, 1859, the first rumblings of the approaching conflict were heard when John Brown made his raid on Harpers Ferry. On that night, Brown stopped an eastbound express at Harpers Ferry Station, held it up all night and caused great discomfort to its passengers. In the confusion, a porter and the telegraph operator were killed, and several others injured. Colonel Robert E. Lee was sent to Harpers Ferry with the entire Marine Corps, then ninety strong. He snuffed the revolution, and hung John Brown, but the first spark of Civil War had been struck.

Shortly after the outbreak of the war, the Main Stem of the railroad was captured by the Confederates after the Federal forces at Harpers Ferry destroyed the arsenal and rifle works there, and hastily fled the town. General Stonewall Jackson helped himself to four engines, small enough to transport, at Harpers Ferry, ran them over a branch line to Winchester; from there, down the famous Valley Turnpike to Strasburg, twenty miles away. There the engines were placed on the rails of the Manassas Gap Railway, which connected with the Virginia Central, and in turn, the entire railway system of the Confederacy.

Following this, Jackson undertook the task of destroying the railroad property at Martinsburg, consisting of forty-two locomotives and three hundred and five cars. This was a terrific waste, as the Confederacy sorely needed rolling stock. This need gave birth to an idea in Jackson's mind. Since there was very little that could be burned on an engine, salvage was possible, and Jackson ordered Hugh Longust, veteren railroader from Richmond, to undertake the moving of these half-burned locomotives over the thirty-eight miles of turnpike from Martinsburg to Strasburg. The engines were stripped and hauled away, one by one, down the valley by large teams of horses. At times, the men were forced to help the horses, and at other times, all movement had to be stopped while the workers fought off the Yankees. At Strasburg, the engines were reassembled, and sent off to the railroad shops at Richmond.

There was much plundering done by both sides on the Main Stem. They took rails, tieZs, spikes, plates, cars, in fact everything which would move, or could be moved and put it in service, only to have raiders of the other side swoop down and take all back. If it could not be moved, it was destroyed beyond all use. Wood was burned, and used to heat metal to be twisted out of recognition. Bridges, culverts, and the general right-of-way received special attention from the wreckers. One of their favorites was the bridge across the Potomac at Harpers Ferry. This structure was destroyed many times during the war,

not only by both armies, but by the unruly Potomac, which would suddenly swell its banks and take everything in its path. Telegraph lines, way stations, and other property were destroyed. The Main Stem was crossed many times by both armies in the course of the four year's struggle.

The Baltimore and Ohio was vital to the life of the Union, for it was the only line from the West with a direct line into Washington. The crowning achievement of the system in the way of service to the Union was the transportation of the Eleventh and Twelfth Army Corps from the Rappahannock River Line, to Chattanooga, Tennessee, a distance of fourteen hundred miles, in eleven days. However, even this was eclipsed fifteen months later, when the Twenty-third Army Corps, seventeen thousand strong, then on the banks of the Tennessee River, was needed to help drive the last spike into the coffin of the Confederacy. They were brought over the same route as before, and in spite of flood, blizzard, broken-down motive power, cars, and trackage, this job was accomplished in less time than before.

The Baltimore and Ohio had one more service to perform for the great war-time president, Abraham Lincoln. This was indeed a very sad service, for it was the Baltimore and Ohio that carried the President's body from Washington. This untimely death was greatly mourned, and the ranks of the mourners did not stop at the imaginary Mason-Dixon Line.

In 1865, the War Between the States was brought to a close, and the entire nation was faced with the unpleasant task of reconstruction. The Confederate soldiers returned to a ruined and bitter South. Its great plantations were devastated, the few small industries were snuffed, its public offices were overrun with corrupt politicians, and its rails were retarded for twenty years. Dixieland was destined, even to this day, not to regain the position it had enjoyed previous to the war.

From this sad conflict, many lessons were learned; as already mentioned, the advisability, if not necessity of troop and supply transportation by rails, at that time the only quick means. In addition, the merit of the telegraph as a speedy method of communication was proven. Indeed the truth of the statement of Nathan Buford Forrest, Confederate cavalryman, was definitely borne out. He said, and rather crudely so, "The feller that gits thar fustest with the mostest men, wins the battle!"

However, more important than any of these results is the one which we all look to pride with today. From the ruins of a nation, practically torn apart by internal strife, rose a new movement - to the West, and it was soon shown that the United States was a confederation of states, bound from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from the Gulf to the Lakes, into one inseperable union, and one of the greatest binders was the steel rails of the transcontinental railroads.