

The Question of Transport

Some of the Problems of Getting Food and Munitions Up to the Front

THE first American combatant unit to appear on the battlefields of France was a motor transport convoy, most of the men of which had been students at Cornell University.

This is a branch of the service which is often lost sight of by those to whom war seems only the fierce clash of infantry with steel against steel, the rattle of rifle fire from the trenches and the snappy artillerymen hurling tons of death over range after range of hills which were vainly considered protecting for troops and batteries.

All these are a part of the glamour and the tumult, the terror and the glory of war, but to the men of the transport service falls duty as hazardous, as difficult and demanding as much combat. Theirs is work which does not show to the uninitiated. One does not hear the tales of their heroism because it does not appeal to the imagination as does the leading of a charge, the slaying of a dozen men single-handed or the swimming of a stream under direct fire. But their names are not absent from orders, and the official reports bear testimony to the valor of many a man who drives a truck to serve the fighters with ammunition and supplies.

The duty of the convoy is not to fight. It is to GET THERE with its precious load. The ammunition is needed at a certain point at a certain time. No sacrifice is too great to accomplish its mission. If the way is barred, the men, armed with carbines, rifles or pistols, must break through, or if possible go by another road.

Must Get There.

It is not running away. The big idea, the one thought which must constantly hammer in the mind of the commander of the convoy is to get there—get there—get there!

Should the enemy shell the road, another route is taken if possible. If it isn't possible, the trucks must pound along as best they can, and those which are damaged as they cannot travel must be tipped off the road, and if there is danger that the contents may fall into the hands of an enemy, they must be destroyed.

Right up to the field of battle the boys who drive the transports must venture. They are under fire, but they have little if any opportunity to return it. It is almost a passive form of fighting, for they haven't any chance to fight back, and that is the hardest thing to bear.

It is only when a transport is directly attacked by infantry or cavalry that the soldiers who guard it and even the men on the trucks have a chance to fight. Then they must fight to the last and destroy their enemies if they are hopelessly surrounded by a superior force. This must be done before they can think of themselves at all. Whole battalions of infantry and squadrons of cavalry are sometimes sacrificed in order to get a wagon train through.

In the present fighting in Europe the convoys travel over comparatively short routes and trench warfare makes them more or less immune to guerrilla attacks. The chief danger to convoys in this kind of fighting is from artillery fire, as the enemy has the range of the roads and frequently drops shells on those over which ammunition and supplies are moved.

The distributing depots are comparatively near the front and supplies are moved to them by railroad. Where permanent positions have been held for a long time, narrow gauge lines are laid and the ammunition is loaded on specially constructed cars.

But at the beginning of the war, and

when the big advances are in progress, things are different. It is likely that before the close of hostilities there will be plenty of work for the convoys in the field and a recurrence of the open, shift fighting which always accompanies the use of this service with armies which are on the move.

In mobile armies the question of transportation of ammunition becomes more complex and great importance attaches to the movement of the trains. Motor trucks are used wherever possible, because of their speed, tirelessness and the large loads which a single vehicle can carry. There are cases, however, where horses and mules must be called upon to go where automobiles are useless.

It is such trains which have furnished some of the most thrilling, one might almost say "Wild West" fighting of the war, and when the armies begin moving again there will be more of it.

In the United States army, in order

to bring them under efficient control, convoys are divided into trains of not more than one hundred vehicles. Such a train occupies about one mile of road space. Motor vehicles are more or less new for field service, and their handling in our organization has not been reduced to so hard and fast a science as has that of wagon trains.

Everything which is true of wagon trains is in principle true of motor trains, although road spaces, the number of

vehicles in a train, distances travelled in a day and so forth naturally vary.

The large loads which motor trucks can carry make it possible to convey a given amount of ammunition or supplies with a smaller unit, making it more easily defensible, and being more economical in use.

It is usual for an officer, with as many assistants as are available, to be in command of a train, when he divides into sections of twenty to thirty vehicles, and

places a non-commissioned officer or wagon master in charge of each section.

The convoy generally marches with about twenty-five yards between sections and ten feet between wagons, a greater distance prevailing with motor trucks. The slower teams or trucks lead the column. Wagon trains should march about two to two and a half miles an hour. Motor trains vary in speed, so that no standard has as yet been adopted.

If an accident occurs to a truck or

wagon it is removed from the road, as quickly as possible and its load distributed to other vehicles. No attempt to repair it is made if it is going to delay the column.

The men on wagon trains are armed, but additional security is provided by troops assigned as guards, usually infantry, cavalry and engineers. The proportion of cavalry is greater in open country. Artillerymen require an especially strong guard, as it is most likely

men of the convoy itself, is to get the ammunition to the men in the firing line. Their first object is to prevent surprise. Surprise is never excusable in the eyes of the higher commanders, and a strong advance guard and flank guards are employed to detect the approach of an enemy. The escort must learn to surround forces in sufficient time to keep them out of effective fire range of the trains.

The flanks of a convoy are the most vulnerable, and for this reason the movement of an enemy is reported near the column is closed up. If the road is wide enough the vehicles proceed two abreast, which most effectively reduces the length of the flanks to be protected.

Attack on a Convoy.

The enemy usually comes down on a convoy when it is passing through a defile, over a bridge, round a curve, over a rough road or up or down a steep slope. A man who has seen much service in this line says that when we're most help-

Take a wagon train crossing a bridge. The teams on the bridge can't turn

the enemy at a distance great enough to prevent firing into the wagons or trucks. The troops accompanying a train never seek a fight. Their duty, like that of the

Those ahead, if they are surprised, are likely to be thrown into confusion and the train may be cut in two. The same is true when we're rounding a curve and the head of the column is not in sight of the tail of it.

"You take a couple of hundred cavalry coming yelling and shooting down onto the flanks of a wagon train in such a situation, and unless you've got a pretty stiff force with you it's likely to be all up with the train.

"Another favorite time for an attack is when the horses are being watered or we are beginning to form a corral. Once the corral is formed we're in a pretty strong position for defence. The first thing to do when you're attacked is to form a corral if the enemy is in superior force and you can do it. One of the strongest formations and a quick one to form is a diamond shape.

"In this formation each of the quadrilaterals' section. If it is a wagon convoy the teams of the first two sections counter-march in forming the corral. That is, they turn around so that all the horses are facing inside the corral, the wagons being axle to axle.

"Meanwhile the guard has engaged the enemy on a line as far away from the corral as possible and sniffer trenches are dug or wire entanglements erected if there is time.

Forming in Line.

If there isn't time for this formation the wagons may be formed in two lines facing each other. An oval or a square is a good formation for defence.

"The men who have to stay with the wagons or trucks take what protection they can and keep up as heavy a fire as possible against the enemy, but the brunt of the fighting falls on the escort unless they are driven back on the train.

"If the enemy is not in superior force the train simply keeps on moving in the most orderly manner possible. The worst part of this kind of fighting is that even the escort cannot pursue the enemy if he is beaten off.

"The best it can do is to chase the wanderers far enough to verify the fact that they are really retreating and they are no merely withdrawing to attack from a new quarter.

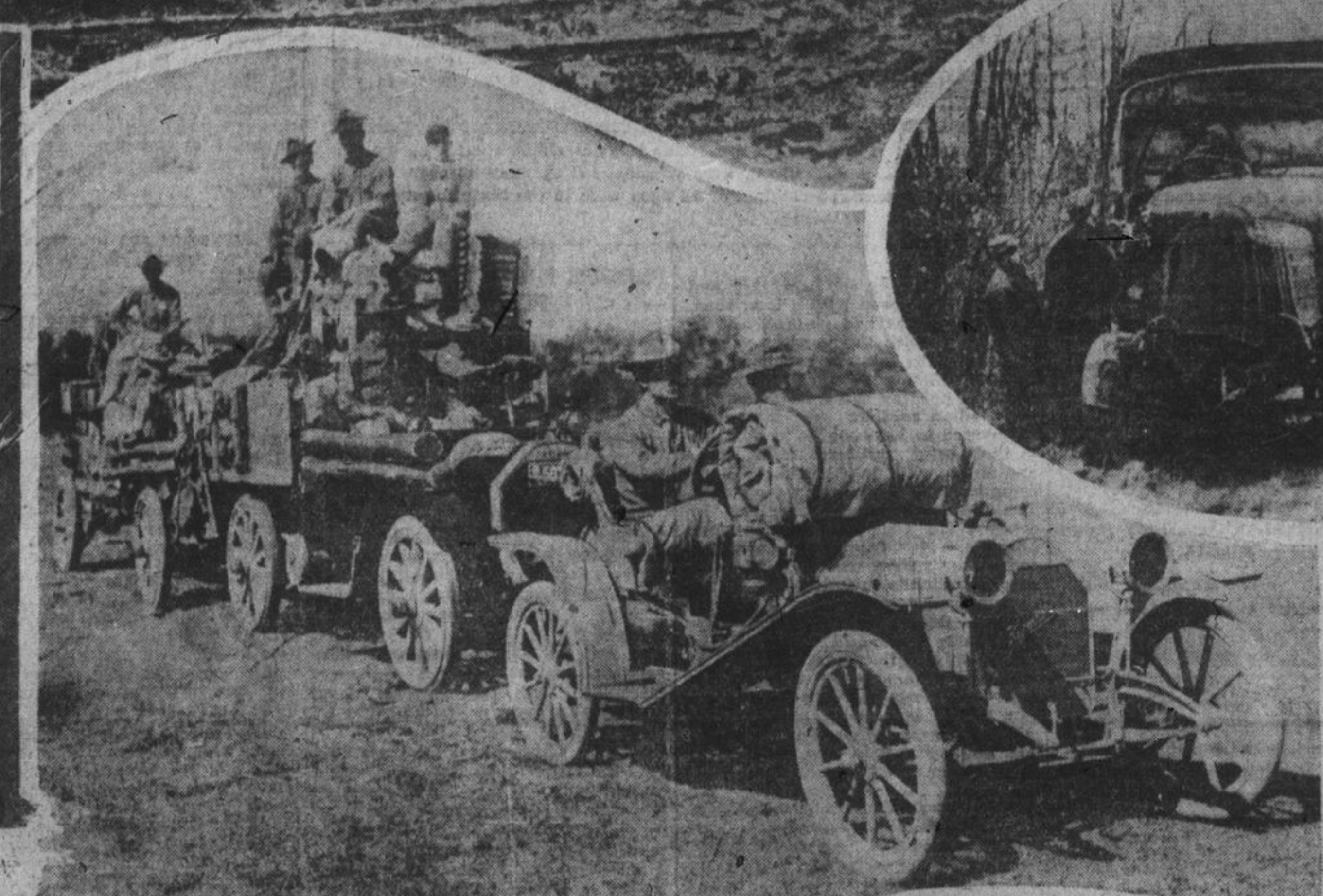
"The minute the train is attacked couriers are sent to the nearest military force informing the commander of the strength of the attacking party so that assistance can be sent.

"If the enemy occupies a commanding position and cannot be dislodged, the train takes another road or, if necessary, retreats. It is better to save the supplies than to be obliged to destroy them.

"If it becomes apparent that the train cannot be saved, it is the duty of the commander to escape with as great a portion of it as is possible and to burn or otherwise destroy the remainder.

"Stand, open, roads that have become nothing but a conglomerate mass of ruts, holes and ditches—nothing must stop a convoy. If gasoline engines fail, horses, mules or oxen must be used. If these fail or are killed the men themselves put shoulders to the wheels and carry forward the necessary load.

"Ammunition is the food of the big guns. They must have tons and tons of it to devour and it is the patient, must-stained, helpless men of the conveyance who must see that it GETS THERE.



Top—At the Light Rail Head in Picardy with Prussian Prisoners Coming Back from the Firing Line Under Escort.
 Small Oval—Transport in Difficulty on a Narrow French Road.
 Upper Centre—A U. S. A. Transport Train Ready to Move.
 Lower Centre—Conditions a Horse Transport Has to Meet in France.
 Bottom—A Transport Motor Which Needs Considerable Human Aid in Extricating Itself.



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