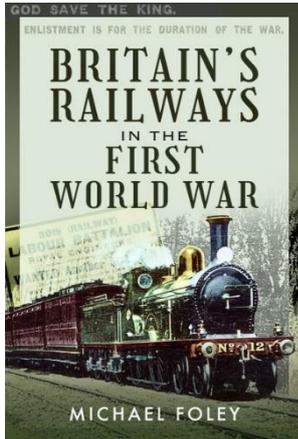


BOOK REVIEW
BRITAIN'S RAILWAYS
In the First World War
Michael Foley
Pen & Sword Transport 2021 (hb)
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The study of transportation and logistics has always been seen by many as a rather arcane pursuit. However, as has been proven time after time, ignore them at your peril especially in wartime! Even contemporary experience shows that fragility of the nation's transportation and logistics systems manifested in the present shortage of Heavy Goods Vehicle drivers and some consumable food and grocery items. This reviewer is only too well aware of that fragility having spent some part of his working life planning and executing logistic supply systems and understands how easy it is for many to believe that during World War 1 Britain's railways simply shunted troops to the ports for embarkation on the ship that would take them to France or elsewhere. Michael Foley has delivered a

deeply researched and readable work that lays that viewpoint to rest and clearly shows how vital the railway network was to the overall war effort.

Strategically, Britain's rail network was not as effective initially as the continental systems in moving large bodies of troops from A to B. France and Germany in particular had large standing armies and therefore the strategic use of railways was implicit in the mobilisation plans and subsequent operational and tactical movement of these forces. However the many different railway companies were used to moving large bodies of troops around Britain transporting Territorial Army units to and from their summer camps. The scale of troop transport increased significantly however with the declaration of war with the movement of 120000 men and equipment of the BEF to France, the first train leaving Waterloo for Southampton on 10th August.

With an introduction giving the initial context, following chapters cover the wars years in sequence concluding with the year 1919. He covers in detail the impact of the *rush to the colours* and subsequent conscription on the railway companies. 130 of the many rail companies were taken over by the government but manpower issues were always problematic as skilled railway men were sent to work at the front. The rapid expansion of 'military' use of railways had a great impact on normal service, people still had to travel to get to work for example but there was an improvement in efficiency overseen by the Railway Executive Committee and the recruitment of personnel for the Royal Engineers and later employment of Canadian Railway Troops enhanced operational capability. With the increase in railway traffic accidents were inevitable and those such as Quintinshill are included as are memorials to those railway employees who gave their lives which includes an ancestor of this reviewer remembered on the Southern Railway Memorial at Waterloo Station.

Despite the pressures on the rail systems the railways endured the Great War and made a significant contribution to Britain's war effort. Whilst saying the railways helped shorten the war may be going a bit to far it's contribution cannot be understated and Michael Foley has done a good job in describing this contribution and how it was to lead to a post war unified system. A more comprehensive Index would have been useful when cross referencing but this is a minor quibble in an otherwise laudable book.

Martin Willoughby