A GLIMPSE OF RAILROADING IN THE CIVIL WAR

The American Civil War took place before specialization had progressed far enough to teach military men the value of granting exemptions from army service to those individuals who held highly skilled positions in the key industries. The inevitable result was that before the end of 1863 the railroads were finding it difficult to maintain a normal schedule in the movement of ever-increasing quantities of war materials. Enlistments and the draft had so depleted the ranks of train crews that eighteen hours per day was not unusual on many of the roads. This was especially true of the lines running out of Pittsburgh, one of the most important rail centers of the North. In January, 1864, the engineers of the Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne and Chicago Railroad went on strike and serious consequences threatened the Union armies operating in Tennessee. A document recently noted by the writer in the archives of the quartermaster’s department of the United States Army at Fort Myer, Virginia, indicates that on January 21 of that year the president of the road, George W. Cass, wired Colonel Daniel C. McCallum, the military director of railroads, for ten or twelve engineers, and the absence of other correspondence on this incident suggests that it was a threat to draft all the striking engineers and operate the line as a military railroad—as was done on other occasions—that forced the contending parties together within a few days and ended the tie-up.

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