

ACCIDENTS

It is with regret that I have to record two serious accidents during the year. In the first case the Cromwell-Dunedin passenger-train left the rails between Hyde and Rock and Pillar on 4th June, 1943, and twenty-one passengers were killed and forty-six injured.

In the second case the Upper Hutt - Wellington passenger-train was derailed between Haywards and Andrews on 8th November, 1943, and three passengers were killed and nineteen injured.

Both accidents were the subject of investigation by Boards of inquiry and the reports published.

Such of the recommendations of the Boards of inquiry as were capable of immediate implementation, and especially that dealing with the strengthening and maintenance of the track between Wellington and Upper Hutt, have been carried out, and the others will be dealt with immediately conditions permit.

PUBLICITY ACTIVITIES

Although railway publicity has been curtailed by war conditions, every endeavour has been made to keep the public informed as to the Department's services and facilities. Friendly liaison has been maintained with the press generally, and I desire to express my appreciation of the courtesy and consideration extended from that quarter.

TRACK, PLANT, AND ROLLING-STOCK

The track, bridges, structures, signalling appliances, rolling-stock, locomotives, and other plant are in good order and efficient for the work required of them.

STAFF

The following table shows the staff position, together with appropriate comparisons with the previous year's figures (the figures do not include the railway employees serving in the Armed Forces):—

						1944.	1943.	Variation, 1944 with 1943.
Total staff as at 31st March—								
Permanent	..	..	..	..	..	13,598	12,647	+ 951
Casual	..	..	..	..	..	10,044	9,903	+ 141
Totals	..	..	..	..	..	23,642	22,550	+1,092
Average staff throughout the year						23,422	22,237	+1,185

At the outbreak of war the total staff employed by the railways was 25,765, so that as at 31st March, 1944, the number employed was less than the pre-war staff by 2,123, or 8.24 per cent. The Department has since the outbreak of war lost the services of 3,444 of the permanent staff through deaths, resignations, retirements, and dismissals.

The improved position as at 31st March, 1944, compared with 31st March, 1943, is due mainly to the return to duty with the Department of the majority of the members of the 16th and 17th Railway Operating Companies after a fine record of service abroad. From the Department 5,440 men are still serving with the Armed Forces, and it is regretfully recorded that since the outbreak of war 248 employees have made the supreme sacrifice, while 61 have been posted missing and 187 are known to be prisoners of war.

Railways employees have assisted the National Patriotic Fund by way of voluntary subscriptions deducted from their pay to the extent of £24,940 while deposits in the national savings accounts by way of fortnightly instalments have reached a total sum of £124,859.

A total of £76,960 was paid under the Workers' Compensation Act during the year to employees suffering injury in the course of their employment.

WAR AND POST-WAR ACTIVITIES

Although the necessity for the continued vigorous prosecution of the war continues to dominate our efforts, some thought is naturally being given to the many problems which will arise in the post-war years.

One cannot lose sight of the fact that revenue from military sources forms a substantial portion of our present receipts. During the year under review, movements of Armed Forces personnel provided 34.09 per cent. of the total passenger revenue, while military freights provided 9.47 per cent. of the total goods revenue. This comprises what may be termed the direct traffic from the war, but there is undoubtedly a considerable amount of indirect traffic which will cease with the cessation of hostilities. A considerable amount of traffic has also been diverted to rail by the curtailment of road services, the immobilization of private cars, and the shortage of coastal shipping. Benefit has also been received in longer haulages from the centralization of shipping.

While there may be an intensification of industrial activity during the immediate post-war years, it does not appear that it will be sufficient to counterbalance the disappearance of those factors mentioned above which have so benefited the railways, and a fairly substantial decline in gross revenue would seem inevitable.