

229. In July, 1943, 771 members of the Railway Operating Unit were returned from the Middle East. The return of these men to duty with the Railways Department provided a much needed degree of relief, although it fell far short of meeting the total requirements.

230. The loss of staff by the railways had necessarily resulted in the curtailment of some of the normal activities, including work on the tracks. By November, 1943, it was apparent that, for the continued safety of passengers and train crews, either speeds would have to be reduced in certain sections, or additional labour would have to be provided for track-maintenance work. As a consequence, permanent-way maintenance rose to an even higher priority than the traffic and workshops branches. District Man-power Officers pursued an active direction policy in respect of the three branches mentioned, but the difficulties of providing suitable men for work on the permanent-way were extreme. An accentuating factor was that men for this class of work, involving the handling of heavy rails, required to be physically fit, but the pool of fit men had been drained by the Forces. A further difficulty was that the work involved living away from home and moving from place to place. However, material assistance was given by the direction to permanent-way work of fit seasonal workers during the off-season.

231. The decision to return the Third (Pacific) Division to New Zealand provided the means of giving substantial relief to the railways from the middle of 1944. Members of the Division volunteering for work with the railways were directed accordingly, and by November, 1944, 811 Third Division personnel were engaged in railways work under direction.

232. Meanwhile the implementation of the replacement scheme whereby the Middle East Division required not only the normal flow of reinforcements, but also replacements for long-service personnel being repatriated, necessitated a thinning out of Category "A" men held in industry on appeal. A review of men held on appeal was accordingly undertaken at the beginning of 1945, and, in common with practically all other industries, a quota of 20 per cent. of the railway employees whose military service had been previously postponed was made available to the Forces. This loss was partly offset by the return to the railway of former members of that Department returning to the Dominion with the replacement drafts.

233. General.—Particulars of Grade I men held on appeal in transport and communications at varying dates throughout the war are as follows:—

	31st March, 1943.	31st March, 1944.	28th February, 1945.	15th August, 1945.
Railways (including workshops and motor services)	2,781	2,872	2,095	1,956
Tramways (including workshops) ..	212	197	53	43
Motor services n.e.i. (including garages)	1,288	1,212	461	339
Shipping and harbour services ..	2,171	2,111	112*	74*
Air services	17	19	12	15
Post and Telegraph and radio broadcasting	517	575	360	323
Totals	6,986	6,986	3,093	2,750

* These figures exclude ship's personnel.

234. The figures quoted for 1943 and 1944 relate to Grade I men aged twenty to forty inclusive and Air Force and naval volunteers. The figures for 1945 comprise all Grade I men aged twenty-one to thirty-five inclusive with fewer than three children and who had less than three years' overseas service, together with all Air Force and naval volunteers.