

THE harbor of
Vladivostok, Siberia, as
it appeared about the
time of World War I



A Minnesota RAILROAD MAN *in the FAR EAST, 1917-1918*

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ON A clear, cold November evening in St. Paul one year before the end of World War I, a group of railroad men from the upper Midwest waved goodbye to their families and boarded a train for San Francisco. They wore United States Army uniforms and were organized as a military unit, but unlike the thousands of other soldiers enroute across the country in that year, they were not on their way to France. Instead they were bound for Siberia on an unusual and little-publicized mission. The group was known as the Russian Railway Service Corps, and though its members held commissions from

the United States war department, their status was actually that of civilians employed by the Russian government. Their assignment was to restore order along the war-torn Trans-Siberian Railway.

The road to Russia proved long and tortuous, however, for even as the train carried them toward the Pacific, chaos was spreading across the steppes of Siberia. The railroad consultants had not left United States soil when the Russian provisional government which had arranged for their employment crumbled before the Bolshevik revolution, and during the year of uncertainty that followed, the corps was held temporarily in Nagasaki, Japan. There its members had an opportunity to observe at leisure the manners and attitudes of the traditional East—ironically in the same town which learned from their sons the meaning of Western atomic destruction.

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Among the men who took part in this mission was Peter W. Copeland of St. Paul, a division superintendent with the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Omaha Railway Company. He was commissioned a first lieutenant and acted as traveling engineer and assistant superintendent of a Railway Service Corps unit. During his first year with the corps, Copeland had enough free time to maintain a diary and engage in detailed correspondence with his family. These papers, recently uncovered by the Copeland family in St. Paul and Minneapolis, provide a clear picture of the reactions of a Middle Western American to early twentieth-century Japan.¹

SHORTLY after the provisional government assumed control of Russia in March, 1917,

¹ The Copeland papers, presently in the possession of the author, are the property of Perry W. Copeland of St. Paul. Three of Peter Copeland's four surviving children and numerous grandchildren live in the Twin Cities area. *The Railway Review*, 61:768 (December 22, 1917) lists Copeland as a captain, but this is an error.

² Joseph E. Greiner, "Speech to the Engineers Club of Baltimore," in *Railway Review*, 63:171-173 (August 3, 1918); *Russian Railway Service Corps*, 22-24 (76 Congress, 3 session, *Senate Reports*, no. 1239 - serial 10428); Betty Miller Unterberger, *America's Siberian Expedition*, 8 (Durham, North Carolina, 1956).

³ *Russian Railway Service Corps*, 23; Unterberger, *America's Siberian Expedition*, 9.

it called upon the United States for help in improving the efficiency of the 4,700-mile Trans-Siberian Railway. Supplies and war materials badly needed by Russian troops in Europe were piling up in Vladivostok, because of the breakdown and mismanagement of the line.²

In Washington the Council on National Defense approved the Russian request for aid, and President Woodrow Wilson authorized a committee of five railway experts to tour the Trans-Siberian road and make recommendations to the provisional government in Petrograd. The committee was headed by John F. Stevens, a distinguished engineer from New York who had helped plan the Panama Canal and the Canadian Pacific Railroad.³

By July 30, 1917, Stevens had completed his survey and conferred with officials of the Russian government, then headed by Alexander F. Kerensky. He wired Daniel K. Willard, the chairman of the defense council's advisory commission, that Russia required a military unit of railroad men consisting of "division superintendents, dispatchers, train masters, traveling engineers, master mechanics and one telephone expert . . . these men merely to educate Russians in American operation." Two weeks later Stevens specified "12 units of 14 men. . . . Ten units to be located at towns be-



PETER W. Copeland, 1917

tween Vladivostok and Omsk, two Petrograd to Moscow," as well as eighty foremen. Stevens agreed to remain in Russia as advisor to the provisional government.⁴

Willard approved Stevens' requests and turned them over to Samuel M. Felton, the director general of military railways. Felton decided to recruit the units from the northwestern states, "because it was thought that being accustomed to the cold winters obtaining in the Dakotas and Montana they would be better able to withstand the rigors of the Russian climate."⁵ Minnesota provided a large share of the men, including most of the leaders, and Iowa and Wisconsin each contributed a contingent.

The headquarters of the corps was established in the Northern Pacific Building in

St. Paul, and George H. Emerson, general manager of the Great Northern Railway Company, was put in charge. Between them, these two major railroads supplied about forty per cent of the corps' membership. Emerson, who was commissioned a colonel, served as Stevens' right-hand man during the Siberian expedition; he won the respect not only of his men but also of the international array of leaders with whom he came in contact.⁶

Early in October, 1917, Emerson met in St. Paul with top railroad executives from the upper Midwest and explained the situation to them. He urged them to "call upon their men to volunteer for service in this corps as a patriotic duty, advising them that they would receive commissions in the United States army." Officials of each railroad were to vouch for the character of their company's volunteers.

Fourteen railroads responded to Emerson's appeal, and letters were posted on bulletin boards along their lines. Probably typical was the letter written by R. G. Kenly, general manager of the Minneapolis and St. Louis Railroad Company, on October 4, 1917. He called for "men of experience, good character, and of mature judgment." Kenly noted that the enlistment period would be for the duration of the war, that because of the cold climate enlistees had to be in good physical condition, and concluded: "We consider this a very fine opportunity for some of our best railroad men to serve our country. . . . This, therefore, is a 'patriotic call' to our young men. We hope they may respond in goodly numbers." Certainly the patriotic motive was the prime factor stressed in recruitment, although those who enlisted knew they would be exempt from the draft and would receive a rate of pay

⁴ Stevens to Willard, July 30, August 13, November 4, 1917, in United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918, Russia*, 3:194-196, 204, 205 (Washington, 1932).

⁵ *Russian Railway Service Corps*, 24.

⁶ See William S. Graves, *America's Siberian Adventure*, 52 (New York, 1931).

somewhat higher than that of officers in the regular army.⁷

Among the seventeen men from the Omaha road who responded to their manager's call was Peter Copeland. He was forty-nine at the time of his enlistment, having been born in Scotland in 1868. His parents, John and Grace Copeland, emigrated to western Wisconsin in 1875. Peter was the eldest of five children and began work with the Omaha road while in his teens. By 1884 the entire family had moved to St. Paul. Except for a brief sojourn in St. James, Peter Copeland lived in St. Paul for thirty-six years, with his wife Anna and five children. He served the Omaha as locomotive engineer, roadmaster, trainmaster, and superintendent. When he returned from Siberia, his first wife was dead; he then remarried and lived in north Minneapolis until his death at the age of sixty-two in 1930.

In October, 1917, Copeland and the other volunteers for the Siberian mission reported to Colonel Emerson in St. Paul. Emerson personally interviewed each man to determine his mental and physical condition. After intensive medical examinations and a test to determine his railway experience, the enlistee was eligible to make application to the war department for a commission. These commissions, signed by the adjutant general of the United States, were granted on November 1. In accepting appointment, members obligated themselves to "remain in the service of the corps for at least 12 months,

⁷ *Russian Railway Service Corps*, 5, 14-16.

⁸ *Railway Review*, 65:575 (October 18, 1919).

⁹ Copeland Diary, in the Copeland Papers. The author has attempted to utilize quotations from the diary and letters in their original form; in exceptional circumstances abbreviations or spelling have been altered for the sake of clarity. In the pages that follow all quotations not otherwise identified are from the diary, as are the main details of the corps' daily life aboard ship and in Japan.

¹⁰ Francis to Willard, November 7, 1917, in Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1918, Russ'a*, 3:205.

¹¹ Copeland Diary; Willard to Stevens, November 19, 1917, in Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1918, Russia*, 3:208. Willard mistakenly gave the date of sailing as November 18.

or for the duration of the emergency, if less than 12 months." The railroads guaranteed their seniority rights, but corpsmen were not eligible for war risk insurance, and their families, of course, were to be left at home.⁸

During late October and early November the volunteers, most of whom were older than the average doughboy, put their personal affairs in order and gathered in St. Paul for preliminary training sessions. Copeland's son Perry recalls watching from the sidelines as some fifty officers exuberantly drilled inside the St. Paul depot, while the walls echoed with shouted commands. Despite the fever of patriotism and excitement, however, apprehension marked many faces as the families of Railway Service Corps members watched their husbands and fathers board the train at 7:15 P.M., November 11. Copeland recalled that his wife "stood the parting like a major."⁹

Four days earlier, on November 7, David R. Francis, United States ambassador to Russia, had wired Willard from Petrograd: "Government probably deposed; shall know definitely later. Meantime would continue plans for sending Emerson force."¹⁰ Accordingly, the corps arrived in San Francisco on November 14 and was joined by seventy-five machinists from the Baldwin locomotive works in Philadelphia. The members underwent indoctrination sessions at the civic auditorium, received inoculations, and had their passports validated at the Russian consulate. At 9:30 A.M., November 19, they sailed from San Francisco on the transport "Thomas," with 350 men aboard, including interpreters and machinists.¹¹

THE TRIP was uneventful. On the evening of November 22, Copeland noted in his diary that the interior lights in the ship were turned out because the "radio advised strange boat acting like raider. Everyone a little nervous." Responding to war jitters, the "Thomas" remained blacked out until it reached Honolulu early on November 26. There the corps relaxed, spending three days ashore "mostly sight-seeing and bathing at

Waikiki beach." On November 29 the "Thomas" left Honolulu in a holiday mood, as "the Captain read the President's Thanksgiving proclamation and [the] dining room [was] decorated with flags."¹²

Routine aboard ship was regular, broken only by stormy waves or snowy skies, which became more frequent as the transport moved farther north on its way toward Siberia. The officers rose at 5:30 A.M., bathed and shaved, breakfasted at 7:00, attended classes in Russian from 9:00 to 10:00, participated in physical drill from 10:30 to 11:00, and then lunched, with another session of language lessons and calisthenics in the afternoon. Evenings were devoted to social activities, and often boxing matches were included in the entertainment. The men spent their leisure time reading, studying Russian, and learning military procedure, as well as rules of conduct for officers in foreign countries. By December 8, two weeks out, the wearisome shipboard routine had subdued some of the corps' early enthusiasm. Copeland noted that night in his diary: "In the evening had some good bouts [of boxing] for about two and a half hours which broke the monotony of the sea. Pretty much homesick and great many wish they were back in good old St. Paul."

Thirteen days out of Honolulu, the "Thomas" passed its first ship, a Japanese fishing vessel, and that day the Japanese coast line could be seen through swirling snow. The men rushed on deck to peer at the faraway mountains in spite of the storm. It was December 12, and Copeland recorded that "after lunch we entered Tsugaru straits about 1:15 P.M. We passed the town of Hakodate on Hokkaido Island at 7 P.M." The corps was two days from Vladivostok.

Stevens arrived there before them. Dis- mayed at the confusion and lawlessness along the Trans-Siberian Railway from Petrograd to the Pacific, he gloomily advised Secretary of State Robert Lansing that the civil war, with "mutinous laborers and soldiers" in command, made useless any further efforts to help the railroad. In this pessimis-

tic mood, Stevens set up headquarters in a railway car in Vladivostok. There he fretted about the lack of adequate housing and food for the corps, and fell ill just before the "Thomas" steamed into port. On December 14, he wired Lansing: "Transport *Thomas* arrived today. Conditions make it absolutely imperative to delay decision as to landing for some days. It may be necessary to sail quick. Cable instantly placing ship *Thomas* under my orders for any port in Japan we may select. Lose no time."¹³

On the ship, the railroad men impatiently yearned for shore leave after the long voyage. Delay followed delay. Copeland heard "all kinds of rumors as to what will be done. . . . Emerson and ship captain went ashore and returned. Some Russian quarantine officers came aboard. Also some of the Baldwin men who were here before came aboard and gave a lot of discouraging news. Things look unfavorable to our landing. The committees of different political parties had a meeting in town and we are expecting trouble."

The Bolshevik-dominated soldiers and workers committee mistrusted the intent of the Railway Service Corps. Stevens summarized the situation in a cable to Willard on December 15: "If transport *Thomas* can not wait here until our decision about program can be made, then units and myself must wait in Japan or all return to the United States. A serious error not to have brought rations. Emerson should be provided with plenty of money. A great good can be accomplished with right government in full power but worse than folly to undertake at the present moment. Interpreters Emerson brought mostly mischievous political agitators who must not be allowed to land in Russia."¹⁴

¹² Copeland to Helen R. (Ella) Grenier, January 14, 1918, Copeland Papers. Mrs. Grenier was Copeland's sister and the grandmother of the author.

¹³ Stevens to Lansing and Willard, November 24, 26, December 14, 1917, in Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1918, Russia*, 3:209-211.

¹⁴ Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1918, Russia*, 3:211.

On the same day Copeland wrote: "At 9 A.M. Major [C. Treat] Spear called us all together and gave us shore leave. He advised that things were very unsettled and conditions bad, and to use good judgment as to how to act and not resent insults as there are a great many Germans; they are anxious to cause ill feelings toward us. After lunch I went ashore with Spear and [F. E.] Fuhrman and others.¹⁵ We walked around the main street, up one side, down the other. . . . [At the postoffice] I got a 25 ruble bill changed and bought five postcards and mailed them. It cost me 40 kopecks. We then walked to the railway station; it was a dirty place. We met several fellows that could talk English. The town is built on the side of the hill, and stores do not have show windows but small windows.

"We came back at 4 P.M. Then we learned we would have no more shore leave. All kinds of stories started around ship about what happened over town, and especially from them that were looking out to get acquainted with the ladies. Some went over early and had dinner and lunch over there and said they had beefsteak, wine and beer for three to five rubles. One fellow got 80 rubles for a \$5 gold piece. All of the Russian money is paper. We rode over with a Chinaman in his Sampan boat . . . and came back in one. We had a hard time getting through the slush ice around our boat. We paid him three rubles for two [passengers] and 10 cents for the other. A ruble here is worth about 6 to 8 cents. Their money has badly depreciated in value. The Russians are all soldiers or students, and nobody does any manual labor except the Chinks and Japs. The Japs will ride you on their backs for blocks for 50 kopecks, which is equivalent to three cents.

"The street cars are small and do not have a trolley as in America, but the trolley rubs along on the wire and is held up with a

¹⁵ Before his enlistment Spear had served as St. Paul freight agent for the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha Railway. Fuhrman was from St. James.

spring same as ours. The conductor and motormen are all girls dressed like a boy. I did not see any cash registers; all the money is put in a black tin box. I guess on account of it all being paper. They would have to get larger cash registers. The banks had all suspended business, and an iron gate was in front of the door. It was Saturday afternoon, and this is supposed to be a holiday, but we heard the banks had suspended business or the agents of the Bolshevika soldiers [had closed them]. There is really no government at all; the only guards we saw were around the Railway yards. The Railway station sure was a dirty, filthy place. I saw one auto which looked like a Buick, but no flivvers. Their modes of conveyance are crude and about 200 years behind the times. Their drays are very short wagons with small horses, but they look fat. I saw two nice rigs. One fellow dressed in a long robe of fine cloth down to his shoetops, a black fur cap, a mustashe [*sic*], and fat, and was driving a cutter with black horse. He had a blue net over the horse from the collar clear back to the cutters; I understand it was to keep the balls of snow from the feet of the horse from being thrown in his face.

"The buildings are all covered with Russian signs. We see some English signs, two barber shops and one money exchanger. There don't seem to be many hotels, and all the buildings are dilapidated. There doesn't seem to be any prosperity at all among them and but few new buildings were being erected, and they were for storage purposes. The ship docks are all filled with piles of pigiron, spools of wire rope . . . and in fact commodities of all description, even to autos awaiting transportation. We understand they move 2 goods trains a day, 1 passenger train a week from Petrograd and 2 express mail trains a week. There are 3 local trains out a day — one 9 A.M., 2 P.M. and 4 P.M. The harbor is fine and a great chance for a great city. The ice is forming around the ship and the government ice breaker. Mail came by government tug about 6 P.M."

All the men were confined to ship the next

day. Copeland's diary indicates that it was a dull Sunday, with Colonel Emerson conferring with Stevens and the remaining officers striding up and down the decks, repeatedly inspecting the harbor, apprehensive about the ice formation, and anxious to set foot on land. A Russian government boat took some of the men on brief trips around the harbor. After lunch the secretary of the Young Men's Christian Association in Vladivostok came aboard with two women assistants to conduct religious services. Hymns were sung the rest of the afternoon. Rumors were common that the "Thomas" would leave before dark the following day for Nagasaki, Japan.

Lansing had wired Stevens that the "Thomas" should not leave Vladivostok without orders unless the ice menaced its safety; he agreed, however, "that undesirable interpreters and others should not be allowed to land." Meanwhile Stevens and Emerson decided that the combination of political chaos, uncertain control of the railroads, lack of adequate food, and menacing ice were enough to merit leaving immediately for Japan, and issued such an order. To Willard on the seventeenth, Stevens reiterated the "impossibility of proceeding with work at the present moment. Danger of harbor freezing makes prompt action imperative. Ice breakers in the hands of insurgents. Please arrange quickly very ample credit for Emerson . . . as I cannot supply him, and shore quarters and food in Japan require cash." Willard approved Stevens' action in a cable to Yokohama, adding that "there seems good reason to believe situation in Russia will improve and that Emerson in short time will be given opportunity to render service." The Russian provisional government's ambassador in Washington agreed to stand the expense of the corps' stay in Japan.¹⁶

The trip from Vladivostok was made in rough seas, with many of the railroad men sick, but the routine of Russian lessons and physical drill was revived. The ship cruised past the coasts of Korea and Japan, while

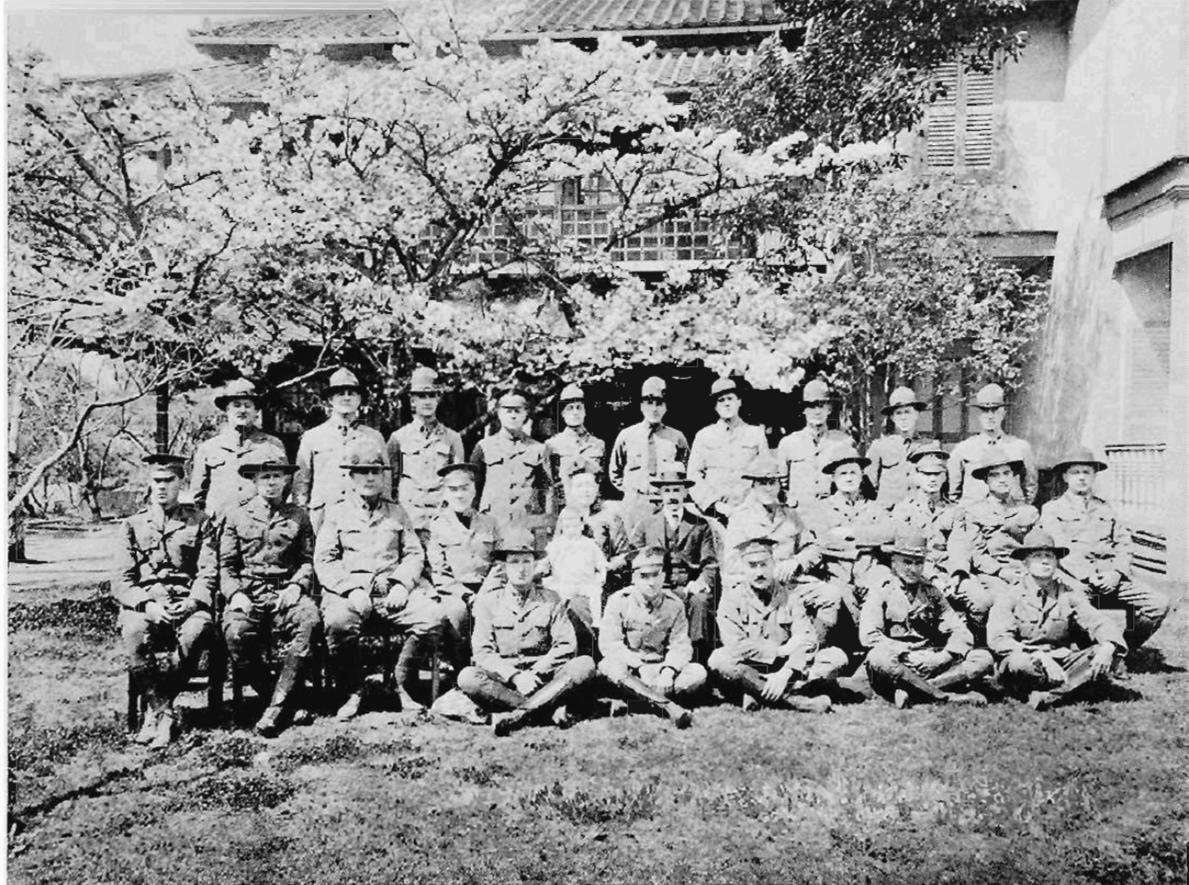
the men read, played cards, and were introduced to Stevens. The "Thomas" anchored in the harbor of Nagasaki on December 19.

STEVENS realized that the Russian Railway Service Corps would fulfill no function by waiting out the war in Japan; nevertheless there the men must remain until some stable authority existed to invite them into Siberia. The prevailing optimism about the chances for Russian stability "in the near future" is indicated by Stevens' decision to keep the men aboard the "Thomas" from December 19 to January 11. Lack of funds also hindered disembarkation. On December 20 Stevens wired Willard: "I ought to know shortly if we can go ahead. . . . We should all go back shortly with man-of-war and 5,000 troops. Time is coming to put fear of God into these people." Willard and Lansing estimated thirty days might be necessary to reach a decision as to use of the corps.¹⁷

While aboard ship during the holiday season, the railroad men became increasingly disgruntled over the situation. By Christmas they had been on the "Thomas" for thirty-seven days; they had nothing to do but study Russian and speculate about the ship's rumored return to the United States. Shore leave in Nagasaki was granted, but most corpsmen were out of money and could only walk up and down the streets, peering into shop windows and admiring (or decrying) the fair sex. No salaries had been paid by the government, so each man was dependent on his own resources in providing holiday cheer. Some, according to Copeland, wrote non-negotiable checks: "I was called to Col. Emerson's office about rumors

¹⁶ Lansing to John K. Caldwell, December 17, 1917; Stevens to Willard, December 17, 1917; Willard to Stevens, December 19, 1917; Boris A. Bakheteff to Frank L. Polk, December 20, 1917, in Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1918, Russia*, 3:212, 213.

¹⁷ Stevens to Willard, December 20, 1917; Willard to Stevens, December 24, 1917; Lansing to Caldwell, December 28, 1917, in Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1918, Russia*, 3:213, 214.



MEMBERS of *The Russian Railway Service Corps* before the home of an American Baptist missionary in Nagasaki, April, 1918. Copeland is at the far right.

of some that had issued bogus checks. Required permit to go ashore." Others, for want of activity, hitched rides on local Japanese trains and fraternized with the engineers. Because free entertainment could be obtained at the local YMCA, run by G. Ernest Trueman, many corps members congregated there for handball, volleyball, group singing, reading material, billiards, religious services, and Bible classes. In addition to participating in these activities, Copeland helped teach classes in English to local Japanese students. Through the YMCA, some corpsmen were introduced to Japanese girls at a local mission school, the *Kwassui Jo Gakko*, where games, skits, and social meetings with a religious flavor were held on Sunday afternoons.

Not all the relationships between sexes took place on a moral plane which pleased Copeland. His diary is replete with refer-

ences to the habits of fellow officers: "Saw the major and captain going out with two Russ women. I do not think he was on ship last night. . . Quite a few got their skates on last night. . . raised cain after midnight. . . The majors got noisy with their fireworks and were so bad they were rolling on the cabin floor with Japs and kept it up till after midnight.—Disgraceful." Copeland roundly condemned the moral habits of Japanese women, and noted that the local American consul (a bachelor) and his secretary had succumbed to the lure of concubines. However, as the days wore on Copeland came in contact with a more "respectable" type of Japanese woman, ceased his finger-wagging, and went so far as to accompany fellow officers to a local bath where a "short fat Jap girl bathed me and never even suggested anything out of the way."



A collection of snapshots from Copeland's diary.
He labeled the one at left,

Trips from ship to shore were made by sampan, rowboat, and the boat's gasoline launch. Sampans hovered about the ship until the men ran out of money; then relations grew strained. On January 4 "Major Spear told us of complaint made by the police that some had not paid sampan man." For fifteen cents, corpsmen were carried about town in jinrikishas. There were no automobiles because the streets were hilly and narrow, "about the width of an alley, some only six to eight feet wide."¹⁸ Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines were favorite sightseeing stops, as was a "tree planted by General Grant on June 22, 1879, on his trip around the world." It carried a marble plaque bearing the text of Grant's letter to the local governor. A second tree, "planted

by his wife, had died out twice, but was sprouting again," Copeland recorded.

ON JANUARY 3 Lansing cabled Emerson fifty thousand dollars. He received it on the seventh and promptly ordered the corps to disembark. On January 11 the railroad men moved from the "Thomas" to the Nagasaki Hotel, where Copeland noted that the beds lacked springs. Portions of three other hotels were also pressed into service, with as many as five men sleeping in rooms designed for two. The seventy-four Baldwin locomotive mechanics were detached from the corps and stationed at Obama, a small fishing village nearby, because, according to

¹⁸ Copeland to Grenier, January 14, 1918.



Japanese photograph album.
 ie. Taken at Okusa."



Copeland, "there was not room for them in Nagasaki."¹⁹

The corps members continued with a daily schedule akin to that followed on shipboard. They rose at 6:30 A.M., had physical exercises at 7:15, breakfast at 8:00, held a corps meeting at 9:00, and hiked from 9:30 to 11:00. Lunch was followed by Russian lessons (without interpreters) at the YMCA, volleyball every afternoon, and sightseeing after 3:00 P.M. For recreation, the corps

¹⁹ Stevens to Willard, January, 7, 1919, in Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1918, Russia*, 3:215; Copeland to Grenier, June 24, 1918. The Baldwin contingent was sent back to the United States in April. See Stevens to Lansing, March 28, 1918, in Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1918, Russia*, 3:226.

²⁰ Copeland to Grenier, February 9, 1918.

boasted "a quartet who are very good," frequent parties and dances, and a series of shows presented for troops and townspeople. Copeland wrote in February, "We gave an entertainment at the YMCA and they got enough out of it to buy a piano. . . . On 15th we are going to put on a minstrel show. The boys are all learning their parts and we have costumes, wigs and everything from Yokohama and the receipts are going to the American Red Cross."²⁰ In addition, the corps organized a baseball team which took on all comers at the local commercial college. After watching the corps team win a hard-fought victory by a score of nineteen to eleven, Copeland admitted, "the Japs played a good game."

In his early comments the lieutenant re-

vealed his acceptance of a number of stereotyped impressions of the Japanese character. For example, he wrote: "The Japanese [have] excellent patriotism and soldierly qualities. . . . After long seclusion to foreigners the feudal constitution is gone but the habits and morals remain. . . . Confucianism or buddhism do not help morals of their women like what Christianity is doing. . . . Sister and wife designated by the same word, marriage of little ceremony or none, and have one or three divorces at will, and utterly unconscious of improprieties or shocking obscenity [*sic*] of word or deed. . . . The politeness the natives display . . . [*is*] superficial and insincere. . . . The Americans and English live in foreign settlements in an atmosphere hostile to the natives, and the longer one stays the less he can sympathize with the enthusiasms of travelers and regards them [*travelers*] as visitors at an elaborate play where you are behind the scenes." In his diary he occasionally described the public toilet habits of pedestrians.

However, interest, if not sympathy, pervaded Copeland's later letters. In February he wrote, "Now that we are accustomed to it [*the Orient*], we don't mind it one bit and the natives don't seem to mind us. In fact they are rather good to us and show us every courtesy." In April he noted that "never in my life seen so many kids as there are here. Now they are having vacation and nearly every boy, girl and woman has a baby strapped on its back, even children six years old with a baby 6 months to a year old strapped on its back and playing jump rope or bouncing a ball, hop scotch or some other game. I guess the old lady will probably be out coaling a boat or in [a] shipyard or some work like that. The coal barges are operated with sail and the whole family, man, woman and children live on the barge in a small hold." On May 21 the children were back in school and Copeland wrote: "On several occasions on our morning hike we went by the large schools and watched the children drill. The boys and girls are

kept separate but they are all drilled in military tactics. The older boys are drilled with guns so they are all soldiers as soon as they leave school. . . . the children all sit on the floor, either barefooted or with short sox . . . but they all have clogs for outdoors. One fellow that has been here 20 or 25 years told me there were 4 women to 1 man on an average on this island. The birth rate for women is larger and a great number of men were killed off in previous wars." In June the lieutenant sent home a detailed description of Shinto customs, indicating that corpsmen had attended both religious and political ceremonies.²¹

Certain aspects of the Japanese physical scene intrigued Copeland, particularly those which most differed from his native Midwest. The thin, twisting streets, crowded by women in narrow skirts, dray horses led by hand, and processions of families and priests fascinated him. It was difficult to navigate the narrow Nagasaki streets, partly because of the widespread use of bulls as beasts of burden. When a family stopped to shop, its bull was tethered to the side of a store, but usually stood across the street, blocking passage. The typical Japanese house impressed the corpsman as "only a shell consisting of two rooms, one where they remove shoes, the other where they eat, sleep, live. No beds or chairs, only a rattan rug." More noteworthy were the homes of the wealthy, which had sliding screen doors, panel work, glass, and lovely terraced gardens on which the entire side of a house might open. "All gardens are walled in from public gaze so one doesn't see the beauties until he can get inside the walls," Copeland wrote. Among the beauties he described were trained, twisted, plants and trees, Camellias with variegated red and white blooms, purple magnolias, red-leafed maples, and camphor trees. In April the cherry blossoms looked "like dark pink double small roses and grow right out

²¹ Copeland to Grenier, February 9, April 11, May 21, June 24, 1918.

of the branch and without a leaf on the trees. At night there are fancy lanterns hung out among the trees in the parks with an electric bulb in them. . . . Pure white blossoms hang like snowballs on the trees.”²²

Foreign populations with whom the Railway Service Corps came in contact included large numbers of Russians and Chinese. The former often landed in Nagasaki in flight from the revolution. A number of Russian women entertained members of the corps throughout their stay. The aimlessness of their expatriate existence was indicated by Copeland’s notation: “There are a great many Russians now in Japan that have managed to get away with a bunch of money and their families. There is nothing for them to do in Japan and the hotels sure put it over on the prices, and I am wondering how long they can stick it out.”²³ Because the overcrowded hotels in the major cities sent the rate of accommodations sky-high, many Russians sought residence in out-of-the-way spas or resort hotels, where corps members sometimes encountered them. Some of the railroad men attended Russian social functions to improve their language ability.

The men had more contact, however, with the Chinese, who tended to live together in a section of town. Copeland wrote with interest on April 11: “The great many Chinese here . . . get along very well with the Japs and a great many are married to Jap women. The Chinese women wear trousers and have feet about 4 inches long and walk as if they had no ankle joint. . . . It’s often you see a Jap girl and a Chinese girl going along with their arms around one another, the Chink with trousers and Jap with Kimona. There is now a law prohibiting them from cramp-

ing the feet of infants There is a very fine Chinese club here and they say that’s the place to go if you’re inclined to do any gambling. . . . The Chinese are all businessmen — tailors, money exchangers, clothing and curios, etc.” The corps’ favorite Chinese tailor had both a Japanese wife and a young Chinese wife whom he had bought in Shanghai for two thousand yen. The younger girl, according to Copeland, “seems to be crying most of the time. I kind of think the poor thing is lonesome for her mother or probably doesn’t get along with the first wife.” Copeland considered the tormented girl to be the best looking Chinese woman he had seen, and he was dismayed when she later died in childbirth. Corps members attended the Shinto funeral and were given gold and silver paper (representing money) to burn.²⁴

BY MAY the large contingent of Railway Service Corps men who had disembarked at Nagasaki had dwindled considerably. Some had fallen ill and returned to the United States; others accompanied Colonel Emerson on a reconnoitering tour of the Trans-Siberian Railway; and a large unit had been sent to Harbin, Manchuria, for work in an advisory capacity on the Chinese Eastern Railway. Less than a hundred remained in Nagasaki, but those who did were becoming part of the community.²⁵ City officials and members of the foreign population welcomed their presence. Shopkeepers lowered their prices and advised corpsmen to stay away when army transports were in town. Copeland noted that six classes of prices were charged in stores: “Transports pay no. 1, tourists no. 2, us fellows 3 and 4, and natives 5 and 6.” When a transport docked and shore leave was granted, members of the missionary community loathed walking in the streets. The wife of the YMCA director told Copeland that she “never in her time saw soldiers behave and act the part of gentlemen until our bunch arrived here and set an example of what Americans really are.”²⁶

²² Copeland to Grenier, April 11, 1918.

²³ Copeland to Grenier, June 24, 1918.

²⁴ Copeland to Grenier, April 11, June 24, 1918.

²⁵ Copeland to Grenier, May 20, 1918. On this date Copeland estimated that about 115 railroad men were at Harbin and 82 in Nagasaki. See also correspondence in Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1918, Russia*, 3:218–233.

²⁶ Copeland to Grenier, February 9, April 11, May 20, 1918.

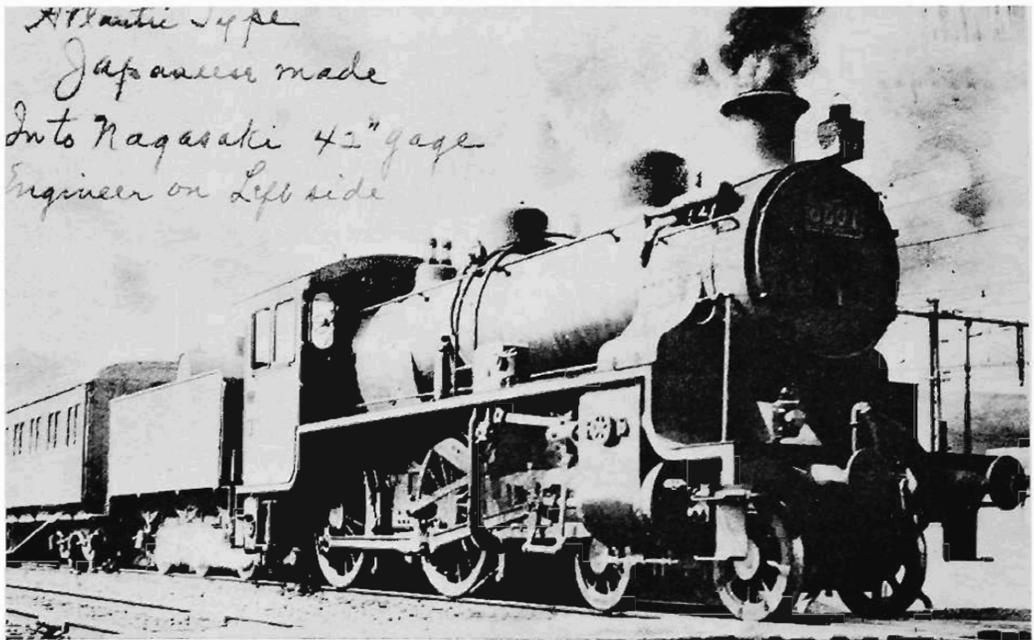
The warmer months of spring and summer offered the railroad men greater opportunities for travel and recreation. Train trips were common, for as a good will gesture the Imperial Railway of Japan had arranged free passes for all corps members. Taking advantage of this, they visited such far-away places as Tokyo, Yokohama, and Kobe, often riding in the engine or strolling through the train, to note differences in operation from railroads in North America. "They have no conductor but a guard for every two coaches," Copeland wrote. "He sounds a whistle he carries and the Engineer gives a short blast on a whistle and away they go. Trains are run on the block and staff system. The Engineer is the whole cheese. They run very fast down the grades." The scenery was impressive because the track ran along the shores of bays, past terraced hillsides, and through frequent tunnels to emerge suddenly into new vistas of sailboats, islands, and sparkling sea. The train stopped "at every station long enough to get tea. The boys are at the platform with pots of tea for sale and there will be 100 or more teapots in the train at the end of the

run. At Nagasaki there is a shanty with hundreds of teapots in it and they ship them back baggage."²⁷

The larger cities of Japan lie on the main island of Honshu, whereas Nagasaki rests on a peninsula of Kyushu, the southwesternmost of the large islands, flanking the Korea Strait. A railway trip from Nagasaki to Kobe took Copeland about nineteen hours, including a short sail by ferry from Kyushu to Honshu, and a brief stop at Hiroshima. Kobe's hotels, gardens, terraced hillsides, and commercial centers caught the lieutenant's interest. While aboard the ferry on his return trip, Copeland met an elderly American in naval uniform, accompanied by two Japanese Christian ministers. He was "Captain [W. H.] Hardy, the only living survivor of the Perry Expedition to Japan in 1853 and 1854. He came here last November and [is] going back home in June. I understand he is a guest of the Jap government, but he is also doing a lot of missionary work." Captain Hardy was pleased to see someone in a United States uniform; he spoke with Cope-

²⁷ Copeland to Grenier, May 20, 1918.

COPELAND'S notes on the picture postcard below reveal his interest.



land for nearly two hours on the train to Nagasaki and presented him with a picture upon parting.²⁸

A local trip popular with the railroad men was a voyage from Nagasaki across the bay by steamer to Omura, home of pearl fisheries and a cultured pearl industry. In Omura they saw oysters opened and culturing demonstrated and observed in a pearl button factory "boys and girls 10 or 12 years of age sorting, cutting, grinding and drilling buttons for 30 sen to 50 sen a day (equals 15 to 25 cents)."²⁹

The mountainous areas on Kyushu also afforded vacation spots. In March the Japanese tourist bureau provided fourteen railroad men with an interpreter and guide for a trip to a volcano called Aso. Copeland was one of the party. Though it was storming on the mountain, he edged up to the crater on his stomach and peered at the spouts of lava. Later at Miyaji, a nearby resort, the men sat on cushions around fire pots and ate raw fish, cold tongue, and pickled vegetables with chopsticks, as six waitresses watched and giggled at their inexperience.³⁰

In June Copeland and ten corpsmen made a journey to Unzen Hot Springs, a mountainous resort area forty miles from Nagasaki. The trip took the lieutenant into the countryside for a firsthand look at Japanese agriculture. He studied scantily clothed men and women cultivating rice in paddy fields and harvesting wheat and barley with sickles and rakes, flails and sieves. The tourists met farmers balancing bundles of grain on their shoulders and many children, "all looking for pennies or goodies of some kind and . . . most had babies strapped on their backs. Foreigners are quite interesting to them and they are usually quite shy of us and ready to run."³¹

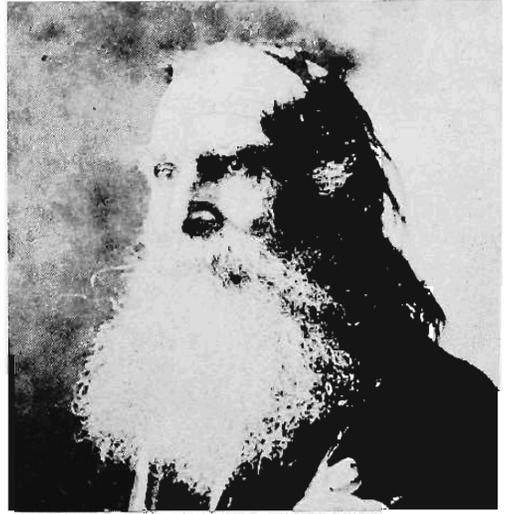
²⁸ Copeland to Grenier, March 30, 1918.

²⁹ Copeland to Grenier, May 20, 1918.

³⁰ Copeland to Grenier, March 30, 1918.

³¹ Copeland to Grenier, June 24, 1918.

³² Stevens to Lansing, June 5, 1918; Lansing to Roland S. Morris, July 10, 1918; Stevens to Lansing, July 18, 1918, in Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1918, Russia*, 3:236, 237.



CAPTAIN Hardy

AS THE months of 1918 wore into summer, restlessness pervaded the corps headquarters in Nagasaki. The railroad men yearned for some sort of action; trips to the country and bartering tours of the stores were not what they had come for. Copeland wrote that the men were eager either to be at work on the Trans-Siberian Railway, or to be sent to France.

On June 29, 1918, the Bolshevik committees controlling Vladivostok were overthrown by Czech contingents which had worked their way east along the railroad from Europe, where they had been fighting the Central Powers before the Russian front collapsed. On July 18 Stevens ordered the remaining members of the Railway Service Corps to move to Vladivostok.³²

Copeland began a letter at sea aboard the Russian ship "Simbirst" on August 9, 1918, as the railroad men sailed back from Nagasaki. The anticipation and excitement of the first ocean trip had returned, but a veneer of war-weary sophistication tempered his enthusiasm. "We were scheduled to leave Nagasaki at 4 P.M. August 7, but the boat was late arriving from Shanghai and did not get in till 3 P.M. and left at 8 P.M.," he said. "We ran into a typhoon the first night and the weather has been awful rough and stormy, and the old ship first standing

on one end, then the other, and most of our chaps are real seasick. . . . They gave us a nice sendoff at Nagasaki. They had their band playing all afternoon and came in a barge alongside the ship after we were aboard.

"There are Chinese, Japanese, Russians and Americans aboard, and it's about crowded. They are sleeping all over in every corner they can find, on mattresses, in the hallways, and on protected places on deck. . . . The sea is not so rough today but the food is sure bum. We are due Vladivostok today at noon, but on account of the storm the boat has not made much headway. . . . One time I thought we were goners. . . . the boat turned into the trough of the sea and listed sideways badly, in fact so much that the water almost came on deck from the side, and the women folks began crying and children screaming, but in a few minutes they got the engines again running.

"Later: the sea has quieted down considerably and it is more pleasant. Just had 4 o'clock tea. That's quite a custom here in the East the same as in England. In fact, the Russians are having tea all the time and don't do much of anything else. They served tea in a glass and round pretzels. Later: Everyone aboard is feeling better. The gang in the music room made the old boat roll with their good old American songs. They sang all the popular airs from 8 to 10 P.M. entertaining the ladies and are still at it.

"Saturday, August 10, 11 A. M.: We are still on this old tub of a ship. The breakfast of stale bread, stale boiled eggs and salty coffee was bum. During the storm the sea water got into the fresh water supply. . . . I don't care to make another voyage on a Russian ship. I think the letter our colonel will write the agent at Nagasaki after all he promised will not be used for advertisement purposes. . . . Later: Well, we are on the dock but must stay on ship tonight and wait for them to go through our baggage and make record of our passports. . . . We lay in quarantine for about one hour, then

we came into the harbor, which is one of the most beautiful in the world, so they say. We met two Jap Cruisers, and there are a bunch of others here. They sure are making this a cosmopolitan town.

"Sunday, August 11, Vladivostok: We are here and located in very good quarters. . . . We were lucky this morning in meeting Mr. Story, the secretary of the Y.M.C.A., a[n] American who gave us a lot of good information about the place. It is cloudy and misty today so I could not see a great distance, even from the top of the hill. The town is much larger than I had thought, and we are going to be much better off than in Japan."³³

With this Copeland's descriptions cease abruptly. The long months of waiting and watching were at an end and along with his fellow corpsmen he was at last called upon to do the work for which he had come. The conditions, however, were vastly different from any the men might have foreseen. In August, 1918, Japanese, British, French, and American troops landed in Vladivostok to maintain order and protect national interests. The United States' "Siberian adventure" had begun and the Railway Service Corps became a part of it.³⁴

The American Expeditionary Force placed the corps under the commanding officer of the Twenty-fourth United States Infantry, Lieutenant Colonel G. H. Williams, through whose jurisdiction passed all requests for the use of railroad men. The corps was later distributed along the Trans-Siberian line as far west as Omsk, Siberia, where it assisted in the movement of Allied troops and supplies; in the evacuation of the the anti-Bolshevik forces headed by Admiral Alexander V. Kolchak; in transporting Czech contingents through Siberia; and in the guarding and maintenance of tunnels, bridges, and depots.³⁵

³³ Copeland to Grenier, August 9-11, 1918.

³⁴ Unterberger, *America's Siberian Expedition*, 89, 107-117; Graves, *America's Siberian Adventure*, 175-186.

³⁵ *Russian Railway Service Corps*, 8, 9, 18.

Copeland's photographs and postcards indicate that he worked out of Vladivostok and Irkutsk, Siberia, and Harbin, and that he encountered units of the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-seventh United States Infantry as well as Russian refugees. The pictures suggest that he did YMCA work with Czech troops in whatever spare time was at his disposal. That his time was limited is obvious; there are no descriptions of these contacts in his diaries or letters.

The Railway Service Corps remained in Siberia until American troops evacuated Russian territory in 1920. The Soviet gov-

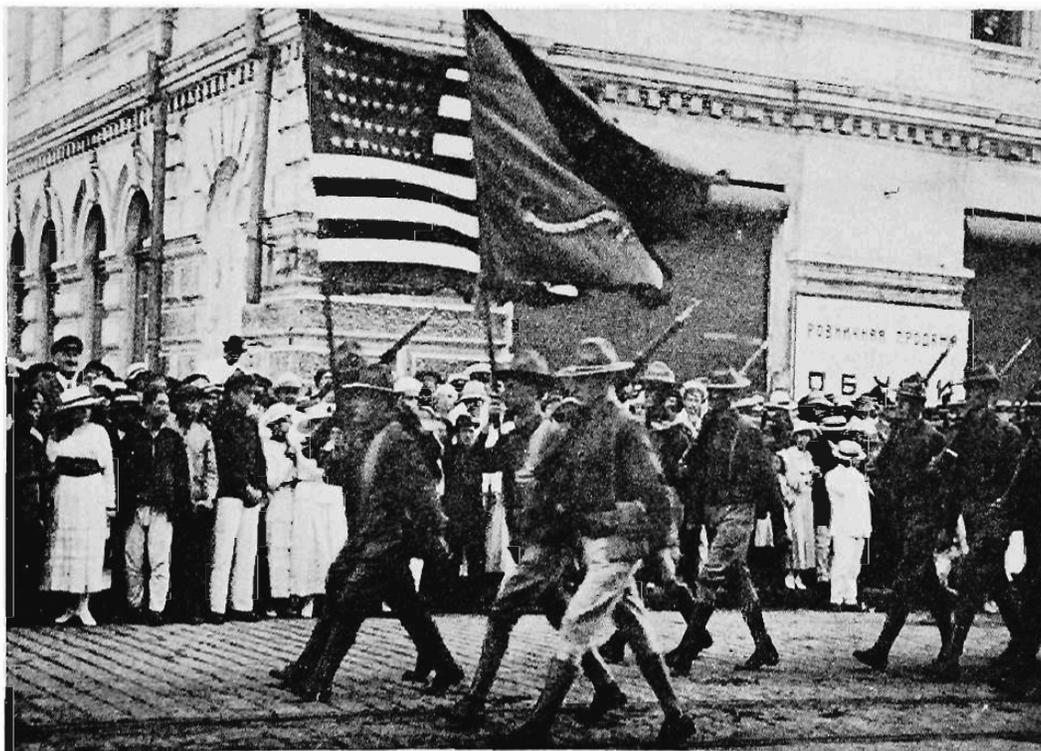
³⁶ A. I. Melchin, *Amerikanskaya Interventsia na Sovetskoi Dalnem Vostoke*, 15 (Moscow, 1951). The passage quoted has been translated by the present author.

³⁷ Graves, *America's Siberian Adventure*, 53, 175.

ALL ILLUSTRATIONS accompanying this article are from the Copeland Papers with the exception of the group picture reproduced on page 317. This was loaned to the author by Mrs. Grace Bundy of St. Paul.

ernment regarded them as subversive agents and still maintains its belief in the role of the corps as disseminators of propaganda. A. I. Melchin, a Russian historian, wrote as late as 1951 that the "mission sent its agents over almost all Russia. Agents were found not only in Siberia and the Far East, but in Petrograd, where there was a center of their activities, in the North, by the Black Sea and even at the front . . . making speeches to soldiers' committees and spreading printed proclamations urging Russian soldiers to continue the war against Germany."³⁶ On the other side, General William S. Graves, commander of American forces in Siberia, wrote that the corps devoted its time to railroad matters and that "Col. Emerson was as disinterested in the political squabbles of the Russian factions as any man I saw in Siberia."³⁷ Certainly the writings of Peter Copeland fail to suggest a trained political agent embarked on a mission of propaganda and subversion.

MEMBERS of the *Twenty-seventh United States Infantry* in the streets of Vladivostok, August, 1918.





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