

ARMY OFFICERS TRY ALASKA AUTO RUN

Much Road Work Remains to be Done in Territory, However, Says Col. Richardson.

MOTORING AREA SMALL

Report of Road Board to Adjutant General Shows Importance of Work and Difficulties to be Met.

Lieut.-Col. Wilds P. Richardson, United States Army, President of the Board of Road Commissioners for the Territory of Alaska, has submitted to the Adjutant-General of the Army his report of the progress made in Alaskan road construction for the year 1913. Recently much has been written with reference to automobiling in Alaska, and some of these reports have indicated that the territory is a pretty fair field for the tourist and his machine. Col. Richardson is careful, however, to point out that while an automobile can make pretty good headway in the Summer time around Fairbanks, and other of the more populous towns, it is practically impossible in most of Alaska to use wheels.

"There is little of level area," Col. Richardson says, "in the territory except the moss-covered tundra of the far north and northwest. The coastal region as far west as Cook Inlet is extremely rugged and broken, wet, and heavily timbered, especially on the seaward slopes, the timber becoming lighter toward the westward. The valleys of the interior or central portion are fairly well timbered near the streams, and covered also with a dense growth of underbrush, overlaid with a blanket of moss, beneath which the ground is usually frozen to great depth. These valleys are transformed in Summer through the melting snow and surface thawing into morass and swamp, through which travel on foot or on horseback is a slow and laborious process. As one leaves the stream valleys the timber becomes lighter, and on the hill slopes fairly good ground may be found, and in a few places considerable areas of dry gravel bench exist, but nowhere is it possible to use wheels for any considerable distance, without some sort of prepared roadway. It is due to these physical conditions more than anything else that Alaska has remained so long an undeveloped and an almost unknown country."

Col. Richardson, after a reference to the work of the early expeditions to Alaska, under command of Capt. Joseph H. Herron of the Second Cavalry, and other army officers, who were the first to discover the feasible routes from the coast to the more important interior points, tells of the various Congressional appropriations for military and post roads and of the manner in which that money was expended.

"The wagon roads constructed may be described," he says, "as good country highways intended to meet an all-year-round traffic of considerable tonnage. They are located with suitable grades, crowned, ditched, and drained, and corduroyed

or planked where necessary. The winter sled road is an inexpensive form of construction adapted to the requirements of Winter travel in portions of the interior. The Winter travel begins in early October and lasts to about the end of April. The trail differs from the Winter sled road only in being narrower and with less attention given to grade and surface inequalities."

The average cost of road construction in Alaska, Col. Richardson adds, is about two and a half times as great as the cost of similar work in the United States, but this difference, he prophesies, will gradually be reduced, largely by the results of the work itself, and by other improvements in transportation conditions, and as the country becomes better supplied.

"The benefits derived from this work," he continues, "are most marked, although the roads constructed so far constitute only the beginnings of a proper road system for the territory. Data in the office of the road commission show the cost of transporting freight and supplies during the year over the roads built by the commission at the prevailing rates to have been \$1,243,735. It is estimated that this amount of freight would have cost, based upon the rates prevailing in the various localities before these roads were constructed, \$3,385,412 had these roads not existed. The saving thus shown as directly due to the construction of these roads amounts to \$2,141,677, a sum not far from the total amount expended on the road and trail system in the territory, or about 16 per cent. of the mineral production of Alaska for 1912. It is doubtful, however, if anything like the amount of freight here involved would have been transported without the roads, and the indirect loss to output and development cannot be easily estimated.

"The business of mining involves the transportation of a large amount of tonnage. As noted in last year's report, there passed over one short road in the Nome district during the Summer of 1912 15,000 tons, representing a saving to the shipper of \$5 per ton over the rate prevailing before the road was constructed. This road paid for itself nearly eight times in six years.

"Although the board makes no pretense of having built roads adapted for automobile traffic, machines are used under the ordinary Summer conditions about Juneau, Fairbanks, and Nome. Several trips were made with machines during the past Summer from Fairbanks to Chitina and to the coast at Valdez. The road commission placed a field truck of three-quarter ton capacity, of the type being experimented with by the Quartermaster and Medical Corps of the Army, on this road during the latter part of the Summer and Fall for the purpose of trying out the machine for supply and maintenance work, and to test the availability of the road for such travel. The truck left Valdez July 28 and arrived at Fairbanks Aug. 6; left Fairbanks Aug. 9 and arrived at Chitina Aug. 15; left Chitina Aug. 16, returned as far as Gulkana, thence back to Valdez, arriving Aug. 19. The distance covered was 922 miles, making about 50 miles per day. The car while running averaged between eight and nine miles an hour. In some stretches as high as 18 miles per hour was made, while in others progress was slow. In some instances the car had to be helped through soft spots on rather heavy grades, but this was not actually necessary for a total distance of a mile throughout the whole length of the road. The President of the Board came with the machine from Fairbanks to Chitina, and the engineer officer from there back to Gulkana and out to Valdez. The truck has done some good work on the road near Valdez since.

"This road from the navigable waters of the Tanana to the coast is 419 miles in length, including the Willow Creek-Chitina branch. It

crosses two mountain ranges, also numerous rivers and glacier streams, several of which remain to be bridged. It is estimated that an expenditure of an average of \$1,500 per mile would improve it to the condition of a very fair automobile road, capable of sustaining any traffic likely to pass over it. Maintenance cost will always be rather high, principally on account of the cutting banks and shifting channels of all streams fed by glaciers. The improvement of this route to the condition mentioned above, with a systematic plan of maintenance and with a regular mail service established over it in Summer as well as Winter will, it is believed, be of very great benefit toward the development of the territory. Mail could be delivered in Fairbanks in seven to eight days from Seattle, as against an average of twenty or more days by the river route, as at present.

"For this work and for improvements and extensions of the road system in other parts of the territory, all greatly needed, some specific enactment of Congress seems necessary. This maintenance, of necessity, means a slight improvement in the condition of the road from year to year."

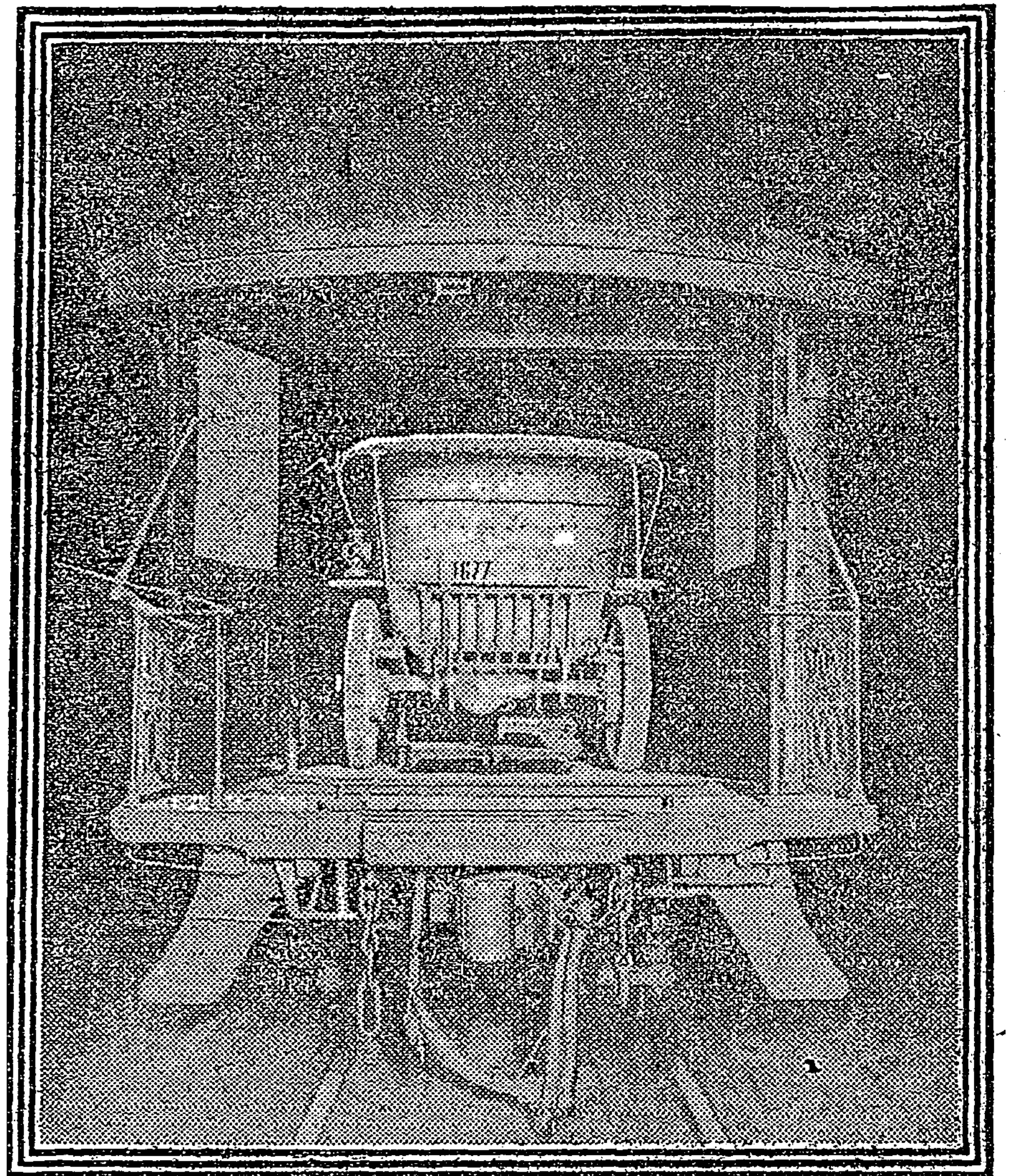
In the opinion of the Board of Road Commissioners the physical conditions in Alaska call for an excess proportion of wagon roads, compared to railroads, over that found necessary for systematic transportation development in any part of the United States.

"Our board," Col. Richardson con-

cludes, "specifically disavows any intent to set forth views in opposition or discouragement to railroad construction in the territory under proper limitations, but, after several years of careful observation and study of the land transportation conditions and of the natural inducements to development and to settlement which exist, is convinced that no rapid or general development will follow the construction of trunk lines of railroad to the interior unless preceded or accompanied by the construction of numerous wagon roads and trails as feeders, and even then the development will be slow. As the territory develops the demand will be for a multitude of short roads between the deep-sea channels of the coast and the streams of the interior, with certain trunk roads leading from the interior to the coast."

Tire Equipment of Motor Trucks.

The Motor Truck Club of America has made elaborate plans for its next monthly meeting, which will be held on the evening of Jan. 21 in the new Locomobile Building, in West Sixty-first Street, when a paper will be presented and discussed on the "Relation of Tire Equipment to Cost of Maintenance of Motor Trucks." In the fulfillment of its purpose, by bringing out all that is of interest in matters of this kind, the club is seeking the support of the owner and user, and invites all interested owners to be present at this meeting.



A PRIVATE CAR GARAGE

This shows the unique garage of Louis J. Hill, Chairman of the Great Northern Railway Board. His Packard "Six" follows him over his lines in a specially equipped private car of its own.