

## The DM&IR Bridge Guards

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In the November issue of the Duluth Township newsletter Rich Sill referred to the bridge guards who protected all of the DM&IR trestles. I would like to expand upon what Rich has mentioned. Indeed the Lake Division between Two Harbors and Duluth was not quite as vital to national security as the mainline to the iron range. It was however important in it's own right and required special protection as well.

How vital was this railroad to national security? J. Edgar Hoover personally wrote a thirteen-page letter to the president of the DM&IR detailing security measures that should be immediately put into place. The letter was hand-delivered to C. E. Carlson by two agents only twelve days after Pearl Harbor. Included within it were instructions for protecting the trestles. Guards were to be on duty 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. They were to check on top as well as below the bridge regularly. Telephones were to be installed for communications just in case problems arose. A Winchester rifle and ammunition was provided by the railroad and each man was responsible for his weapon.

Small shacks were built in the car shop at Two Harbors and loaded on flatcars for transporting to each bridge location. At the bridge site a crane lifted the building off of the flatcar and set it out beside the grade. This provided shelter in bad weather and a place to stay warm or eat a lunch. At bridges that were built of wood, the guards were issued fire-fighting equipment and instructed to check the trestle after every train that passed. A stockpile of extra bridge timbers was kept on hand to hasten replacement should a fire occur.

So was all of this really necessary? Consider this then; Six months after the war started two Nazi submarines landed two parties of saboteurs given the job of blowing up American railroads. Luckily all were apprehended before any of those plots could be carried out. Railroads in the U.S. carried 97% of the military personnel, 95% of the freight, and 90% of the passengers at that period in time. It is easy to see why they were such a tempting target.

But how about the DM&IR? Then consider this also; one day the bridge guard at the trestle over the little Stewart River at Waldo had walked a short distance down the tracks to the west. Looking down he noticed a curious yellow wire sticking up through the track ballast. Pulling the wire up, he found that it was connected to several sticks of dynamite buried beneath a crossover switch. He quickly disconnected the charge, and then followed the wire back to a battery box in the woods. A pile of cigarette butts and flattened grass showed that the saboteur had been waiting for a train to arrive. The bridge guard by being alert had foiled the diabolical plan. Clearly the added precautions that had been taken had paid off. The DM&IR and the steel industry played a huge role in the war effort, and in a large part, helped the nation achieve victory. We owe a special thanks to those forgotten bridge guards who did their part to keep the trains safe.