



The Governors Island Railroad, complete with eight miles of tracks, a steam locomotive and freight cars, was in service during World War I. The influx of war supplies to the island necessitated the need for a rail system. (Left) A locomotive from the railroad (Below) A length of tracks on the north end of the island with the Brooklyn Bridge and Manhattan Bridge in the background.



Chapter 9

Immediately following Congress' declaration of War on Germany and the central European powers on April 6, 1917, Governors Island was designated as an embarkation point for troops and a supply base, and plunged into a maelstrom of intense activity.

Some years before, a set of comprehensive plans for the progressive development of the island's potential facilities had been prepared, but under the pressure of wartime expediency these plans were shelved and construction of new warehouses, barracks, hospitals, offices, and docks proceeded on the basis of what could be furnished quickest where it was needed most. More than 70 buildings were erected on the new-made ground of the island's extension; their floor areas totaled more than 30,000,000 square feet and provided storage for war materials of endless variety to a value of at least \$75,000,000. A million dollars worth of such items were cleared through the island daily. To service this gigantic undertaking the garrison constructed

five miles of additional motor roads, and built the "Governors Island Railroad" – a tiny, narrow gauge affair with a total right of way of only eight miles, but complete with steam locomotives and freight cars, operating on a round-the-clock schedule. Also quartered on the island during this period, in addition to the normal complement of the station, were the district offices of the suddenly expanded Quartermaster Corps and Ordnance and Intelligence Departments, plus such new activities as the War Risk Insurance Agency. Within a month General Wood had departed to a divisional command, and Major General J. Franklin Bell came in his place. This handsome, urbane officer – one of the very few whose battlefield exploits were honored with the triple reward of Medal of Honor, Distinguished Service Cross, and Distinguished Service Medal – stayed but four months, when the veteran Brigadier General Eli D. Hoyle was called out of retirement to take over the command. The third generation of Grants was now serving on the post for the third generation of war, in the person of Colonel Ulysses S. Grant II, who was Chief of Staff