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Supply Front the 16th Port Story

Alex Bower

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Bower, Alex

Supply Front, the 16th
Port Story

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SUPPLY FRONT

The 16th Port Story

LE HAVRE, FRANCE

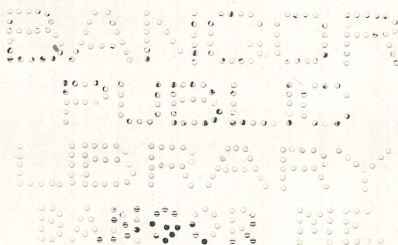
October 13, 1944.

When the 16th Port took it over, the harbor area was
100% destroyed, the city itself about 70% destroyed.



SUPPLY FRONT

The 16th Port Story



THIS BOOKLET HAS BEEN APPROVED FOR PUBLICATION
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TO THE UNITED STATES.

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THE ARMY TRANSPORTATION CORPS.
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FOREWORD



THIS booklet is meant primarily as a recapitulation of those multiple factors from which evolved the miracle of Le Havre — the miracle by which a port wholly destroyed by the Germans was revived, and in less than three months was handling a greater traffic than in peacetime.

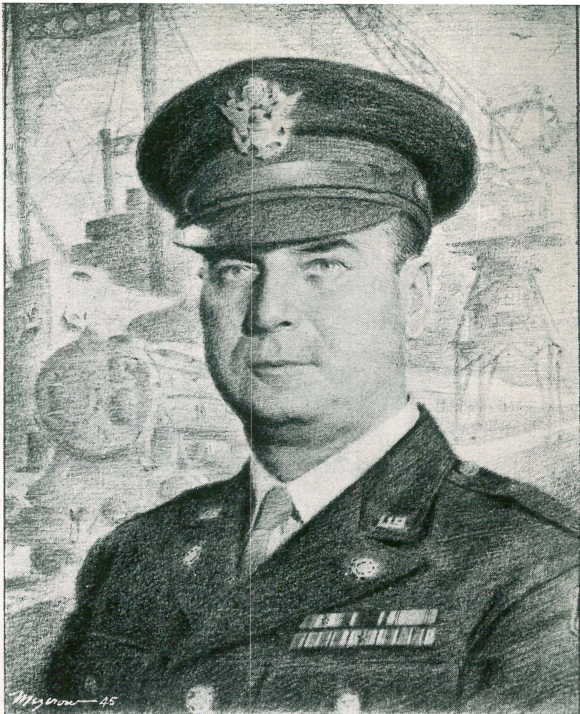
It is basically the story of the 16th Major Port : its birth and growing pains and the accomplishment of its mission. It has been impossible in the relatively narrow compass of a short history to give full credit to the Navy, to Army Engineers, to the Coast Guard, to British Minesweepers and to others who took part in the gigantic task at Le Havre, but this is by no means meant to detract from the credit due these organizations.

The story of the 16th Port is part of the story of the Army Transportation Corps. It is the story of how in the face of overwhelming obstacles, men worked hard together that the combat troops might be fed, that reinforcements might move forward quickly and efficiently, that the multifarious items of supply might flow smoothly to the front, that the guns might fire.



(This booklet was prepared by the Public Relations Section, 16th Major Port. It was written by Cpl. Alex Bower, illustrated by Si Mezerow, QM3/c, USNR, and edited by Lt. Ellis N. Brandt. Photographs are by courtesy of the U.S. Army Signal Corps.)

TO THE OFFICERS AND MEN
OF THE PORT OF LE HAVRE

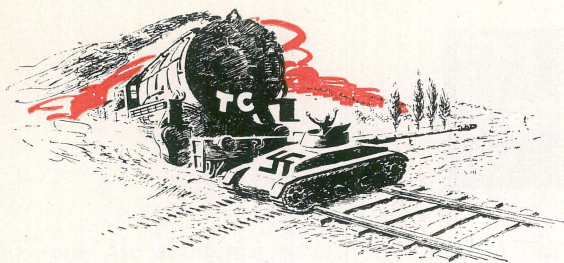


WHEN we first came to Le Havre it was indeed difficult to see how we were to accomplish the task set before us. Perhaps never before in the history of the world was a large port left in such hopeless condition, so completely devastated and so utterly devoid of all its peacetime facilities.

But with all of us working together, Le Havre rose from its rubble to make one of the truly outstanding contributions to the European war on the logistics front. It took team-work to accomplish this — team-work and determination and fortitude. Without this close combination of effort we should certainly have failed.

It is therefore with a great deal of pride that I dedicate this booklet, « Supply Front — the 16th Port Story », to all of you officers and men who participated in this magnificent accomplishment, to you who by your skill, perseverance, and sweat became an integral part of the story which this booklet presents.

COLONEL, TC, COMMANDING.



The Army Transportation Corps

WHEN the Germans put war on wheels, they put the skids under themselves. In challenging the United States, they stalled their Wehrmacht on a grade crossing, squarely in the path of fast-moving, heavy duty rail and motor transport systems with traditions of telescoping time and distance, hitting hard. No immovable object, the Wehrmacht had undertaken to stop an irresistible force and the results were catastrophic.

The problems of moving huge armies and vast columns of supplies to ever-receding horizons called for special measures, and so the Transportation Corps came into being in 1942. The railway transportation functions of the Corps of Engineers, the motor transport facilities of the Quartermaster Corps, and other means of moving men and materials over land and sea were incorporated into the TC, which adopted as its pledge : « The Transportation Corps *will* furnish the necessary transportation. » And it did, adding new luster to the star insigne of the Army Service Forces.

Over railroads and highways, over beachheads and rutted trails, through deserts and atop mountains, the TC delivered the goods to England, North Africa, Sicily, Italy, Omaha and Utah Beaches, southern France, Belgium, and finally dumped a crushing load into Germany itself.

Port Outfits

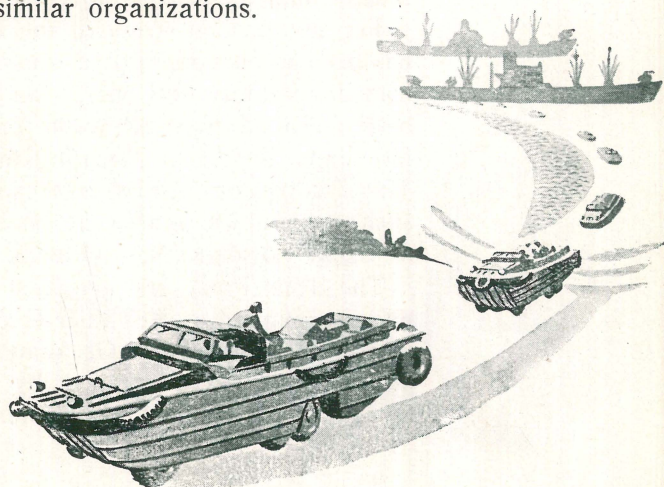
ONE of the important functions of the Transportation Corps is the operation of seaports. Every pound of food consumed by U. S. troops in an overseas theater, every round of ammunition fired at the enemy, every drop of gasoline used by motor vehicles, tanks and planes has to be hauled across an ocean and unloaded at a seaport. The 16th Port headquarters organization was designed to administer a seaport used by the Army as a receiving point for supplies and troops. Its Table of Organization calls for a staff of 409 enlisted men, 109 officers and one warrant officer who administer the port headquarters.

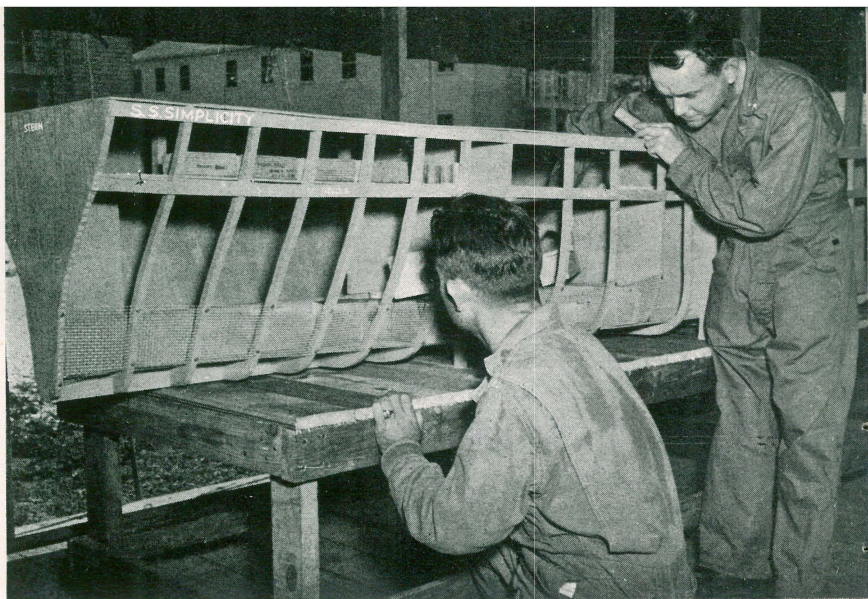
Attached to the headquarters as operating units are stevedore companies which unload the ships; truck companies which haul the supplies to depots or even directly to the front; ordnance companies which prepare tanks and other equipment for immediate service, which supervise the handling of bombs, shells and other ammunition and maintain vehicles in good repair; amphibious truck companies which handle the marvelous « ducks » that have

enabled us to use ruined ports at even more than peace-time capacity.

Also throwing their weight into the battle of supply are port maintenance and repair units which repair damaged harbor facilities and build new ones; medical units which safeguard the soldiers' health; military police battalions charged with keeping order and guarding supplies against theft, pilferage and sabotage; harbor craft companies which operate tug-boats and other small craft needed in a seaport; ack-ack batteries for defense against hostile aircraft; radar units which detect enemy planes and submarines, and many other groups.

At its busiest peak, the 16th Port and attached units totaled more than 15,000 soldiers, plus several thousand civilians employed in various duties. That's big business, handling a big job. From the beach-heads to Berlin, the Allied armies were on the offensive and on the move, always extending their supply lines, always needing more and more ammunition, fuel, food. And what they needed, they got, through the 16th Port and similar organizations.





During the interval of training, the USS « Simplicity », a scale model Liberty ship, provided means of studying cargo loading.

The Interval of Training

AN Army overseas port, center of an enormous transportation and distribution system, can be either a funnel through which soldiers and the supplies of war are channeled in orderly flow or it can be a bottleneck choking the armies in the field, which depend on it for their nourishment. It must be organized intelligently and operated efficiently, so that there will be no unnecessary delays between the arrival of troops and material and food in a foreign theater, and their swift movements to the hot spots.

For this civilian Army of the United States, which has been so outstandingly successful because of American adaptability and energy and courage, men have been recruited from all walks of life and assembled into units, expert at executing their special missions. This integration results from well-planned training, such as the 16th underwent for almost seven months at Camp Harahan, New Orleans.

The 16th Port was activated on May 24, 1943, under command of Brigadier General Joseph L. Phillips; Lt. Col. Edward G. Wadden soon took over but shortly was succeeded by Col. Frederick W. Hyde, who remained in command until after the

organization had arrived overseas. On the day of activation the outfit had a strength of 54 officers and 14 enlisted men, but by July 4 the complement of men and officers was filled.

In mid-July a 13-week basic training program was begun which continued into October. Drills, marches, bivouacs, the rifle range, the infiltration course, technical instruction, clerks' school and other phases of the training regime — including KP, that celebrated *bête noir* — were encouraged. As the men became hardened, the organization also solidified, shaped up. All the officers and 91 percent of the enlisted men qualified with the '03 rifle and fired familiarization courses with the carbine and pistol. Top performer with the '03 was Sgt. Everett Corwin, who scored 181. Capt. Robert Staver paced the officers with 180.

Under supervision of the Army Transport Service Section, the USS *Simplicity* was constructed. The *Simplicity* was a miniature Liberty ship, built to scale. Using this model, problems in loading, unloading, cargo stowage and other operations were studied. The landship *Gloria*, a full-sized section of a Liberty ship, permitted the use of winches, lift trucks and other machinery in cargo loading and segregation.

By mid-November the 16th Port had developed into a well-organized unit, the personnel had received



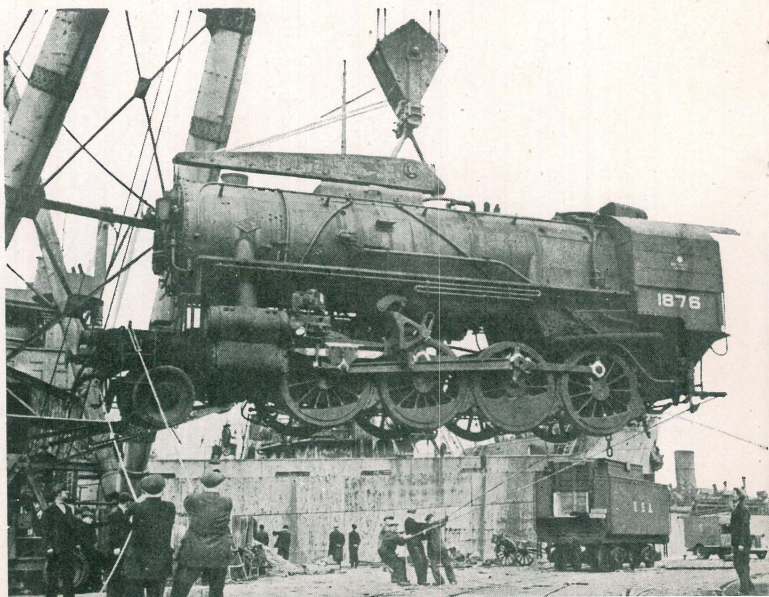
furloughs and the outfit was ready for foreign service. The preparation for overseas movement was undergone at Camp Shanks, N. Y., and on Jan. 8, 1944, the 16th sailed from Pier 86, New York Port of Embarkation, on the SS *Mauretania*.

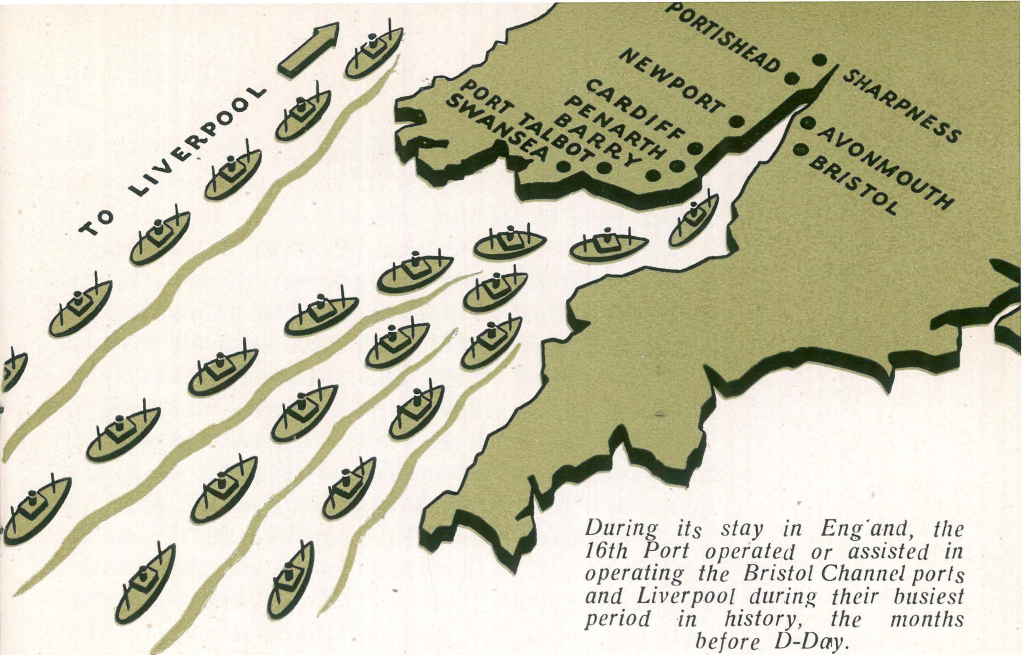
The *Mauretania* collided with a tanker in the harbor and returned to its mooring, but sailed again on the afternoon of Jan. 9. Liverpool, England, was reached on Jan. 18 and the arrivals debarked for billets at Hayes Lane Comp, Barry, South Wales.

THE JOB... England

THE colossal build-up of troops and supplies preliminary to the invasion of the continent required that the 16th Port immediately swing into action. Accordingly, the stay at Hayes Lane Camp was brief, and about half the Port, designated as Detachment D, returned to Liverpool for duty with the 15th Port; a small group also worked at Manchester, another busy spot. The remaining half of the outfit was attached to the 17th Port and worked at Swansea, Port Talbot, Penarth, Barry, Cardiff, Newport, Avonmouth, Portishead, Bristol and Sharpness, towns on the Bristol Channel which were important receiving

American - built locomotives helped the Transportation Corps deliver the necessary supplies once our armies won a foothold in France. This engine is being unloaded in England prior to D-Day; soon afterward it was shipped across the Channel, where it hauled food and matériel from French ports.





centers for incoming men and supplies. Detachment D was commanded by Major Stanhope C. Smith and the small groups distributed on the Bristol Channel were under Col. W. C. Koenig, who soon was to succeed Colonel Hyde as Port commander. Headquarters were established at Newport.

Operations preliminary to the invasion of the continent were in full stride at this time and the various detachments of the 16th were busy day and night unloading the troops and supplies necessary for success. Liverpool, Manchester and the Bristol Channel ports were among the streams feeding the flood that was to roar over the beaches at Omaha and Utah and batter down the walls guarding Festung Europa. The Bristol ports were especially busy during this interval; at one stage they were handling 45 percent of all cargo unloaded from trans-Atlantic ships in the European Theater of Operations. Liverpool, one of the four or five largest ports in the world, of course carried an enormous load.

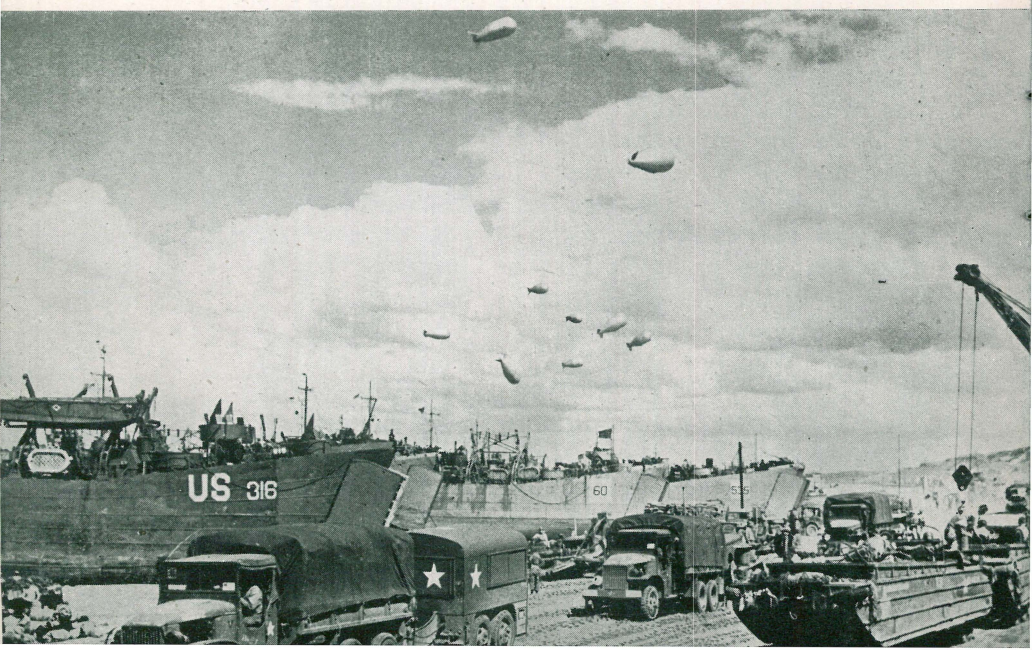
As invasion plans reached a boil, the Liverpool detachment was shifted to the Bristol Channel area and assigned a share of the « Overlord Mounting Plan », code name for D-Day. This group brought troops' service records up to date and was respons-

ible for certain staging-area operations and for the proper loading of soldiers shoving off on the biggest adventure in the history of war.

Even while the beachhead troops were being staged for the jump-off, more supplies were pouring in and the 16th handled its full share of the influx. The detachment at Cardiff unloaded more than 80,000 tons of cargo during May. This included the complete unloading of 25 ships and the partial unloading of five more. The sea train Texas made two visits during this period with locomotives and tanks, important implements of the invasion plans. On the first trip it was unloaded within 48 hours and on the second was discharged of its heavy cargo within 36 hours. Meanwhile, other units of the organization were loading vehicles and personnel for D-Day. The 16th was in the supply battle up to its neck.

After the invasion of June 6 was accomplished, the urgency for material and munitions became more pressing as successes were rolled up by our troops. There was no let-down by the Service Forces, and the 16th continued to work on a seven-day-a-week schedule until the hour arrived for the outfit to shove off for France, where for the first time it operated on its own, independent of other port organizations.

Beachhead supply operations like this one made the difference between success and failure, once our troops had landed in France.

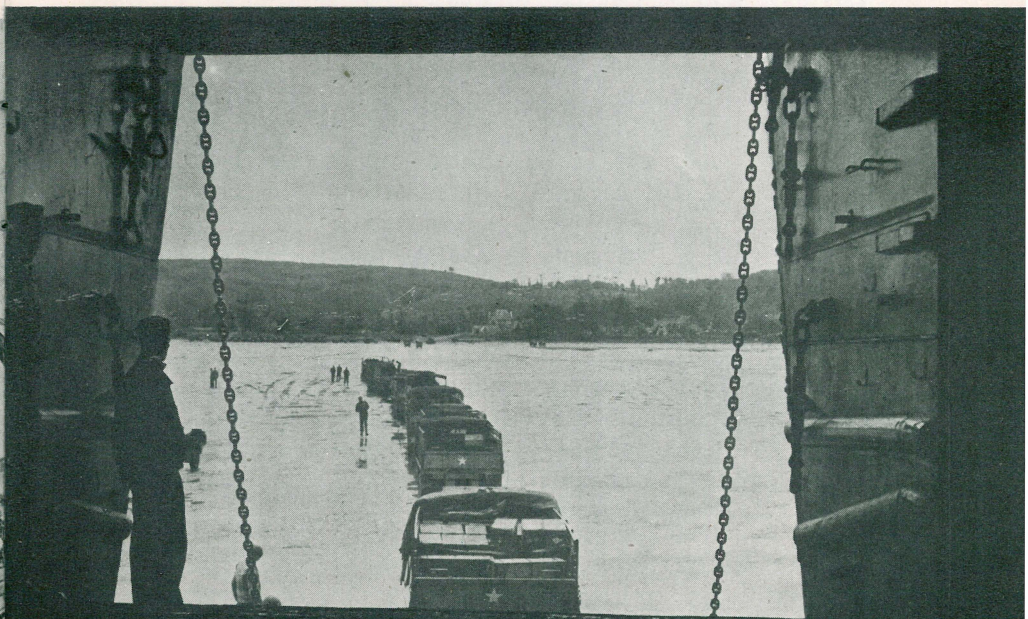


THE JOB... France

ON Aug. 2, 1944, Brigadier General W. M. Hoge was assigned to command the 16th Port, succeeding Colonel Koenig, and on Aug. 5, the General and an advance party of five other officers and six enlisted men flew to France and arranged for the remainder of the outfit to follow. In the advance party, besides the commanding officer, were Lt. Col. Daniel K. Moore, Lt. Col. William H. Shahan, Lt. Col. Harvey A. Zorn, Major Samuel Israel, Capt. Herbert W. Hariman, M/Sgt. William J. Meinhart, S/Sgt. James A. Lewis, Sgt. John L. Ketler, Pfc. Frank E. Bianchi, Pvt. Raymond D. Guier and Pvt. Forest D. Kemlerley.

The group landed near Cherbourg and on Aug. 7 loaded into jeeps and threaded down the peninsula, through the backwash of battle, passing through Valognes, Coutances, Granville, Avranches and Pontaubault to Pontorson, where the men bedded down. That night their lullaby was thunder as the Germans sent bombers against nearby gasoline and munitions dumps. On Aug. 8 the convoy proceeded to Dol, where for three days the men viewed the assault on

At St. Michel-en-Greve, where the 16th operated a beachhead port, LST skippers drove their ships closer to shore than even the fish could swim.



St. Malo, one of the Channel ports greatly desired by the Allied armies. Then they proceeded to St. Michel-en-Greve, where they were joined by a company of the 360th Engineer General Service Regiment. Three LST's carrying supplies already were there waiting to be unloaded, but before that could be done the engineers had to clear mines and obstructions from the beaches and nearby fields.

Meanwhile the main body embarked from Newport on Aug. 13 on two ships; Detachment A was commanded by Colonel Koenig and Detachment B by Col. Porter P. Wiggins. Submarines attacked the convoy on Aug. 14 and an LST, toward the rear of the formation, was hit by a torpedo. An LCT, close behind the Liberty ship carrying Detachment A, veered toward the attacked quarter and was hit by a torpedo aimed at the Liberty. As men of the 16th looked on, the LCT disintegrated and within a few seconds had vanished. Fortunately the submarine attack was not pressed further and eventually the ships arrived at Utah Beach, where the outfit disembarked on Aug. 20 and bivouacked until Aug. 22. Headquarters were established temporarily at Morlaix and the 16th fanned out to begin port operations, close behind the retreating Germans.

EVEN THE FISH WERE OUTDONE

Mission of the 16th was to operate ports at St. Michel-en-Greve, St. Malo, St. Brieuc, Cancale and Morlaix. The beaches at St. Malo and Cancale were not in suitable condition, the lock gates at St. Brieuc were badly damaged and the installation was used only for unloading coal, yet between Aug. 14 and Sept. 22, the various detachments discharged more than 62,000 tons of gasoline, oil, ammunition, rations and fuel; evacuated more than 4,200 casualties bound for England, and disembarked 74 officers and 353 enlisted men. Under makeshift conditions the Port, with attached units, toiled at beach operations, regulated traffic, set up dumps and fed the muscles of an army that was slashing across France.



More than 90 percent of the tonnage was handled at St. Michel-en-Greve.

The long, flat beach was quickly flooded by swiftly rising tides and LST unloadings had to be timed precisely. As the tide rose, trucks were driven onto the LST's for loading during high water, when the vessels were inaccessible. Despite the best efforts of the LST skippers, who drove their ships high onto the beach — closer to shore, according to one fascinated French onlooker, « than even the fish can swim » — the craft were some distance from the nearest road and could be reached by vehicles only at ebb tide.

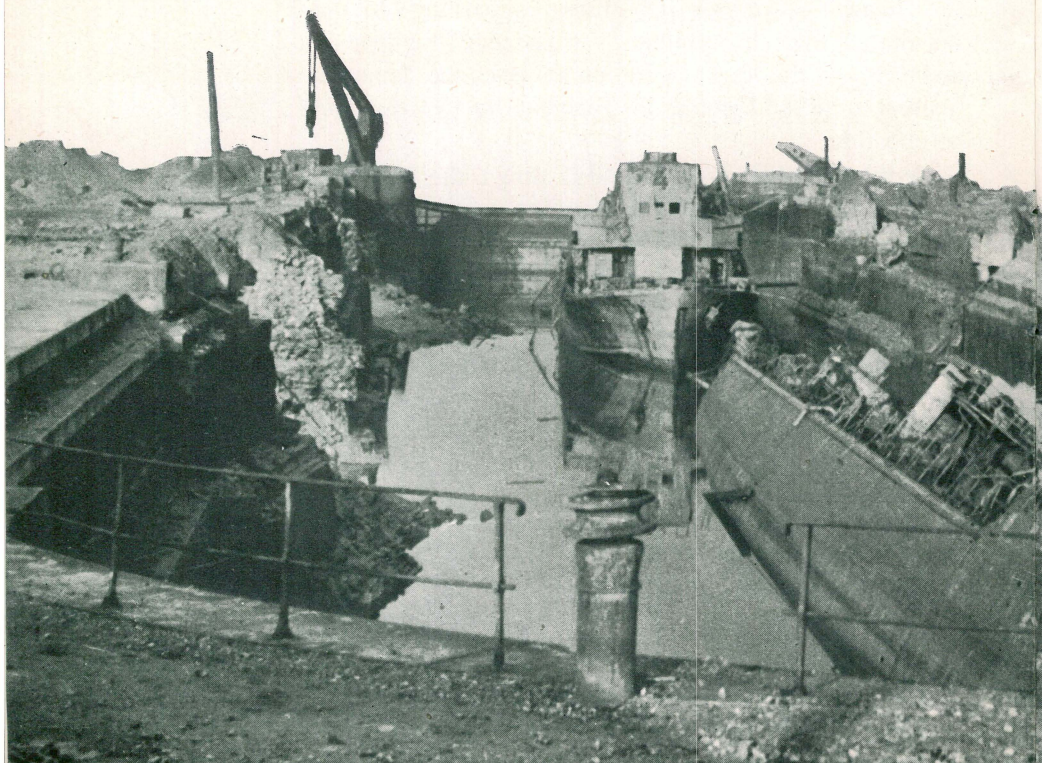
Receding tides were followed down the beach by lines of empty trucks and as soon as possible the LST ramps were lowered, the loaded trucks driven off and the others hustled cargo to shore until the ocean again swallowed the beach and stopped operations. During low water the trucks hummed between the beaches and the dumps, and when the tide was in they joined convoys racing from the dumps down the peninsula to Lannion, chief supply point for the troops hammering at Brest, where German troops had holed up. Twenty-four hours a day the 16th operated a methodical millrace which sluiced supplies from the beachhead to the batteries that were pounding the enemy into submission.

Twenty-four hours a day the 16th operated a methodical millrace which sluiced supplies from the beachhead to the batteries that were pounding the enemy at Brest into submission.

LE HAVRE OFFERS A CHALLENGE

DURING this time, Le Havre, one of France's most important seaports, was wrested from the Germans and the 16th was ordered to move in and whip it into serviceable condition. Allied armor, knifing and plunging across France, was siphoning gasoline and supplies at a prodigious rate and it was extremely important that Le Havre be placed in operation. Supply lines from the Cherbourg peninsula and the beachheads lower down the Channel coast were stretched taut; the opening of Le Havre would ease the strain and provide shorter communications to the armies in the field.

General Hoge and an advance party left Port headquarters at Dinan on Sept. 20 to make a preliminary survey of the Le Havre area and to prepare for the arrival of the main body. The advance group included 23 officers and 33 enlisted men of



the 16th Port, one officer and 43 enlisted men of the 1596th Engineer Utilities Detachment, and two enlisted men of the 346th Medical Composite Section. The main body headed for Le Havre on Sept. 24, traveling a circuitous rail route through Paris and covering the last leg of the journey by truck.

In peace-time, Le Havre had been one of France's principal ports of entry for steamship passengers, and it also was a busy commercial harbor. The *Normandie*, the *Ile de France*, the *City of Paris* and other famous liners had berthed there and many American visitors got their first glimpse of France at the bustling city at the mouth of the River Seine. The port area included 11 major docks and 218 acres of water, bordered by about 11 miles of quay. Half the harbor was usable by ships drawing more than 25 feet of water, but the Allies, moving in after the Germans had been blasted out, inherited a shambles rather than a seaport.

The Allies, moving into Le Havre after the Germans had been blasted out, inherited a shambles rather than a seaport.



Under four years of Nazi occupation the port had been dormant. A tight Allied blockade of the Channel sealed it off from commerce and the Germans were able to use it only for small craft such as torpedo boats and vedettes and a few mine-layers, but they fortified it heavily and prepared demolition charges to be used if the Allies threatened to close in. Thickset concrete blockhouses and gun emplacements were built throughout the port area and along the beaches, and the quays and the sidewalls of the locks were mined and wired electrically.

After invasion troops had landed farther down the coast, the Germans concentrated small war vessels and their fast and famous E-boats at Le Havre, slipping them out to rip into Allied convoys crossing the Channel. On June 14 and 15 the Allies turned their attention to these tactics and gave the port a thorough shellacking from the air, sinking about 20 enemy vessels, including a destroyer. Adding to the damage, mine and torpedo storage depots were touched off by the bombing.

This scathing from the air didn't render the harbor useless, but as the heat increased following the successful invasion landings, the Germans prepared to withdraw from the port and carried out a carefully planned program of demolition.

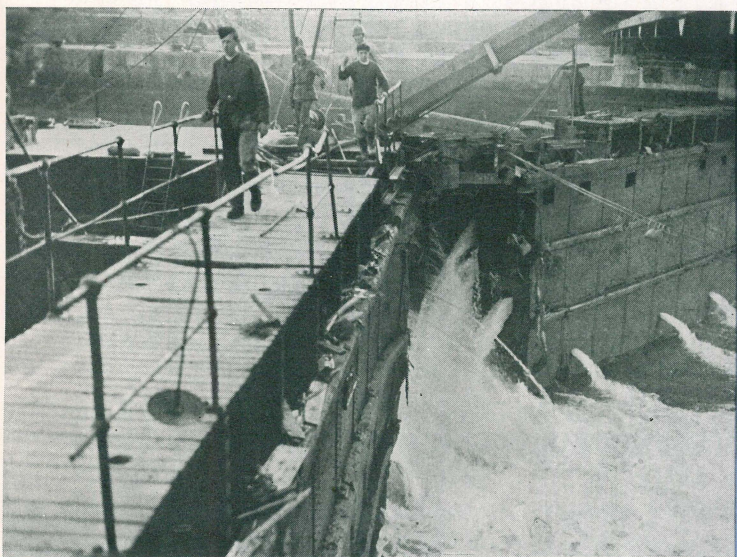
THE PORT AREA— 100 % DESTROYED

THE 16th thus was to work in a city from which the guts had been wrenched; only a blackened and pathetic skeleton remained of a once-prosperous seaport of 170,000 persons. It was officially estimated that the harbor area was 100 percent destroyed and that the city itself was about 70 percent destroyed, but this latter figure didn't include close-lying suburban areas in much better condition. In any case, all but about 25,000 of the population had fled by the time U. S. troops arrived, and these stragglers walked dazedly among the ruins or burrowed into the rubble searching for bodies.

For the 16th there was no time for contemplating the destruction; shipping was poised to come into the port at the earliest possible moment and the armies in the field urgently needed supplies. In war, the time is always *now*.

To create order from such grand-scale chaos as reigned in the Le Havre port area demanded much thoughtful planning. Haphazard measures would not suffice; a monthly target, or quota, had been set and had to be attained or even surpassed.

A rapid survey of the port area provided data on the existing situation, and from this an engineer



The Rochemont lock, key to Le Havre's inner basin system, was bulldozed into operation by Army engineers.



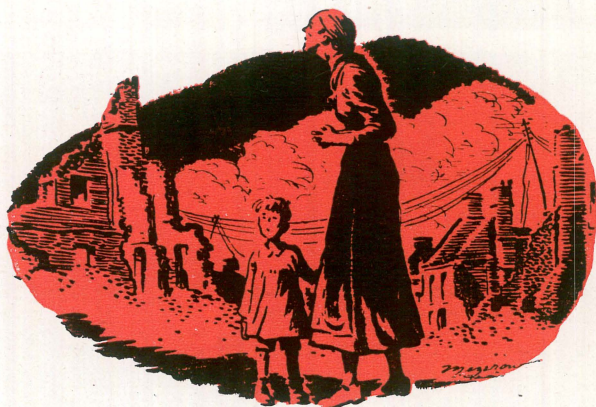
This over-all view of the beach along Boulevard Albert I shows concrete barges, pillboxes and barricades installed by the Germans to prevent an invasion. They were removed by the engineers.

development plan was evolved. The plan was divided into three phases, the first of which was to cope with the problem of unloading such shipments as were expected immediately. The subsequent phases were designed to provide the facilities which eventually made Le Havre one of the key war-time ports of Europe.

As the initial step, 2,000 feet of beach near the Digue Nord was cleared to provide space for landing craft, and five exit ramps were built so trucks could unload the vessels. Roadways had to be bulldozed or blasted through the wreckage, and transfer and storage areas cleared. Similar measures were taken on the beach along the Boulevard Clemenceau, formerly a fashionable promenade.

These beaches bore no resemblance to their characters of before the war. Once dotted with bright umbrellas and gay tents, they had been transformed by the Germans into formidable stretches, laced with barbed wire, studded with ugly steel fingers to rip the bellies out of invasion crafts, planted thickly with mines and backed up by squat, stubby gun positions, cleverly camouflaged, wickedly sited to sweep the areas. These traps and mazes had to be cleared, the lurking mines dug from the sand.

The first phase also included the preparation of lighterage and coaster berths along the battered quays, and the shouldering of roads through the ruins.



The 16th Port, when it arrived at Le Havre, included only the headquarters personnel, a finance disbursing section, an engineer utilities detachment and a medical composite section, but these small forces were augmented by outfits geared for heavy loads and within three months there was attached to the 16th a total of 78 units aggregating about 14,000 troops. Several thousand French civilian workers also were employed.

The growth in strength was gradual, however, and nobody suffered from lack of employment. The 1596th EUD, one of the old standbys, put its complement of carpenters, electricians, machinists and other skilled workers into harness immediately and plunged into the problems of supplying lights, arranging water and heating facilities, building office equipment and otherwise functioning as an able, many-handed jack-of-all-trades.

Headquarters were established in thick-walled, deep-moated old Fort de Tourneville, a former French garrison point, and the Port began to shape up, though of necessity main strength often substituted for finesse.

The second phase of the development plan included the removal of obstruction in canals and locks; the provision of power for the operation of lock gates and swing bridges; the creation of more lighterage space; the building of a pontoon dock; the clearing of storage space for 100,000 barrels of petrol, oil and lubricant; the repair and replacement of damaged bridges and the hanging of the gates in the Rochemont lock.

THE ROCHEMONT LOCK

ON this last task hinged the real success of the port operation. The Rochemont lock and the adjacent Transatlantique lock were the keyways to Le Havre's inner basin system, sorely needed for the unloading of cargo ships. Both locks had been battered by the Germans, but at least one of the

two was salvageable. It was decided to dam the Transatlantique lock, making it watertight, and to restore the Rochemont lock to service. The Germans had failed to destroy a drydock, which they deemed useless to the Allies in view of the other ruin they had wrought, and the gates from this were suitable for the Rochemont lock.

Even under ideal conditions the Rochemont reconstruction task would have been very demanding, but in the absence of proper equipment and in the face of bitter weather it became an operation on a formidable scale. But it was done, and on Dec. 16 the first Liberty ship passed through the lock and into the chain of inner basins.

As the work progressed and gains were made, inch by inch and yard by yard, the volume of matériel handled and the number of personnel debarked at the port climbed steadily. First vessels unloaded were three LST's on Oct. 2 and three more on Oct. 4, carrying quartermaster cargo. This was only a dribble, yet it represented real achievement, because the 16th didn't begin operations until late in September and the hazardous job of clearing the beaches was accomplished in a remarkably short time. On Oct. 6 the SS. *Empire Beaconsfield* appeared with heavy equipment to be used in port operation and reconstruction, and the 16th was on its way.

During this period the Port wasn't able to give its undivided attention to Le Havre, because the Seine river port of Rouen, about 60 miles upstream, and also in damaged condition, was to be operated as a sub-port, so Lt. Col. D. K. Moore with an advance party moved up there to survey the port area and arrange for offices and billets. After about two weeks, however, Rouen was turned over to the 11th Port for operation, and the 16th concentrated on Le Havre.

As rapidly as the first and second phases of reconstruction were finished, the third phase was tackled. This included the extension of floating docks; the construction of berths for Liberty ships; the prepar-

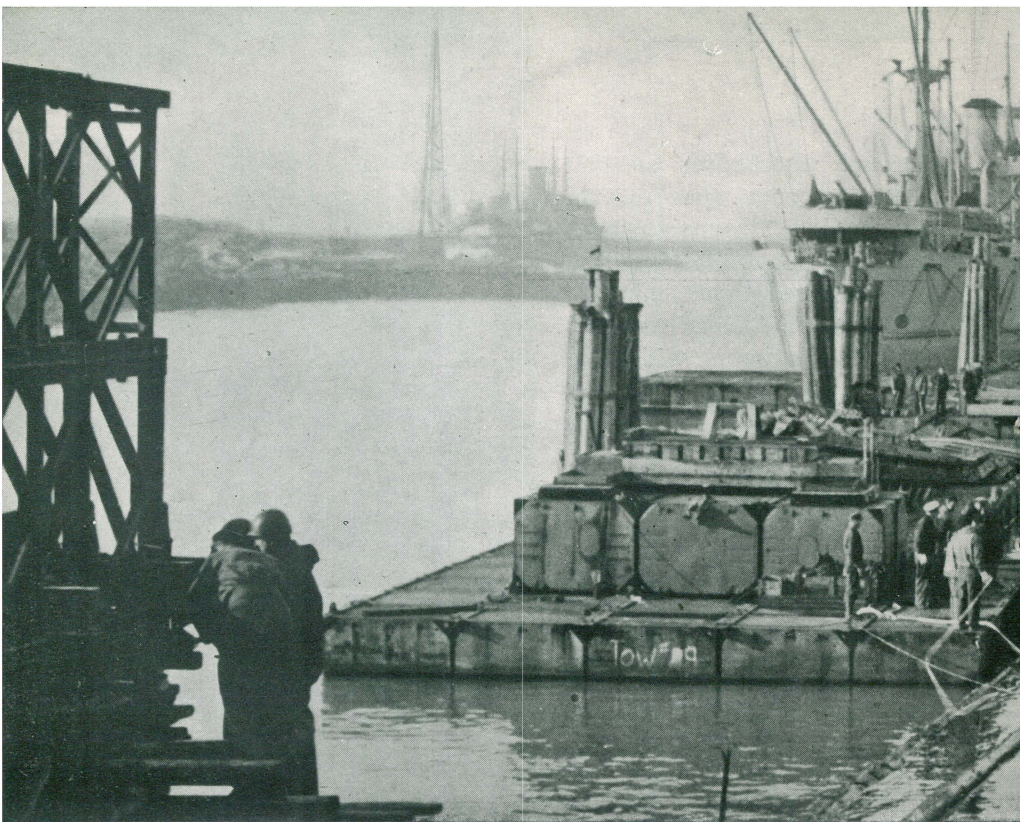
ation of warehouses so that covered storage space would be available; the maintenance of 286 miles of White Ball Highway, and the opening of the Tancarville Canal connecting the harbour with the Seine.

THEY CARRIED THE BALL

THE skills and talents of many specialized units are required in port operation, and during the busy early days of Le Havre under the 16th, everyone was on his mettle. The ball was carried by the following outfits : Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 16th Port; 1596th Engineer Utilities Detachment ; 141st Finance Disbursing Section; 346th Medical Composite Section; 65th Army Postal Unit; 32nd Ordnance Bomb Disposal Squad ; 298th Military Police Company; 103rd Port Marine Maintenance Company ; 505th Port Battalion, including the following Port Companies : 547th, 550th, 551st, 602nd and 649th; the 512th Port Battalion with

*Removing mines from the beaches
at Le Havre*

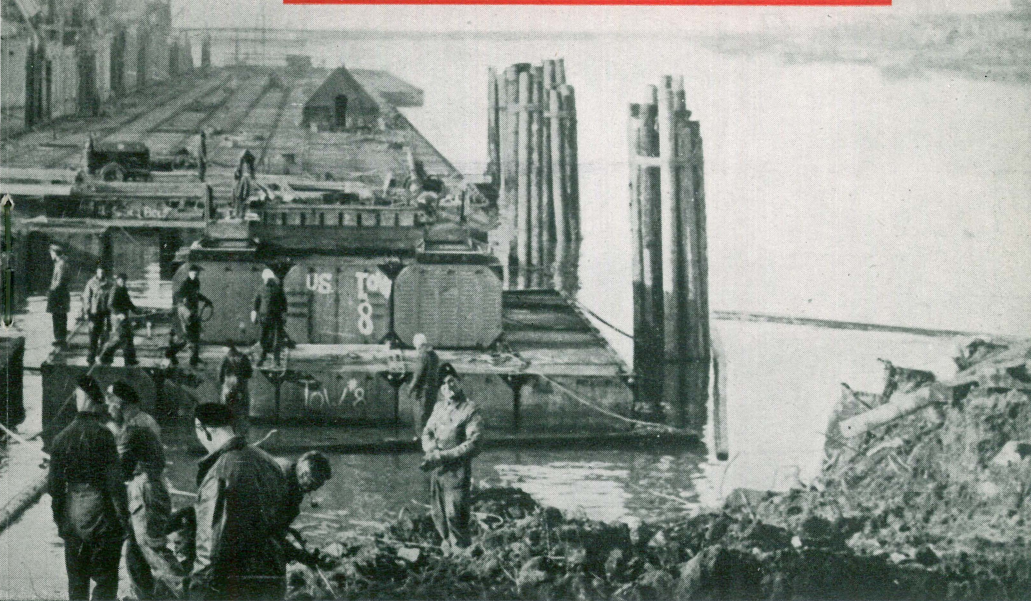




these Port Companies : 319th, 356th, 560th and 561st; 373rd Engineer General Service Regiment, with the 425th Army Service Forces Band and the 577th Dump Truck Company ; 392nd Engineer General Service Regiment ; 1055th Port Construction and Repair Group, including the men of the 1071st Engineer Port Repair Ship.

The 971st Engineer Maintenance Company, with the 1044th Engineer Gas Generating Unit ; 1061st Engineer Port Construction and Repair Group ; 339th Harbor Craft Company ; 1237th Engineer Fire Fighting Platoon ; 332nd Harbor Craft Company ; Harbor Entrance Control Points Nos. 3 and 6 ; 301st Signal Radar Maintenance Unit ; 469th and 470th Amphibian Truck Companies; 748th Engineer Base Equipment Company ; 3080th Motor Vehicle Dispatch Company ; Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 162nd Ordnance Battalion, and the 1st Platoon of the 17th Special Service Company.

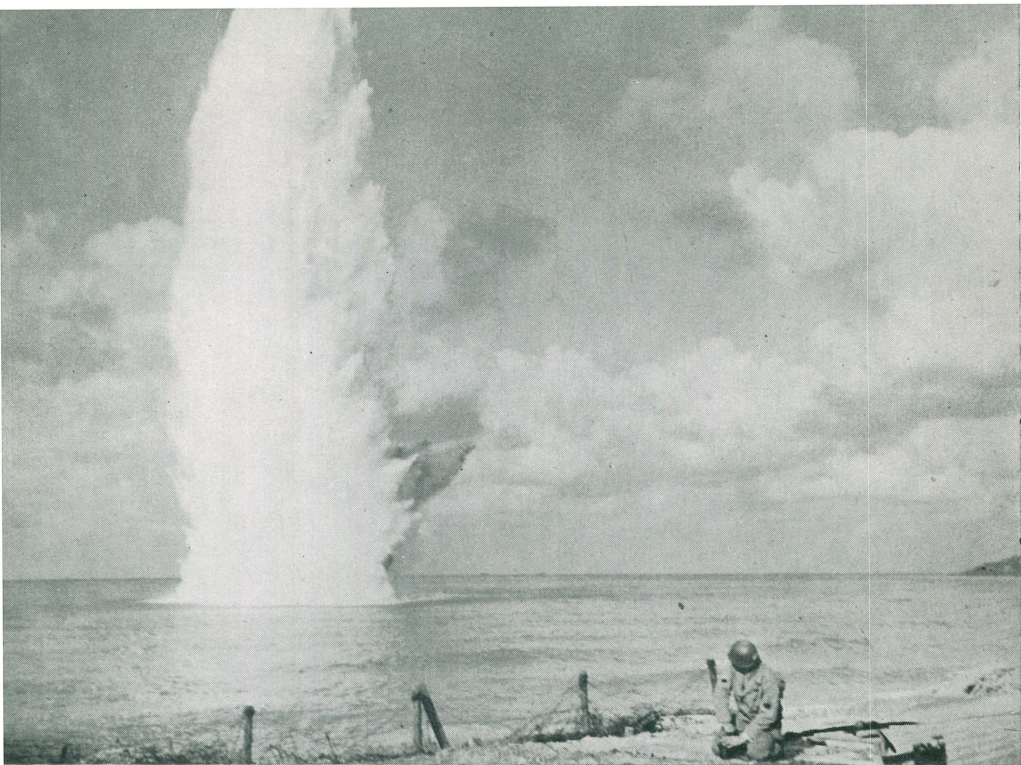
U.S. Seabees and British Royal Marine Engineers co-operated splendidly, worked doggedly in constructing the pontoon pier shown here. Even before the pier was finished, ships tied up to it, discharged their cargo onto ducks and barges.



SEABEES BUILT THE PONTOON DOCKS

THE foregoing are U. S. Army units ; some excellent assistance was given by the 628th Seabees, who worked doggedly on the construction of pontoon piers, and by the 1716th and 1717th Royal Marine Engineers, British outfits which co-operated splendidly in clearing the harbor of wreckage and rendering the dock areas usable.

All the units attached to the Port pitched in to operate ducks and trucks, pile drivers and tugboats, sledges and saws, cranes and motor trucks, postal depots and fire engines. Each was a dependable link in the chain of units that rebuilt the harbor in which ships were unloaded of men and supplies, and rushed to advance sections over the famous Red Ball and White Ball express routes or down the rocking rails.



In an effort to forestall Allied troop landings at Le Havre, the Germans sank heavy concrete barges along the beaches, creating an impassable underwater wall. Here you see an engineer blowing up one of the barges.

One of the big gains was made when the Cotton Warehouse and Hangar 13 were rendered serviceable for the storage of incoming supplies. The Cotton Warehouse is one of the largest storage structures in Europe, but the Germans feared to use it during their occupation of Le Havre because they considered it too vulnerable to bombing. Allied air control made this an unlikely possibility after U. S. forces occupied the city, and both these buildings, after repairs, provided weatherproof storage areas with adjacent shipside and rail facilities.

Each separate improvement was translated into tonnage ; in October, 62,319 tons of ammunition and other supplies were unloaded at the port; in November the total jumped to 171,541, and in December it rose to 201,028.

The number of troops disembarked climbed even more spectacularly : October — 1,887 ; November — 89,825, and December — 101,646. It had not been planned to move any substantial number of troops

through Le Havre, but the swift development of deep-water berthing facilities at the port, and unforeseen changes elsewhere, combined to make Le Havre the largest personnel debarkation point in the European Theater of Operations.

ACCENT ON AMMO

A PARTICULARLY important item of supply was ammunition, and the Port hustled bombs and shells to the front in huge amounts. In terms of quantity, October saw 25 trainloads of ammo leave



Before the port could be used by Allied shipping, sunken vessels and other obstacles had to be removed. This diver is preparing to explore the floor of the harbor.

Le Havre for the battle lines; November saw 50 trainloads dispatched, and during December, when the Germans launched their Ardennes counter-attack, Le Havre speeded 92 trainloads across France and into the critical area. Another record delivery job was accomplished during this period when rockets were rushed to the troops defending a vast supply depot at Liege, Belgium, one of the enemy's principal goals.

The facility with which ammunition was dispatched from Le Havre to inland depots earned commendations from both the Commanding General, Communications Zone, and the Chief Ordnance Officer, Com Z. Groundwork for the deal was worked out by Sgt. William C. Winn of the 16th Port ordnance section, who streamlined ammunition-handling procedure by segregating bombs and shells according to type and size as they were unloaded from vessels, thus permitting the various categories to be shipped in solid carloads. This plan eliminated the need for segregation at forward ammunition depots and also made the ammo part of the Army's « rolling reserve ». Under this system, carloads of a desired type could be diverted to critical spots without further handling or documentation.

Progress during November and December and thereafter was achieved under Col. Thomas J. Weed, who became Port Commander on Oct. 31, succeeding General Hoge. For a short period pending the arrival of Colonel Weed, Colonel Koenig was in charge. Colonel Weed brought to the job a background of many years' experience in the Army transportation field.

THE LEE S. OVERMAN

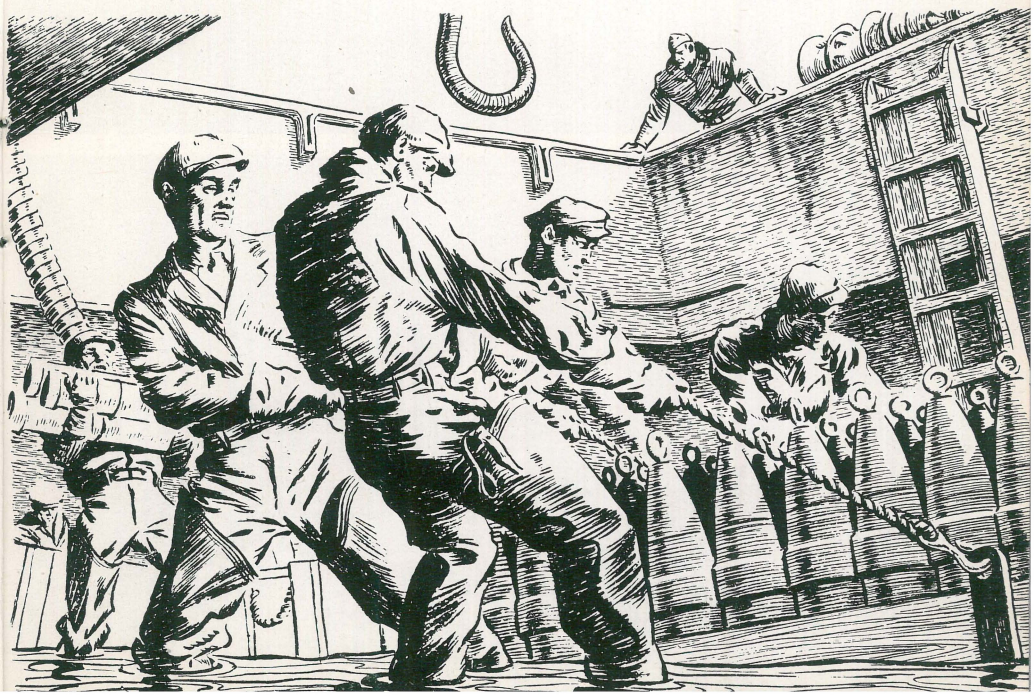
PART of the ammunition leaving Le Havre during November was unloaded from the Liberty ship *Lee S. Overman* in one of the most spectacular and arduous feats in the history of the 16th Port. On the morning of Nov. 11, the *Overman* struck a German

mine just outside the harbor entrance and the explosion tore a hole in the ship. She was in imminent danger of breaking in two, but her quick-thinking captain drove her just outside the break-water and into shallow water before she cracked.

The *Overman's* cargo included a deckload of 36 two-and-a-half ton trucks, greatly needed by the Army, but even more important was 6,000 tons of ammunition, drastically required at the front. It was of the utmost urgency that the cargo be salvaged, though the task was extremely hazardous. The holds were flooded with water and thick oil, and the two halves of the vessel pounded together from the impact of the waves, threatening to pinch some sensitive propelling charges and cause an explosion which might demolish the entire port.

Despite the danger, salvage operations were begun immediately. It was decided to tackle the job with French civilian stevedores, and two floating cranes came alongside at once to remove the deck cargo. The slanting, pitching, oil-soaked decks made the operation very difficult, but by 11 o'clock that night the entire deck cargo had been transferred to bobbing LCT's, a delicate maneuver.

The story of the « Overman » was one of cold, slime, rain, and danger, but almost all its urgently - needed cargo was salvaged and used in battering back the enemy.



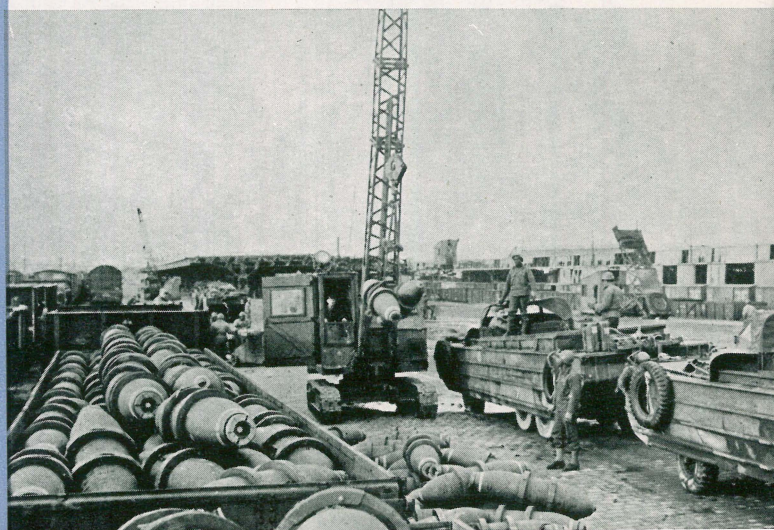
In the face of bitter weather, rising water in the holds and stormy seas which drenched the workers and battered the floating cranes and LCT's employed in unloading the cargo, the men stuck grimly to the job, working every possible moment, day and night.

The task was so important that Colonel Weed was in constant personal touch with the operation; Lieut. General John C. H. Lee, commanding the Communications Zone, and Major General Frank S. Ross, commanding the Transportation Corps in the ETO, also visited the wreck.

Without «ducks,» the marvelous amphibious trucks developed by American ingenuity, wrecked ports such as Le Havre would have been inoperable. Here is a swarm of them unloading bombs from a Liberty ship in the harbor.



Terminal for the ducks is a railroad siding, where the bombs are loaded onto cars for quick shipment to Air Force Depots.



One piece of ammo at a time, one ton at a time, one load at a time, and then triumphantly, a great batch of 519 tons, snatching during a 48-hour break in the weather, were wrested from the sea and sent speeding to the front. The *Overman*, one of the toughest problems handed to any port organization, was licked.

There was business as usual at the Port on Christmas Day, but the soldiers were not unmindful of the occasion nor did they overlook a chance to share their portion of Yuletide cheer. The men contributed



Guarded by Military Policemen to prevent sabotage or other enemy activity, the ducks swim across the harbor, climb dripping out onto roadways blasted through the wreckage.



At the depot, the bombs are sent to air fields. This B-26 Marauder of the U.S. Ninth Air Force drops them on a German railroad yard.

their weekly candy rations from the PX, dug into packages from home for more confections, and inaugurated a series of holiday parties for children from bombed-out French homes. Hundreds of youngsters thus tasted sweetmeats for the first time since the German occupation began in Le Havre in 1940. With characteristic generosity, the GI's divided what they had with the less fortunate.

NEW YEAR, NEW PROBLEMS

THE turn of the calendar brought a new surge of responsibility to the 16th Port. An unprecedented number of troops was disembarked; during the period of Jan. 15-20, almost 50,000 persons came ashore, and the total for the month was 203,309. This imposed another strain: each outfit which disembarked brought with it tons of equipment, which also had to be unloaded swiftly and dispatched to the proper destination.

Among the fresh units arriving was the 52nd Medium Port, which disembarked on Jan. 12 and was assigned to work with the 16th Port in the operation of Le Havre. From that point on, the 16th and 52nd performed virtually as a single unit. Col. William J. Deyo Jr., commanding the 52nd, became director of control for the combined operation.

Besides contributing to the bloody, bitter fighting at the Bulge by speeding all possible supplies to combat troops, the 16th Port and its attached units released men to the Infantry. The 392nd Engineer General Service Regiment and Company E of the 373rd Engineer GS Regiment were dispatched to the Ardennes area. Along the Meuse river, the 392nd was engaged in patrolling, planting mines and guarding bridges. Upon its return to Le Havre later in the month, it plunged into extensive railroad rehabilitation work. Company E of the 373rd improved supply facilities at Charleroi, in the Ardennes, and also engaged in patrolling.

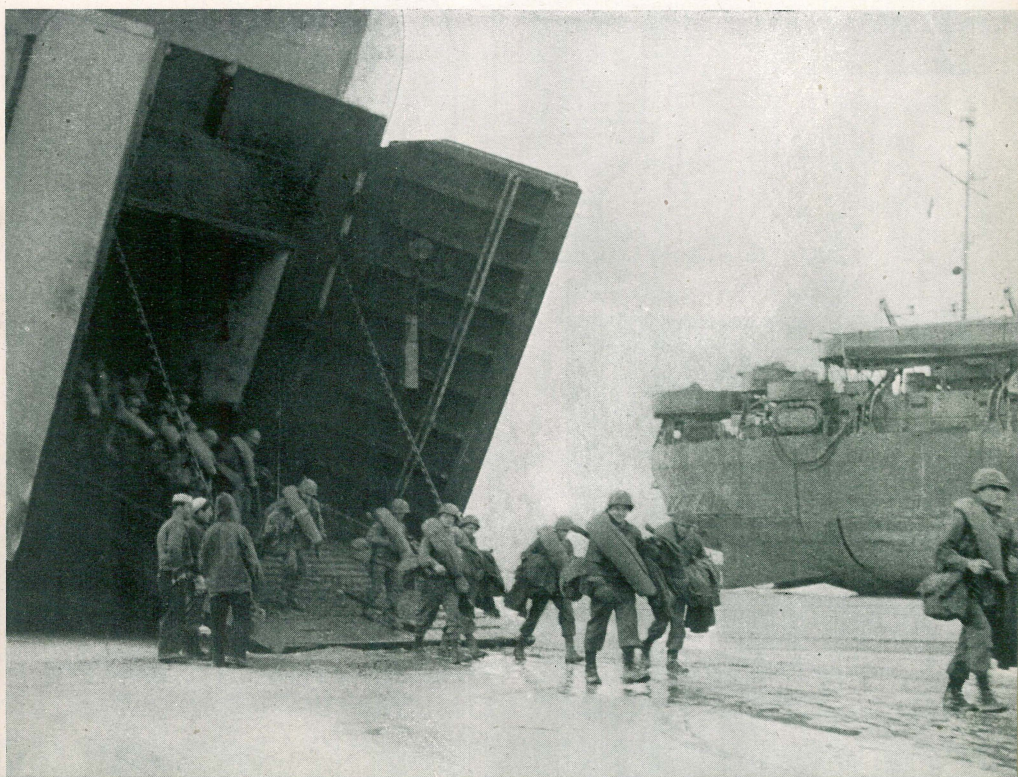
Meanwhile, 261,121 tons of supplies were unloaded in the harbor, an achievement which exceeded the target by 19 percent, and 159 trainloads of ammunition were sent rolling to the front.

DUCKS DELIVERED THE GOODS

MORE than one-third of the war stuff landed at Le Havre during this raw, freezing month was carried in ducks, or amphibious trucks. These boats on wheels, these deepwater workhorses, marvels of American inventive and production genius, were driven for the most part by colored troops, who also performed many of the stevedoring jobs. On Jan. 22, a record day, the ducks climbed dripping up the ramps with 1,897 loads of supplies, a big-league performance.

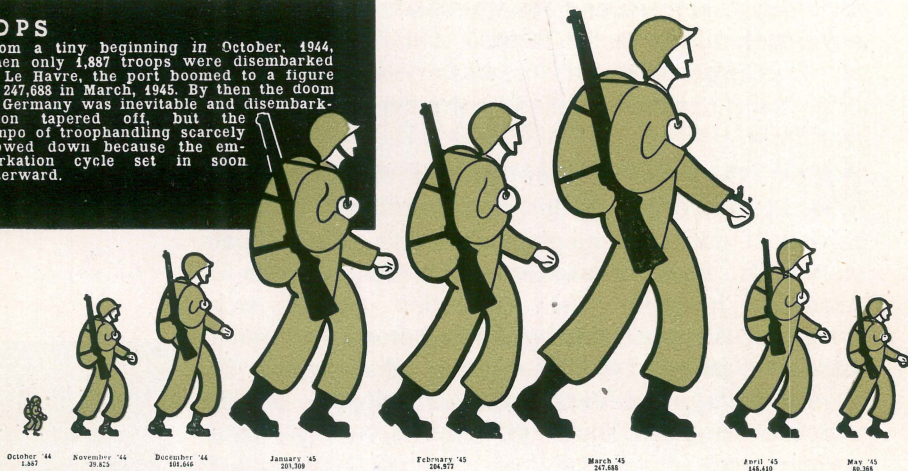
In an entirely different section, other duck outfits from the 16th Port were feeling the brunt of war. The 458th, 459th and 460th Amphibian Truck Companies, white outfits, and the 469th, with colored

Here is the first LST-load of troops disembarking on the beach at Le Havre in October 1944. This trickle soon swelled into a flood.



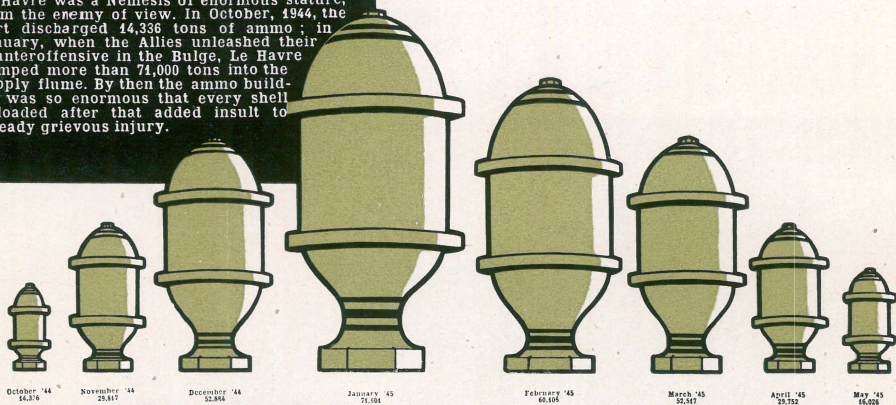
TROOPS

From a tiny beginning in October, 1944, when only 1,887 troops were disembarked at Le Havre, the port boomed to a figure of 247,888 in March, 1945. By then the doom of Germany was inevitable and disembarkation tapered off, but the tempo of troophandling scarcely slowed down because the embarkation cycle set in soon afterward.



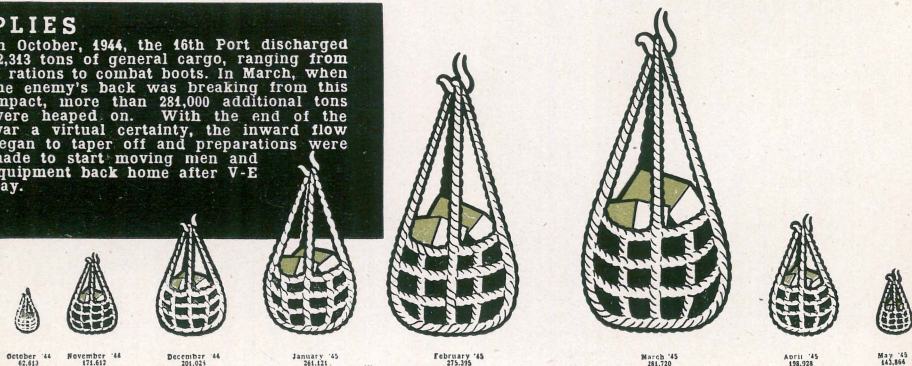
AMMUNITION

In terms of the ammunition unloaded there, Le Havre was a Nemesis of enormous stature, from the enemy's view. In October, 1944, the port discharged 14,336 tons of ammo; in January, when the Allies unleashed their counteroffensive in the Bulge, Le Havre dumped more than 71,000 tons into the supply flume. By then the ammo build-up was so enormous that every shell unloaded after that added insult to already grievous injury.



SUPPLIES

In October, 1944, the 16th Port discharged 62,313 tons of general cargo, ranging from K rations to combat boots. In March, when the enemy's back was breaking from this impact, more than 281,000 additional tons were heaped on. With the end of the war a virtual certainty, the inward flow began to taper off and preparations were made to start moving men and equipment back home after V-E Day.



personnel, were in the combat zone, tackling river crossings under conditions far different from harbor operations. In December they had been sent to Belgium to practice in the swift Meuse river. As the Allied armies advanced, the ducks, laden to the waterline with troops, ammunition, gasoline and supplies, breasted German rivers, including the Rhine and the Elbe, fought off bombing and strafing attacks with 50-caliber machine guns, survived under artillery fire.

Sometimes they spearheaded river crossings with reels of communications cable, stretching back to our artillery. Again they rushed loads of gasoline to the armored forces, deep in enemy territory where ducks shouldn't have followed, according to the rule book. The 459th, forgetting all about the script, even scouted ahead of the tanks, on occasion, and the 469th, which was in Germany longer than the others, zoomed over the famous Autobahnen with loads of supplies.

The 460th, first duck company to cross the Rhine, helped exploit the famous Remagen-bridge toehold by ferrying men and munitions across the stream. Capt. Raymond Newman, commanding the 460th, was awarded the Bronze Star for his work.

Hardest-hit of the duck companies was the 458th, which assisted the 17th Airborne Division across the Rhine and then joined up with the Second Armored Division on the Elbe. The Second Armored hacked out a bridgehead, found itself unable to hold on, and withdrew. Assisting with both the initial crossing and the withdrawal, the 458th stayed in there and pitched until the last man was back across the river, though under constant artillery fire and often handicapped by having to buck the swift current under cover of darkness.

Back at Le Havre, the Rochemont lock, so necessary to successful operation of the harbor, caused some anxious moments during January when one of the inner gates slipped from its lower pinion. Equal to the occasion were the indefatigable 373rd Engin-

eers, who with the 1055th and 1061st Port Construction and Repair Groups, quickly repaired the gate and strong-armed it back into place.

Busy as was January, it transpired that its accomplishments were only a preview to those of foreshortened February. In those 28 days, 275,395 tons of cargo — 62 percent above the target — were unloaded ; 200 ammunition trains were dispatched to forward areas and 204,977 troops disembarked. Ammunition unloaded from ships was 20 percent above January's total. In all respects, it was the biggest month Le Havre had ever seen, even during peacetime.

One of the outstanding events of the month was the record unloading of the SS. *Marine Eagle*. In 52 hours, 30 minutes working time, 4,844 tons of tanks, halftracks, and wheeled vehicles, plus a small amount of mail and miscellaneous freight, were lifted from the hold by ship's gear and lightered to shore.

The duck companies of the 131st Quartermaster Battalion, Mobile, virtually wearing a path through the water, on Feb. 9 eclipsed their record of Jan. 22 by churning 2,277 loads to shore, accounting for 4,484 tons of cargo.

Other milestones were touched when the first REX (Rapid Express) shipment arrived at Le Havre, consisting of 24 tons of mittens, and the Liberty ships *Lou Gehrig* and *Samuel Johnson* put in with cotton, rice, copper and other civil imports, the first to reach Le Havre since 1940.

BOMBS AWAY

MARCH was a month of stabilization rather than of continued upward climb, yet a tremendous volume of work was accomplished by the Operations Division, under Col. William Salman. Materiel and supplies discharged from ships reached 281,720 tons — almost 100 percent above the target — and a new mark for unloading railroad equipment was attained when 15 locomotives and nine tenders were taken off ships.

NEGRO TROOPS

The success of the 16th Port's operations at Le Havre cannot be chronicled faithfully without special recognition of the loyal and indefatigable contributions of the attached Negro troops. Negro port battalions, amphibian truck companies and similar units literally carried the supply battle on their backs during the grim, grueling days when the armies were calling for more and more of everything.



The Tancarville Canal, which by-passed shoals at the mouth of the Seine, was opened to barge traffic and a fleet of specially adapted LCT's began river operations between Le Havre and Paris. The speed of these craft netted a saving of several days over slow-moving barges.

At the beginning it had not been planned to handle any considerable volume of mail at Le Havre, but gradually the port grew into a busy postal center which, by March, was handling 80 percent of the mail coming to the continent. Letters by the millions and packages by the hundred thousand were expedited from ship-side to U. S. troops by the 17th Postal Regulating Section and its attached units. Both the Port authorities and the ETOUSA Postal Division commended the 17th PRS for its swift, smooth handling of mountains of mail.

Recognition for the outfit which bullied the ripped and shattered harbor into shape was tendered by the Commanding General, Com Z, to the 373rd Engineer General Service Regiment commanded by Col.

Frank F. Bell in the form of a Meritorious Service Unit Plaque. It was the first such award made in the Le Havre area. Accompanying the plaque was a citation, reading in part :
« The superior performance, untiring efforts and incessant devotion to duty displayed by the personnel of the 373rd Engineer General Service Regiment were in keeping with the highest tradition of the armed forces of the United States. »

The reputation of the Port for prompt delivery of priority items was enhanced further 22,035 tons of bombs were rushed to air depots in response to serious needs of the Air

Invaluable in any port, floating cranes were especially useful at Le Havre. This one is unloading a heavy truck onto a steel barge.

The 16th Port worked in a city from which the guts had been wrenched.



Corps. It was an increase of 81 percent over the best previous month for this category of ammunition and earned a commendation from the Chief Ordnance Officer, Com Z, who also expressed appreciation for the accuracy with which the bombs had been documented, which meant that the shipments could be handled with no waste motion after reaching their destinations.

The muscular, aggressive Port organization also racked up some new highs in the handling of refrigerated cargo. So expeditiously was meat, butter and other food moved from ships to mess kitchens that troops in the front line sometimes were eating newly arrived pork chops, chicken or steak before the last load was lifted from the reefer holds.

The procession of broken records had started back in February when the reefer ship *Great Republic* was unloaded in 99 working hours, using only ducks to haul the cargo from ship to rail cars and reefer vans. Early in March, the *Surprise* was stripped in 83 hours, and thus warmed to their work, the men tore into the *Shooting Star* and unloaded her in 71 hours, by far the best record in the ETO. Approximately 4,800 tons were carried on each ship.

The unloadings were supervised by the Third and Fourth Squads of the 3093 Quartermaster Refrigeration Company, with M/Sgt. James J. Walsh at the top, Cpl. A. B. Parsons in charge of the Third Squad, and Cpl. Donald Vidale in charge of the Fourth. The duck shuttle was operated by the 467th, 468th, and 478th Amphibian Truck Companies, and the reefer vans by the 287th, 291st, 483rd and 486th Mobile Refrigeration Companies.

In the background of all the Port's accomplishments was the 103rd Port Marine Maintenance Company, a top-notch organization which did electrical and machine shop work, plus diving and rigging assignments and the maintenance of tugs and towing launches.

THE SHADOW DEEPENS

As the year lengthened it cast a darker shadow over Germany, and with victory in clear sight the stream of supplies pouring into Europe through the 16th Port and similar Transportation Corps installations began to slacken : Enough reserve stocks had piled up to enable the armies to finish their jobs without stint. Yet, though there was a decrease in tonnage unloaded at Le Havre during April, the port still exceeded its target by 27 percent, and rail and truck shipments to the combat zone remained heavy because local stocks were drawn on.

To make success emphatic, nine additional ships' berths were provided in the Bassin Vetillart, convenient to the Cotton Warehouse and Hangar 13 ; if it had been necessary to step up unloadings because of sudden developments in the field, more facilities than ever would have been ready. Additional storage space also was provided for incoming supplies not immediately needed at the front.

Though an ETO record had been set the previous month in the unloading of the reefer ship *Shooting Star* in 71 working hours, there was a conviction abroad that the last word in reefer unloadings hadn't yet been uttered, so when the *Surprise* reappeared with 4,856 tons of refrigerated cargo, she was pounced on like a letter from home and stripped to the bare boards in 54 hours. This was 17 hours better than the previous Le Havre record and 33 hours under the best reported time for England, where quayside unloading facilities were available.

Duck companies participating were the 467th, 470th, 815th, 817th and 818th, of the 131st Quartermaster Battalion, Mobile. The railroad cars and reefer trucks which hauled the cargo away from the port were loaded by the 485th Port Battalion. Civilian stevedores on board the ships were in charge of T/Sgt. Jack Quin of the 52nd Port, who received a letter of commendation for his work from Colonel Salman.

Another GI who turned in a neat accomplishment during the month was T/Sgt. Richard S. Schuba, marine maintenance chief of the 332nd Harbor Craft Company. Sgt. Schuba designed and supervised the construction of a marine railway for drawing small ships out of the water for repairs, added an ironic touch by using captured German equipment to build the railway.

The second 16th Port outfit to receive a Meritorious Unit Plaque was the 580th Port Company, cited for accomplishments at Morlaix during the preceding winter. At that time the 580th was working with the Fifth Port, which took over Morlaix, St. Michel-en-Greve and other harbors when the 16th moved to Le Havre.

The citation accompanying the plaque read in part: « During this period, despite extremely adverse weather conditions, rough seas and the fact that operations were confined entirely to lightering, this unit, by outstanding devotion to duty set a record for daily cargo discharge and contributed largely to successful attainment of the operational target set for their port ». At the time the citation was earned, the 580th was commanded by Lt. Benjamin Patrick.

During critical stages of the fighting in Germany duck companies were sent from Le Havre to aid in river crossings. Here is a duckload of gasoline at the famous Remagen bridgehead.





By rail and truck, the Service Forces rushed gasoline, lifeblood of our mechanized armies, to the slashing advance columns.

Improvements in the communications system within the port were continued by the Signal Section, which used, in part, electric cables that had been installed by the Germans without the knowledge of the French population.

The maintenance of friendly relations between U. S. forces and the French was furthered by the Port Planning and Liaison Section. This office arranged periodic meetings between U. S. Army authorities and French Army, Navy and civilian officials. In this way mutual problems were amicably discussed and close co-operation established among the various groups.

In anticipation of an entirely different mission for the Port at the end of the European phase of the war, which seemed imminent, plans were made to change Le Havre from a receiving point to a port of embarkation for more than 3,200,000 American soldiers on the continent. There was to be no slack period for the 16th.

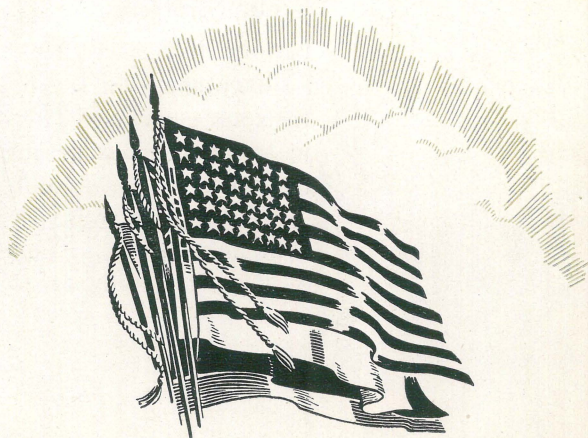
—AND ONE TO GO

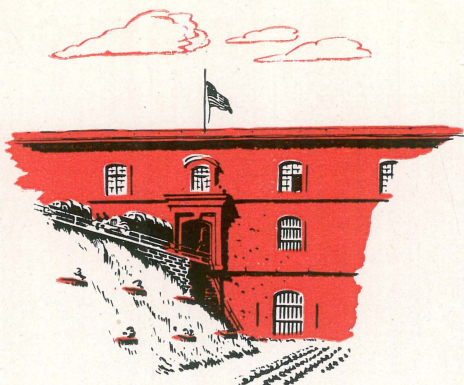
THE solstice notwithstanding, Spring arrived for Le Havre and for the world on May 8. The monotonous strand of days and nights of working and fighting and tiredness had at last paid out; the fabric of victory in Europe was a bright, gay tapestry, but it was no magic carpet. It was, rather, a bookmark in a volume yet to be finished.

V-E Day was observed by the Port and its attached units with a parade through the downtown area of Le Havre. Including forces from the U. S. Navy, the French Army and Navy and local civilian groups, about 15,000 persons marched through streets still scarred by war. Flags of the Allied nations, many of which had been hidden during the years of German occupation, blossomed from buildings, and the shield of the Third Republic decorated lamp posts along the way.

The interlude of celebration was quite brief, though, because Le Havre had been designated one of the two ports of embarkation for the continent, and plans had to be perfected speedily for the turn-around. As a matter of fact, troops had been embarking from Le Havre for some time; these were rotation troops bound for furloughs in the States, and other soldiers headed for brief leaves in England. The swift Allied slashes into Germany also had liberated many American soldiers confined to prison camps, and the advance guard of these was en route home via Le Havre. Altogether, more than 65,000 troops embarked through the port during May, and this was just a token of the immense movement to come. In addition, 143,864 tons of supplies came in on ships, because even in victory the armies had to be fed and clothed.

The reversal of flow included supplies and





equipment no longer needed in the European theater but of first importance in other parts of the world. The port quartermaster outloaded 75,200 tons in this category during the month and prepared for a substantially larger movement. Though Le Havre was to be used mainly for embarking troops — heavy stuff such as tanks and artillery was to be shipped through another port — there yet was a considerable volume of equipment which travelled with the troops. This required sorting and checking and marking to make certain that it was put on the right ships.

Port reconstruction plans, by May, had reached a point where it was possible to install five new portal cranes and to open the Basin Vauban to barge traffic. These improvements lifted the port's potentialities to a new height.

From the « Forgotten Front » returned the 468th Amphibian Truck Company, which, except for one platoon left at Le Havre, had been in the Gironde Estuary assisting the French in cleaning out German resistance pockets. The 468th, a colored outfit, aided in an amphibious assault on the Isle D'Oleron which came off so successfully that Capt. William J. Redmond, commanding, was awarded the Croix de Guerre with palm. Back in Le Havre, the company resumed its task of moving cargo from ships to storage areas.

A PORT OF EMBARKATION

THE operation of a port of embarkation, the 16th's new role, consisted of much more than merely marching soldiers up a gangplank. Staging areas at which troops are prepared for overseas movement are the responsibility of an embarkation port, and the areas in the Le Havre district were designed to accommodate well over 100,000 men. For the personnel operating these camps, for the troops engaged at the port itself, and for men awaiting shipment back to the U. S., an Information and Education program embracing many courses of study was organized.

A rifle range was built for troops freshening up their marksmanship, additional housing had to be arranged at the camps, and measures taken regarding health, sanitation, recreation, policing, messing, the exchange of currency, the pickup and delivery of mail, and the many other functions of an embarkation port. It was a whale of a job, served up on comparatively short notice, but it was accomplished.

As a Port of Embarkation, Le Havre is speeding thousands of troops back to the States. Bon voyage, fellows!



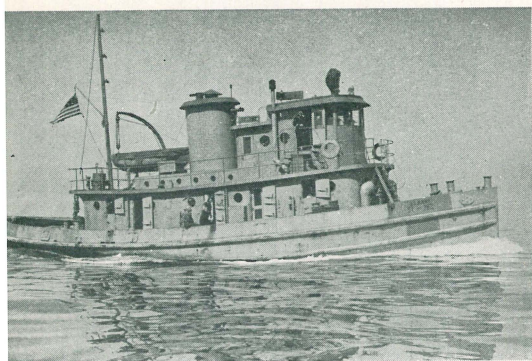
On May 24, Headquarters Company of the 16th Port celebrated its second anniversary of activation with a banquet in the courtyard of the Ecole Pratique, principal company billet. There was, except for this slight interlude of retrospect, no time for dwelling on the accomplishments of the preceding 24 months, filled though they were with genuine accomplishment. Troopships in the harbor were pointing toward the Pacific. It was two down, but there still was a big one to go.

That remaining big one, Japan, became the target for all the vast accumulated strength of the United Nations, and the 16th Port, though far removed from the Pacific theater, threw its weight into the effort by embarking troops at an amazing rate for the States and further training.

From D-Day, when the task of uprooting the Nazis seemed superhuman, through V-E day, when a continent was wrested from slavery, to V-J Day, when the final hour of triumph smiled on our armies, the 16th Port was in the thick of the accomplishment, carving boldly its own brilliant chapter of the Supply story. Good soldiers, the men of the 16th Port and its attached units dug in after victory over Japan to finish up their tasks in Europe and return to their home, there to acquit themselves as good citizens of a great nation.

This hard-working harbor craft is a U. S. Army small tug of the type which is indispensable around a busy seaport.

The J-boats, though frail-looking, are husky little fellows used to carry personnel and messages to ships anchored in the harbor.



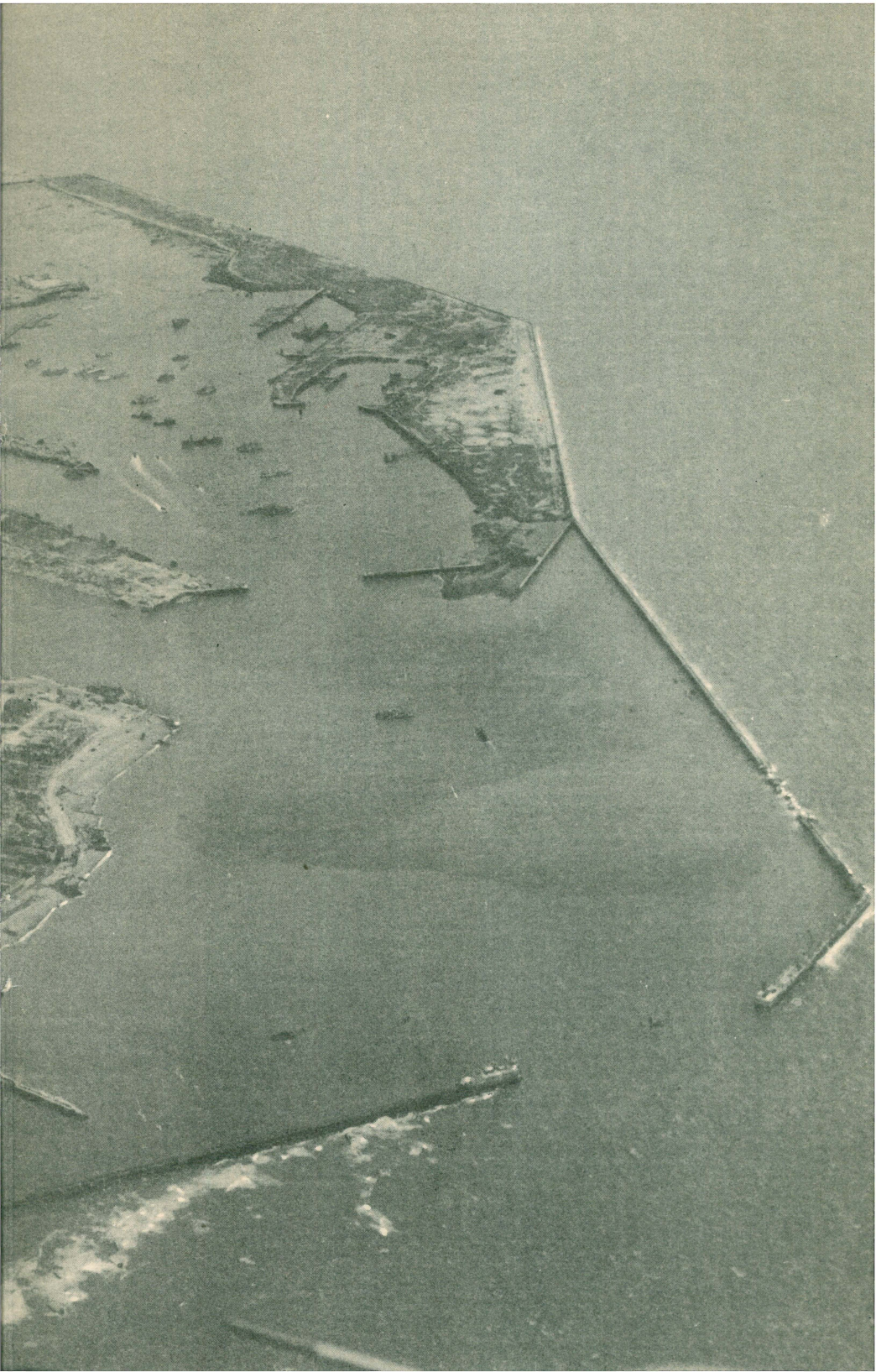


SHORTLY after V-J Day, and at a time when port activities were at a new high — the millionth GI redeployed from the European Theater had just passed through Le Havre, and the charts showed that two-and-a-half million tons of supplies had been unloaded there — the officers and men of the 16th Port were awarded the Meritorious Service Unit Plaque, the payoff for months of aggressive operation. The citation accompanying the award stated that the 16th Port had « achieved an outstanding record of performance. The perseverance, unswerving loyalty and tireless effort demonstrated by its personnel were in keeping with the highest traditions of the armed forces of the United States. » Added Colonel Weed, informing his men of the award : « The entire personnel of this organization is to be congratulated for the tireless co-operation and enthusiasm which have made the award possible. »



Bower, Alex
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