

**Everette F. Coppock III  
CSM, US Army, Retired  
Transportation Corps**

**517th Port Battalion  
(14<sup>th</sup> Transportation Port Battalion)  
World War II**



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On 5 November 1943, one thousand fire breathing Soldiers and a dozen pugnacious Privates of the 517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion (later the 14<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion), boarded the SS Explorer and arrived in Glasgow, Scotland on 16 November. On the 18<sup>th</sup> they arrived at Camp Sea Mills to work at Bristol's Avonmouth docks, the troops were steadfast of conduct, by tenacity, and endurance from the beginning of receiving the pre-staged materials and cargo that set the platform of logistic Quartermaster stocks for World War II. Their skill sets demanded labor support for all the inbound merchant vessels through English, Irish, Scottish and Welch ports as most troops were exhausted, their appetite was unbridled and ambition unmeasured as they labored. Viewing across the deep blue Atlantic Ocean one could see hundreds of vessels staged offshore, anchors dropped waiting for their call up to enter the deep seaports. A ring of barrage balloon battalions viewed the ocean from high above. While U.S. and British destroyers hunt submarine moved along at a slow and steady pace utilizing sonar technology, and Army Air Force Anti-submarine Warfare (ASW) aircraft utilizing Naxos radar detector from the skies above. Intelligence efforts and reports such as Ultra, had also played a major role in finding, tracking, and destroying enemy submarines curtailing the

threat and guiding ASW toward greater success. One could see officers utilizing binoculars on the bridge of a destroyer on convoy escort duties keeping a sharp look out for enemy submarines during the battle of the Atlantic that began in 1941. In October 1943, three of the companies shifted work to the Barry docks while the fourth company moved to Cardiff docks. The sounds of stevedores rigging, stowing, and lifting cargo nets by cranes were a site to see with their hand signals but to hear too with whistles at the docks. Cargo vessel dock turnaround time was clocked at 16 hours. Longshoremen, gear hobbler operators and welders keeping up with the rapid pace, as U.S. military truck and civilian Lorrie operators headed to warehouse locations far into the countryside locations speeding in the process. There forklift operators waited their turn in the processes. The Port Battalions rotated in shifts in proving the labor requirements.

The end of shift came quick in each passing day, the drive back to base camp. The quick shower and a hot meal did wonders for morale. Tentage and Nissen Huts were being placed at each American base camp while some troops were placed into English homes. The US Army built a large camp in the spring of 1942 to house troops that serviced the docks.

On 7 April 1944, the battalion commander was relieved of command, and a battle-hardened North Africa, Sicily and Italy campaign experienced commander takes control. There was intense activity in preparation for the Normandy landings. The 10<sup>th</sup> Replacement Depot (aka Repo-depo) had its challenges filling vacant slots in each line company throughout the campaigns. Most men selected for the port companies replied they could not swim, the clerk replied, "wear a life preserver", next. The skill sets required span from truck driver, crane operator, stevedore, welder, railroad warehousemen, train conductors, train engineer, mechanic, cook, to medical staffing.

The Barry and Cardiff docks were an embarkation point for troops in the second and later waves of the Normandy invasion. Porthkerry Park was used as a vehicle park and ordnance storage. The 15,000 long tons of equipment, including 1,269 vehicles, and 4,000 troops were carried from the docks to Normandy.

The troops caught up on sleep while the companies were staged for five days at English ports waiting for the pernicious weather to lift. The battalion loaded on LST, LSM and LSIs on 2 June 1944 with their equipment and waited. The idle time was occupied by smoking cigarettes and writing letters to loved ones back home. Or to their new girlfriend in a nearby town. As the vessels departed on Operation Neptune, at 0030, Tuesday, 6 June 1944 the short ride on a vessel a veteran noted that the ships stank of diesel oil, vomit everywhere and had backed-up toilets. Troops cadging cigarettes to cover the stink. Just ahead the destroyers USS Texas and Arkansas plus five British destroyers opened their 14 and 16 inch guns at 0550 at Point du Hoc and other identified targets, along with the remaining armada. The German shore artillery folies of fire, and Sudka dive bombers blazing across the skyline. The barrage balloon brigade watched and reported from above. The vessel operators fired the ma duce M2 50 caliber in a

torrent of fire at enemy aircraft as they stretched across the water headed to the shoreline marked Red Beach. Muzzle flash, booming aftershocks, underwater mine obstacles, a mine sweeper here then there, buoys marked the inward attack lanes, hand and arm signals, the raucous beat of unmuffled boat engines. The USS Texas fired 255 shells in just 34 minutes for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Ranger Battalion along with the 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. The USS Arkansas targeted Longues-sur-Mer.

Battle hardened Soldiers from the North Africa, Sicily, Italy, and Southern France Campaigns were redirected to England just a week before, then launched on to Omaha Beach, and were some of the first to land on the beaches serving on their fourth campaign. Good luck, keep your head down! Aim to kill! Grave registration companies at full throttle. While beach station field hospitals only see red. Then on to 2000-year-old Norman cobblestone roads. The fratricide, Medevac'd soldiers, killed in action reports, Soldiers lost at sea, repo depo replacements, railroad train operations, crane cables slinging cargo repeatedly, cargo netting, loading cargo trucks and rail cars that keep leadership under the gun. All the while, as V-2 German rockets blow up the amphibious craft next to you minute by minute. Smoke is intense, smell of burnt powder and flesh, death everywhere. The Platoon Sergeant and Platoon Leader shuffle paperwork on their field desks for the company commander to request replacement Soldiers for the new battalion commander's signature. From dog tags, letters of condolence, the night is short, the light dim, the unfiltered Camel cigarette tastes good. The Soldiers are vigorous, reliable, and very dedicated to the nation. Battle maps cover the field desk, congestion of itineraries, a canteen cup filled with hot coffee as the smell fills the air, it's almost midnight.

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## Distinguished Unit Insignia

### Description

A gold color metal and enamel device 1 1/16 inch in width overall consisting of a gold fleur-de-lis in front of a red annulet and crossed in the center by a horizontal wavy blue bar bearing a gold lion passant guardant between two white five-pointed stars; issuant upward from behind

the annulet a pair of white wings and below it a gold scroll with the word “RELIABLE’ incised into it.

### **Symbolism**

The red annulet is symbolic of the wheel, the basis of all transportation. The fleur-de-lis in gold represents the unit’s service in Northern France in World War II and the loin is for action in Normandy. The wavy blue bar symbolizing water recognizes participation in the Rhineland Campaign and is reminiscent of the unit’s origin. Each of the two white stars represents five of the unit’s Korean Campaign credits and the wings indicate the Battalion’s support to the Army’s aviation program.

### **Background**

The distinctive unit insignia was approved on 12 April 1967.



Coat of Arms

## **Blazon shield**

Gules (Brick red), a vol Argent surmounted by a fleur-de-lis or charged with an annulet Gules; on a chief wavy Azure fimbriated of the second between two mullets of the like lion passant guardant of the third.

## **Crest**

From a wreath Argent and Gules (Brick red) an arc of thirteen swords points down and conjoined of the first gripped or and overall, an equilateral triangle of the fimbriated Vert entwined by an oriental dragon Gules.

## **Motto**

RELIABLE

## **Symbolism**

Shield

## **Shield**

Brick red and golden yellow are the colors traditionally used by the Transportation Branch. Red is emblematic of valor and sacrifice. The annulet is symbolic of the wheel, the basis of transportation. The fleur-de-lis in gold represents the unit's service in Northern France during World War II and the lion is for action in Normandy. The wavy blue bar symbolizing water recognizes participation in the Rhineland campaign. Each of the two white stars represents five of the unit's Korean campaign credits and the wings indicate the battalion's support to the Army aviation program.

The coat of arms was approved on 26 June 2003. It was amended to correct the symbolism of the crest in July 2010.

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Following the bombing of the U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on 7 December 1941, the United States entered its largest war ever. To mobilize its vast resources and deploy them simultaneously across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans created the greatest demands ever on military transportation assets. Consequently, transportation was a critical factor in dictating the Allies' strategy. The magnitude of transportation demands required functional experts.



Initially titled as the 2034th Port Battalion, Camp Myles Standish, Taunton, Massachusetts 1942. The unit was renamed the 517th Port Battalion in January 1943, Transportation Corps.

Constituted 9 February 1943 in the Army of the United States as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 517th Port Battalion, Transportation Corps

Activated at T Camp in Sea Mills, (a suburb of Bristol), England on 18 February 1943.

Reorganized and redesignated 26 November 1944 as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 517th Port Battalion, Transportation Corps

Inactivated 25 June 1946 at Antwerp, Belgium

Redesignated 29 September 1948 as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 14th Transportation Port Battalion, and allotted to the Regular Army, Transportation Corps

Activated 13 October 1948 at Camp Stoneman, California, Transportation Corps

Redesignated 24 July 1950 as Headquarters, Headquarters and Service Company, 14th Transportation Port Battalion, Transportation Corps at Kunsun, Korea until January 1955.

Inactivated 25 June 1955 in Japan

Redesignated 9 May 1956 as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 14th Transportation Battalion, Transportation Corps

Activated 25 May 1956 at Fort Story, Virginia

Inactivated 28 March 1963 at Fort Story, Virginia

Redesignated 29 July 1963 as Headquarters and Depot Supply Company, 14th Aircraft Depot Battalion, Transportation Corps

Activated 11 August 1963 at Atlanta Army Depot, Georgia

Reorganized and redesignated 25 June 1965 as Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 14th Transportation Battalion, Transportation Corps

Inactivated 30 April 1972 at Oakland, California

Activated 16 October 1988, in Vicenza, Italy as the 14<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion (Movement Control), Transportation Corps

Inactivated July 2012, in Vicenza, Italy.

## **CAMPAIGN PARTICIPATION CREDIT**

### **World War II**

Normandy  
Northern France  
Rhineland

### **Korean War**

UN Defensive  
UN Offensive  
CCF Intervention  
First UN Counteroffensive  
CCF Spring Offensive  
UN Summer-Fall Offensive  
Second Korean Winter

Korea, Summer-Fall 1952  
Third Korean Winter  
Korea, Summer 1953

### **Vietnam**

Defensive  
Counteroffensive  
Counteroffensive, Phase II  
Counteroffensive, Phase III  
Tet Counteroffensive  
Counteroffensive, Phase IV  
Counteroffensive, Phase V  
Counteroffensive, Phase VI  
Tet 69/Counteroffensive  
Summer-Fall 1969  
Winter-Spring 1970  
Sanctuary Counteroffensive  
Counteroffensive, Phase VII  
Consolidation I  
Consolidation II  
Cease-Fire

### **War on Terrorism**

Global War on Terrorism

### **Afghanistan**

Consolidation I

## **DECORATIONS**

The Army of Occupation Medal is a military award of the United States military which was established by the United States War Department on 5 April 1946. The medal was created in the aftermath of the Second World War to recognize those who had performed occupation service in either Germany, Italy, Austria, Japan or Korea. The original Army of Occupation Medal was intended only for members of the United States Army, but was expanded in 1948 to encompass the United States Air Force shortly after that service's creation. Germany clasp, 9 May 1945 to 5 May 1955.





WWII Victory Medal



American Defense Medal, 8 September 1939 until 7 December 1941, for service members who were on active duty for 12 months during the period, included the National Guard and Reserves.



American Campaign Medal



Army Good Conduct Medal



European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal



French Croix de Guerre with Palm, World War II, and a unit Streamer embroidered NORMANDY.



FRENCH CROIX DE GUERRE WITH PALM, awarded under Decision No. 758, 25 May 1945, by the President of the Provisional Government of the French Republic, with the following citation: The following units are cited for exceptional war services rendered during the operations for the liberation of France: 6th Engineer Special Brigade, including all units assigned to this Brigade, or attached to it, which were a part of Assault Forces O & B, and which were engaged in the assault on the Normandy beaches. The 185<sup>th</sup>, 284<sup>th</sup>, 285<sup>th</sup>, 797<sup>th</sup>, 798<sup>th</sup>, 799<sup>th</sup>, 800<sup>th</sup> Port Companies and the HQs 517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion. General Orders 43, page 55 and 56, Department of the Army, Washington 25 D.C., dated 19 December 1950.

Go to: [DA\\_GO\\_1950-43\\_\(WWII\\_Foreign\\_Unit\\_Awards\).pdf](#) (army.mil).

Cited in the Order of the Day of the Belgian Army for V-2 rocket action at Antwerp.



## "WITH WHOM WE SERVED"

Unfortunately, records of units who served with us in England are unavailable. The order awarding the Belgian Croix de Guerre to the 15th Port and attached units, fortunately gives us a list of those who were with us in Belgium during the long bombardment. The Belgian decree follows:

DECREE OF DECEMBER 7, 1946, N° 3254ter.

The Port Units of the armed forces of the United States in service at the Port of Antwerp, who participated in the defense of the port and city against the flying bombs, including:

Headquarters and Headquarters Company 15th Port;  
Headquarters and Headquarters Company 5th Port;  
228 Army Postal Unit;  
22 Postal Regulating Section;  
358 Engineer General Service Regiment;  
1598 Engineer Utility Detachment;  
1592 Engineer Utility Detachment;  
694 Engineer Base Equipment Company;  
1072 Engineer Port Repair Ship Company;  
1218 Engineer Fire Fighting Platoon;  
1717 Engineer Floating Power Plant;  
138 Finance Disbursing Section;  
134 Finance Disbursing Section;  
345 Medical Composite Section;  
350 Medical Composite Section;  
29 Field Hospital 30 General Hospital;  
119 Ordnance Bomb Disposal Squad (Separate);  
120 Ordnance Bomb Disposal Squad (Separate);  
121 Ordnance Bomb Disposal Squad (Separate);  
Headquarters Detachment 793 Military Police Battalion;  
Company "A" 793d Military Police Battalion;  
Company "B" 793d Military Police Battalion;  
Company "C" 793d Military Police Battalion;  
Company "D" 793d Military Police Battalion;  
8037 Quartermaster Bakery Company;  
995 Signal Service Company;  
3616 Quartermaster Truck Company;  
267 Port Company;  
268 Port Company;  
Hq and Hq Detachment 152d Quartermaster Battalion;  
Hq and Hq Detachment 487th Port Battalion;  
Medical Detachment 487th Port Battalion;  
184 Port Company;  
185 Port Company;  
186 Port Company;  
187 Port Company;  
282 Port Company;  
283 Port Company;  
339 Harbor Craft Company;  
334 Harbor Craft Company;  
345 Harbor Craft Company;  
352 Harbor Craft Company;  
105 Port Marine Maintenance Company;  
Hq and Hq Detachment 517th Port Battalion;  
Medical Detachment 517th Port Battalion;  
797 Port Company;  
798 Port Company;  
799 Port Company;  
800 Port Company;  
284 Port Company;  
285 Port Company;  
Hq and Hq Detachment 519th Port Battalion;  
Medical Detachment 519th Port Battalion;  
302 Port Company;  
303 Port Company;  
305 Port Company;  
290 Port Company;  
291 Port Company;  
3883 Quartermaster Truck Company;  
3583 Quartermaster Truck Company;  
4261 Quartermaster Truck Company;  
3611 Quartermaster Truck Company;  
3610 Quartermaster Truck Company;  
4262 Quartermaster Truck Company;  
3601 Quartermaster Truck Company;  
Medical Detachment 793d Military Police Battalion;

mentioned in the Order of the Day of the Belgian Army, for:

"The courage and devotedness which they showed by working without respite in the Port of ANTWERP during the terrible period of the V1 and V2 from October, 1944 to May, 1945, thereby saving the city and the port from almost complete destruction."

Award orders N-3254ter, 517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion, 517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion Medical Detachment, 185<sup>th</sup>, 284<sup>th</sup>, 285<sup>th</sup>, 797<sup>th</sup>, 798<sup>th</sup>, 799<sup>th</sup> and 800<sup>th</sup> Port Companies for the Belgium Croix De Guerre, 7 December 1946. General Orders 43, page 57, Department of the Army, Washington 25 D.C., dated 19 December 1950.

Go to: [DA\\_GO\\_1950-43\\_\(WWII\\_Foreign\\_Unit\\_Awards\).pdf](#) (army.mil).

Meritorious Unit Commendation (Army), Streamer embroidered KOREA 1950-1951



Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation, Streamer embroidered KOREA 1950-1952

Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation, Streamer embroidered KOREA 1952-1953



Meritorious Unit Commendation (Army), Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1965-1966

Meritorious Unit Commendation (Army), Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1966-1967

Meritorious Unit Commendation (Army), Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1967-1968

Meritorious Unit Commendation (Army), Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1968-1970

Meritorious Unit Commendation (Army), Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1971-1972



Army Superior Unit Award, Streamer embroidered 1990-1991

Army Superior Unit Award, Streamer embroidered 2001-2002



Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm, Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1970-1972

Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm, Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1970-1972

Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm, Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1970-1972





Republic of Vietnam Civil Action Honor Medal, First Class, and a unit Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1971



517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion, 6th Engineer Special Brigade, shoulder patch.



517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Engineer Brigade pocket patch.



517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion, 6 ESB hat pin

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WW2 Eagle discharge lapel pin



517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion Soldiers reported to Camp Myles Standish, Taunton, Massachusetts, starting in 1943. REF: [www.bing.com](http://www.bing.com).

Constituted 9 April 1943 in the Army of the United States as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 517th Port Battalion, Transportation Corps

Activated 4 June 1943 at Shirehampton, England

Reorganized and redesignated 26 November 1944 as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 517th Port Battalion

Inactivated 25 June 1946 in Antwerp, Belgium

Redesignated 29 September 1948 as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 14th Transportation Port Battalion, and allotted to the Regular Army

Activated 13 October 1948 at Camp Stoneman, California

Redesignated 24 July 1950 as Headquarters, Headquarters and Service Company, 14th Transportation Port Battalion

Inactivated 25 June 1955 in Japan

Redesignated 9 May 1956 as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 14th Transportation Battalion

Activated 25 May 1956 at Fort Story, Virginia

Inactivated 28 March 1963 at Fort Story, Virginia

Redesignated 29 July 1963 as Headquarters and Depot Supply Company, 14th Aircraft Depot Battalion

Activated 11 August 1963 at Atlanta Army Depot, Georgia

Reorganized and redesignated 25 June 1965 as Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 14th Transportation Battalion

Inactivated 30 April 1972 at Oakland, California

Activated 16 October 1988 in Italy

Inactivated at Vicenza, Italy in 2012

## **CAMPAIGN PARTICIPATION CREDIT**

### **World War II**

Normandy  
Northern France  
Rhineland

### **Korean War**

UN Defensive  
UN Offensive  
CCF Intervention  
First UN Counteroffensive  
CCF Spring Offensive  
UN Summer-Fall Offensive  
Second Korean Winter  
Korea, Summer-Fall 1952  
Third Korean Winter  
Korea, Summer 1953

### **Vietnam**

Defensive  
Counteroffensive  
Counteroffensive Phase II  
Counteroffensive, Phase III  
Tet Counteroffensive  
Counteroffensive, Phase IV  
Counteroffensive, Phase V  
Counteroffensive, Phase VI  
Tet 69/Counteroffensive  
Summer-Fall 1969  
Winter-Spring 1970  
Sanctuary Counteroffensive  
Counteroffensive, Phase VII  
Consolidation I  
Consolidation II  
Cease-Fire

### **War on Terrorism**

Global War on Terrorism

### **Afghanistan:**

Consolidation I

## **DECORATIONS**

Meritorious Unit Commendation (Army), Streamer embroidered KOREA 1950-1951

Meritorious Unit Commendation (Army), Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1965-1966

Meritorious Unit Commendation (Army), Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1966-1967

Meritorious Unit Commendation (Army), Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1967-1968

Meritorious Unit Commendation (Army), Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1968-1970

Meritorious Unit Commendation (Army), Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1971-1972

Army Superior Unit Award, Streamer embroidered 1990-1991

Army Superior Unit Award, Streamer embroidered 2001-2002

French Croix de Guerre with Palm, World War II, Streamer embroidered NORMANDY.

Cited in the Order of the Day of the Belgian Army for action at Antwerp.

Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation, Streamer embroidered KOREA 1950-1952

Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation, Streamer embroidered KOREA 1952-1953

Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm, Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1970-1972

Republic of Vietnam Civil Action Honor Medal, First Class, Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1971

## **March 1942**

In March 1942, the Army created a Transportation Division under Colonel (later Major General) Charles P. Gross in the Services of Supply. On 31 July 1942, under the authority of Executive Order 9082, the Army established the Transportation Corps as a separate branch. The new branch acquired the deep-draft fleet, railroads, stevedores, and harbor craft units from the Quartermaster and Engineer Corps.

## **February 1943**

The 517th Port Battalion with 1,000 men was activated at Camp in Sea Mills, England (a suburb of Bristol) on February 18, 1943. This is interesting, because the five other port battalions researched were all activated in the US. Initially titled the 2034th Port Battalion, the unit was

retitled the 517th in June 1943. The first commander was Major Donald N. Cereface. The battalion was composed of Headquarters Detachment, and A, B, C, D companies.

The enlisted men all came from replacement depots in England. So, basically these GIs were shipped to the UK after their basic training in the States. These guys were shipped to the UK not knowing what kind of unit they would end up in. The uncertainty leading up to their assignment in the port battalion must have been frustrating. The port battalion's companies were distributed over several English and Welsh ports and towns. They were shifted around quite a bit before the Normandy invasion. While working on the Welch and English Ports another winter front comes in, the boreal winds blasted Soldiers faces and hands. The pernicious weather lasted for weeks as the hands-on training began.

### **HHD, 517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion**

Major, Donald N. Cereface the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Commander (relieved)

SGM, MSG, Joseph R. Winters

LTC, Harold E. Bonar the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Commander

A Company was commanded by 1LT, James J. Powell and 1SG, SFC, John Gordon. The enlisted replacements came from the 10th Replacement Depot in Litchfield, England. The company's first duty was to maintain railroad tracks and roadbeds in the US Army depots at Newbury, Thatcham, Aschurch, Sudbury, Highbridge, and Burnham-on-the-Sea.

B Company, commanded by Captain Russel J. Morton and 1SG, MSG, Joseph Adams, was composed of enlisted men transferred from the 761st Engineer Railway Operating Battalion and the 10th Replacement Depot (aka Repo-Depo). This company's duty was to operate railway engines at all the same US Army Depots as A Company, along with the depot at Burton-on-Trent.

C Company was commanded by 1st Lieutenant George Gilman. Jr. and 1SG, MSG, John Killara. All personnel came from the 10th Replacement Depot.

On 28 February 1943, HQ, HQ detachment, and C Company moved from T Camp to the newly built Camp Sea Mills (previously occupied by the 2034th Port Battalion).

D Company was created on 29 February 1943. It was commanded by Captain George Oliver and 1SG, SFC, William Train. Once again, the enlisted men were supplied by the 10th Replacement Depot. It was posted at Camp Sea mills.

### **March 1943**

On 25 March 1943, C Company moved from Camp Sea mills to Hayes Lane Camp, Barry Glamorgan, South Wales. Here the company discharged cargo from supply ships at the Port of Barry, Wales.

### **April 1943**

The 284th Port Company, 505th Port Battalion, was activated in the spring of 1943. The company trained at Camp Myles Standish, Taunton, Massachusetts and worked in the Port of Boston. On 5 November 1943 the battalion boarded the SS Explorer and arrived in Glasgow, Scotland on 16 November. On the 18th they arrived at Camp Sea Mills to work at Bristol's Avonmouth Docks. More pernicious weather set in.

### **June 1943**

Battalion redesignated as the 517th Port Battalion, Transportation Corps.

The 285<sup>th</sup> Port Company is reassigned to the 517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion. The 285<sup>th</sup> was located on the River Severn at Southsidewood, Gloucestershire, England.

### **July 1943**

On 19 July 1943, the scattered detachments of A Company relocated to Manchester, England. The company unloaded cargo from supply ships at the Manchester Ship Canal.

On 19 July 1943, the scatted detachments of B Company relocated to Camp Sea mills, in Sea mills, England to unload ships at the Avonmouth Docks.

On 30 July 1943, D company moved to Barry, Wales. The company unloaded ships at the Port of Barry. This seaport was under the jurisdiction of the US Army 11th Port of Embarkation.

### **September 1943**





517th Port Battalion at Hayes Lane Camp in September 1943. Nissen huts are a prefabricated steel structure originally for military use, especially as barracks, made from a half-cylindrical skin of corrugated iron. Inventor Major Peter Norman Nissen. It was used also extensively during the Second World War and was adapted as the similar Quonset hut in the United States.

### **Docks at Barry**

During World War II (1939-1945), the docks at Barry were used to import war materials. A ring of barrage balloons protected the docks. One was located on the Mole, and one was beside Barry Island Station. The very first air raid in Barry was on 2 January 1941, where 90 to 100 incendiary bombs were dropped on the central and western areas of Barry and Cardiff port and dock areas. German bombs fell and hit houses at the West End of Barry and Barry Road areas. Incendiary bombs also fell over the Moors at Cadoxton and Porthkerry Park. Reports state that an air battle between German planes and British Spitfires could be seen from Victoria Park in Cadoxton. The U.S. Army built a large complex of Hissen Huts in the Spring of 1942. Housing troops that serviced the docks. The 517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion, which consisted of 1,000 Soldiers in four companies, moved to Hayes Lane Camp in September 1943.

On 9 September 1943, D Company moved to Cardiff, Wales. It unloaded supply ships at the Port of Cardiff.

On 12 September 1943, HQ, HQ Detachment, and B Company moved to Hayes Lane Camp,

Barry, Wales. B Company unloaded ships at the Port of Barry, while the HQs managed administration and supply to its four companies.

On 13 September 1943, A Company also moved to Hayes Lane Camp. It unloaded ships in the Port of Barry, Wales too.



A Company, PVT, William Albert Hancock, MOS 271, Longshoreman, 1941-1945, Union County, Mississippi.

### **February 1944**

On 10 February, the command of C Company was turned over to Captain Philip V. Dunbar on the 18th the company moved to the Transportation Corps Training School at Mumbles, Wales for training in amphibious operations with the 1st and 5th Engineer Special Brigades.

### **March 1944**

On 12 March, C Company completed training and returned to Barry, Wales.

On 13 March, B Company moved to Torquay for amphibious training with the 6th Engineer Special Brigade.

### **April 1944**

On 7 April, Major, Donald N. Cerefice was relieved of command and was replaced by LTC, Harold

E. Bonar. Bonar had been in command of the African American 490th Port Battalion. On 4 April the A, B, C, and D companies were re-named as the port companies.

In April of 1944 the companies moved to Transportation Corps Training School at Mumbles, Wales. Including the 284<sup>th</sup> and 285<sup>th</sup> Port companies.

During this period there was constant talk of invasion, not alone by the military chin of command, but newspapers, radios, people in the street, the air war was being stepped up, and the American 8th Air Force was hammering the coast of Pas de Calais, France every day. With two companies undergoing amphibious training, there was a growing awareness that the 517th Port Battalion was to take part in the Invasion of Europe. It was on 10 April, that this organization received notification that it was alerted and was attached to the First United States Army for operations with the 6th Engineer Special Brigade.

### **Exercise Tiger**

With two-line companies taking part in Exercise Tiger; the ill-fated invasion practices off Slapton Sands, a D-Day dress rehearsal proved as fatal as Omaha Beach to around 700 Allied sailors and soldiers who died in a training exercise at a friendly British beach. Speedy German attack vessels called E-boats became aware of the maneuver and attacked the Allied flotilla, sinking several ships with torpedoes. Some survivors who went on to storm the beaches of Normandy later recalled that the Exercise Tiger fiasco was more terrifying than D-Day itself.



The LST 507 crew. Photograph by Winfred Polzin.

During the buildup phase of TIGER, eight LSTs in a convoy were caught by German E-boats which torpedoed and sank two, causing a loss of life greater than that later suffered by the assault troops during initial attack on Utah Beach. The final account of this incident must

consider naval records not available in the European Theater, but Army records indicate that the following took place.

During the night of 27-28 April 1944, eight LSTs in convoy T-4 were proceeding at about five knots per hour off Portland. The craft were scheduled to participate in the buildup phase of the exercise. They had travelled almost due east of their points of departure, Plymouth, and Dartmouth, had turned around, and were proceeding westerly toward Bruxham. They were loaded with troops of the 1st Engineer Special Brigade (ESB), the 4th Infantry Division, and VII Corps. Presumably the LSTs were escorted by one corvette, but this vessel does not seem to have been in the vicinity during the action. The night was dark but clear, with no moon. At least one LST was equipped with radar and reported that two unknown vessels were approaching, but it was assumed that these were craft belonging to the convoy.

Times given for the attack vary between 0130 hours and 0204 hours 28 April. The attackers, believed to have been E-boats, were never positively identified, and it is not known whether the two picked up by the radar constituted the whole enemy force. LST 507, the first attacked, was hit by several torpedoes which failed to explode, then was set afire by a direct torpedo hit. Another struck five minutes later. The enemy craft strafed the decks with machine guns and fired on men who had jumped into the water.

About the same time, LST 531 was hit, ablaze, then capsized. Flares were seen to drop, but LST officers did not know whether the planes were enemies or Allied. Some survivors stated that they heard anti-aircraft fire, but there is no evidence of bombs being dropped. LST 511 was struck twice by torpedoes which failed to explode.



LST 289 at Dartmouth Harbor, England torpedo damage. Photograph by US Navy.

About 0210, LST 289 was hit by a torpedo which destroyed the crew's quarters, rudder, rear guns, and tug towed back to port. The commanding officer of the 478th Amphibious Truck Company (DUKW aka Duck), Transportation Corps, a 1st ESB unit, suggested to LST officers that the vessel's ramp be put down and personnel be taken off in the company's DUKWs. This plan was considered but abandoned when flooding was brought under control. LCVPs (Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel) were put over the side to steer the LST, and it made Dartmouth under its own power at 1430 hours.



478<sup>th</sup> Amphibious Truck Company, beach landing marker during Exercise Tiger. Photograph by Winfred Polzin.

Other LSTs put on full speed and escaped, although LST 515, according to Army records, turned and picked up 132 survivors several hours later. LSTs 507 and 531 belched black smoke continued to burn and floundered at 0230 as Sailors were now in the water. Deck guns were not manned, although some shots were fired by Navy personnel. The crafts burned for about two hours, LST 531 floundered at 0217. At 0400 a British destroyer arrived and picked up survivors. Its captain ordered that LST 507, which contained petroleum 5-gallon jerry cans exploded, and floundered. The enemy did not suffer any known casualties or damage.

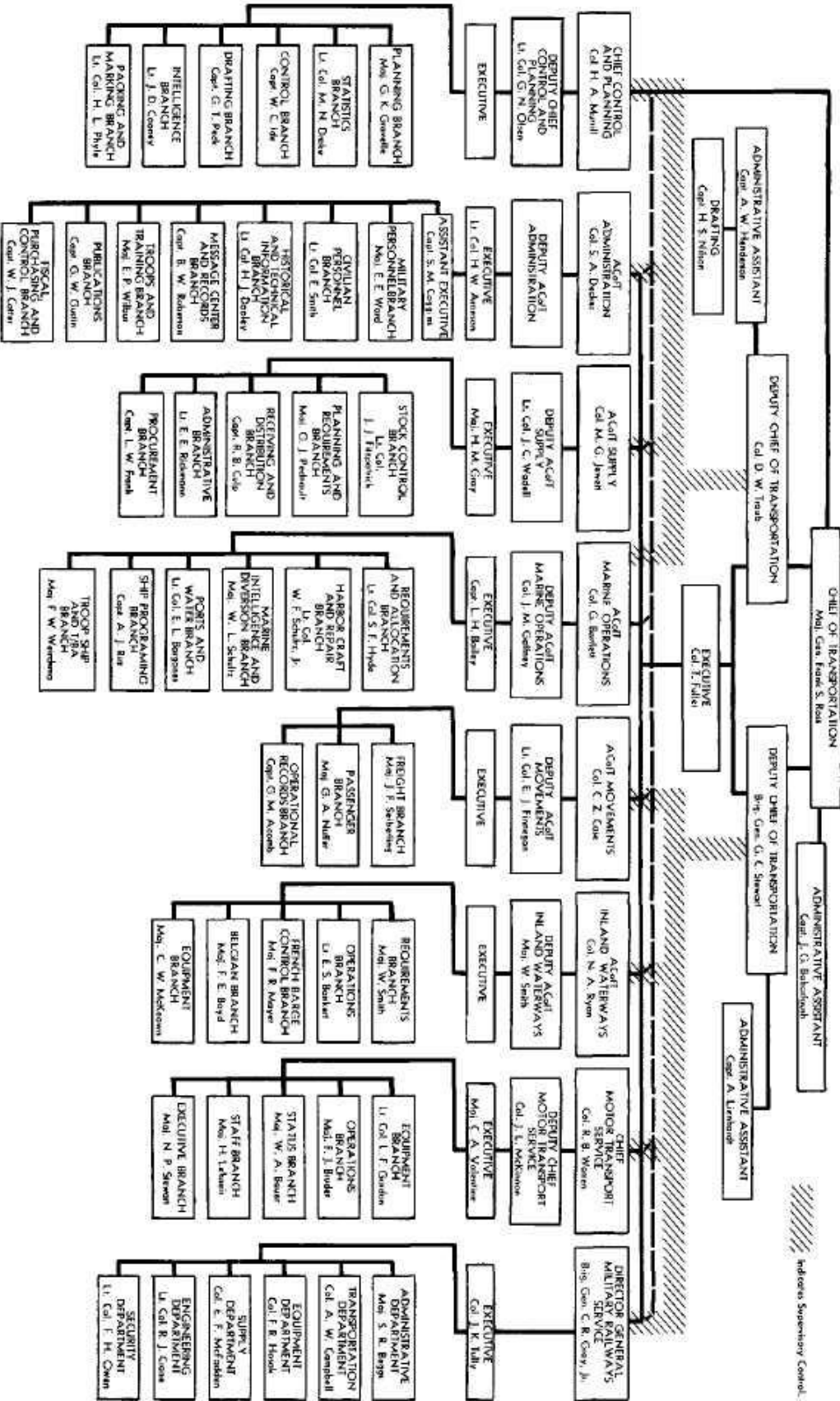
Most of the casualties were from LST 531. There were only 290 survivors of 744 soldiers and 282 sailors. Aboard LST 507 there were 13 dead and 22 wounded. The 1st ESB suffered most heavily in the action with 413 dead and 16 wounded. The 3206th Quartermaster Service Company was virtually wiped out, 156 missing in action (lost at sea), 39 killed in action, and nine wounded. The 557th Quartermaster Railhead Company had heavy losses, 48 killed in action, 25 missing in action (lost at sea) and one wounded in action. 478<sup>th</sup> Amphibious Truck Company (DUKW), 15 killed in action, 13 missing in action (lost at sea), and one wounded in action.

A complete list of casualties is not available, but Army records, possibly not complete, state that 749 were killed and more than 300 either injured or suffering from severe exposures.

These service members are buried or identified on the Tablet of the Missing at the Cambridge American Cemetery and Memorial, Madingley Road, Coton CB23-7PH, Cambridge, United Kingdom.

### **May 1944**

The 517th Port Battalion relocates to Perth, South Wales, where it remained until the 30th. Packing everything they owned into containers, which would later join them on or about 25 June 1944.





## Transportation Chief May 1944 Organizational chart

### **June 1944**

The invasion marked the largest amphibious landing since the Persians under Xerxes invaded the Greek mainland in 480 B.C.

The operation would be conducted in three phases:

In Phase 1, D-Day to D+14, one US Corps and a British army of two corps would hold off German attacks from the east while two other American corps capture Cherbourg.

In Phase 2, D+15 to D+40, one British and one Canadian army would defend to the east, one US army would face south, and another US army would capture the seaports of Brittany.

In Phase 3, D+41 to D+90, two Allied army groups controlling four armies would push eastward to the Seine, and southward to the Loire.

Post OVERLORD, plans were revised so often, both before and after the landings, that no detailed description will be attempted. But one basic assumption was common to them all. The Germans would contest all major river crossings and attempt to hold every favorable terrain feature. The Allies would probably have to make a thirty-day pause at the Seine while supplies were built up for a future advance. Another pause at the Somme-Aisne line would be necessary. The advance to the Rhine would require a full year, at the average rate of less than two miles per day. This forecast was not an inflexible plan, but primarily a yardstick for computing requirements. It was conservative, even pessimistic, and the derived requirements for combat units, replacements, and supplies were very high. This was, overall, an advantage. All the forecasts contained a serious error. The expected slow rate of advance implied that there would be ample time to repair railroads and bridges and that there would be no unusual requirements for motor vehicles. An example of the influence of these studies upon specific plans was the Communication Zone (COMZ) action recommended by the Transportation Corps during the BOLERO period. General Ross had estimated that 240 truck companies would be required, but the G\_4 Section decided that 160 would be sufficient.

REF: <https://history.army.mil>.

To land so many troops so quickly, the Allies would have to ensure complete naval and air supremacy.

The Army conducted more amphibious operations than the Marine Corps during World War II, and the D-Day landing in Normandy would remain the largest amphibious operation of the war. The Normandy landing sites would sustain three armies until the First Army took the deep-draft port of Cherbourg and rehabilitated it a month later. This became the standard for over-the-beach operations.

## **The Air Force**

The 446th Bombardment Group, Davis-Moahan field, Arizona were stationed at Bungay in Suffolk, England and became known as the "Bungay Buckaroos". The 446th was organized as part of the Second Air Division, to fly B-24 Liberators from eastern England against occupied France, the Lowlands and Germany.

Pre-bombing the beaches before any landing element reached them was going to be a critical element that would help achieve overall success of the invasion. Without the pre-bombing or softening of the beaches and its defenses, allied casualties could have been catastrophic, or the invasion could have failed. In darkness on the night of June 5, 1944, the 446th maintainers and flight crews began their execution of Field Order 328, making them the lead element for - the 8th Air Force, tasked with the bombing support of the Normandy Beaches. No one needed to share on the importance of their mission. The lives of over 150,000 allied forces relied on the success of their mission.

Now in the pre-dawn darkness of the 446th taxiing for takeoff in their B-24 Liberators, they knew not all of them would return, but that had not deterred them before. This flight - this mission - was the lead element of Operation OVERLORD and the 446th would not falter or fail in their mission. Their mission was not just to soften the beaches of Normandy, but to destroy the Luftwaffe's air combat strength and disrupt rail communications to isolate the designated invasion area in Normandy. This would allow the allied invasion force to focus their efforts on establishing a beachhead on Europe.

The 446th conducted their mission ahead of the invasion force under low visibility due to cloud cover presenting problems for the bombers. At Omaha Beach, the bombing was relatively unsuccessful due to poor visibility. Nevertheless, the 446th bombers hit the beach defenses an H-Hour minus 5 just prior to the allied ground forces landing. At times the bombing was so close to the ground forces some bomber crews feared for the ground forces safety. The 446th was the first of four missions flown by the 20th Combat Wing on D-Day.

## **The Navy**

### **Battleships**

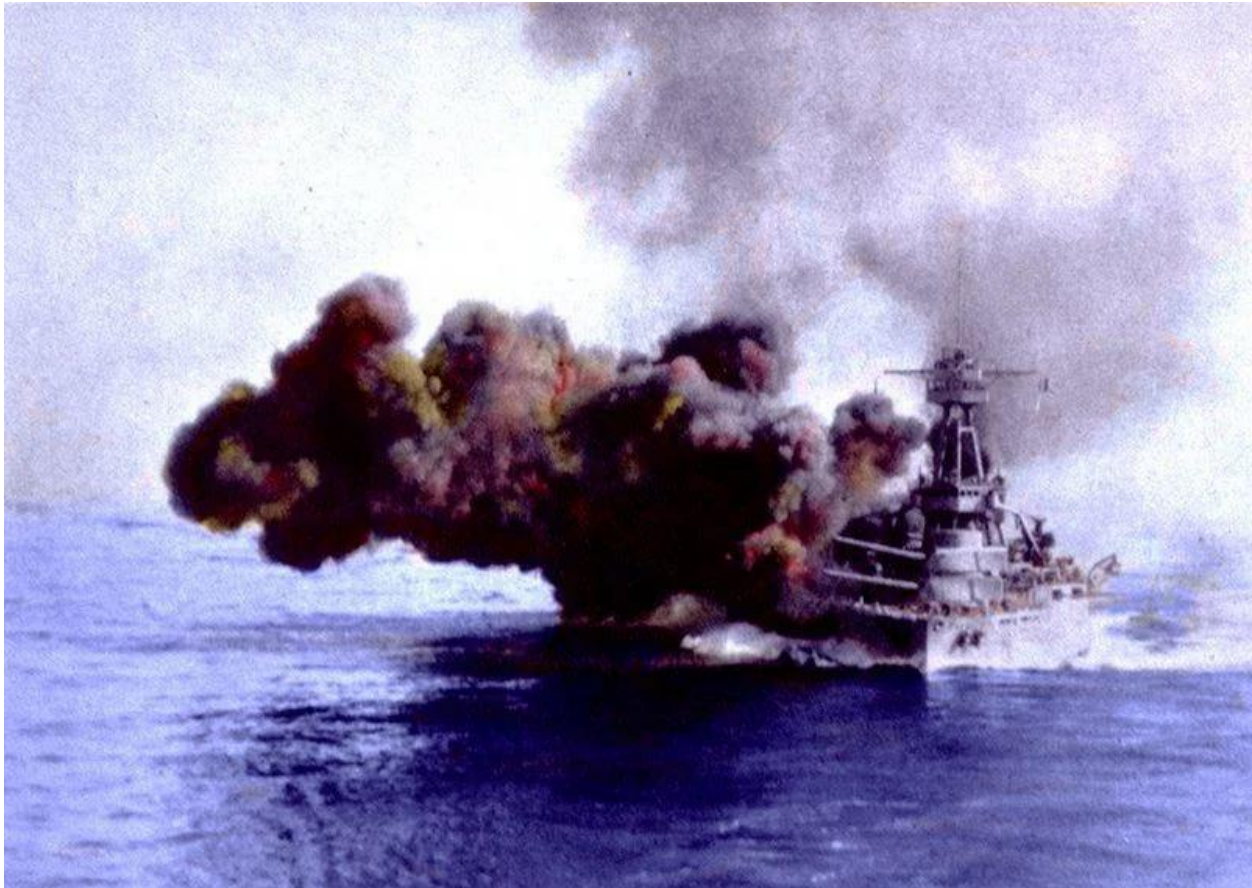
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Seven battleships took part: four British and three US:

- USS Arkansas, eastern Omaha Beach (Wyoming class, 26,100 tons, main armament: twelve 12" guns) primarily in support of the US 29th Infantry Division.
- USS Nevada, Utah Beach (Nevada class, 29,000 tons, main armament: ten 14" guns).
- HMS Ramillies (1915, Revenge class, 33,500 tons, main armament: eight 15-inch guns).

- HMS Rodney (1925, Nelson-class, 38,000 tons, main armament: nine 16-inch guns).
- USS Texas, western Omaha Beach (New York class, 27,000 tons, main armament: ten 14-inch guns in support of the US 1st Infantry Division).
- HMS Warspite (1913, Queen Elizabeth class, 35,000 tons, main armament eight 15-inch guns, only six operational).

In addition HMS Nelson (Nelson class main armament: nine 16-inch guns) was held in reserve until June 10.



USS Texas on D Day, 6 June 1944.

#### Heavy cruisers

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Five heavy cruisers (main guns of 8 inches) took part, three from the United States and two from Britain, HMS Hawkins had her original armament of seven 7.5-inch guns while HMS Frobisher's main gun armament had been reduced from seven to five single-mounted 7.5-inch guns.

- USS Augusta (LTG Omar Bradley embarked)
- HMS Frobisher
- HMS Hawkins
- USS Quincy

- USS Tuscaloosa

### Light cruisers

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17 British light cruisers took part along with two of the Free French navy, and one of the Polish Navy. All carried either 6- or 5.25-inch guns of varying numbers.

- HMS Argonaut
- HMS Ajax
- HMS Arethusa
- HMS Belfast (Flagship of Rear Admiral Frederick Dalrymple-Hamilton)
- HMS Bellona - also carried jamming equipment against radio-controlled bombs.
- HMS Black Prince
- HMS Capetown
- HMS Ceres (Flagship of U.S. Service Force)
- HMS Danae
- HMS Diadem
- ORP Dragon (Polish, damaged in July and then used as a blockship in "Gooseberry" breakwater)
- HMS Emerald
- HMS Enterprise
- Georges Leygues (Free French)
- HMS Glasgow
- HMS Mauritius (Flagship of Rear Admiral Patterson)
- Montcalm (Free French, Flagship of Rear Admiral Jaujard)
- HMS Orion (which fired the first shell of the coastal bombardment)
- HMS Scylla (Rear Admiral Philip Vian's flagship, mined and seriously damaged, out of action until after the war)
- HMS Sirius In reserve until June 10

### German Army

The Crisbecq Battery (sometimes called Marcouf Battery) was a German WW2 artillery battery constructed by the Todt Organization near the French village of Saint-Marcouf in Normandy. It formed a part of Germany's Atlantic Wall coastal fortifications. The main armament was three Czech 21 cm Kanone 39 canons, two of which housed in heavily fortified casemates up to 10 feet thick of concrete. The battery, with a range of 17–21 miles, could cover the beaches between Saint-Vaast-la-Hougue and Pointe du Hoc. The battery engaged US ships on D-Day, 6 June 1944, and was evacuated by the Germans on 11 June 1944 and took no further part in the Normandy landings.



While providing substantial gunfire support for the landing forces at Omaha and Utah on June 6, 1944, the U.S. Navy task force warships navigated mines while also enduring aerial attacks from German Luftwaffe. Enemy E-boats, based out of Cherbourg, France, and U-boats were also an annoyance. USS Corry (DD-463), USS PC-1261, 14 LCTs, 7 LCIs, and LC (FF) - were lost on D-Day, with USS Baldwin (DD-624) among those ships damaged. The destroyers closer to shore focused on shore batteries, radio stations, pillboxes, and fortified homes. Also providing support were battleships and cruisers such as USS Arkansas (BB-33) and USS Texas (BB-35) at Omaha beach while USS Nevada (BB-36), USS Tuscaloosa (CA-37), and USS Quincy (CA-71) supported the landings at Utah beach. German mines, torpedoes, and aircraft damaged numerous U.S. Navy landing-craft and warships. Some named ships lost before and after landing were: USS Partridge (AM-16), USS Osprey (AM-56), USS Tide (AM-25), USS Glennon (DD-620), USS Meredith (DD-726), and USS Rich (DE-695). The cargo ship SS Charles Morgan and the troop transport USS Susan B. Anthony (AP-72) were also lost.

REF: [www.history.navy.mil](http://www.history.navy.mil).

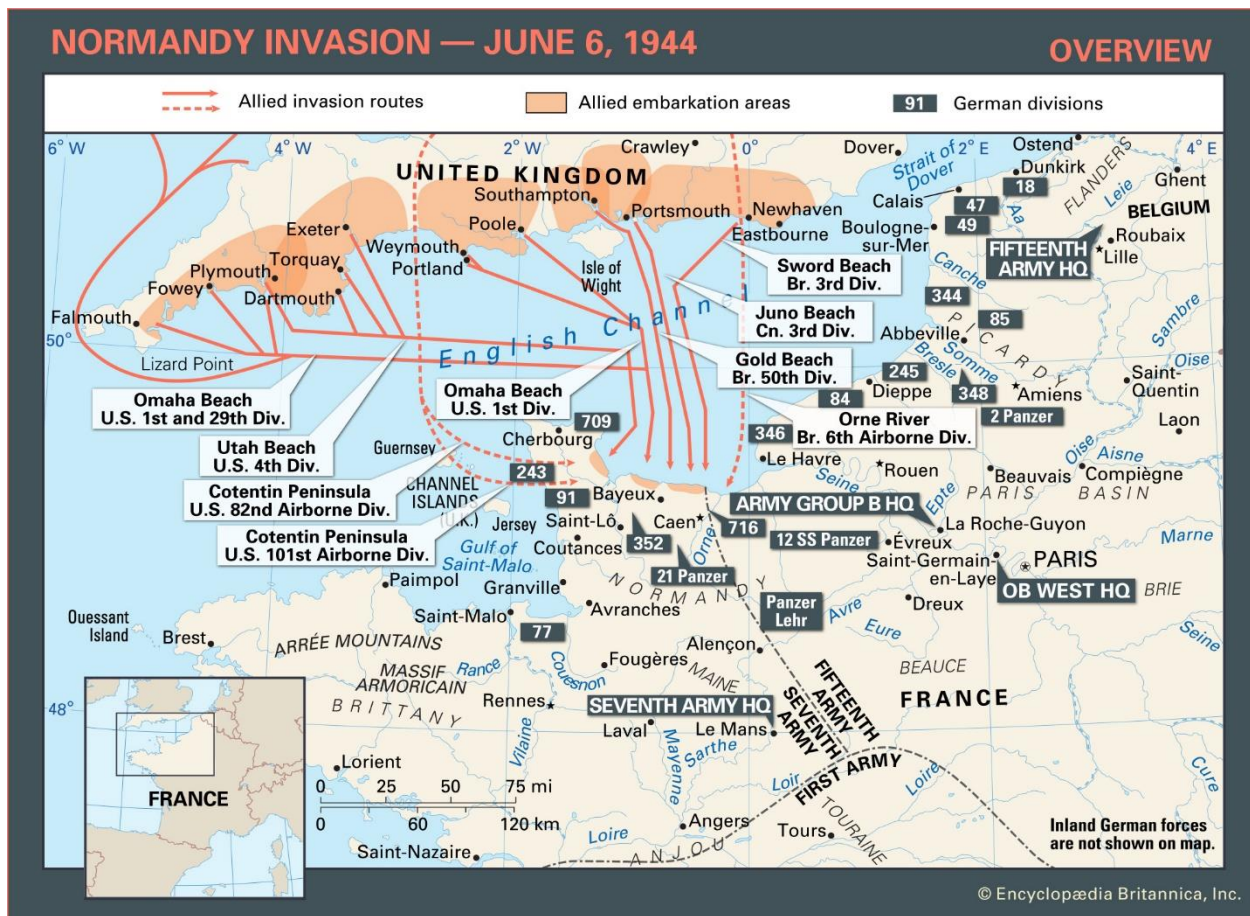
### **Across the English Channel**

The 517th Port Battalion boarded ships on 2 June 1944 of the Allied invasion fleet, sailed and arrived on 6 June 1944. The battalions Soldiers were spread out among the vessels with their equipment.

The 6th Engineer Special Brigade (ESB) was activated on January 20, 1944, and assigned to the U.S. 1st Army. Throughout the first half of that year the Brigade received reinforcements of men

and additional support units. Until the invasion of Normandy, the reconstituted Brigade was involved in training operations in England. There were three Engineer Combat Battalions assigned to the 6th ESB: the 147th, 149th, and 203rd. Along with some supporting units, these battalions landed on Omaha Beach as part of the First Army on June 6, 1944. The remainder of the Brigade landed in follow-up waves throughout that month. After the initial assault on Normandy, the Brigade assisted in the expansion of the beachhead. Most duties for the three Combat Battalions consisted of scouting out and clearing minefields, while the supporting units for the Brigade were involved with the processing of prisoners, transportation of supplies and personnel, and other rear area functions.

REF: [www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov](http://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov).



Normandy landings overview. REF: [Bing.com](http://Bing.com).

A great invasion force stood off the Normandy coast of France as dawn broke on 6 June 1944: 9 battleships, 23 cruisers, 104 destroyers, and 71 large landing craft of various descriptions as well as troop transports, mine sweepers, and merchantmen-in all, nearly 5,000 ships of every type, the largest armada ever assembled. The naval bombardment that began at 0550 that morning

detonated large minefields along the shoreline and destroyed several of the enemy's defensive positions. To one correspondent, reporting from the deck of the cruiser HMS Hillary, it sounded like "the rhythmic beating of a gigantic drum" all along the coast. In the hours following the bombardment, more than 100,000 fighting men swept ashore to begin one of the epic assaults of history, a "mighty endeavor," as President Franklin D. Roosevelt described it to the American people, "to preserve our civilization and to set free a suffering humanity."

Omaha Beach was part of the invasion area assigned to the U.S. First Army, under Lieutenant General Omar Bradley. The assault sectors at Omaha were code-named (from west to east) Charlie, Dog (consisting of Green, White, and Red sections), Easy (Green and Red sections), and Fox (Green and Red sections). The beach was to be assaulted at 0630 hours by the U.S. 1st Infantry Division, with the 116th Regiment of the 29th Division attached for D-Day only.

Landing on Omaha Beach where they faced immediate, horrendous, German Army resistance.

Omaha was wide enough to land two regiments side by side with armor in front, and so the 116th Regiment was to land at Dog (Green, White, and Red) and Easy Green, while the 16th Regiment, 1st Division, was to land at Easy Red and Fox Green.

The objectives of the 1st Division were ambitious. First it was to capture the villages of Vierville, Saint-Laurent, and Colleville; then it was to push through and cut the Bayeux-Isigny road; and then it was to attack south toward Trévières and west toward the Pointe du Hoc. One hundred eighty DUKWs took the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Rangers to the cliffs at Point du Hoc. Elements of the 16th Regiment were to link up at Port-en-Bessin with British units from Gold Beach to the east.



A dozen British and U.S. DUKWs landed on Omaha Beach with 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Ranger Battalions, D Day, 6 June 1944.

From the beginning everything went wrong at Omaha. Special “Duplex Drive” (DD) tanks (amphibious Sherman tanks fitted with flotation screens) that were supposed to support the 116th Regiment sank in the choppy waters of the Channel. Only 2 of the 29 launched made it to the beach. Except for A Company, no unit of the 116th landed where it was planned. Strong winds and tidal currents carried the landing craft from right to left. The 16th Regiment on the east half of the beach did not fare much better, landing in a state of confusion with units badly intermingled.

Throughout the landing, German gunners poured deadly fire into the ranks of the invading Americans. Bodies lay on the beach or floated in the water. Men sought refuge behind beach obstacles, pondering the deadly sprint across the beach to the seawall, which offered some safety at the base of the cliff. Destroyed craft and vehicles littered the water’s edge and beach, and at 0830 hours all landing ceased at Omaha. The troops on the beach were left on their own and realized that the exits were not the way off. Slowly, and in small groups, they scaled the cliffs. Meanwhile, navy destroyers steamed in and, scraping their bottoms in the shallow water, blasted the German fortifications at point-blank range. By 1200 hours German fire had noticeably decreased as the defensive positions were taken from the rear. Then one by one the exits were opened.



Normandy Invasion: U.S. troops moving inland from Omaha Beach

By nightfall the 1st and 29th divisions held positions around Vierville, Saint-Laurent, and Colleville—nowhere near the planned objectives, but they had a toehold. The Americans suffered 2,400 casualties at Omaha on June 6, but by the end of the day they had landed 34,000 troops. The German 352nd Division lost 20 percent of its strength, with 1,200 casualties, but it had no reserves coming to continue the fight. The 517<sup>th</sup> supported and equipped the artificial mulberry harbor at Omaha, troops everywhere in support. Crain operators, stevedores, welders, and mechanics had their hands full the battalion landing at 0745, with the 797<sup>th</sup> and 798<sup>th</sup> Port Companies. Processing of enemy prisoners of war, supply dumps, transportation of supplies and personnel, and other rear area functions.



The 517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion Medical Detachment saw nothing but red in support of the wounded troops, then processed to the 453<sup>rd</sup> Medical Collection Company, 60th Medical Battalion. The overwhelming use of morphine, plasma and bandages was mind boggling as the hail of bullets and exploding 88 shells. The use of tourniquets, other life threatening wounds, psychological damage, chronic tension, and anxiety as the providers assisted those in need. The cries for help, Soldiers crawling around with limbs missing, and the Chaplain giving last rites a site imbedded in one's mind forever. The 3rd Auxiliary Surgical Group, Team 18, had the task of life or limb, nights turned to days as the pace was constant. After 18 straight hours the surgical team moved into a blown-out pill box and continued its mission. The 634th Medical Clearing Company, in the cover of darkness processed evacuated wounded on the next vessel headed back to England.

On D+2, the 517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion crane operators were attempting to unload ammunition by cargo nets from a Liberty ship and were knocked off course by high waves. Assigned to the battalion, Private, William Andrew McKenney rode on a DUKW hit a German landmine, and he was severely injured in his left arm, losing half his wrist and elbow, and spending many months in military hospitals in England. He was sent back to the U.S. and received therapy at a hospital in Oklahoma and awarded the Purple Heart.

Not far from Omaha Beach a temporary cemetery was established at D+5 not far from their company tentage location. Each servicemember personal items were processed by graves registration, a dog tag placed in their mouth, the processor cut open a shirt pocket – one letter addressed back home, one pen, in a pant cargo pocket a lighter and a pack of Camel cigarettes. Cut open a rear hip pocket – one wallet. Then a coating of lime, then wrapped in a blanket waiting for the backhoe to dig out a hole five feet deep, two feet wide, and six feet six inches long. The servicemember then interred. A numbered marker was placed. The graves team would average 500 graves per day.

The 517<sup>th</sup> and its line units drew fuel from the 3820<sup>th</sup> Gas Supply Company which arrived at 1700, driving 10-Ton tractor trailers and GMC CCKC 2.5-Ton trucks off the LSTs onto the beach head of Omaha. Each CCKW held 200 5-gallon cans of fuel and dispatched around the immediate area to designated fuel dumps along the coastline as planned. As the battlefield developed the company relocated east toward Le Cambre and Bayeux, only ten miles from Omaha Beach to establish their fuel dumps.

Some of the Quartermaster trains were broken. But as to no surprise to a Private or Second Lieutenant its warfare is at its very best. Wars between powerful nations have built dynamic, demons, and evil capacity to accelerate across the battlefields. It's a deliberate decision, emotional, life and death. Material items equal total victory. It's our mission to capture victory even at all costs.



Two miles off the Omaha beach head, the 3820<sup>th</sup> Gas Supply Company sets up a fuel dump location. REF: [www.reddit.com](http://www.reddit.com).

**Pointe du Hoc**



Normandy Invasion: Returning Allied bombardment of Pointe du Hoc.

An ominous piece of land jutting into the English Channel, Pointe du Hoc provided an elevated vantage point from which huge German guns with a range of 15 miles could deliver fire upon both Omaha Beach four miles, to the east) and Utah Beach seven miles, to the west. Allied intelligence and photoreconnaissance had identified five 155-mm guns emplaced in reinforced-concrete casemates on the Pointe, and Allied commanders had determined that the neutralization of these guns was the key to the fate of the Omaha and Utah landings. The area of the Pointe was defended by elements of the German 352nd Infantry Division.

The task of neutralizing the guns, and of cutting the road running behind the Pointe from Saint-Pierre-du-Mont to Grandcamp-Maisy, fell to the 2nd and 5th Ranger battalions, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel James Rudder. The scheme was to land Companies D, E, and F of the 2nd Battalion in a cliff-scaling attack on the Pointe while Company C landed to the east to destroy gun positions on the western end of Omaha Beach. While these assaults were taking place, Companies A and B, along with all of the 5th Battalion, were to mark time off the beach and wait for a signal that the cliff scaling had succeeded. If the signal came, they were to follow in and scale the heights. If the signal did not come, they would land at Omaha Beach and attack the Pointe from the rear.



Normandy Invasion at Pointe du Hoc

Companies D, E, and F landed at Point at 0710 hours, 40 minutes later than their planned landing time. They were the victims of heavy seas and winds, one of their landing craft having

sunk on the way in. Once landed, however, the rangers engaged the Germans on top of the cliffs in a heavy firefight, and within minutes the first man was up. In small groups the rangers fought their way to the casemates, only to find them empty of the big guns. They moved forward and cut the road behind the Pointe, and then a two-man patrol went down a narrow road leading south and discovered the guns some 550 yards from the casemates. The guns were zeroed in on Utah Beach, and a German force, totaling some 100 men, was assembled a short distance away. Using thermite grenades, the two rangers melted and destroyed the guns' elevating and traversing mechanisms, rendering the pieces immovable. They then returned to their positions.

The other rangers offshore, not seeing the signal from the Pointe, landed at Omaha Beach but were not able to accomplish their mission of attacking Pointe du Hoc since they became involved in the desperate fighting in Omaha itself. They were, however, a key to the eventual success at Omaha.

Although early reports characterized the attack on the Pointe as a wasted effort because the German guns were not there, the attack was in fact highly successful. By 0900 hours the rangers on the Pointe had cut the road behind the Pointe and had put the guns out of action. They were thus the first American unit to accomplish its mission on D-Day—at a cost of half of their fighting force. By the end of the day, they were holding onto a small pocket on the heights of the Pointe, and the Germans were counterattacking. The rangers held out for two days until help arrived.

Allied forces, however, face a major problem: they are heavily dependent on supplies of life, equipment, ammunition, and petroleum from artificial mulberry harbors. The weather is rather bad on Monday, 19 June in Normandy, and the air support is limited. The artificial harbors of Saint-Laurent-sur-Mer and Arromanches are hard hit by a storm in the English Channel that is gradually increasing in intensity since Saturday, 17 June. The waves destroy the caissons of the outer jetties and run aground in various places. The confusion is immense in the two artificial ports: boats also run aground, some sink and floating bridges break their moorings.

The supply chain to the front is extremely delayed. Storms in the English Channel have always been violent, with the wind whipping the waves in the confined area between Normandy and England. The great storm of 19-20 June succeeded in doing what the Germans had not been able to do.

On 26 June 1944, the beach head is secured and is now designated Headquarters, Omaha Beach Command.

### **Ancient history**

The Seine and Eure valleys were inhabited from Paleolithic times. Their Celtic inhabitants were conquered by Julius Caesar in 56 BCE, and the region eventually became the Roman province

of Gallia Lugdunensis Secunda. Its inhabitants were Christianized in the 3rd and 4th centuries CE and passed under Merovingian Frankish rule in the late 5th century, becoming part of the Frankish kingdom of Neustria.



**Rollo**

The Normandy coast was repeatedly devastated by raids of the Vikings, or Northmen, from the 8th century on, and, as its Carolingian rulers became weaker, the Vikings penetrated farther inland in the course of their depredations. Finally the French king Charles III the Simple ceded the territory around Rouen and the mouth of the Seine River to Rollo, the chief of the largest band of Vikings, in the Treaty of St. Clair-sur-Epte (911 AD). Rollo's Scandinavian countrymen immigrated in large numbers to settle the country, and they adopted the French language, customs, and religion. These Vikings became known as Normans, and the region they settled became known as Normandy.

REF: [www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com).

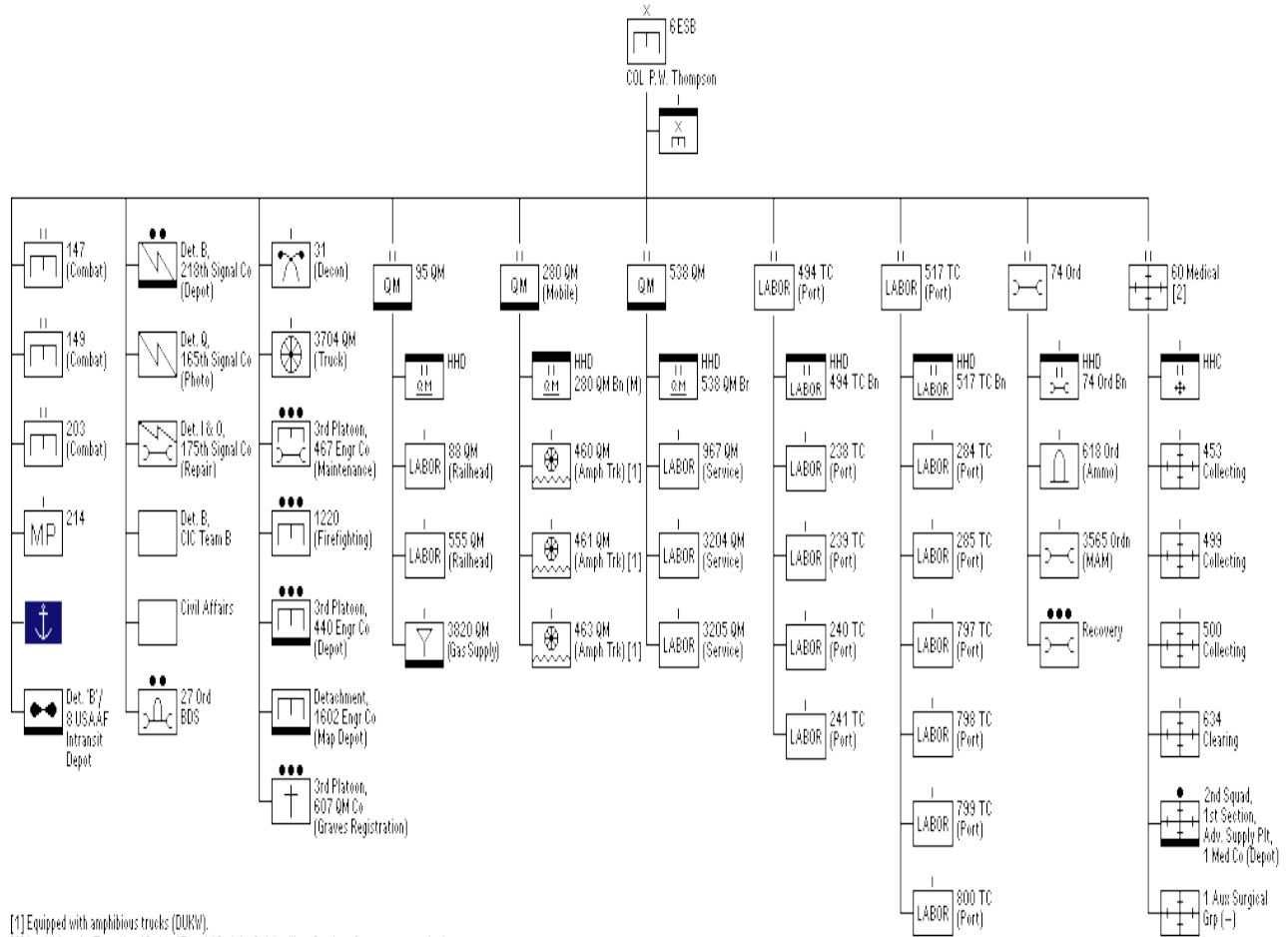


Storming on to Omaha Beach, D Day, 6 June 1944.

**Units assigned on D-Day, 6 June 1944**

- 6<sup>th</sup> Engineer Special Brigade Headquarters
- 147th Engineer Combat Battalion
- 149th Engineer Combat Battalion
- 203rd Engineer Combat Battalion
- 517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion
  - 797<sup>th</sup> Port Company
  - 798<sup>th</sup> Port Company
  - 799<sup>th</sup> Port Company
  - 800<sup>th</sup> Port Company
  - 517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion Medical Detachment
- 60th Medical Battalion
  - 453rd Medical Collection Company
  - 499th Medical Collection Company

- 500th Medical Collection Company
  - 634th Medical Clearing Company
- 214th Military Police Company
- 31st Chemical Decontamination Company
- 293rd Joint Assault Signal Company
- 74th Ordnance Battalion
  - 618th Ordnance Ammunition Company
  - 3565th Ordnance Medium Automotive Maintenance Company
- 538th Quartermaster Battalion
  - 967th Quartermaster Service Company
  - 3204th Quartermaster Service Company
  - 3205th Quartermaster Service Company
- 280th Quartermaster Battalion
  - 460th Amphibian Truck Company (DUKW)
  - 461st Amphibian Truck Company (DUKW)
  - 463rd Amphibian Truck Company (DUKW)
- 95th Quartermaster Battalion (Mobile)
  - 88th Quartermaster Railhead Company
  - 555th Quartermaster Railhead Company
  - 3820th Gas Supply Company



REF: <http://www.niehorster.org>.

The 517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion Medical Detachment is not listed. Unknown how or where it came from, or date reported. However, listed on the issued Belgium award listing.

A V-1 rocket explodes near TEC4, Allen D Shell, goes overboard never to be recovered.

Technician Fourth Grade, Allen D. Shell, service number E-34084971, killed in action on D Day, 6 June 1944 while serving with the 285<sup>th</sup> Port Company, 517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion. He is listed as Lost at Sea on the Tablets of the Missing, Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial, Colleville-sur-Mer, Normandy, France 14710. Home of record Fulton County, Georgia. Awarded the Purple Heart, WWII Victory Medal, American Campaign Medal, Army Presidential Unit Citation, Army Good Conduct Medal, and the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal.





Omaha Beach U.S., Canadian, and British troops landing.

Nearly 20,000 French civilians were killed as “collateral” damage.



DUKW aka Duck a “hog trough”, a simple two-piece lumber with legs assembled to unload cases of ammunition, food, and petroleum much faster at predetermined dump sites.



Ambulances on Whale pier at Arromanches, Mulberry Harbor, Omaha Beach, D Day, 6 June 1944.



Mulberry Harbor, Omaha Beach on D Day, 6 June 1944. Truck convoys headed inland.



A DUKW aka Duck loaded with 507<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment equipment and supplies on D Day, 6 June 1944. Losing 200 men in two days.



LST landing on Omaha beach on D Day, 6 June 1944. Liberty ships filled with cargo and Barrage Balloon Battalion report from the sky.

The approach to Omaha Beach was a site no man will ever forget. The mine sweeper making a final pass, three troops hanging from barbed wire 20 yards from the beach, blood pouring out of reach hole, DD tanks swallowed up in the surf as they sank to the bottom in seconds killing the crew. A friend catching a bullet in the head, another in the leg. The injured troops started to mount up in vast numbers alone. No one man can state all the facts as they happened so quickly. Your heart knows something your eyes do not, as you cry those tears that cloud your sight for all those who lost their lives on 6 June 1944.

A visit to the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial, Colleville-sur-Mer, Normandy, France will make you cry all over again for those who gave it their all.

The 517th Port Battalion set foot on Omaha Beach on 6 June 1944. For the two days prior the port companies had been unloading the supply ships which had transported them across the channel. The companies of the 517th were scattered in separate camps surrounding St. Laurent-sur-Mer. The men of the 517th first lived in simple foxholes, then built little shacks made from "dunnage," wooden boards used as packing material in ship holds. Constructed slit trenches and water points. The battalion's medical detachment was later housed in an abandoned German headquarters building in town.

The day-to-day work of the port companies involved unloading supply ships anchored a few miles at sea. DUKWs aka Ducks an amphibious truck, barges, and landing craft were filled with material and motored back to shore. In the first week the men worked anxiously with the expectation of a German counterattack which never came. The very real threat of German artillery barrages and Luftwaffe fighter-bomber attacks persisted for several weeks. The pace of work was so frantic there was no time for recreation. Four hundred servicemembers are killed or wounded every hour for the first 24 hours.

German aircraft and artillery were a constant threat to the beach. Germany aircraft generally strafed the area at night and in the early hours of 10 June, a dive bomber hit the SS Charles Morgan. It floundered after two days.

**D+3, 9 June 1944, it was getting dark now,** the 499<sup>th</sup> Collection Company and grave registration personnel collecting the dead servicemembers and lying them in single rows of 300 in three separate rows. Grave registration had completed their mission as the bodies were rolled up in grey Army blankets with their boots hanging out of the bottom just as high tide came rolling in. The Germans were sending artillery rounds on to the beach hoping to strike Soldiers or equipment being staged for onward movement by unit troops.

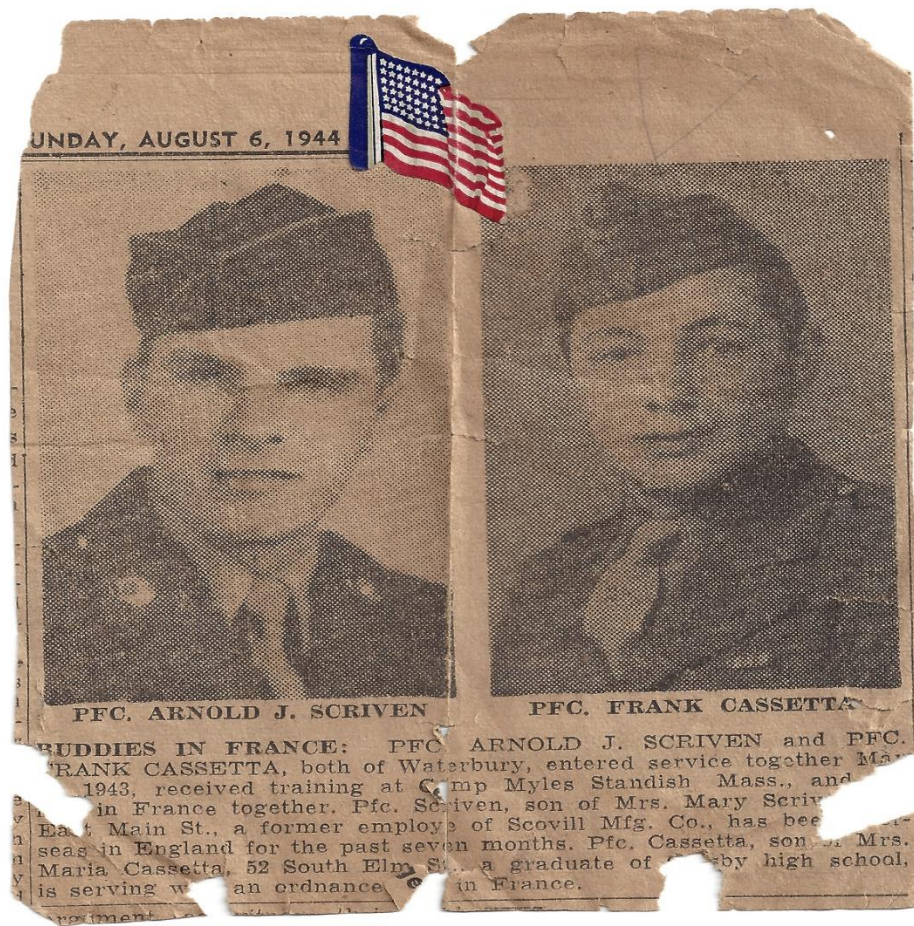
D+21, a V-1 rocket explodes and kills TEC5, Edwin A. Stants while operating a winch.

Technician Fifth Grade, Edwin A. Stants, service number E-35327075, killed in action on 27 June 1944 while serving with the 517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion. Lost at Sea on the Tablets of the Missing, Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial, Colleville-sur-Mer, Normandy, France 14710. Home of record Montgomery County, Ohio. Awarded the Purple Heart, WWII Victory Medal, American Campaign Medal, Army Presidential Unit Citation, Army Good Conduct Medal, and the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal.

An accident between vessel cargo net loads kills PVT, Charles Karkhanian at the Barry docks. It was common practice to rotate back to England in support of the mission.

Private, Charles Karakhanian, service number E-31131559, passed away of non-battle injuries on 27 June 1944 while serving with the 517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion. Buried in Plot F, Row 6, Grave 10, Cambridge American Cemetery and Memorial, Madingley Road, Coton CB23 - 7PH, Cambridge, United Kingdom. Home of record Middlesex County, Massachusetts. Awarded the WWII Victory Medal, American Campaign Medal, Army Presidential Unit Citation, Army Good Conduct Medal, and the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal.

### August 1944



6 August 1944, PFC, Arnold J. Scriven and PFC, Frank Cassetta.

On August 8, the Germans staged a last-ditch counterattack that the Allies repelled. It was the beginning of the end of the Nazi occupation of France. The Allies finally broke out of Normandy a week later on 15 August, and on 25 August, they liberated Paris.

PVT, William D. Logston was killed in an accident on the Barry docks, Wales.

Private William D. Logston, service number E-15042813, passed away of non-battle injuries on 29 August 1944 while serving with the 517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion. Buried in Plot C, Row 2, Grave 4, Cambridge American Cemetery and Memorial, Madingley Road, Coton CB23 - 7PH, Cambridge, United Kingdom. Home of record Indiana. Awarded the WWII Victory Medal, American Campaign Medal, Army Presidential Unit Citation, Army Good Conduct Medal, and the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal.

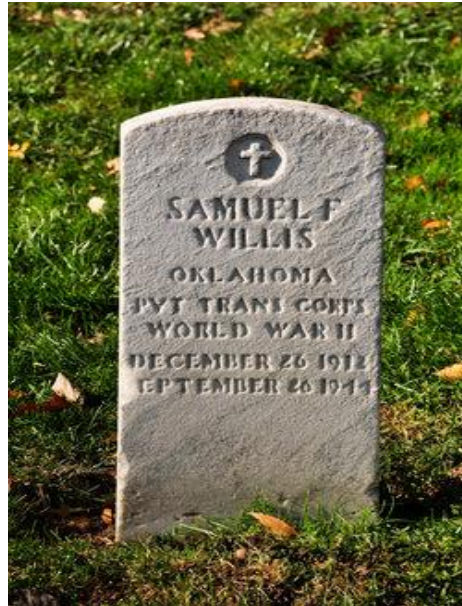


### **September 1944**

While dispatched in support of the mission in Le Mans, France PVT, Samuel F. Willis was killed in an accident on the Sarthe River.

Private Samuel F. Willis was injured in a non-battle event and passed away on 26 September 1944 from his injuries sustained while serving with the 800<sup>th</sup> Port Company, 517<sup>th</sup> Port

Battalion. He was buried in a temporary grave at Saint Corneille-Le-Mans, France. Private Willis was re-interred on 18 April 1949, buried at Arlington National cemetery, Arlington, Arlington County, Virginia, Section 34, Grave 2010. Home of record Comanche County, Oklahoma. Awarded the WWII Victory Medal, American Campaign Medal, Army Presidential Unit Citation, Army Good Conduct Medal, and the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal.



On 8 September 1944, the S.S. Empire Heritage was dispatched from New York to Liverpool and the Clyde with 16,000 tons of fuel oil and 1,900 tons of deck cargo including 45 Sherman Tanks, 30 half-tracks, and 38 cargo trucks was torpedoed twice by the German submarine U-482. All 112 crew members and passengers jumped into the cold water; the S.S. Empire Heritage foundered immediately. The S.S. Pinto who was nearby to attempt a rescue was also torpedoed and floundered, 23 crew members went into the cold water. Some of the survivors from both ships were picked up and rescued by Her Majesty Ship Northern Wave and taken ashore at Derry, Ireland.





Diver explores the cargo of the SS Empire Heritage in a 1995 photograph. Photographs by Barry McGill. REF: Caters News Agency.

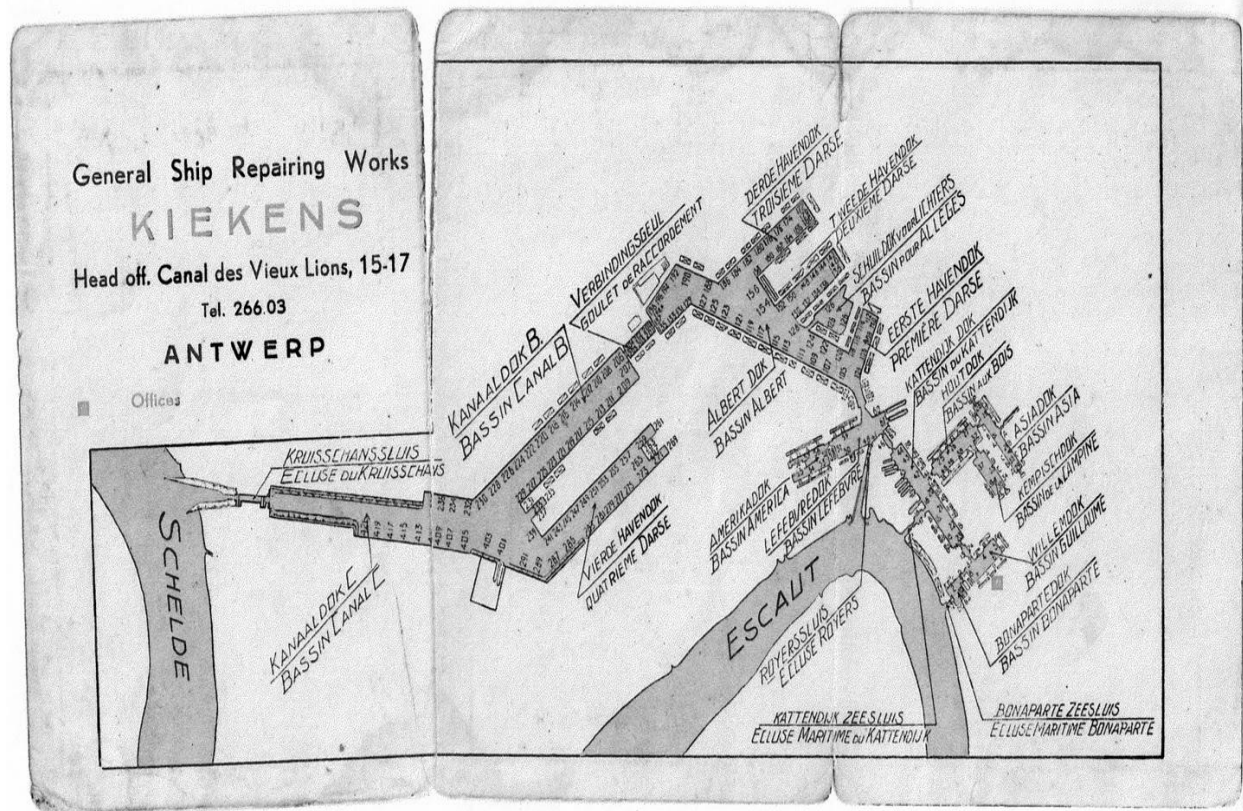
The tanks and trucks are still visible scattered on the seabed next to the wreck. Undisturbed for decades these untouched instruments of war look eerie in their watery graveyard, a chilling reminder of a world at war.



284<sup>th</sup> Port Company, photograph by Charles Morris as the battalion received Pyramid Tents in October 1944 on Omaha Beach.

### **ANTWERP, BELGIUM**

Morale was lifted when the port company men were notified of their transfer to the Antwerp Port, Belgium. They felt rejuvenated for their splendid work on the beach. On November 24, 1944, the 517th loaded unit equipment and boarded trains at Isigny-sur-Mer, France. They arrived at the Antwerp Port on the 29th after a 360-mile journey and an uncomfortable ride in the cramped "40 & 8s" (WWI-era train cars built to hold 40 men or 8 horses).

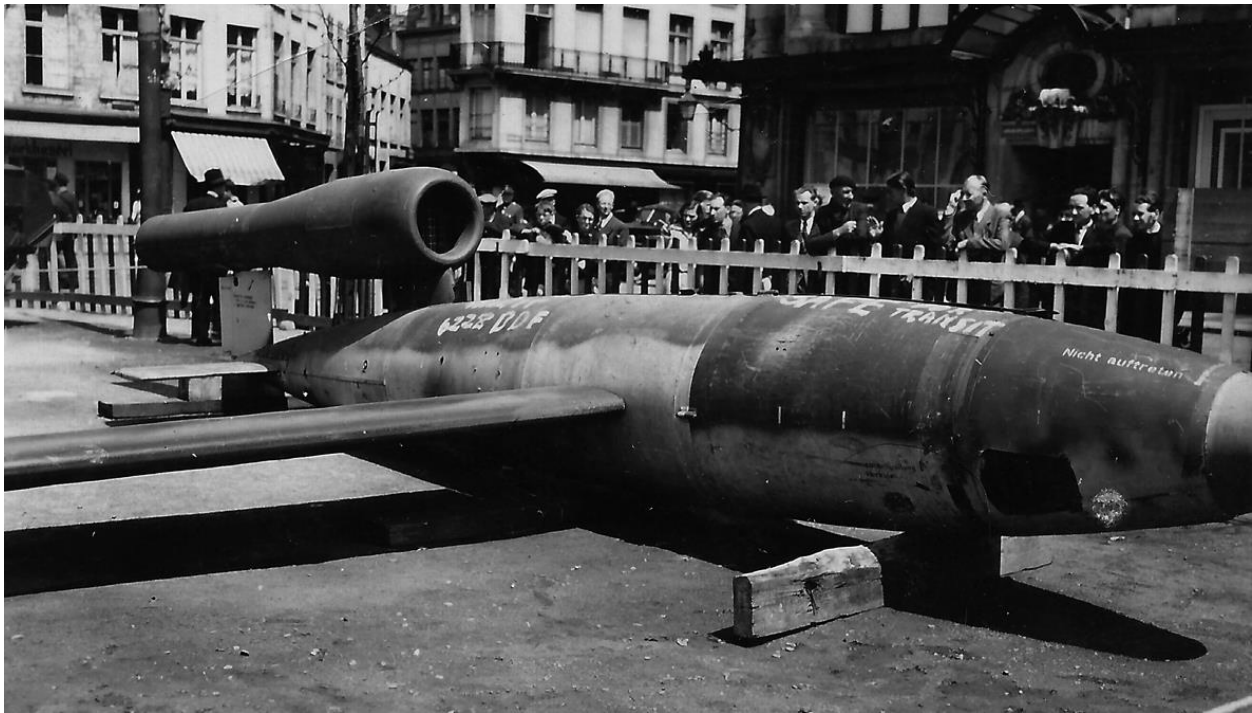


Antwerp Port Map, 1944. REF: <http://3.bp.blogspot.com>.

The battalion moved in to five story apartment complex named Tampico Flats, located near the docks. The 517th Port Battalion Medical Detachment report from August 1945 adds further V-2 rocket detail on the danger:

"The conditions in this sector were a little different than before, and the men had to be trained for another type of warfare. The most serious problem became the psychosis problem. The men in the battalion could do nothing to combat this menace except seek shelter, and the psychological reaction was great. Many men had to be hospitalized because of V-1 and V-2 bombs as psycho-neurotics.

The greatest catastrophe to befall the battalion and in which the medical detachment did great work was in a V-2 bombing of a theater in Antwerp, The Rex Theater. The battalion lost fourteen men, and a greater number in wounded men. The detachment was dispatched to the scene of the incident and carried on rescue work all day and night, doing yeoman's work. There were other occasions when the detachment was called upon to do rescue work, but this was the greatest."



284th Port Company, V-2 rocket photograph by Frank A Cassetta.

The 797th, 798th, and 799th, and 285th port companies' duty was to supervise the Belgian civilian stevedore's discharge of Allied supply ships, the storage of cargo, and the out loading of cargo onto trucks, trains, barges, and deliveries to warehouses.

The 284th and 800th port companies provided guards for trains heading to the front lines, they served as guards in Antwerp's North Yards, and several skilled personnel worked as crane operators and warehousemen.

### **The Expansion of Port Capacity**

The Allied offensive in the summer and early fall of 1944 accentuated the need for developing additional ports. Concentrating their main effort on the eastward pursuit of the retreating enemy, the tactical forces were unable to take Brest, Quiberon Bay, and Lorient on schedule. Other ports of potential importance in Brittany, including St. Nazaire and Nantes, also were denied to the Allies by the stubborn defense of German garrisons. As a result, the northern armies had to rely on the invasion beaches, Cherbourg, and the minor Normandy ports. The facilities barely sufficed to keep the Allied offensive rolling. The probability that over-the-beach operations would be severely curtailed by adverse weather beginning in September lent additional urgency to the problem of securing other suitable deepwater ports.

As previously indicated, delays in implementing OVERLORD plans for port development had caused transportation planners to cast about in search of additional discharge capacity. By the end of July Cherbourg's planned discharge targets had been greatly increased, but much

rehabilitation was required before they could be attained. The minor Normandy ports were also being developed, and proposals were made to develop Cancale, in Brittany, as a substitute for Quiberon Bay. In August efforts were made to open the small Brittany ports that had been captured, including St. Malo, Cancale, St. Brieuc, and Morlaix.

Prospects for major port development in Brittany faded in September, as the enemy continued to cling tenaciously to key points and as the Allied forces drove farther eastward. Early in the month General Ross reported that the Quiberon Bay project was “definitely out,” in view of the impracticability of getting tows from the United Kingdom into the Bay of Biscay at that time of year. Brest was captured on 17 September but was so badly damaged that it was not worth rehabilitating. The Lorient–St. Nazaire area remained in enemy hands throughout the war.

During the same month, meanwhile, the advancing forces had uncovered Le Havre, Rouen, and Antwerp. While Le Havre and Rouen had suffered extensive damage, Antwerp was taken virtually intact, a development that even the most optimistic planner could not have foreseen. The prospective availability of these ports placed the entire matter of ship discharge in a new light.

Until the newly captured ports could be placed in operation, the supply situation remained critical. In a communication to his major commands on 13 September 1944, General Eisenhower expressed his belief that the availability of additional deepwater ports was prerequisite to a final invasion of Germany. The current port situation was such that a week or ten days of bad channel weather might well “paralyze” the Allied effort. To support the Allied forces, Eisenhower stated, it would be necessary to secure the approaches to Antwerp or Rotterdam and to capture additional Channel ports.

Shortly thereafter, in a communication to Eisenhower, General Lee noted that while tactical progress had exceeded expectations, port development was still behind schedule. In Lee’s opinion the development of Brest and the other principal Brittany ports to the tonnage previously planned was impracticable. Since Le Havre was reported seriously damaged and since its location did not materially shorten the lines of communications, he recommended that it be placed in operation as rapidly as possible but with a minimum expenditure for reconstruction. Lee recommended that the major port development be confined to Cherbourg, Le Havre, and Antwerp.

The port problem underwent continuous study during the month, and on 27 September 1944, Communication Zone (COMZ) issued a revised port development directive tailored to the current tactical and logistical situation. The main emphasis was now placed on the development of Antwerp, Le Havre, and Rouen. Under the new plan, Antwerp was slated to become the major British-American port on the Continent. Le Havre would be immediately developed to receive cargo from Liberty ships discharging into DUKWs or lighters, and its capacity would eventually be increased to 7,000 tons per day. Rouen was scheduled to discharge 3,000 tons daily from coasters. Until Antwerp became available, to the south Cherbourg would be used at maximum capacity, and although unfavorable weather would reduce their intake the beaches would have to be kept open. Of the minor Normandy ports, Grandcamp-les-Bains was closed; Granville was designated for coal discharge only; and the

coaster ports of Barfleur, St. Vaast-la-Hougue, and Isigny were to continue in operation on second priority.

By this time, the Brittany ports had ceased to be an important consideration. Regarding Brest, plans were made only for a survey regarding its possible future use and development. Cancale was abandoned before it was opened, and port reconstruction work at St. Malo had stopped. Only Morlaix and St. Brieuc were scheduled for continued operation.

With the opening of Le Havre and Rouen in October, the port situation improved somewhat, making possible the elimination of minor or expensive operations. Early in November 1944 General Eisenhower made available to the French St. Brieuc, Barfleur, St. Vaast-la-Hougue, Carentan, Grandcamp-les-Bains, and Isigny—shallow-draft ports that the Allies no longer required. The invasion beaches, where operations had been severely curtailed by bad weather and high seas, were closed later in the month.

While Le Havre and Rouen furnished some relief, no real solution to the problem of port capacity was possible until Antwerp could be opened. This was delayed until late November because of the difficulty of clearing the Germans from the approaches to the port. During this period the Allies were denied the port facilities and the shortened lines of communication required for the adequate support of the tactical forces.

Once Antwerp came “into production,” port capacity was no longer a serious problem. Thereafter, the emphasis in planning shifted from port discharge to port clearance and inland distribution. The subsequent opening of Ghent increased the port reception capacity on the Continent still further and provided insurance should the enemy interfere with operations at Antwerp. No additional ports were opened until after V-E Day.

REF: <http://tothosewhoserved.org>.

## **December 1944**

At exactly 1523, 16 December 1944, a German V-2 rocket hits the Rex Theater. The Allied soldiers sought recreation in the city after work. The Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA) organizes various performances for British soldiers around the city, including here on the corner of Anneessens Street. So many Allied Soldiers are attending a sold-out movie, Plainsman. Starring Gary Cooper, Jean Author, and James Ellison. A western chasing Indians and a gunrunner. The V-2 rocket killed 567 people, including 296 Allied soldiers from Britain, the United States, Poland, and Canada. Many of the Belgian civilians who died were children who had been taken to see the film. The rocket was one of the hundreds that fell on Antwerp in the winter of 1944. The country had been liberated in September, but the war was far from over for Antwerp. As others servicemembers and medical support arrived and viewed the building as one of the largest and bloodiest V-2 attacks in history. Eleven other buildings were destroyed. The remains were taken to the Antwerp Zoo, where a Grave Registration detachment was dispatched. Fourteen Soldiers from the 517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion were killed.

As the Allies drove the Germans further back into their homeland, Antwerp became a prime target for V-1 and V-2 rockets. As many as six thousand such rockets rained down on Antwerp.

PFC LiPetri was severely injured on 16 December 1944 the German V-2 bombs were scheduled to attack. Most of these men were inside the Rex Cinema and just outside along the neighboring streets, Antwerp, Belgium. PFC LiPetri died two days later 18 December 1944 from his injuries.



799th Port Company, 517th Port Battalion, PFC Ferdinand C LiPetri.

PFC Ferdinand C LiPetri is buried at the Long Island National Cemetery, East Farmingdale, Suffolk County, New York in Plot J, Grave 14723.

TEC5, Marshall E. Harbaugh JR, service number E-33555319, killed in action during a V-2 rocket attack in the Rex Cinema along with others while serving with the 798<sup>th</sup> Port Company, 517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion on 16 December 1944, Antwerp, Arrondissement Antwerpen, Antwerp, Belgium. He was buried in a temporary grave then exhumed and later interred at the Rest Heaven Cemetery, Hagerstown, Washington County, Maryland. Home of record Hagerstown, Maryland. He enlisted in the Army on 5 February 1943, in Baltimore, Maryland. He was noted for his metal work and fabrication. Awarded the Purple Heart, WWII Victory Medal, American Campaign Medal, Army Presidential Unit Citation, Army Good Conduct Medal, and the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal.



TEC5, Marshall E. Harbaugh JR.

Sergeant, Frank M. Lang, service number E-32599172, killed in action during a V-2 rocket attack in the Rex Cinema along with others while serving with the 798<sup>th</sup> Port Company, 517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion on 16 December 1944. Buried in Plot H, Row 9, Grave 26, Henri-Chappelle American Cemetery, 159, rue du memorial Americain, Hombourg, Belgium 4852. Home of record New Jersey. Awarded the Purple Heart, WWII Victory Medal, American Campaign Medal, Army Presidential Unit Citation, Army Good Conduct Medal, and the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal.





Technician Fifth Grade, Robert F. Martenusen, service number E-39839954, killed in action during a V-2 rocket attack in the Rex Cinema along with others while serving with the 798<sup>th</sup> Port Company, 517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion on 16 December 1944. Buried in Plot H, Row 9, Grave 24, Henri-Chappelle American Cemetery, 159, rue du memorial Americain, Hombourg, Belgium 4852. Home of record California. Awarded the Purple Heart, WWII Victory Medal, American Campaign Medal, Army Presidential Unit Citation, Army Good Conduct Medal, and the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal.



Private First Class, Frank Ferguson, service number E-35658366, killed in action during a V-2 rocket attack in the Rex Cinema along with others while serving with the 798<sup>th</sup> Port Company, 517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion on 16 December 1944. Buried in Plot H, Row 11, Grave 7, Henri-Chappelle American Cemetery, 159, rue du memorial Americain, Hombourg, Belgium 4852. Home of record West Virginia. Awarded the Purple Heart, WWII Victory Medal, American Campaign Medal, Army Presidential Unit Citation, Army Good Conduct Medal, and the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal. His brothers Harry and James served in the Army and Navy respectfully during World War II.





Rex Theater, 16 December 1944. Photograph by [www.the-low-countries.com/article/remembering-the-v2-attack-on-cinema-rex](http://www.the-low-countries.com/article/remembering-the-v2-attack-on-cinema-rex).

### **January 1945**

Technician Fifth Grade, Clovis C. Gardiner, service number E-31318807, he resided in Penobscot County, Maine and enlisted on 11 May 1943 in Bangor, Maine. Worked as machinist at a paper and pulp manufacture. Killed in action while serving with the 517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion on 20 January 1945. Buried in Plot E, Row 7, Grave 7, Henri-Chappelle American Cemetery, 159, rue du memorial Americain, Hombourg, Belgium 4852. Home of record Maine. Awarded the Purple Heart, WWII Victory Medal, American Campaign Medal, Army Presidential Unit Citation, Army Good Conduct Medal, and the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal.



Technician Fifth Grade, Frederick E. Heidelmark, service number E-32858130, killed in action on 20 January 1945 while serving with the 517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion. Buried in Plot F, Row 6, Grave 12, at the Netherlands American Cemetery, AM Bergraafplaats 1, Margraten, Belgium 6269 NA. Home of record Albany County, New York. Awarded the Purple Heart, WWII Victory Medal, American Campaign Medal, Army Presidential Unit Citation, Army Good Conduct Medal, and the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal.



Private, Othen B. Stratis, service number E-31356449, killed in action on 22 January 1945 while serving with the 798<sup>th</sup> Port Company, buried in Plot D, Row 14, Grave 41, Henri-Chappelle American Cemetery, 159, rue du memorial Americain, Hombourg, Belgium 4852. Home of record Peabody, Essex County, Massachusetts. Awarded the Purple Heart, WWII Victory Medal, American Campaign Medal, Army Presidential Unit Citation, Army Good Conduct Medal, and the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal.





This decorated folder held files for Antwerp X. That was the name given to the American, British, and Polish anti-aircraft units defending Antwerp from German V-1 rockets. This cartoon is held at Antwerp's city archives, the Felix Archief. If you are interested in learning more about Antwerp X, definitely check out *Impact: The History of Germany's V-Weapons in World War II*, by Benjamin King. The author gives very detailed information on the organization, types of anti-aircraft artillery used, placement, tactics, etc. Antwerp X was of no use against the V-2 ballistic missile, but against the low-flying V-1 the Air Artillery guns were bringing down close to 98% by the end of the war.

### **March 1945**

The 798th Port Company left dock work and was reassigned to guard duty on trains, train depot and in railroad warehouses. The port company men serving as guards were put under the operational control 793rd Military Police Battalion.

### **May 1945**

### **U.S. Army Port Operations**

Despite the delay in developing the port discharge and depot capacities envisaged in OVERLORD and the consequent shipping congestion, the U.S. Army-operated beaches and ports in France and Belgium handled an enormous volume of traffic originating in the United States,

the United Kingdom, and the Mediterranean. Between the invasion of Normandy and 8 May 1945, approximately eleven months, they discharged 15,272,412 long tons of Army cargo and handled the debarkation of 3,702,180 personnel. In most cases, port operations were handicapped by extensive destruction of facilities, personnel and equipment shortages, and limited means of transportation to the interior. The workloads carried by the various Army port and beach installations during this period are indicated in the following table:

<b>Ports</b>	<b>Cargo Discharged (Long Tons)</b>	<b>Personnel Debarked</b>
Southern France	4,123,794	905,512
Cherbourg	2,697,341	95,923
Antwerp	2,658,000	333
OMAHA Beach	1,264,999	801,000
Le Havre	1,168,171	1,014,036
Rouen	1,164,511	82,199
UTAH Beach	726,014	801,005
Ghent	614,861	6
Minor Normandy	600,884	788
Brittany	253,837	1,378

REF: <http://tothosewhoserved.org>.

### **June 1945**

The 185th Port Company, 487<sup>th</sup> Port battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Engineer Special Brigade was reassigned to the 517th Port Battalion. It was responsible for the discharge of supply ships, checking, out loading supplies onto trucks, trains and barges, and the storage of cargo in railroad warehouses at the Antwerp Port, Belgium.

During the war, the Transportation Corps moved over 30 million Soldiers in the United States and 7 million overseas, along with 126 million tons of cargo.



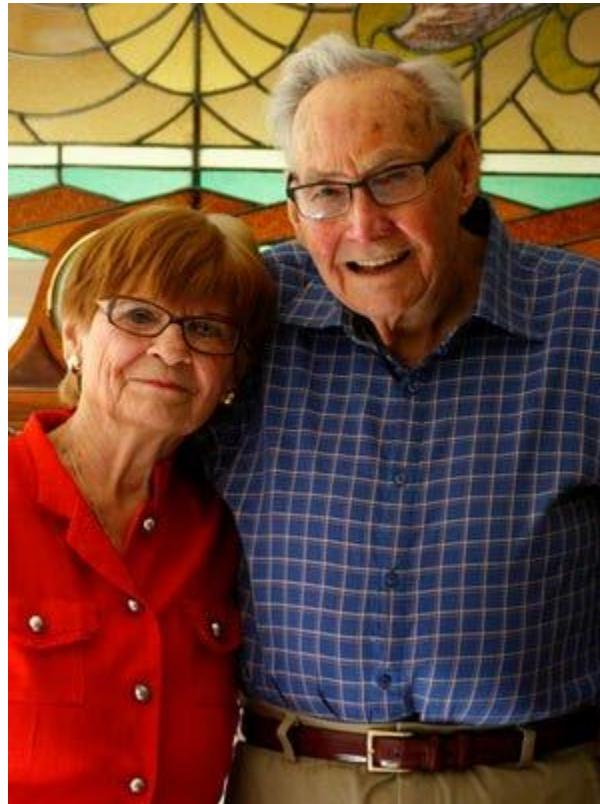


185th Port Company, Private, Marion Tabor and future wife Carmen in Antwerp, Belgium while on R&R. Married in June 1945.

Marion Tabor's home in Omaha, the Nebraska city, is a long way from Omaha Beach in France. Still, he says, his memories of landing in Normandy to reclaim Europe from the Germans remain close at hand. "Like everyone else, I was shaking in my boots," recalls Tabor, 90. "I had only been in the Army less than a year." Tabor had left his home in Olive Hill, Ky., to join the war effort. His brother, Virgil, lived in England and enlisted, but only Marion went to Normandy.

He was a part of the 185th Port Company, which landed on D-Day and helped unload cargo from the ships on Omaha Beach. Crawling on his stomach across the beach, Tabor says, he thought he was bound to die. Then he came across a rosary-bead necklace. "He was one of the few there that survived," says his wife, Carmen, 88 (posted 30 May 2014). "That rosary bead saved him."

Tabor's service in Europe, for which he earned the Bronze Star, took an unexpected turn when he met Carmen, a French native who was living in Antwerp, Belgium's primary port city. She was 19 and working as a translator for the U.S. War Shipping Administration.



While in Antwerp, Tabor drove a supply truck between Belgium and France. He helped Carmen and her mother reconnect with their remaining relatives in Paris, relaying letters back and forth. Carmen's family had a history with the Allied powers. Her grandfather had served in World War I, and her mother assisted the Allies when she was as young as 8 years old, relaying messages between the soldiers in the trenches and the officers in Paris. Located in Omaha, Nebraska. Marion Tabor passed away on 16 January 2017 at the age of 93.

An interview dated 6 June 2014, with the couple can be seen at:  
<https://www.ketv.com/article/couple-starts-sharing-wwii-stories/7138285>.

On 28 June 1945, the 284th Port Company was detached from the 517th Port Battalion and reassigned to Bremerhaven Port, Germany under the command of the 487th Port Battalion.

### **September 1945**

On 8 September, the British and Canadian forces liberated the Belgian Port of Antwerp.

### **December 1945**

On 12 December 1945 the battalion had been relocated to the Luchtbal Barracks, north of Tampico Flats.

On 20 December 1945 the men who had been with the battalion since activation were slowly sent home as they manifested with correct point numbers for discharge to return to CONUS. Replacements were the last to depart country as they did not qualify not having enough points to process through manifesting requirements.

### **The interview:**

Stewart Barr: In His Own Words

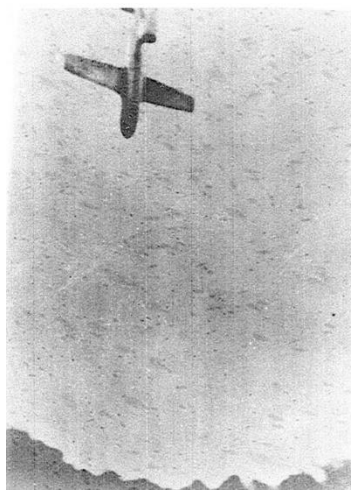
Stewart Barr was interviewed by Erwin Fullerton on February 20, 2002. In the following excerpt, Stewart — with his wry humor and keen insights — shares a few of his remembrances from serving in the Army during World War II.

Well, I went in on May 12, in '43, and I was in the States training for about five months... I believe it was November 16th when we left the United States and went to England... I was in the Army and reason number one was while I was in the Army, we did have the right to pick the type of service we wanted to be in, the branch of service. And being a farm boy and scared to death to ride in even a rowboat, I certainly would not have picked the Navy. Consequently, I ended up in the 517th Port Battalion and most of my three years was on a boat, so I did my fair share of getting rid of my breakfast, dinner, and supper at times...



Our job when we got overseas was unloading the ships for the troops. We were on the water June 7th actually, so we had a front row seat of what was taking place on Omaha Beach. And some of my outfit went in on the 7th and the rest of us kind of drizzled along in, and finally I went in on the 11th, and even then, it was a sad sight to see because of so many bodies and stuff that remained on the beach... The Rangers had to go up over the steep cliffs... That was the worst, as they sent them up, they kept shooting them off and shooting them off, so what it all amounted to is the more backup you got; this is how we won the war...

When we hit the Normandy Beach, the Omaha, we worked maybe three days straight. We worked day shift and night shift, and I do recall one time when we were allowed to sleep on the job. What we had on the ships to unload in one case was barbed wire, and believe it or not we curled up and went to sleep on rolls of barbed wire, and it didn't seem to bother us any... We were armed. We had our weapons, but we were not fighting outfits. We had to get the food and the supplies, the ammunition for the boys on the front lines. That was basically our job. But while we were on the beach, we couldn't use any lights to go from shore out on the ocean to unload the ships. We had to go in the DUKW aka "duck" to transport back and forth, and in the darkness, of course, you would see these landmines floating all the time, and occasionally a "duck" would go up. But as I recall there was only two of them out of our outfit that hit a mine....



Stewart Barr noted the danger from V-1 Buzz Bombs. This is the photograph that was taken by the soldier as the buzz bomb was descending toward him. Later, a civilian found the soldier's camera and had the final pictures that he took developed. They were sold in the stores in Belgium, where Stewart acquired this image.

But I think the most threat was after we had left France, believe it or not. We were in Antwerp, Belgium. The Germans were trying to take that back again, and that's where we got hundreds of hits a day from the V-1 Buzz Bombs as they called them... Once they got the radar set up, then they could either down them or cripple them, so they wouldn't achieve their targets. But that was almost worse in a way, because then they'd be up there going around in circles, and they'd

land just about at random anywhere.... I have pictures in my album here of a soldier, that was found by a Belgium civilian, that took a picture of the Buzz Bomb coming down and he had no way of getting away from it. So, he got pictures of it as it was coming down and it hit him. So that was a big seller over there in all the stores and stuff at the end of the war.

I was told by my company commander one of the biggest morale boosters that the company ever had [was my guitar]. Believe it or not, most of my outfits were Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky fellows. There were very few, you could count them on the fingers of one hand, that was from Vermont and Maine, and the rest of them were southern boys. So, I would pick up my guitar and start playing and all those fellows would chime right in. Somebody had a violin, and I learned to play a violin quite a lot from him, and he learned to play guitar quite a lot from me, and that was quite a morale booster. The fact is, what happened when we'd land on the beach, our personal property like the guitar and stuff came in later. We just carried what we could carry on our back because we had to go into the water and off the landing craft, the LSTs.

So, it was probably a month or two after we were in France, that we went to the nearest farmhouse. We were stationed in an old barn at St. Laurent. When we first arrived, we were in open ground in fox holes, but we had to move because they were unloading tanks and that's the path they were going to be going through. And we were quite pleased to move from there anyway, because we had our fox hole dug right in the hedgerows where the Germans were buried, and that wasn't a comfortable place to sleep. So, we ended up in this old barn, anyway, and the house next door is where we'd get our canteens of water, sometimes cognac or calvados. And we were there one day, a buddy of mine, and a man from another outfit came with his canteen and my buddy says, "that looks like your guitar" cause my guitar never did arrive. And I went over, and my girlfriend at that time was Margaret Waters so I had her initials on the guitar, and I had some little cheap inlaid pearls all over and I had my mother's name on it. It was a beautiful, big, blonde guitar I got from Sears Roebuck, before I went in the service. So, I went over and asked him, told him that was my guitar and he wanted to know what made me think so, and I says, "It has my name on it, my mother's name and everything." And "Well," he says, "sorry, I can't let you have it because it doesn't belong to me." But he did give me the information about where this outfit was.

So, the next day, my company commander, or the orderly guy, who was running the thing at the time, gave me a pass to go to this company. And so, I went over to this company. I walked. I remember it was quite a little way. I walked and it was on a Sunday, and at the orderly room there, their company commander wasn't there, but he told me where this guy's tent was. So I went to the tent, and they were playing cards. Well back then, we all had a knife, carried a knife on our belt. And I went in there, and they were playing cards and there was my guitar laying on a kind of a bunk up there. So, I introduced myself and told them I wanted my guitar. Well, they were truck drivers. They were guys that were unloading our personal stuff off on the beaches, and it was supposed to come to us, and he was a guitar player and he kept it himself. Well, in my disgust that he wasn't going to let me have it, I put my hands on my hips and he thought, I

guess, that I was going to draw my knife or something. So about six of those fellows got up from their chairs, and they had their knives out, and I said, "no guitar is worth that to me."

So I went back to my company, and my company commander asked if I got my guitar, and I told him what had happened. Well, next morning we fell out for reveille. It was still dark. He announced to all the troops from the company there, "Who would like to have a God damn, good rough-and-tumble fight, if necessary?" Nobody raised their hands because you didn't volunteer for anything like that. And he said, "Let me tell you the reason why," and explained the situation with me and he says, "that guitar of Stewart Barr's has built the morale in this company as long as we've been in here, and I think we should go over there and get it." Then everybody raised their hands. We all marched over, and the company had moved out. There was nothing there but garbage cans, and so that was the end of my guitar story. But then my own company went and got me another one, so we continued with our music...

Yep, the biggest thing I think that goes on record in my mind anyway, while we were unloading the ships on Normandy Beach. What they do is, when they load the ships lots of times they put a layer of complete crates, a bottom layer completely crated with wood, but Jeeps. Jeeps are all completely crated, weren't no slats or anything. So, they get them in their first and then they put axle grease on that layer, so then when they drop other stuff in, they could skid it back with pullers to the back of the hull of the ship to get them in there.

Well, this one day, there was a terrible storm, and we shouldn't have been unloading stuff anyway because it was so rough. Waves was probably fourteen feet high, slapping up and down, and I was a foreman on the ship. I had my area to unload and my signal man which gave instructions to the winch drivers to lift the cargo out of the hold of the ship over the edge and down onto a big flat barge. Well, we had already got a layer of Jeeps on there that had this axle grease on it. Then, unbeknownst to me, up out of the hold came this big open crate that you could see through. And it was an automobile. An army green automobile, and quite a deluxe looking thing. Well, in the absence of my regular signal man, I was taken over at the side of the ship to get this stuff... I had two men on the barge that would uncouple the cable when it got down there. Well, we lowered the car down on the barge and they were slipping and sliding on the grease, trying to get up there and unhook it. When the barge went down, when the waves went down, and the cable came tight, and they couldn't unhook it. So, it came back up and they tried to unhook it again and the cable went down, and it was tight again. The third time the cable broke. In the meantime, the barge has shifted out away from the ship a little bit, and so this big box or whatever it was, this car, kind of tipped up on its side and went down between the barge and the ship and that was the end of that. It didn't even make a bubble.

About two weeks later I had to sign a report about where General Patton's Cadillac went because I was responsible for unloading that day. So, I always felt that, after the war, it was a kind of a joke because in '45 he was killed in an automobile accident in Germany. So, I felt that I did him some good by drowning his first car, and then he went and got another one and that's what happened. Nope, I thought I was going to be court martialed for that, but all I had to do was make a statement about what name to it, and that was the last. Never heard about it.

REF: [www.woodstockhistorycenter.org](http://www.woodstockhistorycenter.org).

In a 2008 interview at age 84 with SGT, Haig Samuel Goodsoozian was assigned to the 285<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion, shipped out of Fort Devens, Massachusetts, arrived in Scotland on the SS Mark Hanna. Then training in Wales, reassigned to the 517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion as crane operator. V-1 bomb attacks in the dozens. One of the first to land on D Day, 6 June 1944, unloading a LST with ammunition, setting up a dump site on the beach head with 300 German prisoners, off to Antwerp and more V-2 rocket attacks, to the Battle of the Bulge operating a crane. Returned to Boston, Massachusetts. Discharged at Fort Devens, Massachusetts.

Go to the Library of Congress: [https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.63504/#item-service\\_history](https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.63504/#item-service_history).

**HHD, 517<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion roster:**

PFC, Clovis C. Gardiner (KIA)

TEC5, Frederick E. Heidelmark, New York

Major, Donald N. Cerefice the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Commander, New Jersey (Reassigned)

LTC, Harold E. Bonar the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Commander

MSG, Joseph Winters

SGT, James Vanderet JR, New York

SGT, Haig Samuel Goodsoozian, Massachusetts

Private, William Andrew McKenney, Kentucky

**185<sup>th</sup> Port Company roster:**

Private, Marion Tabor, Omaha, Nebraska

TEC5, Ralph E. Pendleton, (KIA), Maine

TEC5, Bernard E, Minich, Worthington, Armstrong County, Pennsylvania

**284<sup>th</sup> Port Company roster:**

**Alabama**

Clarence L. Filyaw

**California**

Robert Bonsells  
Clark H. Hibell  
Sergio L. Moreira  
Emilo Y. Renteria

**Colorado**

Melvin C. Swanson

**Connecticut**

Connis B. Boccuzzi  
Frank A. Cassetta  
Ralph L. Cipriano  
Robert Drapatin  
John F. Dessereau  
Edward M. Grifa  
Frank O'Brien  
Jerry M. Raimo  
Clair B. Roys, Fr.  
William A. Sabetta  
Maro Samela  
Michael D. Santone  
Arnold J. Scriven  
Boleslaus J. Sowl  
Frank S. Tarrasewicz  
Frederick D. Trowbridge

**Florida**

Vernon R. Elarbee  
George W. Floyd  
Vernon Hartlene  
Julian Keathley  
Luchen B. McCracken  
Pervis Roach  
Orlo W. Smith  
Keith C. Whitlock  
Charles R. Whittaker

**Idaho**

Stanley J. Black

**Illinois**

Russel R. Antler



Stanley A. Rzewnicki

**Indiana**

Alexander L. Bride

John T. Wilson

**Kentucky**

Benton M. Mullins

**Lousiana**

Stewart M. Beatty

B.M. Sumrall

Edgar B. Wroten

**Maine**

Keith R. Calef

Clarence E. Childs

Herman A DeRasier

Earl F. Dore

Joseph B. Kelly

John L. Nadeau

Robert Whiting

**Maryland**

Karl J. Wheeler

Harr J. Dempsey

**Massachusetts**

Lionel S. Andrade

Victor G. Barrett

Joseph Barys

Louis Bonavire

Roger Bonneville

Richard A. Boscardin

Armand J. Boucher, Jr.

Roland A. Boucher

George F. Boufreau

Anthony Brzosteki

Charles E. Buxton, Jr.

Francis E. Byrne

Albert E. Chretien

Fred Clifford

William Cloutin

Albert M. Colonna

William R. Crevier  
Joseph H. Diaz  
Joseph A. DiStasio  
Joseph E. Ferriera  
Clarence Fournier  
Robert E. Gelinas  
William B. George  
Edward V. Goff  
Valmore R. Gonneville  
John Hagerty  
Louis Joseph  
Raymond A. LaRue  
Chester G. Long  
Charles J. Morris  
John J.P. Morrison  
Charles E. Powell  
Boleslaw P. Przydzial  
Thomas Ruta  
George M. Sahilakas  
Daniel J. Salmon  
Anthony A. Sannicandro  
Raymond A. Savary  
Walter J. Silva  
Joseph R. Soares  
Francis Stimporziewski  
Thomas J. Sweeney  
Hagerty Tilkin  
Kenneth H. Sennett  
Clayton L. Vaughan

**Michigan**

Glenn J. Rice  
Vernon H. Zahl

**Minnesota**

Winifred B. Johnson

**Mississippi**

Robert C. Alexander  
George L. Arnett  
Rex Butler  
Henry D. Callicutt  
James C. Clark  
James F. Coleman

Thomas L. Cook  
John Davis  
John W. Edwards  
Melvon R. Eldridge  
Robert L. Goff  
Forrest L. Grisham  
Vester R. Hallmark  
Thomas A. Harris  
Donald A. Hemphill (Don gave me this list)  
Alvin Howard  
Samuel R. Liddell  
Jessie M. Martin  
Waldo C. McClamroch  
Lester S. Nicholson  
Robert W. Pollard, Jr.  
Ernest L. Smith  
Richard A. Stulman  
Keylon C. Randle  
David W. Shilton  
Basil M. Sumrall  
John P. Thomas, Jr.  
Walter L. Tribble  
William F. Tyer  
Hugh C. Wallace  
Clifton Williams  
Dewey B. Windham  
Edgar B. Wroten  
Thomas P. Yates

**New Hampshire**

Jpseph N. Anton  
J. Antony  
George Beckwith  
Russell C. LaClair  
John E. Travia

**New Jersey**

John J. Farley  
Charles Mershon

**New York**

Thomas M. Aiello  
Lawrence W. Agoney  
Rolf C. Anderson

Howard Bensen  
Irvine Charles  
Alexander Goldman  
John "Irish" F. Haren  
Charles J. McGroarty  
Laurence P. Ritcha  
Leonard L. Rosenberg  
Carl R. Schwartz  
Edward J. Simmons  
Anthony Zahorian, Jr.

**Pennsylvania**

Miller C. Baumgardner  
Walter E. Consylman, Jr.  
Lewis H. Eshbach  
Landis H. Eshelman  
Jacob Fritz, Jr.  
George C. Herzberger  
Steven E. Jacobs  
Sameul Lowery  
Victor A. Mahdad  
James Mitchell  
Michael Proch  
Andrew Spero  
Steve Torau

**Rhode Island**

Walter E. Barber  
Harold E. Briggs  
OScar L. Bruvere  
Carmine Catola  
Lew H. Chin  
Henry Costa  
John Costa  
George M. Cunha  
Lawrence Diaz  
William S. Edelman  
Jack Feldman  
George Fitzsimmons  
Charles N. Fuller  
Sherman N. Greengus  
Meyer Grossman  
John E. Hague  
Herbert Hiatt

Russell F. Hamieson  
Frank A. Joyner  
Francis J. LaLiberte (LaLiberté ?)  
Eugene N. Larence  
Joseph F. Laurie  
Enville P. Leueille  
Arthur Lori  
Duane W. Kelley  
Leonard K. King  
Robert L. Lomas  
Andrew T. Mignacca  
Joseph Morrisey  
George H. Potter  
John Silva  
Chester Swiszc  
Maurice Turgeon

**South Carolina**

Harol J. Rowell

**Tennessee**

Floyd Willis

**Texas**

Robert L. Ward  
Oscar O. Gibson  
Theodore N. Hine

**Vermont**

Francis C. Stack  
Edmiund F. Short

**Virginia**

Harvey Durham

**Wisconsin**

Eugene G. Denio  
Leonard A. Ruzinski

**285<sup>th</sup> Port Company:**

PFC, Joel McGee

TEC4, Allen Shell

**797<sup>th</sup> Port Company (formerly A Company):**

1LT, James J. Powell

1SG, SFC, John Gordon

PVT, William Albert Hancock, Mississippi

PVT, Samuel Willis, Oklahoma (KIA)

**798<sup>th</sup> Port Company (formerly B Company):**

CPT, Russel J. Morton

1SG, MSG, Joseph Adams

Sergeant, Frank M. Lang (KIA), New Jersey

TEC5, Robert F. Martenusen (KIA), California

PFC, Frank Ferguson (KIA), West Virginia

PVT, Othen B. Stratis (KIA), Massachusetts

Rex Butler

John Haren

TEC4, Alvin Schultz, Manitowoc, Wisconsin

**799<sup>th</sup> Port Company (formerly C Company):**

1LT, George Gilman. Jr.

1SG, MSG, John Killara

? Cantrell

TEC4, Allen Shell

**800<sup>th</sup> Port Company (formerly D Company):**

CPT, George Oliver

1SG, SFC, William Train

PFC, Thomas William Swann, service number E-33008078, farmer and milk truck operator, Maryland.

PFC, William LeVerne Behrens, Nebraska

James Lewis Blevins, Alabama

**ORIGINAL SIGNED ON 10 June 2023**

**Everette F. Coppock III**

**Command Sergeant Major, US Army, Retired**

**Transportation Corps, 1977-2007**

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