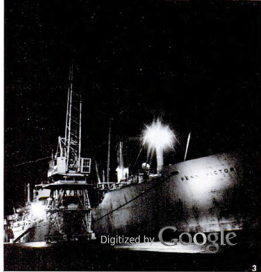


# MTMTS the English

by James A. Zicarelli



The year was 1588. Through heavy seas, the mightiest array of ships ever assembled approached the British Isles. The fleet was the "Invincible Armada" of Philip II of Spain. But the Spanish ships were not destined to reach the British shores. The English Navy and stormy waters took their toll and virtually the entire argosy went to the bottom of the sea.

Early this year, another armada braved gale force winds and the inclement winter weather to approach the English coast. It was no fleet of Spanish galleons nor ships of war bent on invasion. These were merchantmen of varied type and description, 500 strong. Transports, freighters, tankers, coasters, and tugs, sailing under the flags of Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and even Britain herself. Each was intent on landing its individual cargo at in-ports throughout the United Kingdom. Each was playing its part in a unique and complex logistics movement operation—an operation during which old familiar names would be heard . . . The ports of London, Southampton, and Liverpool . . . and the great storage depots of Sculthorpe and Burtonwood. Also to be heard were others not so familiar—names of smaller, tradition-bound ports of Felixstowe, Hull, and Immingham and remote ammunition depots such as Ditton Priors and

1. Scene of Operation FRELOC.

2. U.S. Army floating machine shop, towed by Dutch International tug *Sheldo* leaves Rochfort, France, harbor and heads for Southampton, England.

3. Rail cranes stand by for nighttime discharge of general cargo from the vessel *Fenn Victory* at Ipswich, England. (East Anglian Daily Times Photo.)

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Fauld, with its underground caverns dating back to the time of the Roman Legions in the eighth century. This was Operation FRELOC. The period was January 16 through March 31. This time the armada did land and its cargo moved through the ports by every available mode to ultimate destinations in England and Wales.

Operation FRELOC was an unqualified success. Yet perhaps it was the peculiar arena in which it was carried out that made the operation unique, and it was the Military Traffic Management and Terminal Service (MTMTS) that provided the key to its success.

FRELOC was the code name for the relocation operation. President Charles de Gaulle had delivered his eviction ultimatum, "France intends to recover on her territory the full exercise of her sovereignty now impaired by the permanent presence of Allied military elements." NATO military facilities scattered throughout France had to go . . . . The deadline, April 1, 1967.

A considerable portion of the U.S. military resources was scheduled to vacate bases in France and be relocated in the United Kingdom. Permanent depot and port complexes, airbases, communications facilities, headquarters, and a variety of smaller installations had to be dismantled and moved. In all some 820,000 tons of supplies, equip-



4. Small electrically run railway at Fauld, England, transports ammunition from unloading stations to the storage warehouses.

5. Col. Fred Porter, MTMTS commander in London, discusses day-to-day activities with officials of the Royal Air Force, the U.S. 3d Air Force, MTST, and commercial shipping contractors.

6. A British Road Services truck departs the dock at Liverpool after taking on a cargo of ammunition.

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ment, and reserve ammunition stocks valued at \$1.2 billion were to be transported from French soil to Germany, Belgium, United Kingdom, and other countries. The United Kingdom move had to face the traditional challenge of the English Channel.

With the ships of the U.S. Military Sea Transport Service (MSTS) already preoccupied maintaining a 10,000 mile pipeline to Southeast Asia, European commercial "coasters" (shallow water vessels) were procured and more importantly, actions were taken to insure their movement through British ports in the face of myriad complexities compounding the task. It was this critical phase of Operation FRELOC that fell to MTMTS' Eastern Area and its 1414th U.S. Army Transportation Terminal Unit in London.

It became obvious in the early planning stages of FRELOC that the MTMTS Terminal Unit in London would be deeply and intimately involved in the FRELOC movement. Col. Fred Porter and his busy staff were soon operating around-the-clock, 7 days a week. Because of the amount of coordination required among the many agencies involved, the "Key Sign House" headquarters, just off old Oxford Street, became a busy command post.

Such things as tonnage figures, ship schedules, weather, French labor disturbances, availability of British rail wagons, lorries, and chipies (stevedores) and double documentation (British and United States) were discussed in detail and problems were solved on the spot.

Back in Washington, D.C., meanwhile, Maj. Gen. John J. Lane, who commands MTMTS, was keeping tabs on the entire operation. He dispatched his Eastern Area Commander, Brig. Gen. Austin J. Montgomery, to London to "obtain in as great detail as possible the parameters of possible problem areas." As a result, 78 skilled military terminal operations specialists were selected and flown to London to augment the busy operation in the United Kingdom. This quick response provided coverage for each of the principal ports to be used (Milford Haven, Felixstowe, Barry, and Immingham for ammunition . . . Liverpool and Southampton for general cargo).

With the ports manned, MTMTS was ready for the exodus which would take place as the first 34 commercial coasters began their many trips across

the Bay of Biscay and the English Channel from St. Nazaire and Bassens in France and across the North Sea from the Belgian port of Zeebrugge. In all, 222 individual sorties were made. The colorful coasters, which have traditionally plied the waters of the North Sea and the Channel, were ideally suited to the type of operation. In spite of their limited carrying capacity and the variety of configurations, they became the "work horses" of the operation.

It was not, however, the size nor magnitude of the movement that is especially noteworthy. In the annals of military history other movements of greater size and scope have taken place and probably will again. Rather, the commendation is in that Operation FRELOC was effected smoothly and professionally, and without major incident, despite a multitude of unique and complex barriers that confronted the operation. There seems little question that without the know-how of the professionals of the MTMTS terminal units and the cooperation of the English, FRELOC might well have missed its target date of March 31.

The problems associated with FRELOC and threatening its success were many. To the average U.S. transportation expert, the situation would fall somewhere between improbable and impossible. Certainly, in some cases, almost unbelievable even when viewed first hand.

In the United States, ports and labor are generally standardized on all coasts making operating rules and procedures similar regardless of the port used. Such is not the case along the English and Welsh coastlines where each port has its own labor procedures, customs, and traditions, and where each varies widely one from the other even in its equipment. Further frustrating the endeavor, one port might be able to accommodate only one mode (rail) for the through-movement of traffic, while another might accommodate only trucks. Additionally, a limit of 250 tons of ammunition alongside a dock at any one time was imposed. This, coupled with protracted bad weather and labor disturbances in France, played havoc with the operation in the initial stages.

Add to the hodgepodge receiving depots that had been out of operation in excess of a year, small ports that have seen relatively little military cargo since World War II, shallow waters and unique tides which necessitated use of "coasters" and in



Ammunition stocks recently arrived from France are unloaded at a port in Wales. (Photo by Burton's.)

some cases even tugs, and one begins to glean the complexity of the operation.

Then consider the national transportation barriers involved. British and United States ammunition categories were not compatible and needed on-the-spot interpretation. Ammunition classified by the United States as nonsensitive was sometimes classified as sensitive by the British, while sensitive U.S. categories were processed in accordance with British classification and under stringent supervision of the Royal Air Force.

Now place parameters around tonnage allowances and limit loads, and as a final thought put a security classification on the whole project. Until classification was lowered, communications with the commercial shippers on kinds of cargo, port of origin, and destination was virtually impossible. These then were some of the problems that had to be overcome and were.

The splendid cooperation and overall attitude by the many agencies involved was very evident. John G. Ashley, Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry of Transport said "It was a real challenge. I particularly enjoyed lowering and sometimes eliminating the barriers in the path of the operation." The role of "running interference" played by Ashley was significant when one considers that the normal British commerce had to continue through the ports. Through his efforts, British agencies frequently cut down their own requirements so that the FRELOC Operation would not be delayed.

In discussing the operation with Michael B. Ackerley, President of Benjamin Ackerley & Son,

Ltd., who was the MTMTS prime contractor for terminal operations in the United Kingdom, he said "The degree of emergency connected with the operation and the idea of working side by side with Americans again was reminiscent of World War II. It was an achievement of which we can all be proud."

The young terminal specialists who were flown from the United States and assigned to little-known port cities of Britain and Wales were complimentary and impressed with the hospitality they received. As in World War II, homes were open to the "Yanks" and parties were held in their honor when they left. The older officers, many who were stationed in England in the forties were seen to smile knowingly, recalling the warm hospitality they themselves experienced.

All the problems associated with this particular military movement were solved, the necessary coordination was effected and the barriers were surmounted. MTMTS professionally carried out its mission, and without hitch even though the movement was unique in regard to obstacles placed in its path. Herein lies the laudatory ingredient of the MTMTS role in Operation FRELOC. In a wire to General Lane, the Commander, U.S. Army, Europe, Gen. Andrew P. O'Meara said "USAREUR has completed the relocation of all material and personnel required to be out of France by 1 April, 1967. This task could not have been accomplished without the assistance provided by the Military Traffic Management and Terminal Service. The responsiveness, energetic and highly professional support rendered by your organization, especially the Eastern Area, MTMTS and the 1414th U.S. Army Transportation Terminal Unit, are worthy of special mention. No finer performance could have been given by the dedicated personnel involved in this operation."

The NATO forces are now out of De Gaulle's France. British bases are again populated with the American uniform and the Stars and Stripes are flying alongside the Union Jack. Deep in the bowels of Wales and England the weapons of war lie in 12-000-year-old Roman caves ready to be called forth if needed.

Time will soon forget Operation FRELOC. But the personnel of the Military Traffic Management and Terminal Service can still take pride in their contribution to a milestone in history.