

From:

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The Technical Services

THE TRANSPORTATION CORPS:

OPERATIONS OVERSEAS

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(p. 270) ...The unloading of cargo vessels, scheduled to begin on D Day, was delayed one day by heavy enemy fire and then proceeded slowly while the Engineers performed the necessary tasks of organizing and clearing the beaches. Among the earliest Transportation Corps units at OMAHA Beach was the 184th Port Company of the 487th Port Battalion, which was attached to the 5th Engineer Special Brigade.

The 184th arrived aboard four coasters at 1700 on 6 June. Very little of the cargo aboard the vessels was removed during the first twenty-four hours, and at 1800 on 7 June enemy shellfire forced all the ships to withdraw. After the enemy guns had been silenced the vessels returned to the beach and discharge continued. As each coaster was unloaded, the port troops aboard came ashore and settled in foxholes on a hill overlooking the sea. The unit worked around the clock in twelve-hour shifts. Although it had landed with only a field desk and personal equipment, by borrowing from other units and by salvaging captured and abandoned enemy material, the 184th Port Company soon managed to erect suitable quarters and to serve two hot meals every day from two field ranges.

Because of the scarcity of cargo-handling gear, special slings had to be fashioned from spare lengths of cable and chain. For lack of docks or other shore facilities all cargo was unloaded from vessels at anchor into DUKW's, rhino barges, lighters, and LCT's. **Activities of the other units of the port battalions attached to the brigades followed a similar pattern (including the 185th, 187th, 282nd and 283rd Port Companies)**. After unloading their vessels, mainly coasters and MTV's, they moved ashore, set up their bivouac areas, and began working assigned vessels. The port companies were ordinarily divided into 16-man to 18-man hatch gangs for the discharge of coasters, while 10 winch operators and 5 other men were assigned to each motor-transport ship. Again, crews worked around the clock on twelve-hour shifts. Cargo handling on the shore was performed principally by Quartermaster service companies.

FROM: THE HISTORY OF THE 5TH ENGINEER SPECIAL BRIGADE:

487th Port Battalion, Hq & Hq Det, including following Port
Companies: 184th, 185th, 186th, 187th, 282nd, and
283rd -- Strength of Bn Hq & Hq Det:
6 officers, 2 warrant officers, 26 enlisted men;
strength of each Port Company:
4 officers, 226 enlisted men -- all attached 1 April
1944

c. 487th Port Battalion:

(1) This Battalion is composed of the 184th, 185th, and 187th Port Companies, with the 282nd and 283rd Port Companies, attached. Their mission was to supply personnel for ship platoons to Battalion Beach Groups for the unloading of cargo from ships as required, under control of Brigade Headquarters, and to coordinate the activities of ship platoons to effect the most efficient and rapid unloading of assigned ships.

(2) Battalion Headquarters, the 184th, and 185th Port Companies, and two platoons of the 186th Port Company were scheduled to land at H / 3 hours on D-Day; the 186th Port Company (less two platoons) and the 187th Port Company, on D / 1; the 282nd and the 283rd Port Companies, on D / 3. The coasters on which these men were transported carried cargoes of ammunition and gasoline. It was planned to retain aboard, enough men for discharging the ship's cargo while the remainder went ashore to locate and prepare a bivouac area near the beach and thereafter work in 12-hour shifts, unloading craft.

(3) All personnel of the Battalion were moved from their permanent stations on 1 June 1944 to Marshalling Areas and loaded on eighteen MT ships and coasters at Southampton and the Bristol Channel on 4 and 5 June. On D-Day, the ten coasters carrying the troops of this Battalion which were scheduled to land were held offshore by the control ship throughout the day. The following morning, D / 1, the Battalion Headquarters beached and set up a CP; the troops were held aboard ship until a suitable bivouac area could be selected and cleared of mines. In the meantime, the ships were unloaded by the Battalion troops aboard as LCT's and DUKW's were sent out to them. The coasters which were to be unloaded on D / 1 arrived offshore as scheduled.

(5) Enemy air attacks were withstood each night during the first week while unloading. No casualties were sustained excepting on one ship which, during the early hours of morning on 10 June, fell victim to bombing and strafing attacks that killed three men, seriously wounding eighteen, and slightly wounding five others. Four enlisted men of the 282nd Port Company were recommended by their Battalion Commander for the Award of the Bronze Star for their heroism and courageous conduct in helping care for the wounded on this occasion.

(a) Tec 5 Grade Lawrence E. Hubbard, of Utica, New York:

"....was a member of a platoon of 64 men of the 282nd Port Company aboard the coaster ACTINIA, the principal cargo of which was gasoline. The holds and hatches of the ship were completely filled with cargo, so that there was no room for the quartering of troops below deck or to provide temporary cover for them below deck in case of an air attack.

"At about 0035 hours 10 June, an unidentified number of enemy planes.... dropped flares, one of which landed on the bow of the ship. At the same time, the flames from a balloon which had been shot down added to the light from the flares. One plane then strafed the deck and bridge of the ship, and a few seconds later a stick of three bombs landed.... Another plane again strafed the deck and bridge of the ship.

"Tec 5 Grade Hubbard helped a man from the deck whose arm had been blown off at the shoulder. He took him to the ship's Captain's room and administered First Aid to him there. He then returned to the deck and helped in the task of giving First Aid to 20 other men who were found wounded. For supplies, he used from what was being collected from the First Aid Packs of the men in the unit.

"Throughout the remainder of the night Tec 5 Grade Hubbard worked on the deck, directing other men of his unit, in covering the wounded with blankets, moving them to whatever cover could be found on the open deck of the ship, and rendering First Aid insofar as was practical with the Medical supplies obtained.

"There were two more strafing attacks on the ship while the wounded were being attended, but there were no additional casualties. The enemy continued with the bombing and strafing of other ships in the vicinity and these attacks lasted up until past daylight.

"At about 0700 hours the wounded were transferred over to a Hospital Ship; of the 21 seriously wounded, 3 died later. On the same ship several members of the ship's crew were also killed.

"Tec 5 Grade Lawrence E. Hubbard displayed a high degree of courage and initiative during this emergency. Although he was not a Medic, his continuous work with the wounded throughout the remainder of the night contributed a great service to the 18 wounded men whose lives were saved and, at the same time, his actions helped greatly in maintaining the morale of the unit during the uncertain hours that followed the first attacks. The calm and efficient manner in which he reacted to the emergency, rendering First Aid to the wounded, and organizing the uninjured in caring for the casualties, reflects lasting credit to him."

(b) The following men of this same unit, likewise, received recommendations for the Award of the Bronze Star for their heroism and courageous conduct in the administration of First Aid to the wounded on the same occasion as described in the preceding paragraphs:

Sgt James E. Medlar, of Burlington, Vermont
Tec 5 Grade Cotter (NMI) Peck, of Boston, Mass.
Tec 5 Grade Harold V. Wilcox, of Arcadia, Florida

(6) For their meritorious services during the planning of the 487th Port Battalion's work for the Invasion of France, the following officers and enlisted men were recommended by the Battalion Commander for the Award of the Bronze Star:

Major BRUCE I. BUTTERWORTH, of Detroit, Michigan
Capt. FENTON A. GAGE, of Delmar, New York
T/Sgt Edward J. Schmitt, of Seattle, Washington

(7) The following Commendation was issued on 30 July 1944 by Brigade Headquarters for a Port Company of the 487th Port Battalion:

"UNLOADING RECORD: A new unloading record has been established for unloading a three hatch coaster with hand swung booms. This record was established by the 186th Port Company of the 487th Port Battalion. This company discharged 1027 tons of Class V supplies from coaster No. 62 in 61.75 hatch hours or an average of 16.63 tons per hatch per hour. Turn around time for the vessel was 21½ hours. This unit is commended for its excellent achievement."

14. 487th Port Battalion:

a. As indicated previously in this History (paragraph 3d(15)), the vessels scheduled for unloading on D-Day, carrying also personnel of the 487th Port Battalion, were held offshore by Navy Control Ships throughout the day. A limited amount of unloading was accomplished by this Battalion on D / 1; on D / 2 it began to progress substantially. As the personnel of the various elements of the 487th Port Battalion completed unloading the ship on which they had crossed the English Channel, in support of the assault on the northern coast of France, they came ashore and set up bivouac. They then took over their assigned duties of unloading cargo from coasters and MT ships anchored offshore, as required, on directions from Brigade Headquarters.

b. The first step in accomplishing the unloading of ships in the most efficient manner, so that as much tonnage as possible could be moved across the beach, was to reorganize the working sections of the Port Companies, of which the Port Battalions, attached to 5th Engineer Special Brigade, are comprised. Under normal conditions a Port Company is set up to work three ship's hatches on a 24-hour basis, working in three 8-hour shifts. A company is divided into nine 21-man hatch gangs. In the initial stages of the operation, the Port Companies were reorganized into twelve 16-man hatch gangs and the length of the shift was changed from eight to twelve hours. This made it possible for each company to work six hatches on a 24-hour basis, thus doubling the normal working capacity of the unit. Hatch crews were ordered from the Port Battalions by the Brigade S-5 Section after determining the number of hatches and the type of cargo aboard each ship.

c. The new arrangement for 16-man gangs during the initial stages of the operation worked successfully when the discharge was made into DUKWs and while landing craft, such as dumb barges and LCT's, were being used only for vehicles. When general cargo was unloaded to this type of landing craft, however, it became necessary to revert to the use of the 21-man hatch gangs.

d. During the operation period, 15 through 31 July 1944, the 487th Port Battalion used a total of 889 hatch crew shifts. The Battalion was organized into 60 regular working hatch gangs so that it would normally be capable of discharging 30 hatches 24 hours of the day if the vessels were Liberty Ships requiring men to work on the Rhino Ferry or LCT's. However, the organization of gangs was kept flexible enough so that when unloading from coasters to DUKWs the size of the gangs could be decreased and the actual number of gangs could be increased to work a total of 36 coaster hatches on a 24-hour basis.

e. For the operation period 15 August, the total number of hatch crews was 689. The Battalion was organized to unload 30 Liberty Ship hatches or 36 coaster hatches on a 24-hour basis. By companies, the 487th Port Battalion unloaded the following total tonnage through 15 August 1944:

184th Port Company	35,444 tons
185th Port Company	37,079 tons
186th Port Company	35,319 tons
187th Port Company	40,341 tons
282nd Port Company	28,246 tons
283rd Port Company	32,886 tons
Total for Battalion	209,315 tons

f. The discharging of cargo by personnel of the 487th Port Battalion was by no means of a routine nature. Due to the scarcity of gear, many ingenious arrangements were devised for removing cargo from ships. The 184th Port Company's Historian writes:

".... in one instance, a pre-stowed Liberty Ship arrived with six 22-ton cases of road building machinery as deck cargo. A sling capable of working these loads was finally fashioned from a combination of spare lengths of 1-inch cable and chains. Another problem of getting cargoes of telephone poles ashore was solved by lashing a draft of 5 to 7 poles to the mooring hook ring on each side of a DUKW and floating them in."

g. Regarding the repairing and maintaining of gear, the 185th Port Company reported:

"A shop was set-up on the beach in which gear was stored, repaired, and made up. The entire beach was scoured for cable and miscellaneous gear, and trips were made even as far away from the area as Cherbourg for these materials. Crews were kept busy making up and repairing slings. All available gear was taken from each ship as unloading operations aboard were finished. This enabled us to gather a sufficient amount of gear to handle ships coming in with none aboard. The main difficulty was encountered in securing enough cable to handle 22-ton and heavier lifts."

i. As of 15 August 1944, the 4141st Quartermaster Service Company was attached to the 487th Port Battalion to do stevedore work. The technique of unloading had to be developed among these troops although they had previously been given similar training. The increase in personnel thus provided, gave five additional working gangs for a total of 35 Liberty Ship hatches on a 24-hour basis.

j. During the month of August, this Battalion also out-loaded ammunition into LSTs which were beached and dried before loading, as it was not practical to load them by DUKW while afloat.

