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ROYAL NAVAL MATERIAL

Can No. 915.

ANTWERP. - Pan. of docks - unloading in  
docks.

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Can No. 917.

MINE-SWEEPERS.

No further dope sheets available.

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Simultaneous publication in U.S.A. and Canada has been arranged.

CONVOYS AT ANTWERP

From BOB EUNSON for Combined Press & Radio

Antwerp (delayed) - An American liberty ship and a British merchantman led a convoy of Allied ocean going freighters that stretched across the English Channel into the docks here today and opened the third largest port in the world to the use of Allied armies battering their way into Germany.

The "James B. Weaver" with short and husky Captain Jim Sweeney of Drexel, Pa., at the helm was the first American ship tugged alongside the concrete docks that stretch for 30 miles along a giant horseshoe shaped waterway system off Belgium's Scheldt river.

Captain J.C. Van de Carr, onetime American submarine skipper from (602 Tulsa St.) Norman, Okla., who is in charge of the American docks, said U.S. Army transportation corps freight trains will be leaving for the front.

"This cuts a 500 mile truck haul to a 100 mile train ride," the captain said, "it also means the boys who have been losing their anchors on the beaches and fighting cargo over the side will have real facilities to work with from now on."

Captain Sweeney of the James B. Weaver said his ship had made 17 trips to the beaches since D-Day and didn't express much joy when discussing unloading 10,000 ton freighters without proper equipment.

Today the Belgian stevedores were unloading new dock equipment from the Weaver and coffee, sugar and pork sausages from another ship we visited.

Standing beside Captain Sweeney we saw the veritable forest of unloading cranes silhouetted against the cold blue sky of Flanders and later visited most of the ships' berths.

Helmet wearing GIs are working side by side with wooden shoed Belgians shifting the cargoes from the holds of the vessels to the trains leading direct to the front. The docks employ 8,000 skilled civilian workers and about 10,000 semi skilled Belgian labourers earning about 100 dollars per month.

/Actually

Actually the first freighter in the docks was the "fort cataraqui" of the British merchant fleet which streaked on ahead of us and broke out a big flag of Belgium just as we tossed our line to a puffing little tug. The Mayor and his party met the "fort Cataraqui" and two sailors in a rain soaked jeep met us.

Lieut. Commander Barry Bingham of Louisville, Ky., learned from townspeople that since Germany ran over the lowlands in 1939 only two ocean going ships had entered the Scheldt river.

That probably explains the waves from the river bank and the smiles on the faces when our convoy wound into town. Past Walcheren and Beveland islands we saw farmhouses standing in water that has engulfed their fields since RAF planes broke the dykes to flood out the Nazis who were holding the entrance to the estuary even after this city of 285,000 had fallen.

The smiling Belgians who greeted the convoy here probably heard of the grain and other foodstuffs allied ships are bringing in this winter to combat the famine that threatens both Holland and Belgium.

American and British soldiers are eating at their own messes because there isn't enough civilian food to go around. We saw an old woman sniping cigarette butts in the gutter and a tall blonde girl wearing a fur coat and silk stockings stroll past.

The people here are taking their plight fairly well. Shops have more jewelry, perfume and other likely Christmas presents to offer than London has seen in five years. You can walk inside from a dreary and traditionally soppy blackout to the glitter of a modern night club where cognac and wines and beer are served in tinkling glasses by men waiters wearing full dress suits.

Dance bands play modern music augmented by the classics and languid eyed damsels speak French and a little English to Allied soldiers and sailors relishing the atmosphere.

The Germans held parties for mixed crowds in their rooms, but the Allies forbid such goings on in requisitioned hotels - and every major hotel is requisitioned.

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CONVOYS AT ANTWERP: From  
Tom Swarbrick, Merchant Navy Official War Reporter,  
for Combined Press & Radio

(Simultaneous publication has been arranged in U.S.A. & Canada

The quays and sheds of Antwerp which 36 hours ago I saw deserted and overgrown with grass are now buzzing with activity.

The ship, in which I sailed in the first big ships convoy to the port, slowly passed right along the city's waterfront to a berth up the river as darkness was falling. At last the supplies had "gone in" to the main port of North-West Europe.

From various ports of the United Kingdom, where they had been secretly loaded ready to sail immediately the Scheldt was cleared first of enemy forces and then of mines, the vessels assembled at the convoy rendezvous. The line of ships made an impressive moonlight picture. Soon after dawn we picked up the long low beaches of Waalcheren with the obstructions against landing parties still lying uselessly in the sand.

Off Flushing our Dutch pilots came aboard. I stood with one of them on the bridge as we steadily passed up the Scheldt. It was raining hard and blowing almost half a gale but, telling me of the thrill of doing this job for the first time after  $4\frac{1}{2}$  years, the pilot shouted in my ear "never mind though, gladly I'd do it in a snowstorm".

Small craft lying off Ternouzen signalled salutes to us as we passed the base and then, as the river narrowed, groups of people and children came running to the waters edge to greet us. So the convoy steamed on right into the city's heart where the Cathedral bells pealed out their greetings.

At last we have on the North-West European coast our first port ready for immediate use by a large number of the big supply ships. Secondly, that port is close to the fighting fronts. Thirdly, the strain on manpower, rolling stock, coal and petrol by the overland convoys of supplies from Cherbourg by rail or on the Red Ball highway is now removed.

Cherbourg, as I saw it only a short time ago, is doing a grand job but, apart from the fact that the retreating Germans carried out great demolitions, the supplies landed there are nearly 400 miles from the places where they are needed.

The numbers of men, vehicles and supplies landed through the Mulberry Harbour and the nearby beaches on which the original landings were made has surprised the world. Through them were mounted the British and U.S. attacks that established the bridgeheads, captured the Cherbourg Peninsular, and achieved the break through at Caen and Avranches to open the way to Paris and Brussels.

Recently I sailed to Mulberry in a convoy of large cargo ships and saw how the supplies were still going in there. But winter in the channel is a cruel enemy to temporary breakwaters, and the liberation of France and Belgium has left Mulberry and the beaches far behind the forward sectors.

These apart, the battle of transporting men and supplies, since D-Day, has been fought through small ports - Granville, Barfleur, St. Vaast, Isigny and Port en Bassin, and with little ships - the "coasters". The suicide defenders of Brest, Le Havre, Rouen, Dieppe, Boulogne and Calais, have denied us the use of these ports as long as possible and, when finally overcome, they made a thorough job of the demolitions.

These facts give an indication of what Antwerp means to those charged with fighting this supply battle - the British Merchant Navy and Ministry of War Transport, with the U.S. Merchantmen and War Shipping Administration.

From British ports, locos and rolling stock, have had to be sent to set moving the transport that feeds the forward area; coal to get the Continental coal mines working, petrol for the vehicles making the long journeys "up the line", not only from the distant ports but also from the "dumps" left well in the rear by the speed of the Allied advance.

The men of the Merchant Navy have given of their best. Little ships used to coastal waters have taken out their small craft in weather that was "the channel at its worst." Many a deep sea man has made a score of trips in the time he used to be away for a single voyage. They have watched the spring and neap tides to minutes, and carried out miracles of seamanship in shallow draughts.

Dockers in the United Kingdom have made new records, but even these have been excelled by the Ministry Dock Groups working and living in appalling conditions on the far shore.

Whilst the Armies were fighting for the possession of the beaches and ports, the uniformed men of the Sea Transport Division of the War Transport Ministry went in to open up the unloading operations. Their Offices were, many times, in their waistcoat pockets and their houses in slit trenches.

As the assault moved on they went with it leaving much of this port work in the hands of the "B.M.W.T." men - who stepped up this organisation until it matched the work in the ports in Great Britain.

That has been the battle of transport. But now it is not enough.

"I want more supplies than we are getting" the Supreme Commander has declared. And the biggest answer of all to General Eisenhower is - Antwerp.



The port can handle all the British military tonnage which may be required for the armies in North-West Europe and, at the same time, deal with an enormous additional tonnage of supplies for civilian use. Actually it is to be used jointly by British and American transportation authorities supplemented, of course, by the other liberated ports already in use.

There are 178 berths for big ships in the docks which has wet basins covering nearly 26 miles of dock frontage, the riverside berths stretching for  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles.

All the small dock tugs are intact and the big river tugs have been brought back from England to which they were taken when the Germans occupied the port. A corps of 250 sea and river pilots, all of them Belgians, are ready to take in the ships.

All the cranes, totalling more than 540 of various types have been left, and more than 90 per cent of them are in working order. Many of them are capable of heavy lifts up to 150 tons.

Although the Germans retained possession of Marksan, where the city's electric power station is situated, for a considerable period after the port was liberated, they did not destroy the plant, so that there is ample electric current available for the working of the docks gear.

The dry docks are in excellent condition and will not only meet the needs of Antwerp itself but also relieve the strain on British dry docks.

Clearance of supplies will be by rail, road or inland waterways. The vital points where the rail systems has been damaged are being rapidly repaired, the roads, including two direct to Brussels are in good condition, and the clearance by canal will be assisted by the 500 barges which were captured together with the 62,000 tons of material in their holds.

For Port labour an army of 8,000 skilled stevedores and 10,000 unskilled men are ready - many of them already in action. They are administered by ABAS, an association of 60 stevedoring companies. The movement of cargo after it is landed on the shore will be handled by the Bon der Naties organisation.

The Belgian Government has already announced that it will be responsible for paying the wages of all port workers. The Civil Affairs Organisation is providing tyres for the workers' Bicycles and special tram and bus services have been arranged.

Assisting the British War Transport Officers in the port are 30 former Belgian Merchant Navy Officers, most of them having served in the White Brigade.

Two 10,000 ton cargo ships, a 12,000 ton tanker and dozens of craft capable of carrying 2,000 to 3,000 tons were amongst the vessels found in the Boel shipyards when the port was liberated.

The vital part the port can play in helping to feed the population of the liberated countries is shown by the 23 grain elevators, each capable of unloading 200 tons per hour. A ship loaded with 7,000 tons of grain could be unloaded in 36 hours.

The bulk oil installations at Hoboken are intact. They have a capacity of 300,000 tons, so that tankers too can join the victory convoys to Antwerp.

In peacetime Antwerp handled up to 80,000 tons of cargo per day. Its wartime figures cannot, of course, be revealed.