

# Ensign John H. Harwood, USNR Writes Interestingly Of Allied Speed In Clearing Port of Cherbourg

(Editor's Note: Ensign John Harwood, USNR, and commander of a Naval gun crew on an American merchant ship, and former managing editor of the Birmingham Eccentric, has prepared the following interesting story about Cherbourg, France, the port cleared in record time by the Allies and through which is passing great quantities of Allied war supplies.)

There is a statue of Napoleon in the principal waterfront square at Cherbourg. Astride a bronze horse, the famed soldier looks out over the harbor with what may well be a glowing yet surprised expression, for he is gazing on an important part of one of history's most successful military operations.

The Germans, as they scuttled out of Cherbourg, after first blowing most of the harbor installations to smithereens, probably

didn't have the wit—or time—to see the irony of leaving Napoleon intact. Hitler might just as well be riding that horse, too, for his career parallels that of the French emperor. Both set out to conquer the world, both were defeated in Russia, and both failed in a cross-channel invasion.

I made the acquaintance of Napoleon a few weeks ago when the Liberty ship on which my men make up the gun crew poked her way through the harbor ruins to bring another load of the stuff making up the funeral arrangements for Hitler and his gang. The activity was a surprise to me and it must be even more astounding to the Nazis some 400 miles to the east as their spies bring back tales of the mountainous quantities of supplies which are pouring in at this "most important port in Allied hands on the English channel," to use the words of Col. James A. Crother, harbor commander for the Army.

Until the recent great German counter-offensive, the enemy limited his retaliation to launching robot bombs and rocket bombs at England. I have seen the former and the latter, and while they are not comfortable things to have around, they have so far failed to do any military damage, according to the English authorities.

### New York Traffic

Cherbourg reminded me of Broadway and 42nd street insofar as bustle and traffic is concerned, but in regard to the mud—it's more like Uncle Timmy's cornfield after a spring thaw. To try and carry on a conversation is almost useless as you stroll along on Cherbourg's narrow sidewalks for the huge trucks going by in an endless procession make a terrific rattle, and meanwhile you are busy trying to maintain a footing and to avoid the mud splattered about by the spinning wheels. German prisoners, many of whom are not Germans but come from the Balkans and even Mongolia, seem a bit dazed by it all as they repair roads, put up buildings and help unload ships.

The trucks feed the supply dumps and the ten-ton, ten-wheeled Red Ball express highway, on which some 9,000 trucks roll day and night bringing supplies to the front. Two roads are used—one east and one west, and only vehicles with the red ball on their windshields are permitted to use the thoroughfares, which are four lanes wide and spaced about 100 feet apart and which carried 200,000 tons of supplies in the first 26 days of operations. One night 10,000 troops were rushed eastward. Before the express highway idea was inaugurated Aug. 24, Army authorities say there were terrible traffic jams and trucks became lost, strayed or stolen—yes, some were even hijacked by units which needed the vehicles and supplies.

But trucks were not the only load. Another remarkable victory in the battle of supply is that of the pipelines—more than 700 miles of them—which carry gasoline overland to the front. The new canal of the English channel in pipelines, one of the major engineering achievements of the war. Tank trucks, too help carry this all-important fluid; the Red Ball express alone is capable of handling 1 1/2 million gallons a day.

### Rail Traffic Important

Less novel, but of major importance, is the railroad traffic. The locomotives are largely American—36 were recently unloaded, with steam up and ready to run as soon as they hit tracks laid down at the quay's edge. It is reported in the French edition of "Stars and Stripes," the Army daily newspaper. At one time early in the campaign, an engine ran out of coal but continued operation when the fireman threw in cross-ties, straw and scrap lumber. One engineer fired the engine and handled the throttle for 36 hours without respite.

The rolling stock is composed of American locos built on the European style, which means they are smaller, with only four wheels instead of the customary eight, with chain couplings and round hummers on both ends. Mixed with them, I noted in Cherbourg, are English cars, French, Italian, Belgian and even "Deutsche Reichsbahn" cars.

I was standing on a viaduct one day, watching a train approach, and I wondered why half a dozen children were waiting so intently. I soon found out. When the engine drew near, I saw the GI Casey Jones in the cab give a healthy kick and out flew about a bushel of coal, with the youngsters scrambling to pick it up. While on the subject of coal, it was a common sight to see Frenchmen wearing berets and clamping along in wooden-soled shoes, carrying a

bundle of wood salvaged from the debris.

### Seek Normal Life

Amidst all this activity, the French are trying to get back to normal life, but still have a long way to go. It appeared that half of the stores are closed and in those that are doing business, the shelves are almost empty. It seemed to be a fair amount of food in Cherbourg—at least of bread, vegetables and meat. I saw much more beef in the shops than in England. Allied forces are forbidden to buy any food, nor can they frequent any of the numerous cafes and bars, which are still featuring a Normandy special. (The French spell it cidre, the English, cyder.) Nearly every day I saw farmers coming in from the country on their big two-wheeled carts, hauling great casks of this apple juice.

The surrounding countryside is a rich agricultural area and it is easier for food to come in than in the case with Paris, for example. I didn't go to the capital, but I saw others who did, and they reported that the city is just as fascinating as ever, with the boulevards enhanced by plenty of well-dressed women. Supplies are short, however, particularly cigarettes. A package of cigs—such as the English idiom puts it—sells for \$1.40 on the black market.

As far as destruction is concerned, Paris escaped completely in comparison with Cherbourg. On June 26, when the city was captured, its docks and great naval arsenal were shambles. Our bombers and naval gunfire did most of the destruction, and then the Germans finished it, sinking ships wherever they could, mining the harbor, blowing up airplane hangars, burning warehouses and repair shops, and destroying the locks which maintained the water level inside the basin. (The tides at Cherbourg are common to 20 feet.)

Three days after the city fell, naval ship salvage forces, under the command of Commodore William A. Sullivan, of New York, veteran salvage expert, began immediately clearing the harbor of the wrecks in the harbor and basin, while nearly 8,000 army engineers were busy working on the docks and railroad lines. Meanwhile, supplies started rolling ashore as LST's and scowler craft beached themselves at high tide, and not only that, scores of army "ducks"—those amazing amphibious boats—plied back and forth to ships lying at anchor. At one time, 100 "ducks" were used in the ashore in this sector by means of the ducks and they are still being used.

### GI Swarm Edinburgh

Over on the English side of the channel life is just returning to a semblance of normalcy, now that most of the soldiers have gone, although in a popular "flexo city" like Edinburgh. I noticed that there are still as many GIs on the streets as there are Scotsmen. The air raid sirens still howl at night in the areas subject to robot bomb attacks. These Nazi machines are interesting to watch as long as they keep their distance. When one of them approaches, the detection device picks up the sound and the sirens wail. Then you see a light on the horizon like that of a locomotive headlight, growing larger and closer. As the anti-aircraft batteries open up with their brilliant streams of tracers, accompanied by the staccato cracks and slower crumps from the larger guns, the sound of the flying bomb is also heard. This resembles the noise of a big truck more than the roar of a high-speed airplane engine. As the bomb comes nearer, you hold your breath, then relax as you note with relief that it is going past. Finally comes the roar of a pursuing plane, and then a great detonation that lights the sky and shakes the earth. You wonder, in conclusion, who and what hit it.

The new secret weapon No. 2, the rocket bomb, which was described publicly for the first time Nov. 10 by Prime Minister Churchill in the House of Commons, is a still more erratic weapon and more eerie. There is no warning. If one drops nearby, there is just a terrific flash and blast which jars the filling in your teeth.

Our English allies are pretty much inured to all this, but it is easy to see that one great sight of relief will be heaved when it is all over and people can get a good night's sleep.

It's pretty unattractive up at and near the front, to put it mildly. No wonder the servicemen I talked with were not much concerned with politics and the crumbling world order! Their main objective is to get a nasty job done with and to get home.

(Passed by Public Relations Office, Third Naval District.)

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