

D-Day: Stories from the Walls



14th Major Port US Army: Southampton Operational History

During the Maritime Archaeology Trust's National Lottery Heritage Funded D-Day Stories from the Walls project, volunteers undertook online research into topics and themes linked to D-Day, Southampton, ships and people during the Second World War.

Their findings were used to support project outreach and dissemination.

This Research Article was undertaken by one of our volunteers and represents many hours of hard and diligent work. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our amazing volunteers.

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14th Major Port US Army: Southampton

(Re-designated 14th Major Embarkation Port Southampton in June 1945)

OPERATIONAL HISTORY



Figure 1: US Army Transportation Corps Insignia

Source: <http://www.milbadges.com/corps/USA/transportation>

From CivicHeraldry.com

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1. Introduction & Period to D-Day

The 14th Port was formally and fully established in Southampton port and docks by 1 February 1944, its purpose being to control and administer the unloading of cargo from America up until 26 April 1944 [Fold3 Ch.IX], followed by the embarkation of troops and equipment destined for Normandy on D-Day, the replenishment thereof, receiving war casualties, receiving German prisoners of war from France to a transit camp near Dock Gate 8 , and repatriation of troops and equipment to America and of war brides.

The first 14th Port Commander located at Southampton was Colonel Walter D. McCord, appointed on 1 February 1944. The US Army Regulations “defines the duties of a Port Commander as follows: -

“The commanding officer of a port of embarkation will be responsible for and will have authority over all activities at the port, the reception, supply, transportation, embarkation and debarkation of troops and the receipt storage and transportation of supplies. He will see that the ships are furnished him are properly fitted out for the purpose for which they are intended; he will supervise the operation and maintenance of military traffic between his port and the overseas base or bases through the superintendent, Army Transport Service; he will command all troops assigned to the port and its component ports, including troops being staged and will be responsible for the efficient and economical direction of their operations. He will be responsible for the furnishing of necessary instructions to individuals and organizations embarked or debarked at the port and he is authorized to communicate directly with the proper individuals or authorities relative to such matters, after initial War Department movement directive has been issued. He will be responsible for taking the necessary measures to ensure the orderly flow of troops and supplies through the port” [Fold3 Port Commander Duty].

Cargo and troops were shipped to the United Kingdom under the Bolero programme – Bolero was the code name in official communications for United Kingdom, to which American troops and cargo would be shipped from April 1942 through to 1944. Initially, war planes were prominent but cargoes became generic [Bolero]. 59 Bolero ships arrived at Southampton between 1 August 1943 and 30 June 1944 [Fold3 Ports], but a significant amount of cargo was shipped to the UK's western ports and moved overland to where needed. Most of the American troops landed at other UK ports and were entrained to staging or marshalling areas. The marshalling area around Southampton was known as Area "C" which required unprecedented creation of facilities for thousands of troops and a vast tonnage of material, comprising camps, depots, hards, slipways, fuel dumps, all backed up by security provisions.

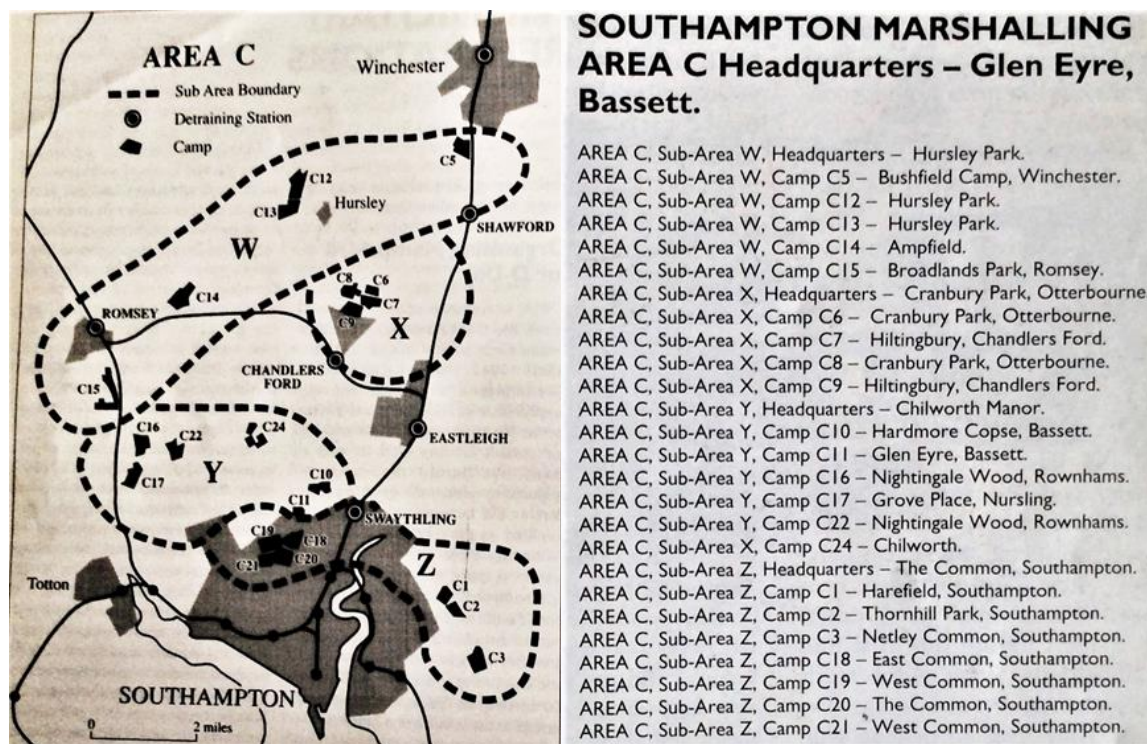


Figure 2: Marshalling Area "C"

Source: Hampshire and D-Day. Edited by Martin Doughty. Chapter Two by Martin Polley (1994:21,48)

Following a trial in July 1943 as to how many troops could be boarded per day at Southampton, Area "C" was uprated to embark 44,000 per day which by D-Day had risen to over 50,000 per day and over 7,000 vehicles, reflecting the impressive capacity of Southampton and confirming its choice as the principal port [Hampshire and D-Day, Figure 1]. Area "C" became the responsibility of the 14th Port in August 1944 [Transportation Corps: 263], Area "C" was planned to accommodate 44,750 troops and 6,690 vehicles – 50 percent of Southampton Common and 50 percent of Hiltingbury were to be used mainly for respectively marching personnel and vehicles. Additionally, as far as possible, 50 percent of each of Southampton Common and Hiltingbury were to be utilised as spare. "Accommodation in King Edwards School may be included in capacity for vehicles and personnel required in Southampton Common" [Fold3 Marshalling]. The long-established school had vacated Havelock Road and only opened in its new Hill Lane location in November 1938 but was soon evacuated on 2 September 1939 to Poole Grammar until the summer term of 1945. The War Office took over the Hill Lane premises and grounds until 1945, the buildings being used as a barracks and



Figure 3: Area "C" Map Board (Undated)
 Source: Southampton City Archive

the playing field, on which were built air raid shelters, a barrage balloon and anti-aircraft site, for parking heavy vehicles. Bomb damage including a direct hit on 6 December 1941 and together with the ravages of its use as a barracks subsequently required extensive repair and refurbishment [KES].



Figure 4: MTL (Motor Towboat Large) being offloaded from a Liberty Ship at Southampton Q2, 1944

Source: USA National Archives. U.S. Army, U.S. Forces, European Theater, Historical Division: Records, 1941-1946. WWII European Theater Army Records 4 - Staff Section Reports 582c - Transportation Corps, Vol II Quarterly History, Page 73. Accessed March 2020 via <https://www.fold3.com/image/1/291670488>

The personnel including attached units active in the 14th Port throughout the period comprised mainly black sections in the majority of port companies, truck companies, quartermaster service companies, fumigation company, engineer general service companies and medical sanitary companies [Google Service Units]. Most other Units did not have enlisted black personnel.

A wealth of US derived statistics for late 1942 to end of 1943, including some part periods therein are available [Fold3 Statistics] but in general do not deal with Southampton in isolation. One that does is shown in Figure 5. In the period displayed, Southampton docks discharged 9.58 long tons per gang hour, placing them 9th out of 15 ports.

Several different US Units came under the umbrella of the 14th Port, including the 499th Port Battalion as of 31 March 1944 [Fold3 Port Battalion]. Port Battalions were adept at loading and unloading at sheltered UK harbours but underwent training to offload cargoes from coasters lying offshore under battle conditions using amphibious DUKWs. Also included were Motor Transport Units, Military Police, Army Transport Service, and Port Signal Company [Fold3 Chart]. There were also specialised sections such as Harbor Craft Companies and Port Marine Maintenance Companies, Engineers, Ordnance, Quartermaster, Chemical Warfare etc.

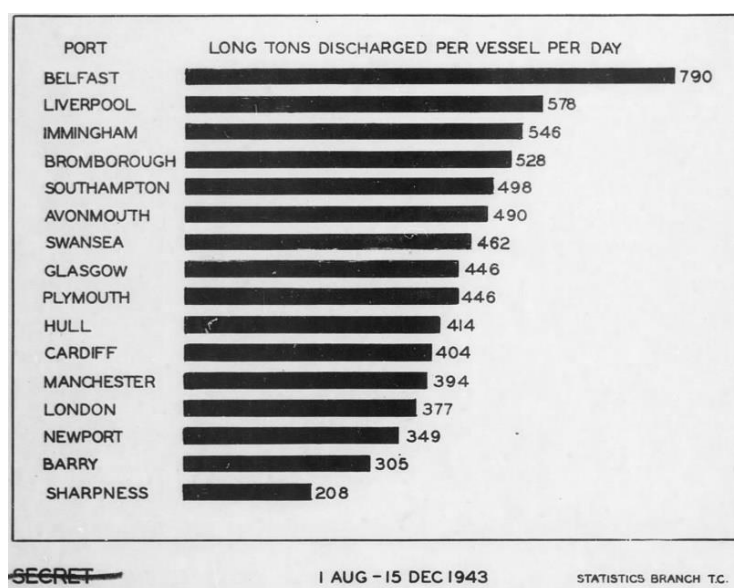


Figure 5: Comparative Port Discharge

Source: USA National Archives. U.S. Army, U.S. Forces, European Theater, Historical Division: Records, 1941-1946. WWII European Theater Army Records 4 - Staff Section Reports 582a - Transportation Corps, Appendices to Vol I, Page 166. Accessed March 2020 via <https://www.fold3.com/image/1/291669543>

(A long ton is 2,240 pounds in the British Imperial system, equivalent to 1,106kg) Southampton data based on 29 vessels.

All 331 vessels were Bolero full cargo vessels

The period April to June 1944 was extremely busy with Invasion Force "G" set to sail from Southampton. All the craft for Force "G" were loaded at Southampton except for craft carrying certain

vehicles, these being loaded at Stanwood Bay, Calshot as were some LCMs preloaded with beach rails for train rolling stock and were carried on the derricks of the Empire Class LSI. The Port Commander, Colonel Walter D. McCord was performing additional duties as US Regional Transportation Officer at Southern Base Section Headquarters, thereby dividing his time and Lt. Colonel Leo J. Meyer was acting Port Commander. Closed on 26 April to import in preparation for the invasion, the 14th Port and its attached Units increased in May to a total of 5,288 personnel. Poole was established as Sub-Port and with Southampton included the pre-invasion of loading of 104 self-propelled LBV type barges with

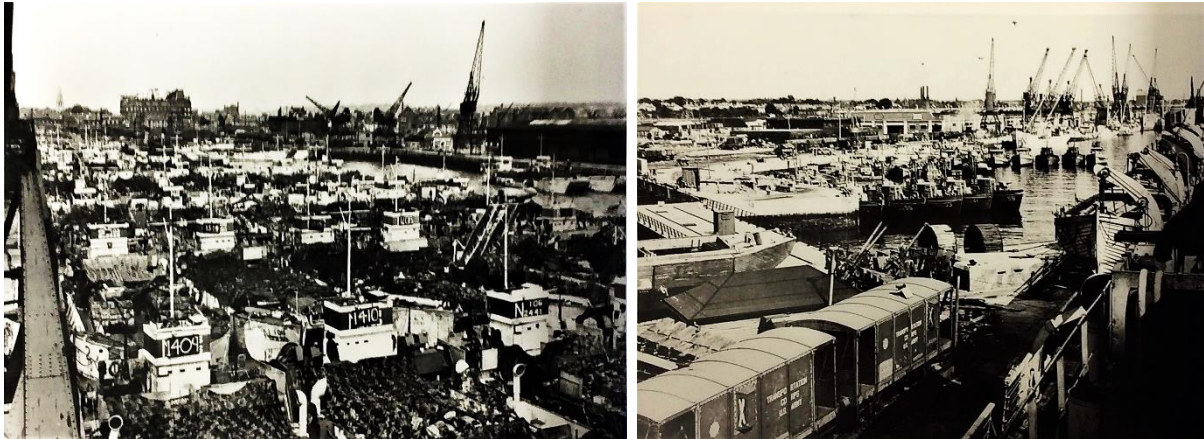


Figure 6: Pre-Invasion Congestion in Southampton Docks

Source: Southampton City Archive. About and Around Southampton: The Town and the Port [Local History]. Burrow.



Figure 7: Building Rafts at Southampton

Source: Still ex <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=48pH89admYg>

ammunition, petroleum products and supplies. Additionally, *“because of the fundamental importance of sustaining the Allied offensive, 14th Port also became responsible for the loading a special pool of tankers at the Solent installations of Hamble and Fawley”*. The 14th Port was responsible, under the supervision of American and Canadian personnel for building huge rafts from large poles bundled with wire, similar to Canadian lumber rafts, for towing to the invasion beaches for use by Engineer units.

2. From D-Day to December 1944

By invasion day, 15 LSTs were equipped with rails to transport, from July, assembled railway wagons to improvised shore ramps, later direct to Cherbourg. Larger rail units including locomotives were shuttled by British ferries between Southampton and Cherbourg, and by two American sea-trains – the *Texas* and *Lakehurst* from Cardiff to Cherbourg. Southampton embarked 90 percent of the rolling stock shipped to Europe [Transportation Corps: 258, 259].

Wanting to ensure that 14th Port in Southampton was proceeding without problem following the start of the invasion, the Chief of Transportation, Major General Frank. S. Ross, spent most of that week in Southampton [Fold3: Ross].

By the end of June, 1944, 14th Port had risen to approximately 700 civilian personnel, including additional truck drivers, and 5,153 military including the 103rd and 104th US Port Marine Companies,

engaged in ship repair and maintenance using a waterfront facility keeping harbour craft operational and which subsequently became key, repairing damaged craft returned from Normandy. From 6 June 1944, D-Day, the loading comprised two distinct activities, vehicles with personnel on Motor Transport Vessels and general stores on coasters. The target was 12 MTVs daily but severe storms in the third week curtailed voyages because the temporary Normandy beach installations were damaged – nevertheless, over 19 days a possible total of 168 MTVs sailed carrying 63,104 personnel and 22,548 vehicles. Coaster voyages began on 11 June and by 30 June, 34 coasters had carried 20,972 tons of ammunition and POL. From 19 June to 30 June, Hamble and Fawley had carried 5,469 tons in 13 tankers.



Figure 8: Activity in Southampton Docks (Undated)

Source: Southampton City Archive.
About and Around Southampton: The Town and the Port [Local History]. Burrow.

The US Military Police assisted by the Southampton Police ensured that convoys to the docks travelled uninterrupted both within the port area but also along the external road network. The MPs were additionally responsible for security and subsequently they assisted with movements of Prisoners of War. The 499th Port Battalion was joined in this period by the 512th Port Battalion, respectively commanded by Major Erquiet Taylor and Major James G. Buchanan and are credited with the successful and timely loading of the Motor Transports, converted American Liberty ships, and importantly the onboard stowage so that vehicles were not damaged in the Channel crossings. To achieve the foregoing schedules, over 2,000 Port Battalion stevedores were moved to and from the port using over 100 buses and trucks. The 399th Truck Company moved the stevedores but also transported rations from nearby storage facilities, one three-day period in June totalling over 570,000, and during the month dispensed over 75,000 gallons of fuel travelling about 225,000 miles.

The two Harbor Craft Companies - the 329th and 330th - from nearby Selsey, towed Phoenix units, bridge spans and pier heads to their waiting seagoing tugs to take to Normandy where the work they accomplished was commended by both the Admiralty and US Navy authorities. Nine of their small craft were severely damaged, but no lives were lost. The 14th Port's Quartermaster section were responsible during June 1944 for the procurement for loading of 645,000 10-in-1 rations, 70,000 "K" rations, and "C" rations, 368,000 gallons diesel, 442,000 gallons petrol, 39,000 gallons lubrication oils, over 6,000 Army blankets and over 156,00 life-jackets.

The Engineer section constructed a new 14th Port Headquarters with 1,000-person mess in Taunton School. The Medical section provided medical supplies for the MTs, harbour craft and hospital ships, and the Port Surgeon liaised with the American hospital ships discharging casualties at Southampton. The Port Veterinarian's office inspected rations loaded aboard ships. The Chemical Warfare Section assisted supervising loading of POL supplies as well as their routine work. The Port Signal Section, provided with emergency generator and batteries for key equipment, became increasingly busy when Southampton was confirmed as the principal port for the invasion, and on 15 March 1944, requested additional equipment to cater for the increase of signal communication which resulted in 23 and 125 percent respectively for teleprint and ordinary messages [Fold3 Chapter IX]. Southampton became the centre of most of the communications and signal traffic not only in its port, but also for its Sub-Port Poole, all the attached units, as well as the XVIIIth District Transportation Office, and operated as a clearing house for communications for all units in the area near Southampton [Fold3 Signals].

On 21 July 1944, 75 vessels were loaded for Normandy, comprising 10,603 deadweight cargo and 19,828 troops [Southampton Port of Embarkation].

At Southampton in the *“period 6 June to 6 September 1944, 686,868 personnel were embarked on LSI’s, MTV’s, LST’s, LCI’s, and LCT’s and 140,303 vehicles were loaded aboard MTV’s, LST’s and LCT’s”* [Transportation Corps: 263]. *“During the first 90 days of the invasion 14th Port out-loadings, including ammunition, packaged POL, general cargo, bulk POL, and vehicles, totalled 990,341 long tons”* involving 3,517 vessels and landing craft [Transportation Corps: 268].

On 3 September 1944, 703rd Medical Sanitary Company was officially attached to the 14th Port *“for rations, quarters, and administration”* although they had been at their tented camp at Millbrook for some months. *“The primary mission of this organisation was to supply the litter (stretcher) teams necessary for the evacuation of waterborne casualties from 14th Port to either a Holding Station or to Transit Hospitals”* [Fold3 703rd Medical].

Southampton in October 1944 was notable for the unexpected arrival of American troop ships, the 1,000,000th embarkation of an American soldier, extension of 14th Port responsibilities, salvage work, resumption of cargo arrivals, unexpected arrival of French troops, and marshalling area “D”.

Troop ships from America after the invasion were scheduled to disembark, not at 14th Port, but at Continental ports which had been expected in pre-invasion planning to be in a condition to receive them which was not the case, and the majority were diverted to Southampton and Plymouth. The first diverted arrival at Southampton was the *Thomas Barry* disembarking 3,693 personnel, the next day the *Marine Raven* disembarked 2,500 troops; four more troop ships arrived during October at Southampton. This was to continue until the Continental ports were ready.

On 25 October 1944 after only 141 days, the 1,000,000th American soldier, private Paul S. Shiner, Jr of Chambersburg, was embarked from Southampton for Europe, and the occasion was marked by a brief ceremony involving Shiner, the American Red Cross, US and British Army Officers with speeches from Colonel Kiser and Councillor R. J. Stranger, Mayor of Southampton. During 24 hours on 27 October 1944, 22,465 troops embarked for Normandy.

On 13 October 1944, 13th Port relinquished control and responsibility of the ports of Plymouth, Dartmouth, Truro, Falmouth and Hayle which became Sub-Ports of the 14th Port which already controlled Southampton, Portland, Weymouth, Poole, Fawley and Hamble. Major Ralph Hall was appointed Sub-Port Commander of the Plymouth area.

Salvage work increased significantly in October. Two vessels, *SS Campfire* and the *John C. Kendall* were seriously damaged in separate collisions due to heavy weather and poor visibility. Their cargoes were discharged at Southampton, as well as from other ships, the tonnage being the largest since Bolero discharges had been stopped on 26 April. Early in October, without any warning, Southampton received 2,100 Free French recruits and repatriated troops who were billeted in nearby Staging Area Camps, jointly operated by British and American troops. Medical examination of the French showed that they were disease infected, and 14th Port supplied medical services, interpreters etc until it was decided that they belonged to the British Army.

Marshalling Area “D”, a pre-invasion facility, was terminated by the British on 5 October 1944. The 14th Port assumed responsibility of Area “D” and operated it similarly to Area “C” which was by now under control of the 14th Port. However, prior to the invasion, 14th Port had provided the nucleus of staff and 1st Lt. Pufred L. Schaeffer now assumed command of Area “D” which had been for 25,770

American troops and 3,736 vehicles located at Dewlish, Yellowham, Piddlehinton, Dorchester, Kingston Russel, Winterbourne Abbas, Bradford Down, Winterbourne St. Martin, Broadmayne, Down Wood, Bincombe and Chicherill.

Outgoing tonnage of cargo, vehicles and railway stock decreased in October compared to September and the numbers of troops reduced, 134,350 to France and 7,436 to America. Tanker loading was the only increase, 21,970 tons compared to 5,820 in September reflecting the requirements of the Allied mechanised armies. The total tonnage was 279,252, the highest of the UK ports, and the fourth highest in the world for October. In total, 90 percent of the railway rolling stock was loaded at Southampton.

In October Southampton also received 53,588 German Prisoners of War and 8,250 casualties, both German and American. Five high ranking German Generals and four Admirals, part of an entire vessel load of Germans was embarked on 25 October upon the *John Ericson* for America.

By November 1944, the operational character of the 14th Port had changed dramatically, significant troop transports being the norm rather than cargo vessels of which only 37 MTVs were loaded. But tanker loadings became the emphasis, with 81,462 tons of POL supplies, again reflecting the advances in Europe of the Allied forces. One tanker was loaded with 14,464 tons, the largest amount of cargo to be loaded on any one ship during the 14th Port operations. Since it began, November 1944 had the highest number of operatives and by the end of the month had 6,641 American military personnel and 665 Italians who were housekeeping for the 14th Port Staging Area. The Harbour Craft Company numbered eight different Companies and were the largest Unit at that time working in the 14th Port. There were also changes in key operational staff.

The heavy November weather resulted in the loss of two harbour craft, a medium sized tug MT854 lost to an explosion without casualties, a large tug LT371 grounded off Hayling Island but was eventually saved, and on 28 November 1944, LT389 and LT638 collided off St. Catherine's Point. There were seven survivors for the 20 on board LT389 which capsized and was sunk by destroyer HMS *Vanquisher* because it was deemed a "menace to navigation" [Fold3 14th Port].

In December 1944, the Germans effected a breakthrough of Allied forces, known as the Von Rundstedt Offensive in the Ardennes [Wikipedia Rundstedt] which quickly affected 14th Port. Large convoys of American MTVs were en route to America as no longer needed in large numbers but were rerouted back to Britain. The German attack resulted in 108,415 tons of POL from Hamble being loaded, a sharp increase on November, and an eight percent increase in general supplies to 243,415 tons. The one thousandth MTV was loaded by the 14th Port in December, and these vessels carried 121,884 vehicles and 277,741 troops



Figure 9: Troops Embarking at Southampton – 13.12.1944

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62nR0kph9Ic>

during the month. A conference on 21 December 1944 was held to agree new berthing allocations at Southampton, arising from a decision to reduce drastically the loading of vessels in the Bristol Channel area, thus facilitating a return to domestic use and normal trade. This however required additional vessels to be assigned to Southampton, Plymouth and Poole, all under 14th Port control. LSTs and LCTs remained important, and Hamble POL tonnage increased again to 108,415.

German U-boats were still evident, and two LSTs loaded by the 14th Port in December were sunk. SS *Leopoldville*, a Belgian passenger liner converted to a troopship was en route in convoy WEP-3 from Southampton to Cherbourg and was torpedoed on 24 December and sunk by U-486 just over five miles from the French coast. On board were 2,235 troops, of the US 66th Infantry Division, 139 crew, and cargo – the master, Charles Limbor, 55 crew and 763 soldiers were lost. Details of 874 of those on board are available [uboot.net Leopoldville]. On 28 December 1944, SS *Empire Javelin*, an LSI(L), was en route from Southampton to Le Havre when it was struck, probably by a mine, and sank mid-channel [Maritime Quest: Empire Javelin]. There were 1,483 US servicemen of HQ Company 15th Army on board – 11 servicemen and 6 crew were lost.

Due to the transfer of several units to Europe, and the transfer of nearly 300 men to Infantry Replacement Training centres, the strength of 14th Port dropped to 5,136 which was seen with concern for maintaining vessel loading and unloading targets. The Port also rendered assistance to the Postal Units to deal with Christmas mail which totalled 84,969 pouches of which 58,109 were parcel post bags. Chairman Paul V. McNutt, on behalf of the United States Manpower Commission, led a party to the 14th Port for inspection, in connection with inspecting military installations in the United Kingdom and Europe. 10,000 cases of French currency passed through the 14th Port destined for the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force, and 14th Port received a commendation for how it was handled. Finally, for December 1944, Large Tug 553 was towing three TIDs from Le Havre to Southampton when No 70 hit a mine and sank, with the explosion casting TID No 30 adrift but which was later recovered – 533 continued the tow of No 72 arriving in Southampton without loss of life. This was followed by sweeping up 19 mines in the area.

Enlisted personnel from the 14th Port supported by the US Navy provided a Christmas party on 23 December for 1,000 children at Southampton Guildhall [Southampton Port of Embarkation].

3. 1945 Onwards – Notable Events Month-by-Month

January 1945. The large troop transports from America which had been diverted to Southampton and Plymouth in October 1944 were able to dock in Europe, principally at the repaired Le Havre. But these ships after disembarking were routed to Southampton to embark patients and others back to America, mostly consisting of casualties. But, the coaster traffic at Southampton remained busy as cargo for onward shipment to Europe was brought there rather than to the Bristol area.

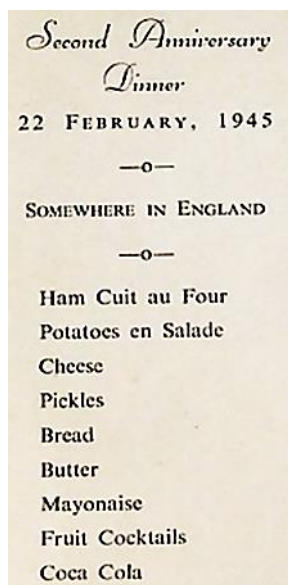
The 1,000th Landing Ship Tank, LST 57, was loaded at Southampton on 4 January 1945, one of an average 143 such vessels per month since D-Day. The 2,000,000th American soldier since D-Day, Pvt. Walter F. Richl of Cumberland, Maryland to embark from the UK, boarded an LSI on 16 January 1945 at Pier 23 in the Old Docks area, Southampton. Bronze Star Awards were made for the first time to ten enlisted 14th Port men together with numerous Certificates of Merit. Southampton was selected as the debarkation and embarkation port for troops visiting Britain on leave from Europe and their subsequent return. These troops were split into three groups according to where they intended to spend their leave, in London, north of London, with special trains or in the south of England. To cater for the third group, camp C-19 (see Figure 2) was closed as a staging area, and “winterised” assisted by the 14th Port Engineer Section for leave troops. Three more 14th Port inspections took place – by the War Department Manpower Board for manpower conditions, for the communications facilities,

and an observation tour of out-loading activities. All tonnages, and troops embarked, reduced in January 1945. By 31 January 1945 Southampton together with Weymouth and Portland, had, since D-Day had loaded 340,334 vehicles, and embarked 2,199,886 troops.

The 354th and the 356th Harbour Craft Companies departed to Europe in January 1945. The 14th Port's Army Air Force section had its inaugural flight with Air Corps representatives in Europe, most incoming cargoes being Air Corps engines for repair. A courier service, originally handled by 14th Port but transferred to London was reinstated during January and the Port's Signal Section operated the service by ships shuttling between Southampton and the French ports.

There was a perception that 14th Port officers were "jinxed", none having been promoted, but this was laid to rest during January when 29 officers were promoted.

February 1945. The personnel strength of the 14th Port was reducing and was no longer able to operate Staging Area Camps "C" and "D" which on 15 February 1945 were transferred to Southern District. The loss of the two Harbor Companies in January forced 14th Port to close Camps C-12 and C-13, thus concentrating activities in those which remained. 14th Port's manpower situation was becoming critical, and following a conference between Colonel Clough Gee of Southern District and Colonel Sherman L. Kiser, it was agreed that Southern District would on 15 February 1945 take over "C" and "D" areas although 14th Port remained responsible for ferrying troops and vehicles between the Camps and the Port. Manpower strength dropped to 4,059. However, coaster loading increased consequent on the reduction passed through the Bristol ports area and Southampton surpassed its target tonnage quota.



**Figure 10: 14th Port
2nd Anniversary Dinner**

Source: Southampton City
Archive. About and Around
Southampton: The Town and
the Port [Local history]. Burrow

On 2 February 1945, a "Leave Ship" service shuttling between Southampton and the Continent was initiated with two vessels, the USAT *Borinquen* and the SS *Explorer*, both requisitioned steam turbine powered American ships, respectively a small liner of 1,289 passenger and 1,010m³ cargo capacity, and a C3 type cargo ship with 2,129 passenger and 3,600m³ capacity. Weather permitting, one of these ships sailed daily and disembarked troops entrained directly on the quayside. Again, there were visits to 14th Port, by the Manpower Board of the War Department studying manpower conditions at Southampton, Poole and Plymouth, by Lt. General Leonard T. Gerow of the 15th Army, and by Major General J.A. Van Fleet and Brigadier General J.D. Balmer observing 14th Port activities on behalf of the 23rd Corps.

Tonnage and troop numbers decreased slightly in February 1945, but 14th Port including all its Sub-Ports had the distinction of having handled, since D-Day, 2,429,777 American troops believed to be the highest number by any overseas Army organisation in a similar period of time. Embarkation of casualties and casuals to America totalled 18,866 in February, and during the month a total of 35,519 were disembarked of which 20,800 were casualties from the Continent, 6,233 were Prisoners of War, 8,295 were casuals, and 191 troops from America.

On 22 February 1945, a Dinner was held in recognition of the Second Anniversary of the 14th Port at Southampton attended by well over 200 personnel representing many of the Sections based at the port. The menu shown in Figure 10 reflected wartime shortages.

Between 5 and 7 February 1945, 14th Port at Southampton was subject to an inspection by the General Inspectorate Section from Headquarters, European Theater of Operations [Fold3 Inspectorate 02/45]. During the inspection, Camp C-19 was being prepared by Southern District for the 7-day leave troops from the Continent, and the Inspectorate reported very favourably about the condition and facilities in the Camp, and noted that 14th Port and the UK Base Section were doing their utmost to execute the leave periods with maximum efficiency. Plans for C-19 included a large theater, two recreation halls, a mess to accommodate 3,000 personnel and other improvements, much of the work being done by Prisoners of War.

March 1945 saw a wide variety of events. *“One of the highlights of the month was the announcement that three units attached to the Port had received the Meritorious Award for outstanding services rendered in the period following D-Day. On 1 March the award to the 10th Hospital Train was announced. This Hospital Train completed 45 crossings of the English Channel between 6 June 1944 and 31 December 1944. Again, on March 19 and 20, respectively, the 552nd and 554th Port Companies were also awarded the Meritorious Service Award. These two units were cited for out-loading vehicles on Motor Transport Vessels”* [Fold3 14th Port].

The Hamble tanker loading installation of the 14th Port shipped its 500,000th deadweight ton on 24 March. Major Corwin E. Hein with Sergeant David Olsen observed reaching this historic milestone which was *“photographed and radio-photoed to newspapers in the United States for nation-wide distribution”*.

For the first time, 6,033 Russian nationals were debarked and entrained, over four days commencing 25 March 1945. They were trucked to Camp C-21 which was 2 miles from the port, checked, clothed where necessary, then entrained for the north-west ports whence they were shipped to Russia. Most had been impressed by the Germans and when overrun became the responsibility of the US Authorities, with British assistance to process the Russians. A Major General and his staff from the Russian Military Mission in London assisted and observed the transfers.

On 14 March, the 341st Harbor Craft Company, and 874th and 824th Fumigation and Bath Companies were withdrawn from 14th Port, thereby reducing its strength to 3,422.

On 22 March 1945, MTV *John Stevenson* was loaded with 182 vehicles and 31 personnel and was the last such vessel to be loaded by 14th Port, the MTV loadings originally having started on 7 June 1944. This took the total vehicles loaded on MTVs at Southampton to 240,900 since D-Day, which with general cargo totalled 542,173 deadweight tons and these MTVs also carried 292,988 persons across the Channel. There was considerable praise heaped on the black Port Companies which had handled some 97 percent of the entire MTV loadings – this was from a start on 7 June 1944, without any training how to load these vessels, but within a few weeks had developed a very efficient methodology, including a record loading of three hours with about 120 vehicles.

Enemy action continued, not involving 14th Port but the ships concerned were using Southampton. Also, on 27 March 1945, two LSTs collided near Calshot – the *Llangibby Castle* loaded with American troops from Southampton for the Continent was severely damaged, transferred all personnel safely to *Antenor*, the other LST which was empty, and 14th Port harbour craft assisted in the prevailing calm conditions escorting both vessels into Southampton.

The tanker *Pawnee Rock* arrived at Southampton on 27 March 1945 from the Continent loaded with US Army aircraft which were transferred to auxiliary aircraft carrier the *Canandoc* for shipment to a north-west port and thence to America.

April 1945. On the 15th, the US Southern District was dissolved. This precipitated control of all staging areas in the south of England being returned to 14th Port, and these included three marshalling area camps, two leave camps and additional holding camps, numbering twenty-two, located over Southern

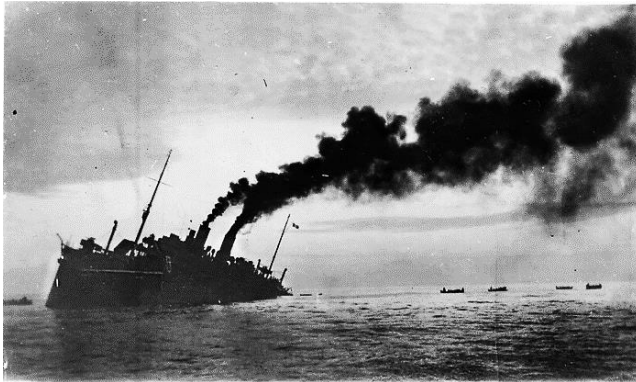


Figure 11: Loss of SS Cuba

Taken by Eddy Dillion from HMS Nene

Source: http://timetraces.ca/nene/SS_Cuba_related_items.htm

England. 14th Port resumed active operational control on 15 April of the principal staging area camps around Southampton, namely C-12 and C-13 used for transient personnel, with C-18 and C-19 used for leave personnel. The overall dead weight tonnage passed via 14th Port and its Sub-Ports during April 1945 again decreased to 292,366, as did 137,553 personnel debarked, and 9,417 vehicles by 433 ships. The reductions were due to the proximity of V-E Day [Fold3 Q2:1945].

Two ships which were frequent visitors to Southampton were lost in April – SS *Cuba*, a French steam turbine liner captured by HMS *Moreton Bay* and converted to a troop ship in February 1941, was providing a long-established shuttle service between Southampton and the Continent. It was en route, empty, in convoy VWP-116 from Le Havre to Southampton on 6 April when U-1195 torpedoed and sank it southeast of the Isle of Wight, one person being killed, the survivors being picked up by HMS *Nene*. Shortly afterwards, U-1195 was sunk by HMS *Watchman* with 32 crew lost and 18 survivors [Wrecksite: Cuba]. American tanker, USAT *Y-17*, a diesel-engined single screw tanker, shuttling between Hamble and the Continent, struck a mine off Ostend and sank with all 18 hands.



Figure 12: Signage for POW Arrivals (Undated)

Source: Southampton City Archive

May 1945. The war in Europe formally finished on 8 May 1945, V-E Day, leading to changes to 14th Port activities. Cargo shipments were immediately affected – the *NY-1284-C* arrived at Southampton with planes and mail but the mail was removed and the ship returned to America with the planes. Similarly, the *NY-1114* discharged its mail and returned to America with its cargo. This was repeated with other ships. However, throughout May 1945, Southampton loaded civilian buses which were to



**Figure 13: Lt. John Busse, MP 14th Port Provost Corps
With POWs at Southampton**

Source: Southampton City Archive. *About and Around Southampton: The Town and the Port* [Local History]. Burrow.

be handed over to the French, together with large shipments of food and clothing. The LST programme at Southampton ceased as of 26 May 1945 when *LST 515* sailed with 33 vehicles and only seven military personnel – 2,539 sailings of LSTs crewed by US Navy crews had been made from Southampton to the Continent since D-Day carrying 101,368 vehicles and over 227,010 troops [Southampton Port of Embarkation], returning with wounded troops when there was insufficient space on hospital ships or, with what was a significant percentage of German Prisoners of War. Throughout May,

the shuttle between Southampton and the Continent for the Leave programme continued, using *Borinquen*, *Explorer*, *Exchequer* and *Marine Wolf*. The American *Exchequer* was built as a steam turbine powered C3 cargo ship of 3,460m³ capacity with 1,613 passengers but was immediately converted to a troopship, and plied the shuttle from late March 1945 for seven months. *Marine Wolf*, also American, which when built had a capacity of 2,407 passengers plus space for almost 3,000m³ of cargo, visited Southampton in February 1945, then from mid-April to early October 1945 made 105 crossings between Southampton and Le Havre.

June 1945. Activities at Southampton were dominated by preparations to accommodate and embark America bound troops aboard the large vessels *Queen Mary*, *Queen Elizabeth* and *Aquitania* and by having been allocated additional staging areas located at Tidworth, Barton Stacey and Southampton, discussed later. The opportunity was taken to send several staff from Southampton's Troop Movements section to the Clyde to observe how these ships were embarked so as to avoid later problems at Southampton. These significant additional troop movements were anticipated for July and August but 14th Port was dealt a manpower blow when several units attached to the port received alert orders – leaving few personnel for marine maintenance operations. This was compensated to some extent by using German Prisoner of War labour, nearly 500 at Tidworth and many in Southampton, engaged in tasks including construction work and operating a large bakery – the Americans regarded their working standards as “exceptionally high”.

Southampton stevedores mounted an unofficial strike to support their demand for additional men to assist them when placing dunnage in ships carrying ammunition, but on 19 June 1945 agreed to return to work and arbitration. The Americans were of the opinion that there was a connection with the then current campaigns for the election due on 5 July 1945 and they avoided any involvement in the arbitration, but during the strike both British and American troops had to intervene to prevent a complete stop to cargo movements.

The first American troops, part of the 71st Regiment of the 44th Division, en route for America debarked from the *Exchequer* at Southampton on 30 June 1945 and entrained first for Tidworth then to the Clyde to embark one of the large troop ships.

Recovered Allied Military Personnel (RAMPS), namely freed American Prisoners of War, created several problems during June at the Southampton staging camps. New American regulations required that these personnel could only be paid a minimum amount of their back salaries, which was quickly spent. Shipment of RAMPS was delayed as priority was given to combat personnel scheduled for further deployment and casualties, and this was not well received by RAMPS.

June 1945 statistics at Southampton were:

Troops - 73,421 embarked to America or the Continent, 33,194 were leave troops, 9,030 disembarked from America.

Tonnage – 124,476 total. General 55,240, tanker 42,186, vehicles 26,851, 199 cargo discharged.

Vessels – 305 total. 188 LCTs, 50 cargo vessels, 32 LDIs, 14 troopers, 10 MTVs, 11 miscellaneous.

Vehicles – 4,242 total, 2,919 were on LCTs and 1,323 on MTVs

Germany signed unconditional surrender on 8 May 1945, known as VE-Day. For the Americans, the war continued for a further year; this was a technicality and a legal decision as President Truman required time to demobilise from Europe and repatriate American forces and material. In June 1945, the “*Southampton Port of Embarkation*” was formally created which was to administer all territory previously the responsibility of the 14th Major Port and additionally what were newly established staging areas at Tidworth, Barton Stacey and Southampton. Command continuity was maintained by the appointment of Colonel Sherman L. Kiser who was the then and continued as commander of the 14th Major Port [Fold3 Q2:1945].

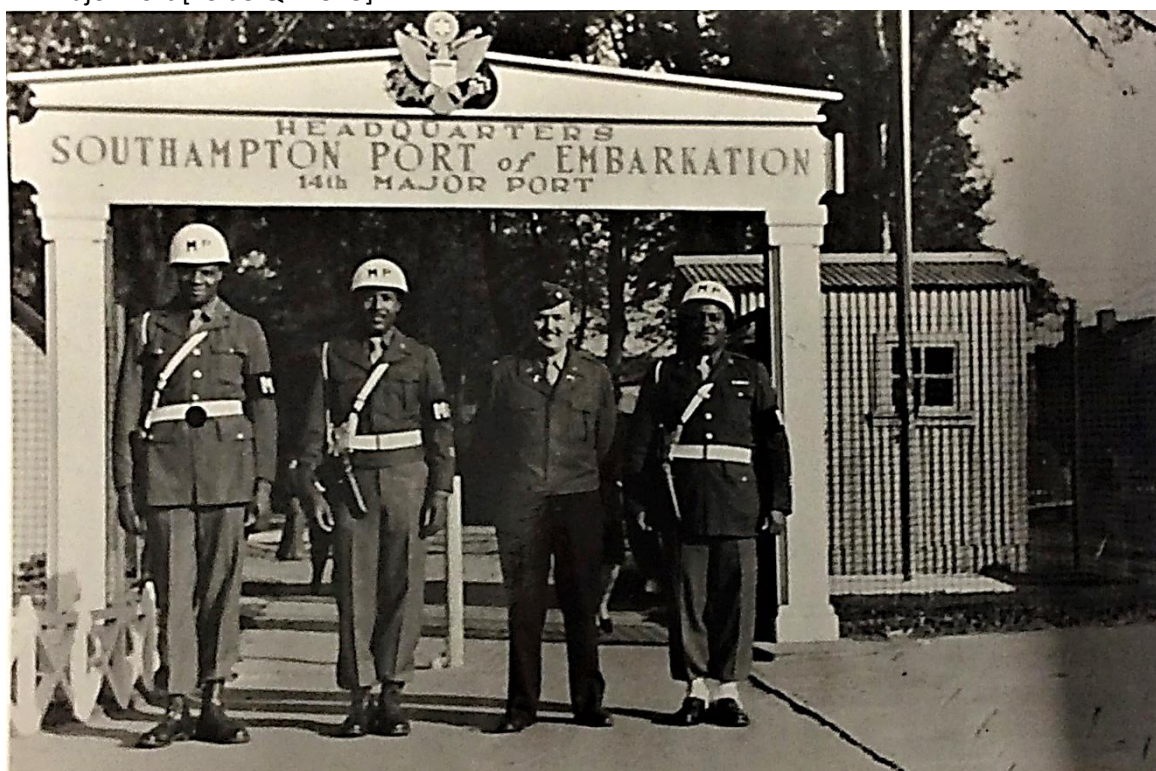


Figure 14: Temporary Gate, Southampton

Source: Southampton City Archive. *About and Around Southampton: The Town and the Port* [Local History]. Burrow.

14th Port's ongoing activities reflected the changing priorities to repatriation of troops, RAMPS, casualties and dependents. The landmark of VJ-Day is recognised as when the Japanese surrendered unconditionally on 14 August 1945 but is also known as 2 September 1945 when formalities were completed. This was followed by the award to Southampton Port of the Meritorious Service Plaque.

4. Sub-Ports

4.1 Plymouth

A detachment of 14th Port arrived at the port of Plymouth on 5 July 1943 to establish an operational presence as a Sub-Port to Southampton, and except for the period between February 1944 and October 1944 when it was run by 13th Port, exercised control through until 14 July 1945 when operations ceased. Plymouth was one of the principal arrival locations for the American troops for the Normandy invasion, with Torpoint one of the main embarkation points for the American invasion forces. US LST292 was the final vessel in the convoy loaded at Plymouth destined for an American port, it was carrying 11 passengers and 309 deadweight tons of cargo, mostly Air Force items. When under 14th Port control, Plymouth loaded 91,470 deadweight tons including tanks, guns, vehicles, ammunition and rations, followed in the second period by 133,807 deadweight tons destined for the Continent and America. It had the distinction during the Battle of Ardennes of shipping in one week 20,000,000 rounds of small arms ammunition. Major Donald H. Black of Oregon was the Sub-Port commander for the final nine months [Fold3 Plymouth].

4.2 Poole

A communication from US Headquarters American Base dated 25 May 1945 confirmed that the chief American petroleum loading port at Poole had recently returned to British control when the coaster *Kentish Coast* had departed on 27 April 1945 with 401 tons of petroleum, oil and lubrication supplies (POL). Poole had been selected for this duty as its harbour was “*best suited to shallow draft coasters*” and had loaded pre-invasion barges with “*ammunition, rations and chemical warfare materials. With only a pair of crawler cranes and improvised conveyor belts, a Black Transportation Corps port company loaded 2,575,000 five-gallon jerricans and 310,000 drums of POL supplies at Poole since D-Day*” [Fold3 Poole].

4.3 Weymouth

An undated communication for immediate release from US Headquarters American Base confirmed that “*Discontinuance of US Army activities at the twin ports of Weymouth and Portland, which played a major role in mounting the invasion of Europe, has been disclosed.....Since D-Day the ports embarked 515,459 soldiers and loaded 143,399 vehicles weighing a total of 1,057,493 deadweight tons. Among the ships loaded were; 2,142 Landing Ship Tanks; 1,587 Landing Craft Tanks, 292 landing Craft Infantry and 40 Landing Ship Infantry..... Colonel Sherman L. Kiser, commanding all US Army port operations in Southern England, recently commended the people of Dorsetshire for their extensive co-operation. ‘The facilities of the two Dorsetshire ports were among the best for handling the invasion operation,’ he said. ‘However, I hope that the two beautiful towns will never again be used for such a purpose’*” [Fold3 Weymouth]. *The Western Gazette* of 24 August 1945 carried a long article describing the unveiling of a memorial by the American Ambassador, Mr. John G. Winant. The memorial was a bronze plaque mounted on Portland Stone at Victoria Square, Portland inscribed “*The major part of the American Assault Force which landed on D-Day, June 6th, 1944 was launched from Portland Harbour. From June 6th, 1944 to May 7th, 1945, 418,585 troops and 144,093 vehicles embarked from this harbour. This plaque marks the route which the vehicles and troops took en route to the points of embarkation. Presented by the 14th Major Port, US Army, Harold G. Miller, Major T.C., Sub Port Commander Sherman L. Kiser, Colonel T.C., Port Commander*”.

5. Movement of People

5.1 Casualties



Figure 15: Ambulance Men at Southampton 8.06.1944
Transferring D-Day Casualties to Hospital

Source: <https://history.army.mil/books/wwii/11-4/chapter20.htm#p7>

Corps:364]. When Cherbourg became operational for evacuating casualties on 15 August 1944, the subsequent casualty evacuation by sea (some were flown from France) was entirely by hospital carriers shuttling between Cherbourg and Southampton. On 3 September 1944, the 703rd Medical Sanitary Company, based at Millbrook Medical Camp Company was attached to the 14th Port [Fold3 703rd Medical]. Its primary duty was to provide litter teams (i.e. stretcher teams). The Area “C” Evacuation Officer, Lt. Colonel Joseph W. Palmer issued an open letter dated 10 July 1944 praising *“the 703rd Sanitary Company for the excellent manner in which they performed their mission in evacuation of casualties in Area “C”*” [Fold3 703rd Commendation].



Figure 16: Casualty transiting Southampton 12.06.1944

Source: <https://www.med-dept.com/unit-histories/736th-medical-sanitary-company/>
Wounded American soldier, evacuated by ship from Normandy transiting, via WC54 Ambulance, to an English Hospital



Figure 17: Casualties arriving at Southampton Docks

Source: Accessed March 2020
Southampton City Archives (Undated image)

5.2 Repatriation

A communication for general release but censored from US Headquarters American Base dated 29 May 1945 designated Southampton to be the *“chief port in Great Britain for shuttling United Kingdom and Continental troops to the United States when the Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth and French luxury liners dock there in mid-July for the first time since the start of the war. Dredging operations are underway to provide an additional 7 feet (c.2.1m) for the 40-feet (c.12.2m) draught of the Queens. Until mid-July as such time as the British Admiralty declares that all German submarines have been cleared from Atlantic waters, the liner-troopships will dock at Gourock in the Firth of*

Clyde.....Southampton will continue to be the main discharging port for cargo sent to the occupation forces in Europe” [Fold3 Repatriation].

A follow up communication, entitled “*US Army Designates Southampton as Port of Embarkation*”, for general release but censored from US Headquarters American Base dated 23 July 1945 identified “*that by mid-August when the Queens were expected to dock, Southampton would absorb virtually all the US Army’s shipping and redeployment from the United Kingdom*”. The communication included that three short-stay transit staging areas capable of handling 33,000 troops at a time would be at Tidworth (approx. 16,000), Barton Stacey (approx. 7,380) and Southampton (nearly 10,000), requiring daily troop trains, buses and trucks to the ships. The Southampton staging areas were to be C-12, C-13, C-18 and C-19, shown in Figure 2. The communication confirmed that Southampton would continue to ship monthly 125,000 to 200,000 tons of cargo [Fold3 Staging].

A public information communication dated 26 July 1945 – No.8 – about US Navy forces in Europe confirmed that Southampton would be the Navy’s most important redeployment centre in the UK. NavPo Southampton, one of the US Navy’s offices established in UK ports tasked with acting as a European base for Navy gun crews on US Merchant ships, estimated that 80,000 to 90,000 Army and Navy personnel would leave Southampton each time the Queens and other good-sized ships sailed [Fold3 NavPo]. Conversely, although both ships were used in other theatres, the RMS *Queen Mary* carried 221,813 troops and RMS *Queen Elizabeth* 228,364 respectively from America to the UK from June 1942 until June 1944, but to ports other than Southampton [Fold3 Troops].

RMS *Queen Elizabeth* – Launched by John Brown and Company on 27 September 1938 at Clydebank, 314.2m long with 36m beam and 83,673 gross registered tons, the intention was, following fitting out, for a maiden voyage from 24 April 1940. With the outbreak of war, *Queen Elizabeth* re-painted in battleship grey was ordered by Winston Churchill to sail to America in secret, and following elaborate precautions including spreading rumours that it was to sail to Southampton designed to avoid becoming a target for German submarines, arrived in New York on 7 March 1940, then eight months later departed for Singapore where it was converted to a troop ship, and then to Canada where anti-aircraft guns were added. Initially in mid-March 1942 carrying American troops to Australia, *Queen Elizabeth* operated between Australia and Asia and Africa. Relocated to shuttle troops over the Atlantic, *Queen Elizabeth* and *Queen Mary* were converted so that they could carry 15,000 troops at a time [Wikipedia]. *Queen Elizabeth* carried over 800,000 troops, finishing at Southampton on 6 March 1946, as reported in the *Kingston Times* of 31 August 1946, this article describing the enormous refit required to prepare for its first commercial voyage. An even more comprehensive full-page article appeared previously in *The Sphere* of 10 August 1946 mentioning that the ship had sailed to Gourock for the second of its 3-stage refit involving over 2,000 workmen and then returned to Southampton for the third stage arriving on 16 June 1946. Over 1,000 employees, covering many trades, of John Brown travelled by two special trains to Southampton to complete the work over three months – the women, cooks and French polishers numbering about 200, were billeted in two large mansions, eating at the former American Red Cross in the Bargate as reported also in *The Sunday Post* of 16 June 1946. The men were housed in a camp furnished and equipped with hot and cold water in Chandlers Ford, originally constructed for bombed out civilians. The *Queen Mary* and *Queen Elizabeth* respectively sailed from Southampton on 12 July 1945 with 14,837 troops and on 25 August 1945 with 14,938 troops. The 3,000,000th soldier embarked at Southampton was one of those on-board *Queen Elizabeth*.

5.3 War Brides

The Courier and Advertiser of 25 June 1945 carried an article headlined “*EYE-OPENER CLASS*”. The newspaper reported that the American Red Cross were to provide classes for British wives of American

personnel who were planning to travel to America, designed to familiarise them with American expressions for common American items and culture generally. The *Manchester Evening News* of 6 July 1945 quoted an American Red Cross official stating that “54,000 British girls had married US Servicemen”.

The British wife of an American soldier, Technical Sergeant Donald Mays McAllister killed in action eight days after landing in Normandy on D-Day, was presented at her home in Swanage with medals awarded to him for gallantry, as reported in *The Western Gazette* of 28 September 1945. Colonel Leo J. Meyer of the 14th Port presided over the Investiture awarding the Silver Star for gallantry in North Africa, and Bronze Star, a posthumous award, also for gallantry in Sicily, the citations being included in the newspaper. Janet Margery McAllister met her husband in November 1943 when stationed at Swanage, they married at Swanage Catholic Church in March 1944 and their daughter was born in January 1945. Mrs McAllister was intending to travel with her daughter when transport was available to live in Monro, Louisiana, her husband’s home town where his parents lived.

“Operation Diaper” was the code name given to the anticipated transportation from Southampton of some 45,000 war brides to America, including at least 40,000 British dependents. Certain ships were to be specially equipped with children’s paraphernalia, and nurses and Red Cross personnel would be added to their crew. The first departure was aboard the SS *Argentina* on 26 January 1946 followed by the RMS *Queen Mary* the following month, and this operation required a fleet of eleven vessels including hospital ships.

6. Recognising the Contribution of Southampton Port

The Evening Telegraph of 16 March 1946 reported “Southampton has conferred upon the 14th Major Port Transportation Corps of the United States Army, the privilege of marching through the streets of Southampton with bayonets fixed, drums beating, and colours flying”. On 11 September 1945, the Port was awarded the Meritorious Service Plaque and on 29 October 1945, the Port was awarded the “Freedom of the City” by Southampton City Council. A press day was held on 1 December 1945, which cited the “Major accomplishments for the period D-Day to date for 14th Port operations include: [Southampton Port of Embarkation]

<i>Measurement Tonnage of Cargo</i>	<i>11,817,111</i>
<i>Total personnel handled</i>	<i>3,640,165</i>
<i>Deadweight tonnage of POL</i>	<i>3,566,795</i>
<i>Deadweight tonnage of cargo</i>	<i>3,566,125</i>
<i>Casualties handled</i>	<i>229,016</i>
<i>War prisoners handled</i>	<i>194,606</i>
<i>Railway locomotives and cars</i>	<i>21,545</i>
<i>Vessels loaded and discharged</i>	<i>10,915”</i>

14th Port, before they departed Southampton, were keen to record their thanks. Bronze plaques were presented and mounted and fixed at Dock Gate 8, the entrance to Polygon Hotel which was demolished in 1999 for flats, the foyer of the Civic Centre, and on the Mayflower Memorial.

The plaque at Dock Gate 8 was presented to Southern Railway who owned the Docks.

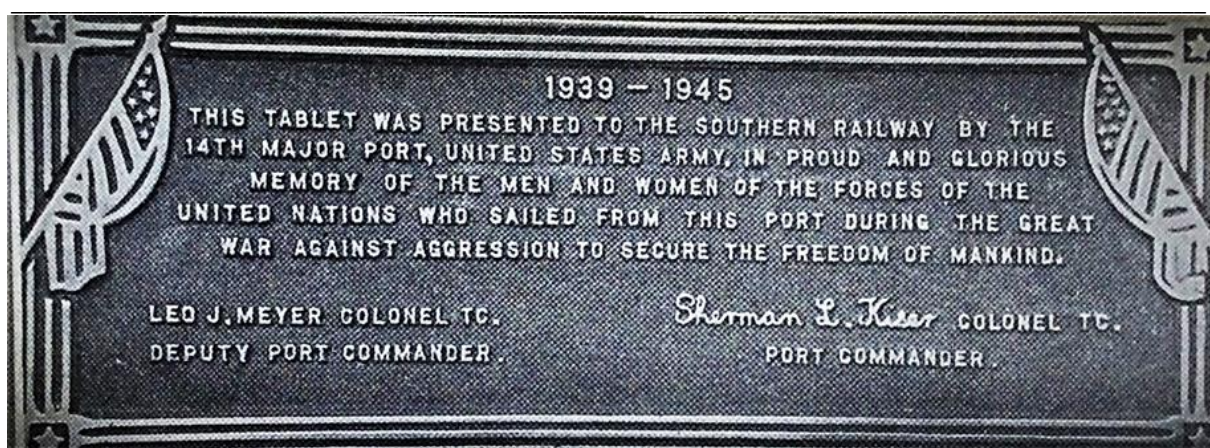


Figure 18: Plaque at Dock Gate No. 8

Source: Hampshire and D-Day edited by Martin Doughty. Chapter 3 by Ken Ford. The Military Preparations.

In the Civic Centre:



Figure 19: Tablet Recording that a Wing of the Civic Centre Southampton was used by the 14th Port
Courtesy Imperial War Museums. By Mark Newton 2016.

Source: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/item/memorial/21622>

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The Plaque on the Pilgrims Father's Memorial was mounted in 1947 above the plaque erected in 1913 to commemorate "the sailing of the 'Mayflower' and 'Speedwell' from Southampton Quay in 1620".



Figure 20: US Army Plaque added to the Pilgrim Father's Memorial

Source: <https://historiceurope.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1179378>

1944-1945

This tablet was presented by the 14th Major Port United States Army in proud tribute To over two million men and women of the United States Forces who together with Their brilliant allies sailed from Southampton Between D-Day June 6th 1944 and the day of Victory to liberate the continent of Europe from aggression in order that The freedom for which the Pilgrim Fathers Strove should not be lost.

Leo J. Meyer
Colonel T. C.
Deputy Port Commander

Sherman L. Kiser
Colonel T.C.
Port Commander

The book, *Southampton Port of Embarkation*, published in 1946 and used as one of the references in this narrative includes a photograph of Colonel Sherman L. Kiser with his foreword, reproduced here:



Figure 21: Colonel Sherman L. Kiser

"This book is dedicated to the officers and enlisted personnel of the 14th Major Port and attached units, Southampton, England, who, by their loyalty and devotion to duty have established records in shipping probably never before attained by any similar organisation in the history of transportation.

Much credit is due to the officers and men of the British forces, the American Red Cross, the city officials of Southampton, and the many British and American civilians working with the Port, who gave valuable assistance during the entire operation. Limited space precludes the mention of all personnel who so ably supported our efforts; however they are none the less

appreciated. We have tried to catch a cross-section of the Port at work. A thousand pictures could not tell the complete story of the tremendous and complicated activities of the Port from D-Day to 1 December 1945, but those selected should serve to rekindle your pride in a job well done".

The 14th Port finally vacated the Port and repatriated in November 1946.

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