

707TH HAD A BIG JOB...

(Continued from Page 5)

gomolas, box C&M, flat cars, tank cars, cabooses, refrigerator C&M, USA 2-8-Q and 2-6-Q steam locomotives, and ISQ, 380, 500 and 650 HP Diesel electric, along with British "Austerity" 2-8-Q'15 and 2-10-Q'15, and 153 HP Diesel. Forty-five hospital ambulances, of 14 to 17 cars each, were received and put into service.

Altogether, some 19,000 railroad cars of all types, pretiously assembled in the U.K., were delivered to the 101st at Cherbourg. They comprise about 63 per cent of all TO-go rail 110th the continent. Operations necessitated bringing some 11,000 more C&M through other ports, dismantled, and assembling them here.

Of a total of 1,231 locomotives of all types, which were delivered to Cherbourg and processed by the 757th Shop under 707th supervision, only 100 were assembled in unloading. A gas on a crane fouled, and one engine fell into the harbor. But it was later recovered.

As operations continued, a series of cracked cylinders on the USA 2-8-Q'15 threatened to cause serious delays. When it became obvious that replacement cylinders were not going to be available, 101 railroaders resorted to bronze fitting. Experimentation developed a system that has since been used with great success in the ETO.

Lack Of Watering Facilities

In the rush of early operations in France, the Engineering Section found that the greatest immediate bottle-neck to railroading was a lack of locomotive watering facilities. French water supply systems had been knocked out by advancing forces or demolished by retreating Germans, and lay in various states of destruction throughout Normandy.

Colonel Morris and Lt. Charles E. Webb, St. Albans, Vt. (Sou), took advantage of every means possible to get the engines watered. In one instance the whole population of a village was marshalled en masse to construct a makeshift dam across a creek, thus providing sufficient backwater for installation of pumps. A bucket brigade was formed by MHS troops in the early days at Cherbourg terminal, before better facilities were reinstated.

Reconnaissance with the Corps of Engineers was also a job for the 701th Engineering Dept., in making decisions on which rail lines should be rehabilitated first.

Telephone communications just didn't exist, and Capt. Theodore R. Hill, Asheville, N.C. (Sou), deployed signal maintenance sections of operating battalions to construct phone lines from Cherbourg through Folligiv and Rennes into Lellans.

In general, the Engineering Section was concerned with securing adequate construction, rehabilitating, and enlarging and developing of yard and main line facilities as traffic grew over more and more liberated territory. This continued until the 101st left the Cherbourg area late in December, 1944, by which time main line trackage had grown to 491.7 miles.

Stores Had A Dual Job

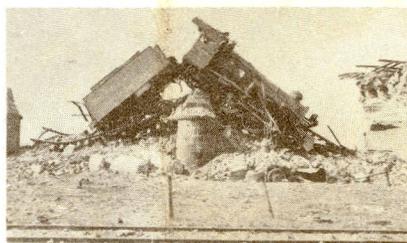
The Stores Section of the 707th started a dual life in England, where men of that department not only accumulated equipment for their own unit, but also worked with battalions which had the same purpose in mind. This involved extensive traveling.

In Cherbourg the dual life grew into

a triple one: (1) handling supply problems of organizations assigned under 707th jurisdiction; (2) supervising and controlling shipment and delivery of TO rolling stock and locomotives; and (3) being a "big brother" of supply to all MRS units, which came through Normandy acting as a central clearing house for tracing and securing emergency supplies needed at once by BOD outfits.

General Store-keeper at that time was Major George D. Sawadere, Alton, Ill. (Ill. Terminal Co.), who is now Lt. Col. with 2nd IRRS. He has succeeded in the 707th by Capt. James L. Hartlaub, Cincinnati, Ohio (NYC).

The Stores Section has often found the 118IVa problem, quite outside the realm



A German locomotive, high and heavy on east approach to main German railway bridge across Rhine at Wesel.

of strict supply laid at its door. One night last November, when it was cold and tough going in, a very tired-looking GI railroader dropped into the supply office. His request was simple: Please, could he get some kind of a light - 811Y kind would do. He'd been signalling the switch engine with kerosene-soaked rags on sticks, cigarette butts, and matches, ever since he had landed. He was issued a lantern, and the story went up and down the line so fast that in the next three days nineteen more men came in with identical requests. They got the lanterns, too.

Units Assigned To The 707th

During operations in Normandy, 15 of 29 IRRS units, less rail divisions, were under direction of the 707th. These included the 720th, 723rd, 728th, 729th, 132nd, 135th, and 744th Operating Battalions; the 757th Fly Shop and five Mobile Workshops; two Hospital Train Maintenance Platoons; and the POW 811Y at Cherbourg where 1st Lt. Calvin E. Dingler, Minneapolis, Minn. (COW 118) in charge of 350 POW's in addition to his regular job as stationmaster at other POW camps. 118 maintained with detachments at Lison, Vira, Argentan, Dreux, and Caen.

They Moved To Antwerp

When the 707th moved to Antwerp on Dec. 29th, 1944, shipping was pouring into the great port in huge quantities. The Grand Division was given supervision of rail operations at the Amber Docks, North Yard, and South to the Aunes. This territory was later expanded considerably.

The buzz and rocket bomb attack on Antwerp area was at its height during the 707th's stay, and it was estimated that some 3,400 missiles poured in during that time, from Dec. 29th to March 29th.

Rail yards, naturally, suffered from these bomb attacks, but with the great facilities at Antwerp it was always possible to reroute traffic with very little delay.

At Antwerp both the regular line of supply work and supervision of incoming

locomotives, tank cranes, crawler cranes and other types of special railroad equipment continued to occupy the Stores section.

Across the Rhine, in Germany, the rapidly changing needs of battalions made it necessary for 707th Stores to stick strictly to that job alone. Surprising amounts of captured enemy stocks were found, and the greatest possible use was made of them.

First MHS Unit Across Rhine

Bridgeheads had been established across the Rhine. The Corps of Engineers was rushing the bridging job over the river at Wesel, and railroads had to be developed eastward.

So the 707th made a lightning dash into Germany, opening HQ at Wesel on March 31st, 1945. They were the first MHS unit established east of the Rhine.

Rail buildings were still burning in Wesel. Displaced Poles, Russians, Italians, Belgians and French people were everywhere, overrunning the place like ants.

Reconnaissance parties started out to learn the conditions of rail lines, shops, rolling stock, etc., in the vicinity. Detachment "B" of the 707th went to work repairing tracks, and the 720th came in just in time to operate the first train across the river on April 9th. Gradually, demolished bridges were replaced, and communications lines restored. The push continued on to the east in like fashion. Then came VE Day.

Without slowing up the pace a moment, the 707th managed to take time to listen to President Truman's radio proclamation, but the railroads kept right on operating. The MHS mission has been just as important since the victory as it has before. There have been thousands of POW's to move, displaced POW's returning to their native country, military organizations changing location, captured loads to be disposed of, repatriation movements of Allied military personnel, etc. Up to 30 days after VE there was still no sign of a let-up, but now the emergency is beginning to taper off a bit. There's an 8-hour office day, and a 7-day-a-week throw-in to give the boys a well-deserved rest.

Capt. C.B. Richardson.

SOUHER'S MEDAL AWARDED

The Soldier's Medal has been awarded to Lt. Col. J. H. D. Shea, Co of the 741st IV Operating Bn., for heroism at Soissons, France, on Dec. 21, 1944.

An enemy airplane had dropped a bomb in the railroad yards, causing a car of oil to ignite and spread to other C&M. Although 400 tanks of 81118 were near the blazing tanker, the area was soon an inferno of flying flames and debris.

The colonel organized and supervised salvage operations, and personally participated in the unloading of about 200 loads valued at over 14,000,000. For over 12 hours he continued working in the danger zone. At one time he ran a locomotive into the inferno to bring out loaded cars.

Before the war Lt. Col. Shea was an assistant superintendent of the C&M at P&P. His home is at 4828 Elliot Ave., So., Minneapolis, Minn.

Two members of the old firmity who hadn't seen each other for many moons, paused to exchange the mystic grip and a bit of gossip.

"How's old Bill these days?"

"Oh, he's much improved since his operation."

"Operation? Didn't know he'd had one."

"Oh yes; they removed a brass rail that had been pressing against his foot for years."