

The Work of the Army's Fleet
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Background on the Army Transport Service (ATS) the "Army's Navy"

THE ability to quickly move an army under modern conditions is probably as important a factor in the success of a campaign as valor and fighting efficiency, while to attempt movements of large masses of troops by foot or by horses over great distances has been proved by recent wars to be no longer satisfactory. Today the motor truck, the passenger and freight car, and the ocean steamship transport have come into the picture, and each offers advantages for quick troop transfers which would have been totally impossible under former conditions.

The problem of sea transport of troops is not new; in fact, it is as old as war itself. But while the transfer of armies by sea in the past has often received meagre attention from great commanders, owing to the inadequacy of ships and fittings suitable for soldier transport, now with high-powered and speedy ships, the trained strategist is turning more and more to water transportation.

The American soldier by reason of his environment probably feels that his duty will normally be to fight on land, on United States soil or on this continent; but our two most recent wars, Spanish and World Wars, have shown that the American soldier may be compelled to fight far across seas. Hence, as the law and appropriation acts provide that the "Transportation of the Army and its Supplies" shall be done by the Quartermaster Corps therefore in the past thirty years the Quartermaster Corps has been required to develop what might approximately be termed "The Army's Navy". This is not, however, a fighting navy, but a transport fleet, capable of handling thousands of men as military passengers. Thus, the Quartermaster Corps transported a third of a million men in the Spanish-American War and over two million men in the World War, which is no mean record for a military fleet, controlled and operated entirely by the Army.

VARIOUS CALLS MADE UPON TRANSPORT SERVICE

"Let George do it" has often been the slogan bandied back to the ships of the Army after commercial lines, or Government vessels, have pleaded their unsuitability for any rare type of sea transportation which might be necessary in an emergency requiring a special ship for a special service. The reason is apparent-the War Department's vessels are always ready, in commission as it were, and prepared to step into their groove as a ferryboat across either the Pacific or the Atlantic, with special trips to any strange port if military needs require.

As some of the special occasions when the Army Transport Service has been called upon for peculiar or strange duties, and which often have been far afield from any military significance, the following instances might be mentioned. From these one might feel that the nation should be pleased that it has in its possession an active fleet, capable of responding to instant call for any transportation duty overseas, whether that duty be military, humanitarian, or for the public welfare.

When our Uncle Sam decided that salvos from Gatlings were not civilizing the ex-insurrectos of the Philippines in 1901 as rapidly as desired, he thereupon concluded that "readin', writin' and 'rithmetic, played to the tune of a hickory stick" could accomplish the trick. Whereupon, trainloads of schoolmasters and school ma'ams were rushed across our broad continent to San Francisco with orders in their pockets for transportation overseas on an Army transport. These "hickory stickers", of course, were to travel as soldiers. "Orders from Washington" are law to the General Superintendent of Transportation at San Francisco, and it was his problem to accommodate on transports these collections of pedagogues. The school ma'ams, of course, were given the first

cabin staterooms, while the schoolmasters were berthed in soldiers' bunks, "three high". No complaints, however, were forthcoming, as they felt the honor of being the nation's representatives in leading ambitious Filipinos from their hazy dialects of Tagalog and Vissyan as well as bad Spanish, into the world's well known simplicity and beauty of American English. Soldiers on the "Frisco" transport piers were agape when the first teacher transport left the docks. There were no military bands, no presenting of arms, no uniforms, no punctilious "military starch" of any kind. These scholastics promptly took charge of their own celebration, and no respect for authority could drive them from the sacred precincts reserved for the showy performance of the crews' maritime duties, such as the bridge, the lookout's walk, the life boats, or even the rigging. There was also noted as an unwonted augury of what was to follow, many couples standing aloof on the deck more interested in covert glances from bright eyes than the an revoirs from shore—an epidemic resulting from transcontinental Pullman acquaintanceship to which even soldiers have been known to succumb under similar environment. University and normal college songs, interspersed with college yells, prevented any moping or weeping upon leaving the United States' shores.

The effect of tropical seas, moonlit nights, sleepy steamer chairs, the sighting of coral beaches and strange birds of plumage was not unforeseen when upon arrival at Honolulu eleven couples immediately sought a Hawaiian divine to celebrate the bonds of matrimony. At Manila twenty more couples likewise committed matrimony. All these teachers had carefully looked over and studied their contracts, their civil service rules, their transportation slips and other documents but could find nothing to even discourage such a step. Thus, three or four shiploads of these good young Americans started in to educate the native Filipino. Evidently they made an impression, for with the exception of scattering individuals, such teachers have no longer been sent overseas.

WAR BRIDES TO AMERICA

Brides and Army transports were again in the foreground following the recent war (transports seem to foster romances), when it was found that some hundreds of our fighting Americans had married French and Belgian damoselles, while other lads favored English, Italian, or German girls. The laws of war are silent on such alliances, but International Law declares that these brides of American doughboys are henceforth daughters of Uncle Sam. Therefore to America they must come to make their homes with their soldier husbands. A simple and logical statement, but how to get all these ladies here was a problem of a different nature. The idea then occurs to bring them to the land of the free and the home of the brave on Army transports devoted solely to the purpose of this feminine transportation. Entire ship loads of the fair sex have never heretofore been seen on ocean transports. Some seven of such special excursions had to be made to and from France to bring these soldiers' wives to their new American homes.

The ships' navigation officers state that no world trips ever equaled these. The inspecting officers might as well have taken a vacation on every such trip, for from the Master on the bridge to the engineer's last assistant, all were constantly in their best uniforms with a fresh shave and white gloves, even to the engine room. Transport seaman daily busied themselves with hot water and gasoline removing grease spots from their uniforms. Ladies were everywhere on deck and even in the boiler room, for to them there was no such phrase as "strength verboten". Enginemen and firemen begged and borrowed cavalymen's gauntlets from the sales room and these gauntlets were daily inspected for any semblance of oil. The obsolete shoe shine parlor at once sprang into being for the ship's staff, while the ship's barber was so swamped with work that he only accepted customers by appointment two days in advance.

There were so many of these fair passengers that cabin accommodations could not be provided for all, so down into spaces originally marked for troops, into troop berths "three high" the overflow of passengers were placed. The medley of voices drifting up through the companionways from these compartments led the man on deck duty to doubt that "all's well below".

One of these transports was routed to the harbor of Charleston, South Carolina, which city to this day talks of the welcome staged for these newcomer wives of southern soldiers, and how they were welcomed with all the warmth of southern hospitality. The southern soldier husbands were of course all on hand at the dock to welcome them. Such a scene of "present arms" has never yet been equaled in any military maneuver on land or sea.

Shortly after the Spanish War, when the Klondike mining craze was still at its height, for all gold diggers were not then in Broadway cabarets, a sudden slump occurred in the placers of the Yukon and beach at Nome. A thousand miners and soldiers of fortune were caught in the advancing Arctic Alaskan winter with no hope of ships, nor means for getting away before the inhospitable season set in. Washington heard and noted their appeal. Vessels of all kinds, commercial and naval, were sought to help these miners out of their predicament. But no such vessels were quickly available, hence again "George" was called upon. Orders went out to The Quartermaster General to at once send one or more ships to Alaska to get these stranded miners before they were frozen in for the Winter. An Army transport was soon steaming for the North, and all of these miners thus marooned who desired to return to the States were put aboard. Here, once more, the duty was not military, but a performance of hard seagoing regime that reflected credit on all those of the Army who participated.

OTHER ROLES OF THE TRANSPORT SERVICE

Immediately after the Spanish-American War, it became evident that Uncle Sam's new possession of Porto Rico was completely isolated from the American mainland, as there was no traffic by sea of any kind, the Spanish steamship lines having incontinently withdrawn when the Spanish troops returned to Spain. Something had to be done and that quickly to maintain the business and governmental intercourse with this fertile island. Here again it was not strictly a military need, yet, as the Army vessels were suitable and in commission, they were at once put to work to maintain the needs of the Porto Ricans. The wholesome result of this steamship enterprise on the part of the Government was to make it evident that a profitable commercial steamship corporation could be formed on the basis of the business which the U. S. Army Transports had turned up, where no such business heretofore existed. The New York & Porto Rico Steamship Company was organized and took over this traffic developed by the War Department, and has since continued in the operation of a steamship line without a break for thirty years, and with signal financial profit to the corporation. The transports were removed from the route as soon as it was evident that the new company could handle all the traffic. This case might also be mentioned as an instance where the Government does not seek to break down private enterprise, but pioneers for it, and after proving the; feasibility of a project, turns it over to private commercial operators for its permanent growth and profit.

Two "Cuban Pacification Campaigns" came on in the peace period between the Spanish-American and World Wars. These good neighbors whom Uncle Sam has brought into a national existence became restive under their newfound liberties and decided upon drastic political upheavals. American authorities however firmly said "No mas", and immediately backed up their demand for Cuban peace; by the presence in Habana harbor of U. S. Transports with troops loaded to the gunwales, before the Cubans fairly understood what it was all about. The transports in due time returned with the admonition that the Cubans settle their bickerings at; the ballot box and not by bullets. Thus the country is still Cuba Libre to its peaceful and prosperous inhabitants.

American refugees had to be extricated from the east coast of Mexico during certain political upheavals in the course of her progress toward more perfect liberty. Two sudden trips of Army transports were made from San Francisco to quickly take on board these Americans before Mexican indedencies considered their presence inimical to the advance of the particular nationalistic cause which their faction temporarily advocated.

TRANSPORTING ALASKA'S NEEDS

The service of transporting supplies and personnel the military posts of Alaska was maintained by the transport service right up to the conclusion of the World War, since which time adequate commercial seamanship enterprise has developed so that the War department no longer has to operate vessels for that purpose. In connection with the work of the Alaskan Army transports, which were maintained for twenty years, there was also developed the only river transport service which the Army ever had. A group of three shallow-draft passenger and freight transports operated up and down the Yukon River, and it is interesting to note that these river craft maintained a greater annual mileage than any other craft belonging to the Army, with the exception of the deep-sea transports. These vessels have since the War been turned over to the Department of Interior, which now operates them on practically a commercial basis. Upon the completion of the Alaskan Railway by the Interior Department, just before the late war, it became the lot of the Army transports to carry complete railway passenger coaches as a deck load, while locomotives were stowed in the ships' holds.

Another interesting development of Alaskan military needs has been the supply and maintenance by the Quartermaster Corps of an Army Transport as a deep-sea cable-laying ship. The first such cable-ship, the U. S. Army Transport "Burnside" was a former prize ship of the Spanish War, and recently has been replaced by a larger ship from the U. S. Shipping Board named the "Dellwood". This transport is in reality a high-grade laboratory and deep-sea cable layer, under the control and operation of the U. S. Army Signal Corps.

The "Dellwood" not only has laid the new Alaskan cable, but has maintained it in the best of telegraphic condition. She is now engaged in a remarkable round the world tour as an incident to her temporary transfer to the U. S. Philippine Administration. The vessel left its home station at Seattle and proceeded through the Panama Canal to England, where it took on, in its huge cable tanks, sufficient cable for the needs of the Philippine cable requirements. Leaving London it proceeded to Algiers, thence to and through the Suez Canal to India, Singapore, and Manila. The vessel has completed the Philippine cable laying duty, and returned across the Pacific to its home station at Seattle, having circumnavigated the world.

This vessel is also of interest in that it was the first cable layer to be equipped with the sonic depth sounder, which determines ocean depths, while the vessel is at full speed, and without the clumsy resource to throwing over a "lead line". Hence it was that the vessel was able to make exploratory sounding and avoided submarine mountains and chasms with a very gratifying reduction in cable mileage which would be otherwise required. On the late voyage mentioned, the "Dellwood" was further provided with the newer development of depth sounder—the "Fathometer", an unusual instrument which records the ocean depth on a clockwise dial when the vessel is at full speed.

TRANSPORT IN THE SIBERIAN CAMPAIGN

The restoration of refugees to their home land has been, as shown, more than a single occurrence but probably the most noted example has been the transferring back to Europe of the refugees of the expatriated Czecho-Slovakian troops from Vladivostock in Asia. These Czecho-Slovakians were originally the allies of the Russian Empire, and when the Empire tottered to its doom, these troops were found in Eastern Russian or Caucasian regions. They then retired in good form to the Siberian Railway, which had not yet become a part of the Soviet property, and thus in easy stages transferred themselves across the vast railway miles of the whole of Siberia. Such non-Russian troops thus arrived at the far Eastern confines of Asia at Vladivostock in units fairly compact. Russia in the meantime was daily becoming more and more disintegrated. First the Kerensky government succeeded in a military way to the Empire, and as the Kerensky administration became more feeble, the seizure of military power by Admiral Wrangell followed. Finally when he also failed, the Union of Soviet Republics was set, and initial chaos followed. All of these remnants of military power went eastward over the trans-Siberian railroad, intent only in getting out of the turmoil of European politics. The Czecho-Slovaks were followed by Kerensky soldiers, then by Admiral Wrangell's whole army. Slowly but inexorably the red army of the

Soviets, as they gained strength, pushed daily further along to the East on the interminable miles of the trans-Siberian railway. Then, with all these refugee troops at the jumping-off place on the Pacific coast of Asia, it was imperatively necessary for the nations of the World War to do something to relieve the situation of these unfortunate military refugees at Vladivostock.

The duty of rescuing these troops was delegated to the United States. Again the Quartermaster Corps was called upon and some of the very largest troopship transports, as the "Mt. Vernon", was hurried to Russia. Most of the transports after taking on the forlorn refugee troops at this Siberian port, then steamed through the China Sea, Indian Ocean, Suez Canal, and the Mediterranean to Fiume or Trieste in the Adriatic, where these troops were disembarked.

America's participation in the Siberian campaign was also material, but as a transportation problem. The American forces were quickly and effectively transferred to Vladivostock; they likewise retired from Siberia and were returned to San Francisco with scarcely more than casual remark, as high operations in the European theatre of war overshadowed all other military operations.

OTHER USEFUL ARMY TRANSPORT TRIPS

An interesting trip of a non-military nature was that undertaken by the assignment of an Army Transport to take the U. S. official delegates and a shipload of exhibits to an Argentine International Exhibition held in Buenos Aires. This ship, its personnel, and all the delegates were lavishly entertained at the gay South American capital, and doubtlessly proved an important factor in maintaining cordial relations with this sister republic.

One who has never seen a U. S. Army Animal Transport loaded with horses has missed an important military sight-five or six hundred animals packed in one ship, and so arranged that they can have the proper amount of light, space, ventilation, and sanitary attention. All of these requirements represent the study and the experience of years with the result that the system used by this country involves less voyage losses or "shrinkage" of animal cargo, than that of any other nation. The controlling factor of the system is that each animal is always held up in his own stall, hence when the ship rolls he cannot fall down to then kick other standing animals. This plan was developed as the result of a sad experience on the Pacific in the Spanish-American War days, when during a typhoon the stall fixtures gave way, and the entire mass of animals became a kicking, rolling conglomeration. All were killed.

The freight vessels of the U. S. Army Transport Service are as important a cog in the wheel of Army transportation System as the passenger ships, and ply along on an equally regular schedule, but with less spectacular acclaim from the public. Often in fact it is desirable not to make too public their notable performance, as they are often loaded at out-of-the-way ports with TNT or equally high explosives, and are transferred to other remote ports for cargo discharge. This is only another feature of the "Transportation of the Army and its Supplies" even though the supplies are not exactly comfortable shipmates.

EMERGENCY FUNCTIONS

A comparatively recent and unusual service rendered by the Army Transports was on the occasion of the devastating earthquake in Japan in 1925. Supplies from all interested nations were to be rushed to the aid of the sufferers. One of the first relief vessels to arrive was a small Army Transport loaded with supplies at Manila and quickly dispatched to Japan. Supplies were still needed on a larger and more comprehensive scale.

The American Red Cross, always alive to the needs of unfortunate victims of such catastrophes, informed the President that there was available on the Pacific Coast the equivalent of a whole shipload of Red Cross supplies, and suggested that the Government might find transportation or ships to get these to the Japanese. An army transport at San Francisco was pressed into service,

fueled, loaded with these imperatively needed supplies, and arrived in a Japanese port before any other Government or commercial supply ship had left American shores. This case is but a repeated instance of where the Army has had the ship available, and where, even if the vessel is not in full commission, The Quartermaster General has authority to purchase supplies, fuel, and other requirements, to transfer crews from other transports, or, if need be, engage such seamen and licensed officers required from the Barbary Coast, or wherever else obtainable.

THE FIRST WORLD WAR CONVOY

During the World War the first convoy of eighteen army transports were off on time, loaded to the decks with troops of every grade. Three early convoys all got under way strictly under Army control, following which the Navy absorbed control of transporting America's Army to Europe to contribute its effect to win the war.