

HISTORICAL . REPORT

Office of the Port Veterinarian
New York Port of Embarkation
1st Avenue & 58th Street
Brooklyn, New York

On 8 December 1941, the Office of the Port Veterinarian, New York Port of Embarkation, had seven (7) officers, seven (7) enlisted men, and one (1) civilian clerk. This Veterinary personnel inspected and passed 11,115,650 pounds, and rejected 236,312 pounds of foods of animal origin in that month. Three and a half years later, on 30 June 1945, this same Office had nine (9) officers, nineteen (19) enlisted men and, in that month inspected and passed 201,427,039 pounds and rejected 586,806 pounds of foods of animal origin.

What took place between these two dates is an accurate reflection of the growth of the New York Port of Embarkation, and a good barometer of the war effort especially in the ETO.

The officer personnel with the exception of Colonel Hershberger, the commanding officer, who is Regular Army, are all reserve officers with various back-grounds. A goodly number were practitioners; some were predominately small animal doctors; others were large animal practitioners; some had experience inspecting meat for the B. A. I. After the Army started its ASTP a number of officers were recruited directly from school. A small number had been enlisted men in various branches of the Service.

Enlisted personnel came from all walks of life. Most of them had had experience in the meat and food business prior to enlistment or selection by their local draft boards. Many of them attended Army Veterinary Service Schools before assuming their duties at the New York Port of Embarkation.

The fact that fifteen (15) men went to OCS and all were graduated and given commissions shows the high calibre of Veterinary enlisted personnel. One man became a captain in the paratroopers. Another man, Almond E. Fisher, a first lieutenant, was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for combat in France.

All personnel, prior to being put to work at the various jobs, were subjected to a thorough and rigorous orientation in the problems peculiar to the area covered by the New York Port of Embarkation.

In the beginning, the work of the Port was varied and the problems relatively simple. But as the food situation became tighter and the Armed Forces larger, the problems of inspection grew apace. When the Quartermaster Market Center program for the procurement of perishable subsistence was organized the necessity for Class III inspection personnel became acute. Having the greatest concentration of intensively trained inspectors the Port Veterinarian's Office was called upon to help out in a desperate situation. The results were so good that the Port Veterinarian was given all the Class III inspections of the entire metropolitan New York Area. This included New York, Brooklyn, The Bronx, Queens, Newark and Jersey City. During the peak period of operations in the Butter District, one million pounds of butter were graded and printed each week. On 1 October 1944, the Jersey City Quartermaster Depot, with Veterinary personnel recruited from the Market Center and from the Port Veterinarian's Office, was given jurisdiction of all Class III work in accordance with War Department Circular Letter No. 63.

The Port Veterinarian's Office always remained a great reservoir of expert inspectors that all other installations could tap. On one occasion, three (3) officers and four (4) enlisted men were used on a "beef set-aside" project in Newark, Jersey City and Paterson, New Jersey.

These men worked for the 1224th SCSU. On other occasions other personnel were sent over to the Jersey City Quartermaster Depot and the Second Service Command to help them out of tough situations. At infrequent intervals the Port Veterinarian's Office was called upon to do work for Lend-Lease and the Port Agency.

In addition to the Class III inspections it was necessary to conduct in all establishments supplying meat, meat food products, fish, and milk and dairy products, a sanitary inspection each month. It started with approximately forty-five (45) such inspections, and reached a peak of one hundred sixty (160). However, when the Port gave up the Class III inspections much of the sanitary work went with it, leaving about thirty-three (33) a month. Most of these are local establishments in Brooklyn and Queens. Before the attack on Pearl Harbor and our formal entrance into the World conflict, the Port was inspecting foods of animal origin for the Panama Railroad Company - a Government owned corporation charged with supplying food to the Panama Canal Zone. In December 1941, 2,125,000 pounds were inspected, of which 2,000,000 pounds were passed and 125,000 pounds rejected. Forage was inspected for the Panama Railroad Co. When the War Shipping Administration took over the Panama ships in June 1942, all these inspections stopped.

The rapid expansion of the Armed Forces and the tremendous procurement of immediate stock-piles of food necessitated quick, accurate and thorough inspection of vast quantities of canned meats that were in civilian warehouses. When these stores were taken over by the Army, Veterinary personnel from the Port Veterinarian's Office went into these storage houses and practically lived there while inspecting the meats. This went on all through 1942, when in a peak month, as much as

18,500,000 pounds were inspected. In 1943, this inspection rapidly diminished and most of the personnel were assigned to Class III inspections in the metropolitan area.

Soon after Pearl Harbor the Port became the site of a Veterinary Officers' Replacement Pool and it was the task of experienced personnel to orient the newly commissioned officers in the ways and traditions of the Army and Veterinary Service. These raw recruits had to be shown how food processing took place; how and where to inspect; what to look for; and how to treat people in the food industries. This extensive training was ideal because New York City presented the greatest variety of food-processing and problems. As many as eighteen (18) new officers a month were assigned to the Pool for orientation and training. As the need for Veterinary Officers subsided the Pool became depleted and no new officers came in. Approximately two hundred (200) Veterinary Officer-Students were trained by the Port Veterinarian's Office between 8 December 1941, and 30 June 1945.

As V-E Day approached and personnel started back to the States, it became the Port's important job to help these Veterinary Officers returning from overseas to acclimate themselves to working in the Zone of the Interior.

On some occasions specially qualified enlisted men were accepted for training in all phases of Veterinary work.

During the course of his inspection tours early in 1943, of the various staging areas under the jurisdiction of his command, the Port Veterinarian noticed the tremendous waste of food taken off troop trains. He recommended that a separate room be set aside for salvaging and processing this food. From this humble beginning, the idea of the central

meat cutting rooms grew. First tried out at Camp Shanks where it proved a great success in saving the Government food supplies and hence the taxpayers' money, the idea was also put into operation at Camp Kilmer, Fort Hamilton, and Fox Hills Terminal. The latter place acted as the central meat cutting plant for the Brooklyn Army Base Terminal, Staten Island Terminal, Caven Point-Claremont Terminal, Port Johnson Terminal, and the North River Terminal. Not only was money saved, but the quality of meals improved due to greater varieties and more uniformity in meat cuts.

As the Army installations overseas grew in size, and more and more facilities for protecting foods were built, foods of a perishable nature were sent overseas in refrigerator ships. All the frozen meat was stored in holds and boxes kept at temperatures ranging from 12° F. to 18° F. It became the duty of the Port Veterinarian's Office to inspect all of the cargo arriving at the piers and going into the ship. The problems were numerous. Since few people were taking any interest in all aspects of the question, the Veterinary Inspector became a packaging expert, a stowage expert, a stevedore, and even a policeman. From the very beginning in 1943, when Army Cargo was first shipped, food was sent overseas in boxes that were poorly constructed, poorly packed, and cumbersome in size. Damage to these inferior containers, which usually contained frozen poultry, frozen pork loins, or frozen bologna, reached a peak of 40%. After much agitation, these conditions gradually improved until the packages today are so solidly constructed that the damage has been reduced to a negligible minimum.

Warm weather brings new problems in shipping. There is a great tendency for the top tier of frozen meat in a car to thaw out as the cars stay in the hot sun. Veterinary Inspectors must be on the alert to detect these packages that are unfit for overseas shipment.

As many as ten (10) cars on a single float have been rejected at one time.

Pilferage of Army Cargo has been another problem for the Port Veterinarian. Nobody else did anything to prevent a loss that amounted to approximately 100,000 pounds of meat a month. After helping to secure convictions in the local courts of the thieves, the Veterinarians got other Port agencies to do something about these losses.

The peak month saw twenty-five (25) refrigerated ships loaded at the New York Port of Embarkation. An average of five (5) days was necessary to load each vessel. Most of the loading took place at the three (3) Port Terminals. The North River Terminal, where the vast majority were loaded, had jurisdiction of all the piers from number 2 to number 97. The Brooklyn Army Base and Bush Terminals controlled all the piers on the Brooklyn waterfront, while the Staten Island Terminal had piers from number 1 through 20 under its jurisdiction.

Exports of meat grew so large that practically the entire force of the Port Veterinarian's Office was used to inspect the shipment of Army Cargo. During the peak month of March 1945, 315,000,000 pounds were shipped.

During the winter months reconsigned, or diverted cars, were sent directly to shipside for Class IV inspections. At least 50% of all the cars that arrived at the piers were of this type. This class of inspection included the candling of 5% of all carlots of shell eggs received.

When troops were being sent overseas in great numbers the War Shipping Administration was given the job of storing the troop-ships with meat. This agency was uncooperative and would not notify the Port Veterinarian's Office of the loading dates. Consequently, only an inadequate inspection was made by the Veterinarian who accompanied the Inspector General's party on its sanitary inspection of the vessel.

The Port Veterinarian's intervention with the Commanding General of the New York Port of Embarkation resulted in the War Shipping Administration's requesting Army Veterinary Inspection of all foods of animal origin placed aboard vessels carrying Army personnel.

The original inspections revealed that the War Shipping Administration was paying high prices for meats of extremely low quality. When the Port Veterinarian proved, by the submission of samples to the Second Service Command Laboratory, that the products were far below Army Specifications a conference was called in Washington of the Army, Navy, and War Shipping Administration to straighten out the situation. Standards were set up for foods placed aboard the War Shipping Administration vessels. Diligent work by the Port Veterinarian's Office in cooperation with the Second Service Command Laboratory has kept the standards of food high.

The same situation came up with the British Ministry of War Transport (BMWT). This agency ran the large British troop-carrying vessels like the "QUEEN ELIZABETH" "QUEEN MARY" and the "AQUITANIA" etc. In general, these people proved more cooperative than the War Shipping Administration, and soon they were operating under the same standards as the Army Transport vessels.

Left over stores were also inspected upon the arrival of all troop-carrying ships. The average monthly shipments on troop-carrying vessels were: War Shipping Administration - eighteen (18): British Ministry of War Transport - six (6): Army Transport Service - four (4): making a total of an average of twenty-eight (28) sailings.

The British Ministry of War Transport also called on the Port Veterinarian's Office for a special task - the shipment of four hundred thirty-five (435) Mules. These Mules were purchased in America by the

British with American Lend-Lease funds. A small freighter was used to ship these animals to India. They were penned in groups of five (5) and were accompanied by one (1) Veterinary Lieutenant and forty (40) enlisted men of the United States Army. While these Mules were under the care of the Port Veterinarian none were lost; at sea there was only one (1) death. En route from inland points to the port of embarkation seven (7) animals in the first shipment died.

The Office of the Port Veterinarian has tasks that have been going on for some time. They are not spectacular but they do take time and are of importance. All the Veterinary Service of all the staging areas (Camp Dix, Indiantown Gap, Fort Hamilton, Fort Slocum, Camp Kilmer, and Camp Shanks) has been supervised closely by the Port Veterinarian. At present only Fort Hamilton, Camp Kilmer, and Camp Shanks are under the jurisdiction of the New York Port of Embarkation. The others had gradually lost their functions as staging areas.

Various points throughout the city receive Veterinary inspection from the Port Veterinarian's Office. These are the barracks that house Army Postal Units at the Hotel Collingwood, Hotel Breslin, Consolidated Edison Building and the Army Postal Building in Long Island City.

During this period of intensive shipping activity when there was a tendency to relax all sanitary precautions on incoming vessels, the Port Veterinarian has been on the alert to prevent the introduction of foreign animal diseases through the New York Port of Embarkation. To that end surveys have been conducted concerning garbage disposal from ships that come into New York Harbor. Through the efforts of the Port Veterinarian's Office, procedures have been worked out for the collection and incineration of all garbage of ships that put into foreign ports.

Each ship carrying troops leaving the New York Port of Embarkation is given a sanitary inspection by the Inspector General's Office. Accompanying this party is a representative of the Port Veterinarian's Office whose function it is to inspect the refrigerator boxes for cleanliness, adequacy of construction, adequacy to handle the perishables, and the galleys. At peak load as many as one hundred (100) such inspections a month are made.