

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE REPORT - PORT VETERINARIAN'S BRANCH

NEW YORK PORT OF EMBARKATION

From 8 December 1941 To 30 June 1945

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--- P E R S O N N E L ---
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At the time of the United State's entry into the war on 7 December 1941, the personnel of the Veterinary Detachment at the New York Port of Embarkation consisted of seven (7) officers, seven (7) enlisted men and one (1) civilian clerk. During the next four years, the personnel increased to a maximum of fourteen (14) officers and thirty-eight (38) enlisted men.

The Commanding General, General Homer M. Groninger, anticipating an emergency almost a year in advance, had approved a system whereby this Department was prepared to efficiently handle the work demanded of it at the inception of hostilities.

Reserve officers were assigned to active duty, and were personally interviewed by the Port Veterinarian to determine which ones were best suited to the type of work required at the Port. Most of the enlisted men had had previous experience in packing houses or Dairy plants, and were also interviewed to determine their educational qualifications, practical experience and their adaptability to the work. Only those well educated and highly skilled in their field were selected for service in the Organization. All were given a thorough course of training in all phases of meat and dairy hygiene, to supplement their previous experience and training. The initial choice was, apparently, well made for most of the men selected proved to be capable, efficient and well adapted to the work required of them. Fifteen (15) of the enlisted men subsequently attended Officer's Candidate School. All graduated, and some distinguished themselves as officers in the field. Lt Almond E. Fisher, a Master Sergeant in the New York Port of Embarkation

Veterinary Detachment at the beginning of the war, was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

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--- P A N A M A R A I L R O A D C O ---
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Prior to 1940, the Assistant Secretary of War, while making an inspection tour of the Panama Canal Zone facilities, had received numerous complaints concerning the quality of meat food and dairy products, which were received for consumption by United States Army troops.

Arrangements were made soon afterward to place this inspection work under the jurisdiction of the Army Veterinary Corps. Accordingly, this work was turned over to the Port Veterinarian at the New York Port of Embarkation, and that Office began the inspection work for the Panama Railroad Company early in 1940. The results were so satisfactory that a request was made by a representative of the company for the Port Veterinarian's Office to take over the inspection of all fruits and vegetables shipped to the Panama Canal Zone, in addition to the meat food and dairy products.

In the Summer of 1942, the Panama ships were taken over by the Army Transport Service and the War Shipping Administration, and all inspection work for the Panama Railroad Company was stopped.

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--- INSPECTION AND SALVAGE OF CANNED MEATS ---
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In the early Summer of 1942, the Government seized all stock-piles of canned meat food products, and the work of inspecting hundreds of thousands of cases of South American corned beef was assigned to the New York Port of Embarkation. Veterinary Officers and enlisted men from the Port worked on the piers and in the warehouses throughout the metropolitan area inspecting approximately 18,500,000 pounds of this product and salvaging the best for use by the Armed Forces.

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--- M E A T A N D D A I R Y H Y G I E N E ---
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With the coming of the War, and the changes from a peace-time to a

war-time basis, there was a vast increase in the amount of meat food and dairy products required, and a corresponding increase in the work of the Corps. With the added requirements of the Armed Forces, the amount grew by leaps and bounds. Contracts were let out to an ever-increasing number of establishments in the metropolitan area and surrounding territory. Fort Jay, unable to cope with this unprecedented amount of work, turned the contracts over to the Port Veterinarian who, by that time had increased the personnel at the New York Port of Embarkation to efficiently handle the mounting volume of work. Coincident with the increased production of meat and dairy products, there was a constantly revised and enlarged group of Federal Specifications for all the various meats, fresh, cured, prepared and processed, in addition to the sundry dairy products. It became the responsibility of the Veterinary Officers and enlisted men at the New York Port of Embarkation to become thoroughly acquainted with these Specifications, and through supervision of all processes from the fresh carcass to the finished product, during Class III inspections, to insure the delivery of products complying in every respect with the written Specification. To accomplish this in the initial phases of the change-over, constant diligence and considerable diplomacy on the part of the inspector were essential. Many new processes were initiated, including the canning and processing of meat for the "letter" rations, boneless beef, overseas ham and bacon, new types of lard and butter, and other items too numerous to mention. Veterinary inspectors from the New York Port of Embarkation, together with the contractors, worked out major and minor problems as they came up, and arrived at a mutual understanding. In addition to the usual duties of selecting and inspecting the various types of meat for type, class and grade, sanitary inspections were made monthly of a maximum of one hundred eighty (180) meat packing houses and dairy plants in the five boroughs of New York, Jersey City, Newark, Bergen and Yonkers.

All Class III inspections in the metropolitan and surrounding areas were performed by Officers and enlisted men of the Port Veterinarian's Office until 1 October 1944. At that time, the Butter District alone was producing over a million pounds of butter a week for the Armed Forces. This work was gradually turned over to the Jersey City Quartermaster Depot according to War Department Circular Letter No. 63. The Officers and enlisted men of the Port Veterinarian's Office assisted in making this change, and acquainted the personnel who were taking over the work, with the various problems involved. Some Officers and enlisted men were transferred from the Port to the Jersey City Quartermaster Depot, and remained in the plants performing Class III inspections. Other members of the Port personnel helped out with the work from time to time, to keep the operations moving with maximum efficiency. At the same time, most of the sanitary inspections of establishments were transferred to the same organization, leaving approximately sixty (60) under the jurisdiction of the Port.

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--- T R A I N I N G O F P E R S O N N E L ---
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With the increased demand for trained Veterinary Officers for the Army, the Port Veterinarian's Office accepted the responsibility of operating a replacement pool and training center for newly commissioned Officers. A course of instruction was instituted, consisting initially of fifty percent classroom instruction and fifty percent practical training in the packing houses of New York City. Subsequent experience indicated that more practical experience was required, and the course was revised to include eighty-five percent practical training and fifteen percent classroom instruction. A practical textbook for reference and study was compiled by the Office and issued to each student Officer. Adequate training in all phases of meat and dairy inspection was possible, due to the large number of meat packing establishments and dairy plants located in the metropolitan

area. Over two hundred (200) Veterinary Officers have been trained at this Station and reassigned to stations in this country and overseas.

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--- A R M Y C A R G O A N D S H I P S T O R E S ---
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As the size of our overseas Army grew, so did the shipment of perishable foods increase. During the period from July 1944, to June 1945, 2,595,853,800 pounds of meat was inspected, and 3,666,759 pounds rejected by Veterinary inspectors of the New York Port of Embarkation. Seven hundred eleven (711) troop-carrying ships were inspected with the Inspector General's Department. The ship stores for four hundred eighty-nine (489) War Shipping Administration and British Ministry of War Transport were inspected, and two hundred seventy-one (271) Army Cargo ships, with a capacity of from two thousand (2,000) to six thousand (6,000) tons of frozen and chilled meats each, were loaded under the Veterinary Corps' supervision. This enormous volume of shipping required constant Veterinary supervision to insure the delivery of sound, wholesome products at ship-side in properly frozen or chilled condition. It was frequently necessary for Officers and enlisted men to work "around the clock" during the loading of these ships to insure the efficient inspection of all products. In the beginning there were problems that had to be solved. Crates and boxes were often of an unsatisfactory type or not properly constructed for overseas shipment. Suggestions from the Port Veterinarian and his assistants, in cooperation with the Quartermaster Market Center, resulted in the improvement of shipping cartons, with consequent decrease in loss of money and material. Summer weather brought its problems in the transportation of refrigerated cargo to the ships by rail and truck. A careful check was made of all products upon arrival, for soundness, proper temperatures, packaging and sanitation. As the demand for meat and dairy products grew, it became necessary, in many

instances, to rush the product directly from the contractor's plant to the ship. In these instances the Veterinary personnel at the New York Port of Embarkation made Class IV inspections of all commodities before they were placed aboard the ship. At one time, eggs were being diverted directly to the piers, and Officers and enlisted men, by working day and night under extremely adverse winter conditions, candled the required five percent of the shipment to determine the quality and condition prior to loading. Portable equipment was shunted from pier to pier, and means were improvised for conducting the inspection in the most efficient manner possible under existing conditions. Subsequent to June 1943, the Port Veterinarian's Office inspected the stores for all War Shipping Administration vessels carrying United States Army Personnel. Samples of sausages, ground meat and any product of questionable quality were submitted by this Office to the Army Veterinary Laboratory of the Second Service Command for chemical analysis. This procedure provided a close check on the vendor, and resulted in the delivery of better products to these vessels.

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--- L O S S T H R O U G H L O A D I N G O P E R A T I O N S ---
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During the process of loading, especially Army Cargo ships, there was constant pilferage of Army meat in varying amounts from freight cars, floats and piers. Cars often arrived at ship-side with seals broken and cartons missing. Some thieves, leaving the piers with stolen Army property, were apprehended by pier guards, and many were fined or imprisoned.

During the three year period from 1942 to 1945, approximately fifty thousand (50,000) pounds of meat fell into the polluted water of the harbor because of inadequate save-all nets, and was condemned by members of the Veterinary Corps as being unfit for human consumption.

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--- A N I M A L S H I P M E N T ---
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During the winter of 1944, the Port Veterinarian's Office participated in the shipment of four hundred thirty-five (435) mules to India by the British Ministry of War Transport. The first shipment arrived at Jersey City in mid-winter and seven (7) of the animals died between the shipping point of El Reno, Oklahoma, and Jersey City. Nine other animals were ill with pneumonia upon arrival, and were stabled and treated by Veterinary Officers of the New York Port of Embarkation. All of these animals recovered, and were later shipped to India.

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--- C O N T A G I O U S D I S E A S E C O N T R O L ---
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During, and previous to the war, the Port Veterinarian was constantly alert to the potential danger of introducing contagious diseases into this Country via incoming ships. Diligent and exhaustive studies were made to eliminate any possible source of infection. Ships carrying meat from countries currently infected with Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Aptha Epizooticae) or Rinderpest (Pestis bovina) were not permitted to discharge any meat at this Port. These diseases, while not current in this Country, are relatively common in other countries, England reporting one hundred eighty (180) cases of Foot-and-Mouth Disease in 1944.

Through recommendations made by the Port Veterinarian, in cooperation with the Bureau of Animal Industry, all garbage from incoming ships was transported in tight, closed trucks to be destroyed at local incinerating plants.

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--- S C O P E O F P O R T A U T H O R I T Y ---
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In December 1942, the small office of the Veterinary Organization of the New York Port of Embarkation in the Administration Building

was vacated, and the Organization moved to the Kenyon Building at the Brooklyn Army Base Terminal to occupy two large rooms with a laboratory equipped for routine tests of meat food and dairy products. These added facilities were necessary to cope with the added duties coincident with the expansion of the Port. At that time, the Port had expanded to include Staten Island Terminal, Bush Terminal and North River Terminal with a combined total of twenty-eight (28) Army piers. Commercial piers from pier two to eighty-four on the North River, and also piers on the East River, and in Brooklyn, Jersey City, Hoboken and Weehawken were utilized for handling Army shipments of perishable foods.

Camp Kilmer and Camp Shanks staging areas, with a combined total of fifty thousand (50,000) enlisted men were subsidiaries of the New York Port of Embarkation; also the Ports of Embarkation at Charleston, Boston, Newport News, Philadelphia, Fort Hamilton, Fort Slocum, the Fox Hills staging area for colored troops in Staten Island, and Port Johnston and Claremont Terminals in New Jersey. Also under the jurisdiction of the Port were included the military hotels Breslin, Collingwood and Broadway Central in New York City: Army messes at Pier 90, North River, New York City, and the Postal Battalion messes in the Edison Building and Queens Boulevard in Long Island City.

All hotel and other Army messes were inspected by the New York Port of Embarkation Veterinary inspectors to determine the quality and condition of the food, and sanitation and efficiency of refrigeration facilities.

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--- S U M M A R Y ---
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During the month of December 1941, the Port's first month on a wartime basis, the Port Veterinarian and his assistants inspected 11,115,650

pounds of meat food and dairy products, of which 236,312 pounds were rejected. During the peak month of March 1945, this same organization inspected 373,312,777 pounds of meat and dairy products, of which 453,683 pounds were rejected. During the period from December 1941, through 30 June 1945, the Veterinary Organization of the New York Port of Embarkation inspected a total of 4,904,752,767 pounds of meat and dairy products, of which 4,888,185,459 pounds were passed and 16,567,308 pounds rejected.

The scope of inspection work accomplished by the Port Veterinarian and his assistants, at the largest port in the World, during the greatest war in history, has been wide, and the amount vast. The results, and the efficiency of the work accomplished may be found in reports from the United States Forces overseas, as to the quality and condition of meat food and dairy products delivered to them from this Port.