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# The L&N's Battalion: The Story of the 728th Railway Operating Battalion, sponsored by the Louisville and Nashville Railroad Company during the Second World War

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A Senior Honors Thesis
By
David Matthew Wilkins

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**A Senior Thesis for the Department of History and the University Honors Program**

**By**
**David Matthew Wilkins**
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## Abstract

Supply by rail was an important component of Allied strategy during the Second World War. Special units, called Railway Operating Battalions, were set up by the United States Army to serve in this fashion. The Louisville and Nashville Railroad sponsored one unit, the 728th Railway Operating Battalion, which operated the important rail facilities around Cherbourg, France, a key allied port in the critical period after the Normandy Invasions.

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On the writing and editing side, I would like to thank Dr. Joseph Millichap, my second reader and confessed railroad enthusiast. Professor Walker Rutledge, who coordinates the thesis program for the University, helped me strengthen my writing style.

Without his help, this thesis would not be as readable as it is today. I would like to thank Dr. Jack Thacker, my advisor, for letting me take an idea and develop it. Robert Hall of the Railway Negative Exchange provided me with the photo that is used on the cover of this thesis. It is of the first run of the "Toot Sweet Express" and features Lt. Colonel Carl Love issuing orders to the train crew at Cherbourg. Finally, my parents Marshall and Phyliss Wilkins, who encouraged my research, helped proofread the thesis, finalize research, make copies, and traveled research trips with me, deserve a big part of the credit. Without their support, I don't think I could have completed such a project.

## Preface

It has been over sixty years since America was thrust into the Second World War. Thanks to the resurgence in public interest in the war, a whole new range of scholarship is being conducted. The generation that grew up during the Great Depression and fought the Second World War is truly "The Greatest Generation" as author and NBC anchor Tom Brokaw puts it.

However, for all of the "Saving Private Ryans" and Stephen Ambrose books, little attention is being given to those troops who served in a support capacity during the war. Even today, little scholarly attention is being focused on the Transportation Corps or the Military Railway Service. I trust that this thesis will be a modest contribution toward changing that trend.

I first stumbled onto a reference of the 728th Railway Operating Battalion in late July of 2001, when I was researching the Military Railway Service at the Fort Eustis library and archives. Since the L&N was the only major railroad headquartered in Kentucky, and since the 728th did play a major role in the war, I decided that their story must be told. The goal of this thesis is not to retell the story of the Military Railway Service in World War II, but to tell the story of one of its battalions and explain how it

was a crucial component in Allied Victory. To help put the story of the 728th into a larger context, I have included a history of the Military Railway Service and details about the importance of railway supply during wartime, and of the history of the MRS itself. Researching and writing this thesis has given me a greater appreciation and respect for those who supplied the Army and operated the ships, trucks, and trains which made Allied victory possible. While I doubt Hollywood will ever make a movie on the MRS, their role was just as important as that of the individuals who fought on the front lines and who still receive the lion's share of attention and glory.

## Railways in War

On 2 December 1942 the Louisville and Nashville Railroad literally went off to join the war. Since 1939 the railroad, like nearly every other railroad in the U.S., had experienced a surge in freight and passenger traffic related to the build-up and mobilization of America's armed forces. The traffic continued to grow after the U.S. entry into the Second World War on 8 December 1941. Like the employees of other war-critical industries, many railroad workers were given draft exemptions, as their specialized skills in operating and maintaining a railroad were vital to America's war effort. The United States Army needed their services as experienced, professional railroaders. On that cold, second day of December, Carl Love, commissioned as a Lieutenant Colonel in the United States Army and on leave from his post as Superintendent of the Louisville Division of the L&N, and eight other L&N employees, also commissioned as officers in the Army, took some ceremonial photos for the L&N employee magazine under the station's giant train shed and boarded a train, bound for Fort Slocum, New York.[1] They would not return until after the war.

These men were to become the officer component of the 728th Railway Operating Battalion of the United States Army Transportation Corps. The Battalion, like most units in the Army's Military Railway Service or MRS, was sponsored by a Class One railroad, the L&N in

[1] "Here and There Along the Line," *The Louisville and Nashville Employees' Magazine*, January 1943, 31.

this case. The Unit was formed originally in 1929 as the 597th Engineer Railway Operating Battalion, Reserve, but had never been activated.[2] Nearly all of the thirty officers and 250 of the unit's enlisted personnel would come from the L&N. The Battalion would go on to provide some of the most valuable rail support operations to the Allied Armies in the invasion and breakout from Normandy by being responsible for all rail operations in the port city of Cherbourg, France.[3] The 728th Railway Operating Battalion of the United States Army's Military Railway Service provided an excellent example of the important supply role that railways offered to the Allied Armies in the European Theater of Operations from Normandy to the surrender of Germany in World War II.

"Nothing Happens Until Something Moves" is the creed of the United States Army Transportation Corps. The Transportation Corps is responsible for all transport-related activity within the Army, including road, rail, air, and even water transport.[4] Their motto reflects the realities of modern warfare. Modern wars are won and lost in the areas of movement and supply. Unlike in ancient times, when armies lived off the land, the modern soldier needs food, clothing, and ammunition. Also, airplanes, tanks, trucks, and jeeps all need gasoline and spare parts.

Because of its truly global nature, World War II would prove to be a war of transport. For the Allies, transportation was essential to victory on all fronts, especially in Europe. The implications of transportation in a global conflict were especially pressing for the United States. With a war that was being fought in virtually every corner of the world, and often far removed from the United States, the successful moving of men and materiel from the United States to the

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[2] Carl D. Love, *A Brief History of Activities of the 728th Railway Operating Battalion, Sponsored by the Louisville and Nashville Railroad Company, at the Request of the U.S. War Department.* L&N Records Project, University Archives and Records Center, University of Louisville, 1.
[3] Ibid., 4.
[4] Benjamin King, Richard C. Biggs, and Eric R. Criner, *Spearhead of Logistics; A History of the United States Army Transportation Corps* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2001), 1.

various theaters of war was the only way to ensure Allied victory.[5] Supplies and personnel not only needed to be assembled at the various ports of embarkation, but once deployed in the battlefield, they would still need a constant stream of resupply. Integral to the transportation system of both Europe and the United States were railways. In the days before interstate highways and the jet airplane, rail was the fastest, cheapest, and most efficient way to ship goods and people. During the war, the railway network proved to be a valuable strategic asset to the Allies.

The importance of railways in the conduct of modern warfare first became apparent in the American Civil War. One of the reasons for the Union victory was that the North had a highly developed railway network that was placed under a centralized military control. Thus, troops and supplies could be moved great distances with very few problems.[6] The South, on the other hand, had a widely scattered system of railroads which was not placed under a centralized command.[7] A problem for both sides was that there was no standard gauge for track in the United States. Most railroads in the North were built to the British gauge of four feet, eight and one half inches. However, some Northern railroads, like the Eire Railroad, were built to a larger gauge. In the South, the problem was worse, as most railroads were built with a gauge anywhere from four feet, ten inches, to five feet.

The Civil War gave birth to what would eventually become the Military Railway Service. President Abraham Lincoln would put General Herman Haupt in charge of Union rail

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[5] Chester Wardlow, *The United States Army in World War II, The Technical Services: The Transportation Corps: Responsibilities, Organization, and Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, U.S. Army, 1951), 1.

[6] John F. Stover, *The Railroads of the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill, NC.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1955), 10.

[7] Robert C. Black, *The Railroads of the Confederacy* (Chapel Hill, NC.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1952), 10.

operations.[8] The first major goal for Haupt was the standardization of Northern railroad gauges. Most railroads were converted to four feet, eight and one half inches, or a compromise gauge of four feet, nine inches. His coordination and leadership ensured the success of the North's utilization of rail transport. The American Civil War also made European military planners take notice. After the war, the continental military powers, especially Germany, France, and even Russia, began to investigate the strategic potential of railways in military planning.[9] As a result, many of these planners became convinced that railways would be a valuable strategic tool, allowing armies to move vast distances in a relatively short amount of time. Since railroads were viewed as a strategic asset, most European railroads were built to run east-west, which would allow the mobilization of armies along Europe's boarders. Large stations and marshalling yards were built along the borders between countries.[10] Military planning also changed as a result of the use of railroads. The German Von Schliffen plan was set up like a railroad timetable, as was the counterpart French Plan XVII.[11] These plans depended upon accurate estimates of how fast troops and supplies could be delivered to the front by train. With the outbreak of hostilities in August of 1914, railroads were used in the mobilization of French, German, Austrian, and Russian troops, as they all moved off to meet each other.[12]

Meanwhile, during the post-Civil War years, the U.S. Army had done very little in the way of railroad planning. The Army of the latter half of the nineteenth century was concentrated in the isolated and remote Western United States. However, with the mobilization of the American Army in June 1916, in its punitive expedition against Poncho Villa, the head of the Army's Engineers, General William M. Black, recognized the need for rail transport and

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[8] Ibid., 11.
[9] John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 25.
[10] Ibid., 27.
[11] Ibid., 27.
[12] Ibid., 27.

planning.[13] The idea was to recruit civilian railroaders into the Army and obtain enough materiel and equipment to construct a 150-mile railroad into Mexico to supply the expeditionary force.[14] Black asked Samuel L. Felton, President of the Chicago Great Western Railroad, to organize this effort. Within two weeks, the requested men and provisions were ready, but they were no longer needed, as Pershing had begun to use the motor truck to resupply his force.[15] Felton was asked to continue serving, pending possible U.S. entry into World War I, which he did. On 3 February 1917, the 3rd Engineer Regiment was created with personnel from six Chicago area railroads. This regiment would become the first rail unit activated since the end of the Civil War.[16] On 14 May 1917 War Department General Order 61 authorized the creation of eight additional railroad regiments.[17] The order stipulated that of the nine railway regiments, five would be assigned to construction, three to actual operations, and one regiment would become a shop unit, tasked with maintaining equipment. The commanding officers of the regiments were to be regular Army colonels, but the rest of the officers would be railroad personnel. By the time the United States entered the war on 6 April 1917, significant steps had been made to assure railroad preparedness. By August, twenty regiments had been dispatched to France to help move the American and Allied Armies. By 11 November 1918 there would be 897 railway officers commanding 32,149 railway soldiers serving in the Military Railway Service.[18] In France the railway troops would operate American-built locomotives and trains that hauled troops and supplies from the ports to

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[13] Don DeNevi and Bob Hall, *United States Military Railway Service, America's Soldier-Railroaders in World War II* (Erin, Ontario: Boston Mills Press, 1991), 13.
[14] Ibid., 13.
[15] Ibid.,14.
[16] Carl Raymond Gray, *Railroading in Eighteen Countries; The Story of American Railroad Men Serving in the Military Railway Service, 1862 to 1953* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 10
[17] Ibid., 13.
[18] DeNevi, 14.

the front. They would also serve a vital role in the evacuation of the American Expeditionary Force once the war ended in 1918.[19]

After the conclusion of World War I, the need for a more permanent organizational structure for railway troops was recognized. The National Defense Act of 1920 laid the groundwork for the Military Railway Service, as well as the structure of the Transportation Corps in World War II.[20] The Transportation Service was originally organized as a separate branch under the Quartermaster General.[21] Although many of the act's provisions would never be fully carried out, it did establish the officer's reserve corps. The act created the Railway Battalion, which would either be assigned to operation or shop duties. By the end of the war, some thirty-two of these battalions were created in World War II, as well as a headquarters battalion, ten Railway Grand Divisions, and several smaller railway regiments.[22] Class One Railroads, or the largest in the United States, were asked to sponsor one or more of these units, of which the L&N originally sponsored the 597th Engineer Railway Operating Battalion, which became the 728th Railway Operating Battalion with the creation of the U.S. Army Transportation Corps 21 July 1942.[23] In accepting sponsorship, a railroad had to supply the unit with most of the officers and a portion of the enlisted personnel.[24] If necessary, the sponsoring railroad had to make available its facilities for training by the battalion. The creation of the Transportation Corps had arisen from the government's realization of how important transportation would be in the new war. Moreover, it was realized that a better organizational structure was needed to successfully carry out the goal of transporting the military.

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[19] Ibid., 16.
[20] Gray, 20.
[21] King, 118.
[22] Ibid., 495.
[23] Love, 1.
[24] DeNevi, 18.

In 1939, the Military Railway Service was composed of largely inactive reserve units. Because of the long period of inactivity, little training had been conducted in the inter-war years. In 1939 Carl Gray, executive vice president of the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Omaha Railroad, a reserve Colonel, was called to active duty as Manager of the Military Railway Service.[25] The MRS would be headquartered in Ft. Snelling, Minnesota, and almost immediately, steps were undertaken to revitalize the MRS and prepare it for war. In July of 1941, the first Railway Operating Battalion, the 711th, was activated at Ft. Belvoir, Virginia.[26] The battalion would be a training battalion, and unlike other MRS units, would have no sponsor. The unit was assigned to Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, to build a training railroad. By the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor, two operating battalions of the Military Railway Service were available for active duty.[27]

The organizational structure of the Military Railway Service and its battalions was somewhat different from that of a normal military organization. This difference was reflected in the fact that the MRS was designed to function like a railroad company rather than an army unit. General Gray would be in a position similar to that of a railroad president, while each battalion commander would have responsibilities similar to those of a division superintendent on a civilian railroad, and would be in charge of roughly 120 miles of track.[28] A Railway Grand Division, of which there were ten, would be in charge of two or more Railway Operating or Railway Shop Battalions, and would serve in an administrative function, with the commanding officer serving in a capacity similar to that of a vice president of a railroad.[29] The commanding officer of a

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[25] Chester Wardlow, The *United States Army in World War II, The Technical Services; The Transportation Corps: Movements, Training and Supply* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, 1956), 439.
[26] Gray, 23.
[27] Ibid., 24.
[28] DeNevi, 15.
[29] Ibid., 15.

Railway Shop Battalion would have duties analogous to those of a shop superintendent on a U.S. railroad, i.e., being solely responsible for maintenance and repair activities on locomotives and rolling stock.[30]

Starting in early 1942, one by one, the various MRS units were called into active service. It was in December that the 728th was called into active service for the first time.[31] The organizational structure of the 728th was like that of any other Railway Operating Battalion, consisting of four companies. The commanding officer was Carl Love, a thirty-year veteran of the L&N, who, before the war, as superintendent of the Louisville Division, was responsible for the smooth operation and management of the railroad's busiest sections. Love explained the organizational structure of the 728th ROB as follows:

> Company A consisted of qualified men to perform track work, bridge work, and building work—supervised by, or under command of a Captain, who would be the equivalent of a Division Engineer in civilian railroad service.
>
> Company B consisted of shop forces who would make repairs to locomotives and cars, under the command of a Captain who would be equivalent to a Master Mechanic in civilian railroad service.
>
> Company C consisted of suitable personnel for operation of trains, locomotives, etc., under the command of a Captain, equivalent to a Trainmaster in civilian railroad service.
>
> Headquarters Company consisted of the Battalion Commander's staff, together with men working in the capacity of operators (teletype operators, telegraph operators, and telephone operators), linemen, and signalmen, under the command of a Captain who would be equivalent to a Signal Engineer on a civilian U.S. railroad.[32]

In late 1942, the L&N had selected the officers to fill out their quota for the 728th. With Carl Love as the commanding officer, the company commanders were selected from L&N employees who had experience in their various fields that would be valuable to the battalion. Major Elmer R. Harris would be the second in command and the battalion's executive officer.

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[30] Ibid., 15.
[31] Dick Fenzel, personal interview by author, 11 October 2001.
[32] Love, 1-2.

Harris was the inspector of transportation for the L&N's Louisville division. The rest of the headquarters staff consisted of Captain A.C. Atchison, who served the L&N as Adjutant Signal Inspector out of Knoxville, Tennessee. First Lieutenant C.G. Lowther, a clerk from Louisville, and First Lieutenant R.L. Morris, the foreman of the diesel locomotive shop in Louisville, would round out the headquarters staff.[33]

The company commander for the headquarters and service company would be Captain F.D. Heflin, who served as chief clerk to the Master Mechanic at Nashville, Tennessee.[34] Captain Mark A. McGee, the Assistant Engineer from Covington, Kentucky, led Company A, the maintenance-of-way company.[35] Company B, the shop company, was not headed by an L&N employee. When the officers shipped out in December, the position was to be filled by a regular Army captain. Company C, the operations company was headed by Captain Paul Fleming.[36]

Besides the officer component of the Battalion, many L&N employees also filled positions as enlisted personnel. From locomotive engineers to telegraph operators, these employees chose to serve their country by serving in the 728th. On 2 October, Dick Fenzel, a former Western Kentucky University student, was a telegraph operator for the L&N in Bonneville, Kentucky, who enlisted in Nashville as a member of the 728th. After enlistment, he and the other enlisted personnel of the 728th were shipped to Camp Harahan, Louisiana, near New Orleans.[37] Camp Harahan was designated as the usual training camp for most MRS enlisted personnel. It was also where units were typically activated, after the full complement of officers arrived from their training. The officers gathered in Louisville at the L&N's general

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[33] "Railway Operating Battalion Organizes," *The Louisville and Nashville Employees' Magazine*, August 1942, 12.
[34] Ibid., 12.
[35] Ibid., 13.
[36] Ibid., 13.
[37] Fenzel.

headquarters and were shipped out on 2 December 1942, headed for officer training at Fort Slocum, New York.[38] While the 728th Railway Operating Battalion then existed on paper, activation would not come until 1943.

[38] Love, 2.

## The 728th In Training

In late 1942 the officer and enlisted personnel components of the 728th Railway Operating Battalion were being trained at two different locations. The officers trained with other Military Railway Service officers at Fort Slocum, New York. The enlisted personnel trained at Camp Harahan, Louisiana, near New Orleans. While both components of the 728th were in training, the battalion was activated as a composite unit on 11 January 1943. At that time, the battalion had a strength of 30 officers and 900 enlisted personnel.[39]

Finding enough component officers was a continual problem for the Transportation Corps and the Military Railway Service. Unlike other services, the Transportation Corps was not in existence before the war and could not take advantage of the period of rearmament in the late 1930s to build a nucleus of trained officers.[40] This problem persisted throughout the war. However, the Transportation Corps and the Military Railway Service were able to find competent officers from three main sources. First, a sizeable number of officers was transferred from other commands in the army, such as the Quartermaster Corps and the Corps of Engineers.[41] Also, when several Railway Operating Battalions and other Transportation Corps Units were activated overseas in the early days of the war, the officer complements were filled

[39] Ibid., 2.
[40] Wardlow, *Movements, Training and Supply*, 426.
[41] Ibid., 426.

by transferring officers from the Headquarters of the Transportation Corps. However, the majority of the officers needed for the Military Railway Service came from the railroads themselves. To accommodate these new officers, the Transportation Corps set up two officer schools, at Fort. Slocum, New York, and at Camp Stoneman, near San Francisco.[42] These schools were initially set up at the Ports of Embarkation, as these were the only facilities under Transportation Corps command in the early days of the war.[43]

The purpose of officer training by the Transportation Corps was to provide basic military indoctrination for inexperienced reserve officers, as well as those who had been recently commissioned from civilian life.[44] Class sizes at Fort Slocum were usually around 100 officers. The 701st, 729th, 756th, and the 728th Railway Operating Battalions were the first reserve units to graduate from the officers' school at Fort Slocum.[45] Each entering class would hear a speech by Colonel Bernard Lentz, commandant of Fort Slocum. Colonel Lentz stated that the goal of the school was to teach "soldiering" to the officers drawn from the civilian workforce. Moreover, the school was aimed at trying to instill these officers "with the military virtues that an officer must fully understand if he is to function properly in any branch of the military organization."[46] Despite being supply troops, officers in the Transportation Corps Schools were still required to undergo standard training, especially physical training, the same as regular army officers were expected to undergo. Following the completion of their officer training, they embarked for New Orleans to join the enlisted personnel.[47]

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[42] Ibid., 427.
[43] Ibid., 427.
[44] Ibid., 430.
[45] Kincaid A. Herr, "The 728th Prepares for the Fray," *The Louisville and Nashville Employees' Magazine*, March 1943, 15.
[46] Wardlow, *Movements, Training and Supply*, 426.
[47] Love., 3.

The enlisted personnel of the 728th Railway Operating Battalion received their basic training at Camp Harahan, Louisiana.[48] Camp Harahan, like other Transportation Corps training facilities, was located near a port of embarkation, in this case near New Orleans. The camp was the main training location for all of the enlisted personnel of the Military Railway Service until late 1943, when because of limited capacity, some of the training functions were transferred to Fort Sam Houston in Texas.[49] At Camp Harahan, the enlisted personnel component of the battalion was filled with soldiers from railroads other than the L&N, as well as regular Army draftees. David B. Squires, a freight billing clerk with the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad, who had hoped to be assigned to his company's battalion, the 729th, was instead assigned to the 728th to help fill the unit to full strength. After six weeks of basic training, the entire unit, including the officers, would move to technical training.[50] The MRS had two options when it came to technical training for units in the Military Railway Service. First, the units could be trained at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, on a fifty-mile-long railroad constructed by the 711th ROB in 1941.[51] However, because of the limited capacity for training at this location, the MRS preferred the second option, which entailed sending units out to work on commercial railroads. This type of training was more advantageous because it provided the soldiers with a chance to operate trains on a "real" railroad, in conditions that sometimes could not be duplicated at Camp Claiborne. When commercial railroads agreed to sponsor units in the Military Railway Service, they also agreed to open their facilities to training for these units. Headquarters and administration units were given eleven weeks of technical training; operating battalions, like the

[48] Fenzel.
[49] Wardlow, *Movements, Training and Supply*, 440.
[50] Ibid., 441.
[51] Ibid., 441.

728th, were given fifteen weeks of training; and railway shop battalions were given nineteen weeks of training.

With the officers and enlisted personnel of the 728th Railway Operating Battalion finally united, it was time for the unit to undergo technical training. On 5 March 1943, the unit moved from Camp Harahan to New Mexico, by troop train.[52] Here the battalion would stay until 12 September 1943. The battalion's destination was Camp William C. Reid, near Clovis, New Mexico.[53] The Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway would serve as host of the unit while they were in New Mexico, providing facilities for the battalion. Technical training had two main goals. First, it would acquaint the members of the battalion who were not professional railroaders in civilian life with the operational aspects of running a railroad. During this period, members of the 728th assisted personnel of the A.T.&S.F. by operating trains between Clovis and Amarillo, Texas, and Clovis and Albuquerque, New Mexico.[54] Members of the battalion also learned track building and maintenance skills, locomotive and car repair, and train dispatching and control. Training in Clovis would also familiarize those members of the battalion with operational methods which their civilian employer might not have utilized. For example, Dick Fenzel, the Kentucky telegraph operator, in civilian life would take his orders directly from the train dispatcher, located in Louisville, and would deliver messages, called train orders to trains as they passed by. These orders were crucial because they controlled the movement on the single-tracked main line between Louisville and Nashville. In the Military Railway Service, Fenzel served in the company in charge of operations.[55] This assignment would put him in control of moving railroad traffic over a particular stretch of track. While at Clovis, Fenzel was trained in

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[52] Fenzel.
[53] David B. Squires, "Military Service: A New Haven Railroader's Odyssey," *The Shoreliner*, January 1994, 9.
[54] Love., 2.
[55] Fenzel.

dispatching.[56] Clovis was an ideal place for this because of its location on the busy Santa Fe mainline. Fenzel was able to gain much experience in governing heavy train movement. Also, he became accustomed to dispatching by telephone and teletype, which had not been used by the L&N at that time.[57] Clovis, New Mexico, was a division point for the Santa Fe Railway. The Santa Fe also maintained a large shop complex for the maintenance and repair of the railroad's steam and diesel locomotives, as well as facilities for the repair of freight and passenger cars.

Morale is a big part of any military training. The 728th was no exception. It was while the 728th was training in Clovis that the L&N's public relations department decided to hold a morale-boosting contest for the battalion. The June 1943 edition of the L&N company magazine contained the headline, "Who will Be 'Miss Ellen N. of the 728th'?" [58] Female employees of the L&N were encouraged to send in a photo and a letter stating why they would wish to become the official female sponsor of the battalion. The name "Ellen N" comes from the common shorthand for the Louisville and Nashville Railroad.[59] The winner would be escorted by L&N officials and presented to the 728th while they were still training in Clovis.[60] The August issue of *The Louisville and Nashville Employees' Magazine* reported that Ms. Marie W. Brantley, a typist in the freight office in Montgomery, Alabama, was selected as "Miss Ellen N. of the 728th." The trip to Clovis was scheduled for 4 August 1943 to 12 August 1943.[61] Her trip to Clovis was covered in detail in the September 1943 issue of *The Louisville and Nashville Employees' Magazine.* Members of the battalion greeted her at the Clovis station, and for the next several

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[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] "Who Will be 'Miss Ellen N of the 728th?" *The Louisville and Nashville Employees' Magazine*, June 1943, 26.
[59] Ibid., 26.
[60] Ibid., 23.
[61] "Montgomery Typist Chosen as 'Miss Ellen N. of the 728th," *The Louisville and Nashville Employees' Magazine*, August 1943, 97.

days she was the guest of honor for a formal dance, a parade, and other ceremonies.[62] On 13 September the 728th Railway Operating Battalion boarded a troop train at Clovis and headed to Ft. Snelling, Minnesota. They would be routed over the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway, and the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul, and Pacific Railroad to their destination.[63]

Ft. Snelling was the headquarters for the Military Railway Service. It is here that General Carl Gray and his staff coordinated the activation, training, and deployment of all the Military Railway Service Units.[64] The 728th was pretty much biding time at Ft. Snelling; the purpose for their move was to clear Camp William C. Reid for another newly activated battalion to begin technical training. The 728th stayed at Ft. Snelling until 15 November 1943, when they once again boarded a troop train for Camp Miles Standish, near Taunton, Massachusetts.[65] Camp Miles Standish was a staging point for units waiting for embarkation orders for Great Britain. The battalion stayed here for three weeks, finally receiving orders on 6 December 1943. The battalion boarded the *S.S. J.W. McAndrew*, bound for Gurock, Scotland.[66] In just under a year, the 728th Railway Operating Battalion had gone from being a reserve unit to becoming one that was fully trained and ready to ship overseas.

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[62] ""Miss Ellen N Takes Over," *The Louisville and Nashville Employees' Magazine*, September 1943, 22.
[63] Squires, 9.
[64] Gray, 29.
[65] Squires, 11.
[66] Fenzel.

## The 728th in Britain

On 19 December 1943, the 728th Railway Operating Battalion arrived in Gurock, Scotland, near Glasgow.[67] The Battalion was transported to Reading, Berkshire, England over the rails of the London, Midland, and Scottish Railway.[68] Here, the battalion was housed in what was a horse racing track and stables before the war. Instead of working as a unit, the 728th was broken up into about seventy detachments and sent all over Great Britain to work on many projects.

Planning the movement of troops and supplies to Britain as part of the invasion of France, code name OVERLORD, was set up in late 1941.[69] The Military Railway Service in Great Britain had ten main responsibilities:

1. Supervision of American troop movements by rail over the United Kingdom railroads.
2. Supervision of rail switching services of all ports of embarkation and debarkation.
3. Actual operation of rail switching and civilian interchange service at all United States Army General and Sub-Supply Depots.
4. Actual operation of rail switching service at some sub-ports of debarkation and embarkation.
5. Supervision of the construction of storage yards for Transportation Corps railroad equipments awaiting movement to the Continent.
6. Actual construction of prefabricated boxcars, flatcars, and gondolas, which had been shipped to the United Kingdom for erection.

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[67] Fenzel.
[68] Squires., 11.
[69] Gray., 165.

7. Maintenance of Transportation Corps Equipment, cars and locomotive in actual operation in the United Kingdom.
8. Supervision of the shipments of all United States troops and military supplies by rail to the ports of embarkation for movement to the Continent.
9. Assistance in the central control of all rail movements from the Office of the Chief of Transportation of the European Theater of Operations.
10. Shop work necessary on the steam and Diesel locomotive shipped from the United States to the United Kingdom to get them ready for operation on the Continent.[70]

In addition to the above duties, the MRS built massive storage yards in Wales for the storage of locomotives, and other rail equipment awaiting shipment to the Continent once the invasion began.[71]

Detachments of the 728th Railway Operating Battalion were dispatched all over Great Britain to help the Military Railway Service. Dick Fenzel spent his time in England helping assemble the freight cars at the racetrack in Reading.[72] Meanwhile, David Squires spent his time in Stamford on the London and North Eastern Railway, helping to convert older LNER passenger cars into hospital trains.[73] These cars would be shipped to France after the invasion and be used to evacuate the wounded from the front and to the ports, where there were better hospitals, or to be transported back to Britain, or the United States.

Operating railways in foreign countries presented some daunting challenges to the Army and the Military Railway Service, and one of these concerns centered around equipment. Early in the war, Allied planners realized that a large number of locomotives and rolling stock would have to be transported to France after the invasion.[74] This was

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[70] Ibid., 167-168.
[71] Ibid., 169.
[72] Fenzel.
[73] Squires, 11.
[74] Gray., 33.

necessary because the operational condition of captured French and German equipment could not be guaranteed. Both the British and the American armies developed specialized locomotives, freight cars, and hospital cars for this work. However, unlike the British, an off-the shelf design could not be used, as standard American locomotives were unable to be used in Europe.[75] While the standard railroad gauge of North America and Europe was the same at 56 and ½ inches, there were significant differences in clearance and weight. American railroads were allowed to develop in a country that nearly had a "clean slate" as far as infrastructure development. In Europe, railroads had to fit into a landscape dominated by bridges, towns, and other structures that had been there for centuries. Because of the differences, European locomotives and rolling stock tended to be lighter, narrower, and shorter than their American counterparts. Thus, any American built equipment had to be specially designed to meet those needs.

However, as far as design was concerned, the Army was not starting from a completely unknown position. Early in the war, the Army had concluded that a majority of the enemy rail equipment that the advancing armies would encounter would be destroyed or taken by the retreating Germans. This necessitated the development of special rail equipment that could be built in the United States and could be assembled and operated in Britain, France, Belgium, and eventually Germany. The main result of this need was the developments of the S-160 locomotive, the T-1531 switching locomotive, and the Whitcomb and General Electric diesel locomotives.

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[75] R. Tourret, *Allied Military Locomotives of the Second World War* (Oxon, England: Tourret Publishing, 1995), 3.

Major J.W. Marsh, of the Army Corps of Engineers, designed the S-160 locomotive.[76] The locomotive was an engineering masterpiece, as it was designed to be "disposable" and last but a few years; however, many lasted in daily operations until the 1980s in Poland, Hungary, and Bulgaria. The S-160 was of a 2-8-0 wheel arrangement, meaning that it had two small guide wheels to help the locomotive negotiate curves, and eight powered driving wheels. The 2-8-0 had first become popular in the United States in the 1880s, but had been replaced by larger and more powerful locomotives. However, in Europe, the 2-8-0 and other smaller locomotives continued to be used, mainly due to the restrictive clearances and lighter loads. The rugged locomotive was designed for easy maintenance and operation.

Designed to pull trains over the mainline, the S-160s were built by the Baldwin Locomotive Works, The American Locomotive Company, and the Lima Locomotive works, America's "Big Three" in locomotive construction at the time.[77] They were first shipped to Britain and later directly to France two at a time, on the deck of a cargo ship. The first units delivered to England were loaned to several British Railway companies to help with the persistent motive power shortage that was adversely affecting rail operations at the time.[78] Additional units were unloaded and shipped to MRS operated shops that would clean up the locomotives and ready them for shipment to France. After this procedure, the locomotives were then deposited in the large rail storage yards in Wales, awaiting D-Day.[79]

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[76] Kincaid A. Herr, "the 728th Learns to Railroad," *The Louisville and Nashville Employees' Magazine*, May 1943, 22.
[77] Tourrett, 223.
[78] Ibid., 225.
[79] Ibid., 225.

Equally important to the S-160 locomotive was the T-1531 locomotive.[80] Whereas the S-160 had been designed as a mainline locomotive, the T-1531 was used mainly for dockside and yard switching operations. Because yard and port trackage often had tight curves and clearances, the T-1531 was of a 0-6-0 wheel arrangement, meaning that it only had six driving wheels and no leading or trailing ones. Also, the locomotive's coal and water supply was not carried in a tender that trailed the locomotive. The T-1531s were called "Tank engines," as they carried their fuel supply in tanks on the locomotive. The Porter Locomotive Works, the Vulcan Locomotive Works, and the Davenport Locomotive Works built these locomotives. Unlike the "Big Three," Porter, Vulcan, and Davenport were known for their smaller locomotives and other steam-powered equipment, mostly for mining and industrial work.[81] These locomotives were shipped much in the same manner as the S-160s, and were also stored in Wales, awaiting D-Day. Once in operation, these locomotives would prove valuable, especially in the port facilities of Cherbourg, where they were used for the offloading of supplies, materiel, and other equipment.

While the transition in the United States from steam to diesel locomotives would not occur until the end of the 1940s, the Military Railway Service became an early advocate of internal combustion locomotives. These locomotives were rather small, weighing only 44 to 45 tons each, and like the T-1531s, were used mainly for switching work in the rail yards and around the ports. However, unlike the T-1531, and S-160 locomotives, most of which never returned to the United States, the diesel locomotives were returned to the

[80] Ibid., 207.
[81] Ibid., 208.

United States after the war, and many were sold to railroads and other industries.[82] Because of their small design, the S-160 and T-1531 were really unsuited for most U.S. railroad use. The diesel locomotives, on the other hand, were more attractive to U.S. buyers because of their ease in maintenance and operation.

After the additional technical training, the 728th was moved around to a variety of locations in Britain, waiting for D-Day, 6 June 1944. On 30 June 1944, the 728th boarded two ships, the *Sea Train Texas* and the *Sea Train Lakehurst*, at Cardiff, Wales. These ships were specially designed to transport rail equipment. Sea Train Corporation had used the ships to ferry rail cars from ports like New York to New Orleans and Galveston.[83] For the purpose of ferrying rail equipment from the United States to Britain and France, the army requisitioned these ships. When the 728th loaded at Cardiff, the two vessels were already loaded up with locomotives and freights cars that had been assembled in England.[84] The locomotives had water in their boilers and wood and coal in their fireboxes. They would be ready to fire up and roll off the special ships once the battalion docked in Cherbourg.[85] After sailing around the west and south coasts of England, the two ships finally dropped anchor near Portsmouth, waiting for the capture and clean-up at Cherbourg. Here, the 728th would wait thirty days. Finally, on 30 July 1944, the 728th Railway Operating Battalion arrived in Cherbourg France.[86]

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[82] Ibid., 274.
[83] Joseph Bykofsky and Harold Larson, *The United States Army in World War II, The Technical Services: The Transportation Corps: Operations Overseas* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, U.S. Army, 1957), 146.
[84] Love., 5.
[85] Fenzel.
[86] Fenzel.

## The 728th in Cherbourg

To better understand the important role that the 728th Railway Operating Battalion played in the invasion of Europe, one must gain a partial understanding of the importance of rail transportation and logistics. The first stages in planning OVERLORD were the build-up of men and materiel in Britain, known as operation BOLERO.[87] Intensive planning for OVERLORD began after the Casablanca Conference in early 1943. OVERLORD was the largest single military operation and invasion ever conducted, requiring massive amounts of planning. The original Allied mission statement decreed that

> The object of Operation "OVERLORD" is to mount and carry out an operation, with forces and equipment established in the United Kingdom, and with target date the 1st May 1944, to secure a lodgment on the Continent from which further offensive operations can be developed. The lodgment area must contain sufficient port facilities to maintain a force of some twenty-six to thirty divisions, and enable that forge to be augmented by follow-up shipments from the United States or elsewhere of additional divisions and supporting units at a rate of three to five divisions per month.[88]

As planned, OVERLORD would call for the construction of an artificial port, called Mulberry Plan A, on the beachhead at Normandy, and the capture of the major port of

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[87] Gordon A. Harrison, *The United States Army in World War II, The European Theater of Operations: Cross-Channel Attack* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, U.S. Army, 1951), 19.
[88] Ibid., 451.

Cherbourg by D+30, as well as other smaller ports.[89] Also, as in World War I, the Army wanted to use the port of Brest as the main debarkation point for troops, while the other ports would be used mainly for materiel.[90] Cherbourg would be a major debarkation point for the allies, as it actually contained three separate ports as well as several large rail yards and servicing facilities, and was easily accessible by road.[91]

However, the plans fell drastically behind schedule. First, the artificial harbor, Mulberry Plan A, was destroyed by a fierce storm only three days after being put into operation on 16 June 1944.[92] Despite this setback, roughly 88 percent of the planned materiel and supplies managed to make it to the beaches and to the troops.[93] The battle for Cherbourg was a fierce campaign, and while the initial breakout from Normandy had gone a bit faster than originally planned, Cherbourg was not captured until D+49, nineteen days behind schedule. When the port was captured, it was discovered that it had been badly wrecked by the defending and retreating Germans. General Eisenhower would later write, "The demolition of the port of Cherbourg is a masterful job, beyond a doubt the most complete, intensive, and best-planned demolition in history."[94] Moreover, the capture of the smaller ports was also behind schedule. Marseilles and Toulon were not fully operational until 15 August, and Brest did not even fall into Allied hands until 18 September.[95] The smaller ports such as St. Nazaire and Lorient did not fall until the end of the war because their small capacity was not needed. Immediately upon capture,

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[89] Roland G. Ruppenthal, *The United States Army in World War II, The European Theater of Operations, Logistical Support of the Armies*, 2 vols (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Center for Military History, U.S. Army, 1953, 1959), 292-297.
[90] Ibid., 464.
[91] Ibid., 473.
[92] Ibid., 464.
[93] Ibid., 466.
[94] Harrison, 441.
[95] Ibid., 442.

the Port of Cherbourg would become the major port for debarkation of troops and supplies until the capture of the intact port of Antwerp in early 1945.[96]

Originally, the planners of operation OVERLORD had envisioned that Cherbourg could accommodate 150,000 tons of supplies by 25 July 1944.[97] Because of the difficulties in its capture and its effective demolition, only 18,000 tons had been landed by that date. The advance detachment of the Military Railway Service arrived in Cherbourg on 27 June to assess the damage.[98] This detachment, part of the 2nd Military Railway Service, a grouping that included the 728th Railway Operating Battalion, had landed at Normandy on 17 June and immediately began to assess the rail situation.[99] Considerable damage had been done to the French rail system in the vicinity of Normandy as a result of the intensive Allied bombing before the invasion and destruction by retreating German forces. The detachment found the rail system closer to Cherbourg in the Contentin peninsula to be in better shape, but with a few key rail tunnels caved in. In Cherbourg itself, the situation was much worse. Most of the rail facilities in the port were severely damaged, if not totally destroyed. Luckily the nearby marshalling yards, the roundhouse, locomotive maintenance facility, and main line were in excellent shape near Cherbourg. However, Allied bombing had destroyed the key junction of Folligny.

Folligny Junction would have to be rebuilt to connect the rail facilities at Cherbourg with the rest of the French rail network. Luckily, the equipment to do so was already on hand. The Allied Armies captured intact a large amount of French locomotives and quantities of rolling stock. This equipment would allow the MRS to quickly rehabilitate

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[96] Ruppenthal, 473.
[97] Ibid., 474.
[98] Gray, 166.
[99] Bykofsky and Larson, 341.

the destroyed French track, especially around Cherbourg, and would facilitate the unloading of American supplies. Rail operation began in early July. On 7 July, a jeep equipped with flanged rail wheels journeyed from Cherbourg to Carentan. Actual train operation began on 11 July. By that time the 707th Railway Grand Division, three railway operating battalions, and one railway shop battalion were in place on the Continent.[100] The first Railway Operating Battalion to take over the operation of the port of Cherbourg was the 729th Railway Operating Battalion. They would be in charge only a few days until the arrival of the 728th in late July.

The arrival on 30 July of the 728th Railway Operating Battalion also marked the first major shipment of locomotives and cars to France on the *Sea Train Lakehurst* and the *Sea Train Texas*. By 31 July, over 48 locomotives and 184 freight cars had been delivered to the Military Railway Service in France.[101] Operational equipment totaled 100 locomotives, 76 passenger cars, and 1,641 freight cars.[102] The Military Railway Service in France was off to a slow, rough start. As the armies pushed eastward, the demand for more and more supplies intensified. Upon arrival in Cherbourg, the 728th was immediately put to work. Company A began the task of repairing trackwork, bridges, and signal and telephone lines. Company B immediately went to work offloading and putting into service locomotive and cars, as well as conducting repairs. Company C began to conduct switching operations and the marshalling of trains. At first, the 728th was only responsible for the port rail facilities, with the 729th in charge of the first section of the mainline to Paris.[103] The Headquarters Company, to which both Dick

[100] Ibid., 342.
[101] Ibid., 344.
[102] Ibid., 344.
[103] Love, 4.

Fenzel and David Squires were assigned, was put to the task of setting up billeting, headquarters, and dispatching facilities. The 728th was billeted in former police barracks on the hillside which overlooked the city.[104]

The restoration and operation of the French railway network was completed in three phases. During Phase I, MRS personnel would conduct all rail operations. Phase II consisted of French operation under direct MRS supervision. This phase would occur as soon as the situation presented itself, in this case late 1944 for the 728th. Phase II allowed the 728th to spread its personnel around. Phase III entailed total French control without any MRS supervision. This phase was first implemented on secondary routes, and for other major routes later in the war.[105]

On 1 August 1944, Carl Love, the commanding officer of the 728th Railway Operating Battalion, was called into a special meeting with other commanders in Cherbourg. At this meeting, called at 3 o'clock in the morning, the commanding general of the Army base section requested that high octane gasoline and other essential supplies be given priority to the movement to the front.[106] The reason given for the priority was that Patton needed the gasoline and other materiel for the completion of his St. Lo campaign, which would complete the breakout from the Normandy peninsula. From this point onward, members of the 728th worked 12, 14, 16, and even 24-hour days to expedite the movement of supplies to the front. Company B was given the task of repairing railroad tank cars for the shipment of this gasoline. These cars had been

[104] Fenzel.
[105] Gray, 189.
[106] Love, 5.

machine gunned and otherwise damaged, but the skillful shop forces of the 728th managed to repair enough cars to further expedite fuel shipments to the front.[107]

The advance of Patton's Third Army and other Allied elements after the fall of St. Lo presented a major problem for the Transportation Corps and especially for the Military Railway Service. The rapid movement across France by the Allies soon outstripped any means of logistical support.[108] The armies could not be supplied quickly enough because of the limited port capacity at Cherbourg, which was the only major port in Allied operation. Even after the ports of Marseilles and Toulon were put into operation, the French rail network was still largely in disarray. The Allied bombing campaigns, especially the attacks prior to D-Day, had done too effective of a job.[109] These missions had destroyed the French rail network to the point that it severely limited the speed at which the armies could advance before outstripping their supply lines.

By late September 1944, the Allied armies had come to a near halt. Even working 24-hour days at Cherbourg could not solve the problem. There was a severe shortage of gasoline, spare parts, and even relief troops at the front lines. In the early days of the invasion, motor transport companies of the Transportation Corps had transported a large amount of materiel to the front. Trucks made sense in the early phase of the invasion because the distances between beachhead and front were relatively short. However, with the French rail network still not up to total capacity, the Transportation Corps implemented a solution to supply the front. Termed the "Red Ball Express," the goal was to use as many trucks as possible to deliver goods from the railhead at St. Lo to the front. Driving a circular route, the "Red Ball Express" was in operation from 25 August to 16

[107] Ibid., 5.
[108] Ruppenthal, 334.
[109] Bykofsky and Larson, 365.

November 1944.[110] However, despite these efforts, the fact of the matter was that there was not enough port capacity as well as rehabilitated rail routes to effectively supply the army in its advance. During the slowdown period in September, several new ports were opened. Also, the major port at Le Havre was finally cleared and made operational. The slowdown allowed the last of the rail equipment that had been stockpiled in England to be delivered, as well as the direct shipment of more equipment from the United States. After a shaky start, the 728th Railway Operating Battalion, as well as the entire Transportation Corps, was finally getting back up to speed by late 1944.

[110] Ibid., 334.

## Germany and the End of the War

In late 1944, the transportation situation dramatically improved. On 29 November 1944, the large port of Antwerp, Belgium, opened. Unlike Brest, which was destroyed beyond use, or Cherbourg, which was heavily damaged but still being utilized, the port was captured fully intact and ready to serve as another large point of debarkation in Europe and was closer to the front.[111] The 729th Railway Operating Battalion, which had originally been assigned to Cherbourg and later to the line between Cherbourg and Paris, was given the responsibility to operate the port. From this point on, the major bottlenecks that had been encountered early in the war had been largely solved. Enough rail lines were open by mid November that the "Red Ball Express" was discontinued, and the majority of materiel was once again moved by rail.[112] The 728th from the time of their arrival in late July had found themselves rather busy. From 1 August to 23 December 1944, the 728th had forwarded a total of 175, 242 carloads of materiel from the port.[113] Also, an average of 1,252 cars a day were loaded at the ports, sent to the

[111] Charles R. Shrader, *United States Army Logistics, an Anthology.* 3 vols. (Washington, D.C.:Center for Military History, U.S. Army, 1997), 518.
[112] Ibid., 519.
[113] Love., 5.

marshalling yards, and then shipped east.[114] Even more amazing was that roughly an equal number of empty cars were arriving into the Cherbourg yards every day and redistributed to where they were needed to be loaded up once again and shipped back east. In addition, the 728th, in this same period off-loaded 30,000 freight cars from landing craft called LSTs.[115] These vessels had been modified with the placement of rails in their holds to carry completed freight cars that were in storage in England. Over 1,400 locomotives were also unloaded from vessels in the port, and all were placed into service by the shop company, Company B.[116] These figures do not include the numerous hospital trains, wrecking and repair equipment, and other special movements that took place. Also, as the transportation situation improved, the operational area in which the 728th was responsible increased. By mid 1944, the 728th was in charge of the mainline between Cherbourg and Paris, with all dispatching operations being carried out of Cherbourg.[117]

It was during the period from late 1944 to early 1945 that both Dick Fenzel and David Squires were very busy. Both were train dispatchers, and they worked first out of a converted government office building in the city of Cherbourg and later in the Cherbourg passenger rail terminal. Dispatching was done mainly by telephone.[118] Also, by late 1944 the mainline from Paris to Cherbourg had been brought completely up to operation. The mainline was double tracked, which allowed for faster movement of trains between the two cities. Eastbound and westbound trains each had their own tracks, and faster trains could also pass slower ones.[119] Also, by late 1944 limited civilian

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[114] Ibid., 5.
[115] Ibid., 5.
[116] Ibid., 5
[117] Fenzel.
[118] Squires, 12-13.
[119] Fenzel.

passenger service had been restored between the two cities.[120] As dispatchers, Fenzel and Squires would work a twelve-hour shift and control the movement of trains out of the Cherbourg yards and onto the mainline for Paris. Also, the dispatcher would compile reports on the number of empty cars in the terminal area. From this report, the dispatchers, under the command of a superior, could direct the distribution of the empty cars to the various docks and terminals where they could be reloaded. Even though all freight traffic was considered important, gasoline, especially of the high-octane variety, continued to be a priority cargo, as well as ammunition.[121] The transportation of empty tank cars was a major priority, as they were always needed to transport gasoline to the front. Hospital trains were not given a high priority, as the wounded on these trains were in stable condition, and the trains were extensively staffed by medical personnel and well equipped to handle almost any emergency.[122] By December, life in Cherbourg was returning to some sense of normalcy. Right after the 728th arrived, Fenzel remembers seeing the city in chaos at times. In early August he recalls seeing French who had collaborated with the Nazis, being shot by French citizens near the police barracks where the 728th was billeted. More and more French rail workers were beginning to return to their jobs as well. The operation of the railroad was well into Phase II, with French crews operating the trains, even the Allied locomotives, under supervision of the 728th.

In January of 1945, the 728th Railway Operating Battalion, under control of the 2nd Military Railway Service, launched a new, expedited freight service from Cherbourg to the front. The train, called the "Toot Sweet Express," cut down running and terminal

[120] Squires, 13.
[121] Fenzel.
[122] Bykofsky and Larson, 349.

times.[123] The name of the train plays off of the French term "Tout Suite," which means *quick* or *fast*. Consisting of roughly 40 cars, at Paris, it was split into two 20-car sections. The first section would head north to Liege, and the second southern section would go to the fortress city of Verdun.[124] These trains used specially allocated and marked equipment and handled supplies and mail between Cherbourg and the front. The service was inaugurated on 22 January 1944, when Colonel Love issued orders to the crew of French railway personnel and members of the 728th.

The "Toot Sweet Express" was deemed a success. Cargo unloaded at Cherbourg would be at the front in less than 36 hours.[125] Also, the MRS decided to handle the mail on the train as well. This was due to the fact that the fast schedule kept pilfering of mail and other important supplies to a minimum.[126] The eastern terminus of the "Toot Sweet Express" was constantly pushed eastward as the army advanced.[127] The train would be in operation until the end of the war with Germany, when expedited supplies were no longer needed.

Operations for the 728th continued at a normal but busy pace throughout the early parts of 1945. The 728th was operating the Cherbourg-Paris mainline in Phase II operations. On 30 April, the entire line was turned over to Phase III, or total French civilian control.[128] The 728th was being shipped to Germany. On 1 May 1945, the entire battalion was loaded onto three troop trains and headed east.[129] Unlike troop trains in the

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[123] Ibid, 348.
[124] George Pillette, "Toot-Sweet Express," *Army Transportation Journal*, 1, no. 3 (April 1945): 10-12.
[125] Ibid., 11.
[126] Before the inauguration of the "Toot Sweet Express" there had been widespread reports of looting and pilfering of supplies and mail. The black market was very much alive and well in liberated France, and with supplies literally lying around, many times unguarded, looting became a major problem.
[127] Bykofsky and Larson, 349.
[128] Fenzel.
[129] Love., 6.

United States, which used either passenger cars or specially built troop carriers, the 728th was loaded on regular French boxcars. These cars were called "40 et 8" by the French. This designation meant that the cars could haul forty men, or eight horses, either way a cramped ride in a car that was only 20 feet long. However, the MRS had converted these cars and added stoves, bunks, and storage for rations. Only eight men were assigned per car, to keep from crowding the men. The trip to Germany took nearly eight days over the damaged railroads.[130] The men of the 728th had been briefed that the situation in Germany would be much worse than it ever had been in Cherbourg. The area that the 728th was to be assigned to was near Nuremberg, and was heavily damaged by three years of intense Allied bombings.[131]

The war in Europe ended before the 728th had arrived at their final destination. On 8 May 1945, the German forces completely surrendered to the Allied armies. On the trip to Germany, both Fenzel and Squires recall seeing thousands of German P.O.W.s being marched off to camps, as well as seeing many displaced persons. On 9 May 1945, the 728th formally took control of its new operational area. This area was a rather large one that contained a significant portion of Bavaria, part of Eastern Czechoslovakia, and part of Austria. The battalion was headquartered in the town of Fuerth, a suburb of Nuremberg.[132]

With the end of the war, the focus of the Transportation Corps and the Military Railway Service changed. The first goal was the continued transport of materiel needed for the Allied Army of Occupation. Also, the Transportation Corps shifted gears and started planning for the demobilization of the U.S. Army and coordination of

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[130] Squires, 11.
[131] Fenzel.
[132] Love, 6.

transportation of the troops and equipment home from the various ports of embarkation.[133] The Military Railway Service was charged with rounding up enough passenger and converted freight cars to provide transport for those going home. For the 728th, the battalion would start operations of their section of the German rail network in Phase II, with German workers under MRS supervision.[134] The 728th was charged with placing into service a number of German steam and electric locomotives. Many of these locomotives were captured in new or nearly new condition, and were easily placed into service.[135] The Germans, even until the last days of the war, had placed a high priority on the construction of locomotives. Many of these locomotives were never used, as there simply wasn't enough railroad for the retreating German forces to use. Nuremberg was a large transportation hub of southeastern Germany, and it was used as a supply dump for the Allied Armies. As a result, even though the war was over, the line under the control of the 728th was extremely busy. However, as more and more German rail workers came back to work, the amount of work for the 728th lessened.

On 1 October 1945, the 728th turned control of its sector over to German civilian authorities, thus placing the line into Phase III control. The 728th was moved back to France, and the unit was broken up.[136] The battalion was formally decommissioned on 22 November 1945 at Camp Killmer, New Jersey, when most of the battalion's officers arrived home. Those left in Europe were shifted around to various camps and reassigned to different units until most had returned home by late 1945 to their civilian jobs. Colonel Carl Love left Germany for Louisville in September 1945, before the 728th was

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[133] Bykofsky and Larson, 353.
[134] Fenzel.
[135] Squires, 12.
[136] Love, 6.

relieved from duty. On 22 September 1945, Love received the Legion of Merit from the United States Army. The presentation was made in a small ceremony at the L&N's general headquarters building in Louisville.[137] The location of the ceremony was fitting because the headquarters building was right next to Union Station, where Love and the other officers had departed for Fort Slocum in late 1942. Immediately afterwards, it was announced that the railroad would promote Love to the newly created position of Superintendent of the entire L&N railroad. Also, the battalion received two awards, the Croix de Guerre with palm from the French government for meritorious service in the operation of the rail facilities in Cherbourg from late 1944 to early 1945.[138]

David Squires and Dick Fenzel both returned from France in late 1945 and were mustered out of the army. Squires went back to his job as a freight agent for the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad, retiring from railroad service in 1984.[139] Dick Fenzel returned to Louisville and began a job as an assistant trainmaster with the L&N, supervising dispatchers and working out of Union Station. However, Fenzel grew tired of working seven days a week, and by the early 1950s, he took a job as a regular train dispatcher, working only five days a week. He retired from the railroad in 1986.[140]

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[137] "Colonel Love Receives Military Honors," *the Louisville and Nashville Employees' Magazine*, October 1945, 10.
[138] Love, 5.
[139] Squires, 13.
[140] Fenzel.

## Analysis and Conclusion

The Transportation Corps and the Military Railway Service played a very important role in World War II. Because the war was one of supply and movement, effective, fast transportation was important to the movement of men and materiel from the ports of embarkation to the battlefront. The Military Railway Service was very effective in its service in Europe. In all 28,828 troops had served with the MRS in Europe. Countless numbers of freight cars had been shipped and returned from the front, and thousands of wounded soldiers had been evacuated from the front. Also, the MRS had helped to rehabilitate the damaged rail networks in France, Belgium, and Germany. After the war, the U.S. government provided the United Nations with the thousands of S-160, T-1531, and freight and passenger cars and shipped free of charge to stations throughout Europe.

The one major problem that the Transportation Corps had throughout the war in Europe was the advancing army outstripping the routes of supply. The Allied bombing effort had done considerable damage to the French and German railroad network. Also, sabotage by partisans fighting the Germans took its toll. By D-Day, the rail network in France had been severely damaged, and its rehabilitation could not take place fast enough to meet the supply demands of the advancing forces. Also, the failure of Allied planners

to come up with contingency plans, if the capture of French ports fell behind, stifled the advance of the army. The problems had become so large that drastic measures, like the "Red Ball Express," were needed to alleviate the transportation problem. The problems that the Military Railway Service faced in France were unlike what had been encountered in North Africa and Italy, where rail lines had been captured relatively intact, thus allowing for rapid supply of fighting forces. However, Allied planners had foreseen some of the supply problems of OVERLORD, and the Army did not have to fall back or retreat because of a lack of materiel.

The 728th performed well. Considering the unit was mostly former civilian railroaders, it is no wonder the battalion was able to conduct the port operations at Cherbourg so efficiently. By being in charge of the rail operations from Cherbourg, the 728th was an important link in the supply chain that kept the Allied Armies advancing across Europe. However, the 728th's success was not unique. The Military Railway Service's component battalions and grand divisions performed well throughout the entire war. Under the leadership of General Carl Gray, the service was able to demonstrate the importance of supply by rail and the role it played in modern warfare.

Sadly, few historical records exist to commemorate either the 728th or the MRS in general. Despite its important role in the war, the 728th was never mentioned in the Army's official history of the war. In the early 1950s, Carl Gray wrote a book on the MRS, but he also only mentioned the battalion briefly in a few passages. Unlike other battalions which were sponsored by larger railroad companies, such as the Pennsylvania Railroad, the 728th never published an official battalion history. The battalion was even overlooked by the Louisville and Nashville Railroad. In the company's official history,

the battalion was given only two sentences at the end of the chapter on World War II. Save for a few references in *The Louisville and Nashville Employees' Magazine*, a yellowing monograph written by Carl Love in the 1960s, and some records at the Army's Transportation School at Fort Eustis, Virginia, very little historical information exists on the battalion.

The Military Railway Service itself would soon fade into obscurity after the war. In the early 1950s, the MRS ordered new state-of-the-art diesel-electric locomotives from General Motors and the American Locomotive Company. These locomotives were envisioned to be the modern equivalent of the S-160 locomotive of World War II. They were designed to operate in tight clearances, in extreme weather, and even operate on different gauges of track. Because of all of the added special features, these locomotives cost several times more than the average new locomotive. Most were put into storage immediately upon delivery and never used as a result of changing strategic planning of the military. It no longer became important to operate enemy railways, as alternate methods of logistical supply were developed. During the Korean conflict, a couple of MRS Battalions were deployed to Korea. However, the conflict never escalated to the level that required the extensive use of railroad equipment as had World War II. Strategic planning also began to change in the 1950s. The development of long-range nuclear weapons had made the concept of occupying and operating enemy railroads, let alone enemy territory, a moot point. Slowly, the MRS began to be downgraded. Ft. Eustis, the home of the Transportation Corps, still operated a large training railroad, and even kept several steam locomotives operable until the early 1970s when they were sold. Today, there are only two railroad units left in the army; they are purely reserve units.

Even the Louisville and Nashville Railroad itself is now history. In the 1960s, the L&N became a wholly owned subsidiary of Seaboard Coastline Railroad. By the early 1980s, what was left of the L&N would disappear into the merger mania that was gripping the railroad industry at the time. The train shed at Union Station in Louisville, where Carl Love and other officers had departed in 1942, was torn down in 1974. The L&N's office building was sold to the Commonwealth of Kentucky in the early 1980s. Union Station now houses the offices of Louisville's Transit Authority. The massive shop complex, where many of the battalion's soldiers had come from, has been torn down, and now is the site of the University of Louisville's football stadium.

World War II had been both the best and the last demonstration of the importance of rail in modern warfare. Just as railroads had originally caught the eye of military planners in the 1860s, by the 1960s, planners were enthralled with new ways of transporting goods, including heavy-lift cargo airplanes and helicopters. The Berlin Airlift of 1948 proved that large-scale supply operations could be undertaken using just airplanes. Even though railways remain a vital link in our freight transportation network, they are no longer viewed as important to military operations. However, one need look back only sixty years to see how important the iron horse was in the defeat of the Axis powers. Without the work of the 728th Railway Operating Battalion, the Military Railway Service, and the Transportation Corps, winning the war would have been much more difficult, and history may have been very different.

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