

**Guide to the United States Army Signal Corps Hampton Roads
Port of Embarkation Photographs, Indexes, and Other
Material, 1942-1946
P0003**

The Mariners' Museum Library

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DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY

Repository: The Mariners' Museum Library

Title: United States Army Signal Corps Hampton Roads Port of Embarkation Photographs, Indexes, and Other Material

Inclusive Dates: 8/26/1942-3/5/1946

Catalog number: P0003

Physical Characteristics: Approximately 48,840 items including gelatin silver prints, gelatin silver negatives, motion pictures (visual works), indexes (reference sources), and ephemera.

Language: English

Creator: United States. Army. Signal Corps.

HISTORICAL SKETCH

First established in 1860 the mission of the U.S. Army Signal Corps is to facilitate military communication, its history driven by technological change. In the late 19th century, signal officers relied on a system of wigwag flags for battlefield communication. With the entrance of the United States into World War I this was replaced by the telephone and telegraph. Battlefield photography, including both stills and motion pictures, became increasingly important in soldier training, home front propaganda, and historical records.

During World War II, when the items in this collection were created, the Signal Corps relied on standard commercial photography equipment and even purchased scarce equipment from civilians. Prints in this collection show HRPE photographers using Graflex cameras. The quantity of work done by the Signal Corps was so great that film became a rationed commodity under the War Production Board. Responding to increased demand for photographic services the Signal Corps expanded from its facilities in Fort Monmouth into a studio in Astoria, Long Island, purchased from Paramount Studios. This would become the Army Pictorial Center where Signal Corpsmen would be trained in still photography and motion picture techniques. Photography had many uses for the Army. The Signal Corps produced training films to teach and indoctrinate new soldiers, while Staff Film Reports documented deployment of troops and equipment in the field for commanding generals. On the home front, still photography from the Signal Corps was used in the nation's newspapers and magazines, and newsreels, an important form of mass communication before television, used Signal Corps motion pictures. Frank Capra's "Why We Fight" was a Signal Corps production.

Into the second half of the 20th century, the Signal Corps grew dramatically as radio played an increasingly prominent role. When electronic warfare escalated in frequency and sophistication it fell to the Signal Corps to preserve the security of transmissions, crack enemy codes, and sift through huge quantities of information. During the Cold War, the Signal Corps played a leadership role in the Space Race, eventually culminating in contemporary satellite communications. It also contributed to the mass production of the transistor, allowing for the miniaturization of communications technology. From the

late 20th century into the present the Signal Corps shifted again as satellite-enabled mobile technology replaced radio in the battlefield.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Hampton Roads Port of Embarkation (HRPE) was activated in 1942 under the jurisdiction of the Chief of Transportation, with a second port under HRPE's supervision at Baltimore, Maryland, to handle more cargo. Between 1942 and 1945, HRPE handled 725,880 passengers and 12,521,868 tons of cargo (Wardlow, 99) making it the third busiest port in the United States. HRPE was comprised of several smaller installations, including Camp Patrick Henry (now the Williamsburg-Newport News International Airport), Camp Hill in downtown Newport News, and the Norfolk Army Base in Norfolk. The materials in this collection were given to The Mariners' Museum by Brigadier General John Reed Kilpatrick, Commanding General of the Hampton Roads Port of Embarkation, in 1946. Much of the photography focuses on the home side of Army supply lines, showing where the supplies and men shipped from rather than where they arrived.

The photographs depict troop arrivals at HRPE, training procedures, and embarkation for overseas service. There are images that show cargo handling, segregation, women's roles both in the military and civilian support, and the work of laborers at the port. Also shown is everyday life at HRPE including parades and picnics in Newport News and Norfolk, dances with local residents, sporting events, and performances by notable personalities.

The Hampton Roads Port of Embarkation Records comprises approximately 16,400 4x5 prints, approximately 16,150 8x10 prints, and approximately 16,400 4x5 negatives, and two 35mm film reels. The collection also contains related items produced by the United States Army Signal Corps: an index of ships, a guide to the printed indexes, a selection of index cards with subjects and photo numbers, and one linear foot of notes, ephemera, and other materials.

The collection is organized into four series that are arranged by order of importance.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Accession Number

UNASSIGNEDP11

Accession Date

1947

Restrictions

Collection is open to all researchers.

Publication Rights

Copies of any materials may not be reproduced, published, or distributed in any form without the expressed permission of The Mariners' Museum.

Preferred Citation

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Processing Information

Cataloging funded by a Hidden Collections grant from the Council on Library and Information Resource (CLIR).

Other Finding Aids

The photographs are catalogued in the Library's collection database at the item level.

The following indexes are held in the Library stacks:

Hampton Roads Port of Embarkation Index of Photographs (11 volumes)

The following index and guide are part of the HRPE records:

"Index to Hampton Roads Port of Embarkation Ship Pictures" is co-located with the 4 x 5 prints.

"A Guide to the Index of Photographs" is co-located with the 4 x 5 prints.

NOTE TO USERS

Due to the fragile and rare nature of the collection, researchers are requested to handle the materials with caution and in accordance with prescribed archival practices. When using these materials, please preserve the original order of the collection.

Photographs bear an alphabetical prefix to the item number that indicates subject matter, as defined in "A Guide to the Index of Photographs."

Some content of this collection may be challenging for some viewers.

RELATED MATERIALS

The Mariners' Museum Library holds three bound volumes of newspapers intended for soldiers stationed at the port, *The New Port News*, call number D731 .N49

There are eleven bound indexes to the HRPE negatives that were accessioned into The Mariners' Museum Library, call number D570.85.V8 H36

Approximately 3,500 8 x 10 prints from HRPE, are digitized and searchable online through the Library of Virginia website, collection C1:002.

The National Archives and Records Administration digitized two HRPE film reels, identified as 77090 and 77091. They show the same military division embarking, and are the same films as in the HRPE Records. They can be viewed at

<https://research.archives.gov/id/77090> and <https://research.archives.gov/id/77091>.

SERIES DESCRIPTION

Series 1: Hampton Roads Port of Embarkation Photographs, 1942-1946

This series comprises approximately 16,400 4 x 5 negatives, 16,262 4 x 5 prints, and 16,150 8 x 10 prints. The photographs were taken by the United States Signal Corps to document activity at and related to the Hampton Roads Port of Embarkation (HRPE).

The series is organized by format and size. It is arranged in original numerical order. The alphabetical prefix to the item number is not used for arrangement.

Restrictions

Forty-eight hours' advance notice is required for access to the 8x10 prints and 4x5 negatives because materials are stored in cold storage and must be acclimated.

Series 2: Baltimore Cargo Port Photographs, circa 1942-1946

This series comprises approximately 50 4 x 5 negatives and 50 8 x 10 prints. The photographs were taken by the United States Signal Corps to document activity at and related to the Baltimore Cargo Port which was under the supervision of HRPE.

Restrictions

Forty-eight hours' advance notice is required for access because materials are stored in cold storage and must be acclimated.

Series 3: Films, 1943

Arranged chronologically, this series consists of two 35mm film reels: parts 1 and 2 of "Embarkation of the 45th Division." They were filmed by the Naval Photographic Center at HRPE and depict the typical embarkation process. This includes troops arriving at temporary barracks, loading and unloading barracks bags, and boarding a ship.

Restrictions

Forty-eight hours' advance notice is required for access because materials are stored in cold storage and must be acclimated.

Requires a 35mm projector for viewing. Patrons are encouraged to use the on-line copy available at the National Archives and Records Administration's website.

Series 4: Ephemera, circa 1942-1946

This series comprises approximately one linear foot of steno books, indexes, notes, index cards, and other miscellaneous items.

SOURCES CONSULTED

Huston, James A. *The Sinews of War: Army Logistics, 1775-1953*. Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1997. Accessed October 12, 2016, <http://www.history.army.mil/html/books/030/30-4/index.html>

King, Benjamin, Richard C. Biggs, and Eric R. Criner. *Spearhead of Logistics: A History of the United States Army Transportation Corps*. Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 2001.

Raines, Rebecca Robbins. *Getting the Message Through: A Branch History of the U.S. Army Signal Corps*. Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 2011. Accessed October 12, 2016, <http://www.history.army.mil/html/books/030/30-17-1/index.html>

Wheeler, William Reginald. *The Road to Victory: A History of Hampton Roads Port of Embarkation in World War II*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1946.

Wardlow, Chester. *The Transportation Corps: Responsibilities, Organization and Operations*. Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, Dept. of the Army, 1956.

SUBJECTS

Port of Embarkation, Hampton Roads, Va. (U.S.)—Pictorial works

United States. Army—Military life—Pictorial works

United States. Army. Women's Army Corps—Pictorial works

World War, 1939-1945—United States—Pictorial works

Civilians in war—United States—History—20th century—Pictorial works

Segregation—United States—History—20th century—Pictorial works

Shipment of goods—United States—History—20th century—Pictorial works

Camp Hill (Va.)

Camp Patrick Henry (Va.)

Newport News (Va.)—Pictorial works

Norfolk (Va.)—Pictorial works

Norfolk Army Base (Va.)