

Tug Tales # 33

By Dan Friend

September 24, 2018

DeLand Historic Trust, Inc.



***Tugboat models similar in design to DeLand tugs by Howard Howe.
8/19/18***

The DeLand Warboats and Cherbourg, France, in WW2

Over three years ago I finished up a decent timeline and history of two of our DeLand Warboats while in Cherbourg, France: the unlucky but historic ST 344 and ST 474. All of that info contained in Tug Tales #30 is attached at the end of this Cherbourg Harbor update for DeLand's ST 679. .

As the Normandy invasion spread out the harbor at Cherbourg was captured. The Germans had damaged it badly, and mines would wreak havoc for many months to come and would destroy DeLand's ST 344 on July 20, 1944. The following Harbor Craft Companies are documented as working around this time in the Rade, or harbor, at Cherbourg: the 328th, the 344th, the 335th, and the 357th. Others may yet be identified as unit transfers came often. One reference indicated 20 US tugs were working at the 4th Port at Cherbourg at one point in time. In addition to the Deland boats, I have identified ST 539, ST 253, and ST 486 as some of the twenty small tugs at Cherbourg... and probably ST 698.

Although a complete list has not been found, we now have more information indicating that there is a good possibility that our tug ST 679 also was there with the other DeLand built boats. I recently received photos of an unknown Design 327 tug which was at Cherbourg, and helped out with the rescue of men on the doomed USS Leopoldville which was torpedoed and sank on Christmas Eve, 1944. Over 800 men would die in the tragedy.

***Cpl John
“Jack” Ellis
was a cook on
a tug helping
out and hurt
his back that
night helping
to save
lives....he
wrote about it
months later***



***while recuperating in a French hospital and his letter has survived.
Our only possible proof that Jack’s tug was a DeLand boat as of now
are fuzzy photos of life preservers that may...repeat may...indicate it
was ST 679.***



Tug Tales #30

Events and Timeline for

***US Army Master Sergeant Ray
Bishop -***

***Master of DeLand’s ST 474
during WW2***

*From original letters and documents
provided by his family*

April 21, 2015 by Dan Friend

I know of exactly one ST ship’s log that has survived out of the 700+ boats built as the logs were all destroyed in 1951, but these remarkable letters and records are as close as we probably will ever get to a ship’s log....

Master Sergeant Ray C. Bishop was one of the skippers of DeLand’s ST 474, and several other ST tugs, and from his base in England he participated directly in support of the Normandy invasion, and after July 19th 1944, at Cherbourg Harbor, France. England during this time was one big “aircraft carrier” containing hundreds of thousands of yanks as all were working on the D-Day invasion. Every ST known to be available was helping get ready in England, and

after D-Day they made countless trips to Normandy and other work in England in support of that effort.

*He assumed command of **ST 474** as soon as he was transferred to France from his initial deployment to England prior to D-Day. He heard of the explosion of DeLand's **ST 344** on July 20, 1944...he was there! He returned the body of an unidentified Warrant Officer friend killed on **ST 344** on **ST 474**...one DeLand-built tug helping to return a sailor killed on another.*

*We now have verifiable proof that **at least two of our boats** helped directly with the Normandy Invasion...**ST 344 & ST 474.** DF*

Page 1: European Movements:

Left the USA for Europe on April 6, 1944, and arrived at Southampton, England, on April 20, 1944. *He would stay based in England, moving things in England in support of D-Day, or making trips to the Normandy area until:*

Left England for re-assignment to France (Cherbourg) on July 18, 1944, and arrived on July 19, 1944. *He would work on **ST 474** as of July 19th until he was reassigned to **ST 486** on May 27, 1945. Apparently he was later re-assigned to back **ST 474** until November 7, 1945.*

Left the European Theater on Dec 12, 1945 and arrived in New York (date illegible) and was discharged on December 24, 1945.

Page 1 & Others: Medals, Citations, Rank Dates, & Unit Assignments

Reports for physical: 2/17/1942
Enters service as a Private 5/12/1942
Tech 5 5/6/1943
Sergeant 5/10/1944
Staff Sergeant 1944
Tech Sergeant 8/2/1944
Master Sergeant 10/14/1945

Ribbon? (*Illegible*) Jan 1943
“....star for “Campaign Normandy” dated 2 Feb ____
“star for “Invasion Northern France” (2 possible Bronze Stars)
Good conduct medal EDA awarded....HQ 335
American Campaign Medal/Theater Ribbon Oct 19, 1945
WW2 Victory Medal Oct 25, 1945

Medal for Service July 1, 1945

Quite a bit of this info is hard to read but the word “star” is very clear indicating the strong probability of two Bronze Stars....Certainly he was in Europe early enough for work on the massive Normandy Campaign, and the huge supply effort shortly thereafter. Quite a few ST tugs would remain assigned to an English base while taking daily trips of barges and other tows to the Normandy area; others stayed in the Normandy area and helped rescue folks and build the “mulberries”. He certainly was in Europe early enough! He was reassigned to the Cherbourg area just one day prior to the sinking of DeLand’s ST 344 in the outer harbor. Near the end of the war he made two trips to Antwerp, Belgium, taking groups of ST’s for storage and sale.

Company A, casual, Camp Grant Illinois, May 12 – 15 1942

Co A, Training battalion, Camp J. T. Robinson, Arkansas, May 16 – June 11, 1942

Co A (or H!), Camp J. P. Robinson, Edwards, Mass., May 6, 1943 – June 1943

334th EAR 4th EAB Edwards, Mass

Co D, Edwards, Mass

(Ray had several training transfers at Edwards....DF)

337th Harbor Craft Company Training Group, Camp Gordon Johnston, Florida

(Ray had several training transfers at Johnston...DF)

Transferred March 4, 1944 until December of 1945.

335th Harbor Craft Company, 4th Major Port, Chanor Base Section, APO 562

(Ray would stay with the 335th in Europe until the last transfer to a holding company for transfer back to the USA and out of the Army. DF)

Page 2: Letter of Commendation for work on the Seamule G.T. 1171 – 335th Harbor Craft Company (90 day job moving large barges)

Page 22: Letter of Commendation for work with the 335th Harbor Craft Company dated 10/6/1945.

Bishop’s Letters to His Wife Thelma

Page 5:

6/9/1945: Painted **ST 486** until dark. Received 13 German prisoners to help paint the boat. (!)

Page 6:

Not dated, but he is discussing events just after he arrived at Cherbourg on July 19th, 1944:
“ The WO (warrant officer DF) I thought a lot of.... I brought him to shore on my boat. But he died. It was a mine that blow (sic) up the boat.....I used to work with him a lot **this boat and mine at Southhampton..** This happened two days after we got here. “

*This almost certainly is an account of DeLand's **ST 344** being blown up by a mine in Cherbourg Harbor on July 20, 1944. An amazing first person account! And it also shows **ST 344** worked at Southhampton...another detail on a DeLand boat!.*

Unknown date letter excerpt: "...you ask about that little book I sent about crossing the channel where one boat was shot at. Yes, kid, I was....that (sic) when we all got lost in the fog. And my pants got caught in the wheel...(apparently his pants were hanging out to dry and got caught in the boat's propeller! Oops!) That ST was sinking that was shot at and one MTL (motor launch) was hit but made it to Cherbourg...."

*(The ST that sank almost certainly was ST 75 off the Channel Islands in July of 1944 which was hit by shore based artillery ..see the history of **ST 474** for the amazing complete story)*

PAGE 7: This is a contemporary typed transcript done by the Hallett family...I do not have the original letters.

"....landed in England on April 20, 1944 at Southhampton. Learned to drive a tugboat. Called them Army sailors. Painted "Thelma" on 12 which he was driving but painted over when he left..." (This would probably be **ST 12**)

"...I was at the Isle of White (sic: Wight) and saw a plane shot down that night. I was working with the Navy and got lost in a smoke screen they put out. Took me 3 hours to get back."

"on the way from England to France there was a terrible fog...two boats ran together but no one was hurt. Was washing my pants and got them wrapped around the screw. Got lost several of us and an English boat led us in. Some landed on Jersey shore and got shot up....."
Jersey was one of the Channel Islands- this certainly ties into his comments on page 6 and below.)

...June 7, 1944 (??) ... We were lost - no maps when (sic-where?) we were supposed to go and very foggy. About 100 boats going to England from France in a fog so thick one could hardly see..... Finally run up to another (sic: boat) **ST 253**. He stopped and said let's not run anymore till we find those English boys who were supposed to be our escort. So we shot some flares up into the sky. A boat came up and I thought it was a U-boat from Germany and I was really praying as if it had been a German boat we would have been goners. It was an English boat which took us to Cherbourg where I worked until sent home... Water (?) and mines were a constant menace in Mahoe Harbor (?). Hear lots of artillery and snipers around. The harbor installations were wrecked and barges and landing craft had been sunk. Those items had to be pulled up by cranes. They were doing salvage lifting .."

(This is a bit confusing...the June 7 date implies Normandy, which is certainly possible, yet the rest of the narrative obviously is Cherbourg which was not in allied hands until mid-July 1944... He may be talking about the ST-75 sinking event here which places this in July of 1944, or, perhaps more likely, this might describe his first trip on July 18 1994 to Cherbourg... DF)

Summary: ... A tugboat was blown up and Ray went over and picked up some of the boys. Didn't say about any except a W.D. (previously mentioned Warrant Officer?) who he had

worked with that died. Another tugboat and a ship right outside the harbor were also blown up.....

This sounds like someone summarizing a letter. This probably is another reference to ST 344's demise. The other tugboat probably is not an ST: there were many other types.

Summary: the ship Nevada was outside the harbor and too shallow for the ship to come in. Ray stated that he went out to get some boys off and the ones that could stand were brought back on a barge...(ST's performed LOTS of rescue missions!)

Summary: ...going up to Le Havre (France) to get ready to go on the boat took on 16000 gallons (!!) of fuel oil 1750 gallons of water, rations for the crew to eat, check life boats and lget life belts aboard, had compass checked. This was **ST 474**, stated that the boat cost \$280,000 and had eight rooms. They had to wait for the next day as the water was too rough. Stated that the tug was top heavy (**yep! DF**) and too much danger that the tug might tip over...

This indicates he was on ST 474 as soon as he reported to Cherbourg on July 19, 1944.

Page 8

Written family summary, not from the original letters....

June 6, 1944: Made sergeant (*what a coincidence...promoted on D-Day!*)

July 19, 1944: Worked 24 hours on and 24 off. No lights until May 10, 1945. (Cherbourg)

Aug 2, 1944: Made tech sergeant today. (*promotions came quickly in wartime*)

December 1944: A ship was torpedoed outside the harbor, and we had to get out and get all the boys we could.

- wires run down from the wheelhouse where Ray is to the engineer. The wire is fastened to a bell. The engineer runs the engines the way Ray signals him. (wow.)

May 20, 1945: Today they had a big parade, 60 boats in the parade and we marched on the docks. Some of the boats are to be named after the **20 boys from our company that lost their lives**. Was taking mail to a tugboat but it blew up before I got to it (!). Then I was taking some of the boys to shore – a barge blew up then 10 minute later a ship blown (sic) up. (*...dangerous work until the end! DF*)

May 27, 1945: Back on **ST 486** in charge of 4 ST tugboats, 2 J boats, 1051 & 879, three MTL boats 538, 600, & 757; and a fireboat 195.

June 30, 1945 – Our boat comes off dry dock today to make the trip to Antwerp. I have a nice room. It is the pilot quarters, has a wash basin with hot and cold water, writing desk, and nice bed.

July 4, 1945: Landed at Antwerp. Had motor trouble on the way up and water was so rough – wondered if we would ever make it. Another boat towed (us) up part of the way. Driving at full speed and the motor shut off and had to be towed.

PAGE 9

Typed family summary from letters:

June 23, 1945: Had left on the 20th going to Antwerp with a group of tugs. (first trip)

August 4, 1945: Ray was frying chicken when port commander came on board to get a cup of coffee. Asked why I was cooking when I was master of the boat. I told him we were all cooks on this boat. He decided we boys had a pretty good time together. Spoke of the boy who had gotten drunk and hit Ray and two others. Called MP, put in brig for 6 months with no pay during that time.

August 8, 1945 (or 1944?). Six of the boys and Ray went in a truck to Omaha beach. Couldn't walk around much due to the mines (?) and the smell was terrible. (?!!!)
(The battle should have moved on far away by 1945....what was the smell or was this in 1944, not 1945, just two months after D-Day...he was assigned to Cherbourg by July 19th of 1944...??))

August 15, 1945: Last night I was woke up at 1 O'clock with all the whistles blowing and shooting. The war was over. I woke up other boys on the boat.

October 12, 1945: The ATS (civilians) are taking over our boats. During the war they got \$8.00 a month and now get \$500 a month for doing the same thing we do. (\$500? Probably not.....DF)

November 7, 1945: Ray came off the **ST 474** at noon. "Out of a job"

December 3, 1945: All of Co. 335 got to Lille, France, on this date staying in an old factory but no heat, stayed in bed to keep warm.

December 6: Left to Antwerp with the tugs, then on to Camp High Hat to board a victory ship home on December 10, 1945.

December 12, 1945: Left Antwerp on Way Cross Victory. *(Headed home!)*