Navy's Role

--- in Occupation of Germany

WHY IS a Navy officer director of Military Government for one of the states of the US Zone? Why are Navy planes flying the Berlin airlift? What is the Navy's function in the land occupation of Germany?—are questions frequently asked by occupation personnel in Germany.

The answer to these apparent occupational oddities lies in the fact that Germany was a sea power as well as a land power. Although the occupation and Military Government of a defeated Germany is fundamentally an Army responsibility, there are a number of occupational duties, policies and decisions concerning which the cooperation and assistance of the US Navy is essential.

The National Security Act of 1947 does not assign functions in the Military Government of Germany to the US Navy; yet, as one of the three armed services, it has participated in the German occupation since April 1945, when the Naval Advanced Base in Bremerhaven was established to board, disarm and guard all German naval and merchant vessels in that area. An integral part of this operation was the taking over of all German coastal defenses and assistance to the British in mine sweeping operations near the mouth of the Weser River, on which Bremen and Bremerhaven are located.

OPERATING in Germany is not new to the Navy. As part of the wartime Army-Navy team whose combat mission was to bridge the Rhine in 1944, the Navy was responsible for providing boats, together with operating personnel for that major operation. The Army was thus ferried over one of the most difficult "road blocks" of the war in equipment of a sister service, manned by sailors in olive drab uniforms.

By agreement between Prime Minister Churchill and President Roosevelt at the Quebec Conference, the US enclave at Bremen was created to provide the American Forces with an outlet to the sea as a means of supplying the US Zone of occupation.

Subsequently, the British turned over to the Americans a part of the British territory around the Weser River, including the ports of Bremen and Bremerhaven. The US Navy is primarily engaged in operating the necessary naval installations in the Bremen Enclave and rendering logistic support to the occupation forces, but it is also coordinating with and assisting Military Government in reaching the proper decisions on a variety of matters.

TO CARRY out these functions the Commander, US Naval Forces in Germany, was appointed naval adviser to the US Military Governor. The present naval adviser is Rear Admiral John Wilkes, who with his Deputy Advisor, Captain J. P. Thew, and staff, maintain offices in Berlin. A small liaison group is located in Frankfurt, while a naval adviser to EUCOM is stationed at Heidelberg for the purpose of maintaining close contact between the Navy and EUCOM Headquarters.

In addition to his other duties Rear Admiral Wilkes is the US member of the Tripartite Naval Commission set up at the Potsdam Conference. This commission governs the disposal of the German naval fleet on an equitable basis among England, U.S.S.R. and the United States. The work of this commission, after many months of world wide census-taking, is virtually completed.

In order that matters which affect the mutual interests of the United States and the United Kingdom may be effectively acted upon, the naval adviser to Military Government maintains liaison with the senior British naval officer in the British Zone of Germany.

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THE NAVY has returned to the German economy nearly 500 captured vessels, including 100 fishing vessels. These fishing craft have materially assisted in restoring the fishing industry for which Bremerhaven has been rightfully famous, with the result that there is a constant stream of vehicles laden with fish leaving Bremerhaven to help feed the people in other parts of Germany.

The original Navy mission in Germany—disposition of captured German vessels, toxic gases and shore installations, plus mine sweeping and port operation—has been completed. However, new problems continue to arise.

For example, naval aviation was called in to assist the Air Force in support of the Berlin population in 1948 under "Operation Vittles." The unique aspect of this job is that the naval air transport squadrons involved are self-contained units. The vast quantities of fuel required to operate the airlift planes has imposed upon the Navy tankers a heavy burden and necessitated a shortening of "turn around" time at the ports of delivery in order that schedules may be met.

Another new function of the Navy in Germany is concerned with the rapid economic recovery of the western zones, an adjunct of which has been a corresponding increase of navigation hazards on the Rhine River. To meet this situation the naval adviser was directed to establish a Rhine River patrol in aid of navigation.

With a 90 foot craft under the command of Lt. Comdr. Nelson M. Cooke, US Navy, the vanguard of a naval unit was established at Schierstein, near Wiesbaden, early in February of this year. Additional craft are being fitted for the task and soon will be assigned to the unit. Surely no member of these crews ever thought he would have duty on the Rhine.

Export-Import Insurance

German insurance companies, which are duly licensed under MG Law No. 53, have been authorized to insure, in any currency, all risks connected with western German exports and imports. This authorization is contained in MG Law No. 16, "Certain Operations Abroad of German Insurance Companies," and is applicable to the Western Sectors of Berlin as well.

The law is designed to facilitate export trade and to increase, for the use of the German economy, the amount of foreign exchange resulting therefrom. By the terms of the law, German insurance companies are authorized to conclude whatever agency arrangements with persons domiciled outside of the western zones or western sectors of Berlin may prove necessary for effecting this purpose.