

CHAPTER __

The morning fog had lifted by 8:30. It was late in October, and for the first few hours during the day sleeves on the blue dungarees were all rolled down until the sun could ease out from behind the overhead clouds. Quite often one would think to himself, “If the sky looked like that back home, “I’d swear it would rain before noon. “ But by 11:00 o’clock the sky was a clear blue, and it left no trace whatsoever¹ of having been a bitter cold night. Indian summer was started, and it would last until along the middle of April... that is, during the daylight hours.

In California during the winter months it was always like a June day in North Carolina, Iowa or Connecticut. But the nights were cold, and one would have had the feeling he was back at Boston harbor. On a rather raw night it was practically impossible to wear enough clothing in bucking the cool night air. It was common to see a stevedore shivering even with a pair of long underwear, a gym sweatshirt, topped by the heavy jacket used by those sailors on duty in the North Atlantic and Greenland. Yes, it could, and very often did get just that cold at night. Those on the graveyard shift did take a beating. It was never felt by those who didn’t have to be up all night. To the users of midnight oil along the waterfront in the bay area, the cold snap was a familiar thing, and unconsciously effected a chill up their spine. Still many in the same section never experienced just how very, very cold it could get along the banks of Suisun Bay.

December, January, on through March... ammunition and more ammunition. Clomp, clomp, clomp, bear to the right, catch up there in the rear. Halt, fall out ... all right to your holds men ... what we working today move gang 4 up to no. 1 and help with the tail fins, sir? What about that car outboard, gonna get it out of the way? Check out saws, hammers, and any crow bars you need at the gear locker. On the double, O.K. gang, let’s not waste any time getting started on these pallets. Drop over to the office and get a loading list, ask the cargo officer on duty for a stowage plan. How much did the last division put on ... 274, we ought to beat that.

Have one of your men get a mule out of the shed watch out for that load of dunnage two loops around that load, get a longer sling coming through, not so fast with that skip box, want to hurt somebody? Eight more loads in no. 5 car, be empty in 30 minutes, what’s coming in next? Need some 2- by-4 to shore up down below.....hold that load a second, let me get this projectile out of the way. Order a new car, have Jake break the dunnage

¹ “whatever” in original text.

out....over there to the side track, C&H 24187 has about 45 tons in it, should have it finished by chow time. Bring that fork lift over here and run this pallet down by that big pile at the edge of the pier. In the way...look out for that hand truck....heads up.....don't let the load swing back and forth....easy, easy.....have 'em send some t-blocks down. Cap't coming down today? Sweep out that car, pull the plates, gonna make a switch, clear the tracks.....come on in with that dump truck right quick and get this load of scrap dunnage....careful of the crane. Oughta use a larger skip box on that stuff, be sure the gate's fastened, don't want one of those things to fall out, blow us up.

No hooks on that powder....s'matter with ya, you're not that weak I know, come on won't hurt you. Checker said 40 mm. followed the 20's.....37 tons in the last car....gonna get more than the last division, using one less gang too. Don't stand between the load and the ship, might knock your ass off the dock; happened 'bout a year ago you know. Boy's head hit the side of the ship as he was falling, knocked him out, came up once or twice but nobody jumped in to save him....scared I guess....didn't even think to throw down a board...never did find his body. Take it easy on those incendiaries, goddammit.

24 tons out of this end of S.P. 1101, rest of it goes out in the magazine. Just that 5-inch with the yellow and white marks on the shell, blue ones all stay in. O.K., what you waiting on?

Already finished four cars, 167 tons on paper now. Couple'a more hours to go. Might get over 300 if that's all the tail vanes. 16"?. Get that in no time. Had to over stow 12 tons of grenades the last division had in the wrong place.

Stay ahead of the hook, boys, oughta have a load waiting for it 'for she leaves the hold. Not over 1500 pounds, ole man might come down and jump {on} somebody for overloading.

How 'bout calling the jointer shop for some smooth 6-inch. Got {to} have it right away, already lost 45 minutes on those boxes now.

Where your wire cutters, gotta depalletize these boxes before we send them down. What mark's that....blotted out...get another one, what's that one say.... O.K. watch the weight.

How's this thing work, lieutenant? What they use it for? Sho' is heavy to be so little....Man.....say, mate, gimme a hand on this here, will ya....don't drop it.

Gotta go to the head, ain't really got to do nuthin'....good excuse to rest for a few minutes with no son-of-a-bitchin' officer hollerin' his head off at me. Sho' would like a cigarette, 'f nobody's around, think I'll light one up. Try to tell me it's dangerous, can't have no

cigarettes the whole time we're down here, not even in our pockets.....must be crazy people what makes de rules at this here place....Can't smoke in the toilet....why the ship's a good 150 foot away from this shack.....won't nobody see me.

Head's up down there mates....back under the wings, 'nother load o' dunnage coming down.....O.K. then, stand there and let it hit you, I don't give a shit.

Step over a little so I can see the hatch tender.... What's that?....'f you don't like the way I'm driving this winch, get the hell over here and do it yourself. Up my _____.....