

Nunemaker's Voyage

By Maynard Miller

One of the efforts made to alleviate some of the ravages that the war left on Europe following World War II was the exportation of a variety of livestock. The cargo was usually mares and heifers, but also included some mules and occasionally chickens.

The project was organized by Brethren Service, the relief arm of the Church of the Brethren, in conjunction with United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Act Agency (UNRAA). Many of the attendants were on CPS assignment but many non-CPS men volunteered specifically for that job. It is estimated that over 500 Mennonite men served in this assignment at one time or another.¹ Those who went were paid \$150 by UNRAA.

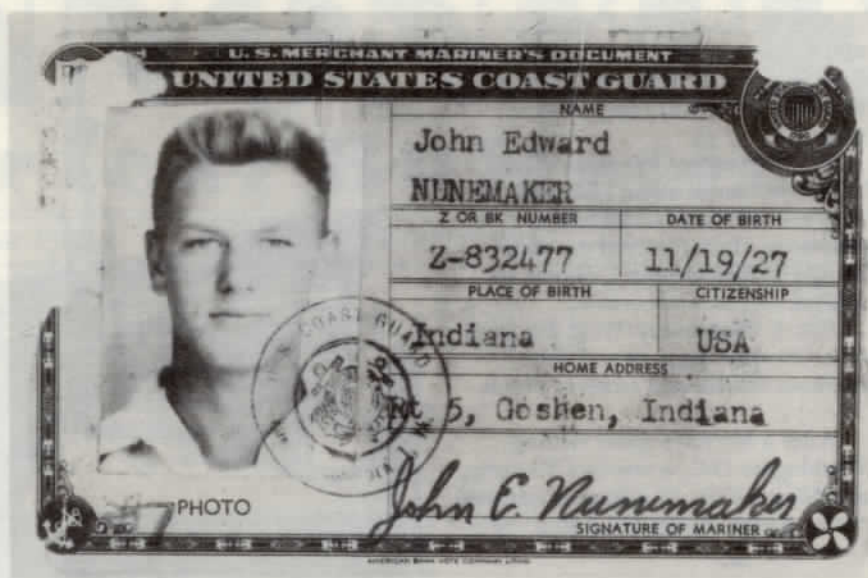
One of the non-CPS men who made the voyage was 18-year-old John Nunemaker. Too young to have been drafted, his father encouraged him to take the opportunity to become a "seagoing cowboy," as the attendants were called.

He left Goshen, his hometown, on August 28, 1946, for Newport News, Virginia. Bound for Danzig, Poland, he was one of 27 livestock attendants for a shipload of 770 horses. He was gone about six weeks.

Nunemaker recalls getting "the biggest shock of my life" upon meeting the crew of the ship, whose lifestyles were quite a change from the rural Goshen community. Apparently with this in mind, Melvin Gingerich notes: "The opportunities for witnessing were great but the temptations were equally great."² But, for the most part, sailors and the "farm boys" did not mix.

Nunemaker worked about 16 hours a day travelling to Europe but the return trip provided much leisure time. The horses were closely confined, and tended to get quite restless. Those in the crew who were from farms were able to take the work in stride, but Nunemaker recalls that "the city boys had big problems."

Nunemaker met up with a moral dilemma even before he left the United States. He had to sign up with the



John Edward Nunemaker: A "seagoing cowboy's" uneasy identity. Photo: Archives of the Mennonite Church

Coast Guard, something that he was not sure that he wanted to do. As a pacifist, he felt uneasy about being identified as a member of a law-enforcement body.

Because of an interest in Mennonite history, Nunemaker was particularly happy to learn that his destination was Danzig, a Polish Mennonite settlement.

He kept a daily journal during his trip, most of it a practical record of his day-to-day activities. Following are some excerpts from that journal. The original was recently placed in the Archives of the Mennonite Church.

August 29, Thursday. Arrived at Newport News, Virginia, at 3:30 P.M. Went to pier and reported, then slept at YMCA.

Sept 3. Went to Brethren Service to hear who would go on next ship. I just made it. Went to UNRAA and received tetanus shot and signed on ship at noon.

Sept. 4. Got up at 6:00 and fed horses. Have 43 horses to take care of with Jim Hoffman. Saw one of our horses from home, "Queen," in my hold. [The Nunemakers had sold this horse some eight months earlier in Goshen.] Dinner at 12:30, supper at 5:00. Finished at 9:00 for night. Sailed at 3:00 PM.

Sept. 5. Rained at 2:00 in night and the Super woke us up to cover hatches. Started being seasick and did not eat all day. Lost first horse.

Sept. 13, Friday. Saw land for first time. Saw many sunken ships, have to travel in sea lane because of mines.

Sept. 14, Saturday. In North Sea along the Netherlands coast. Got to Kiel Canal at 9:00 in evening. Took 5 German pilots on board and all spoke good English.

Sept. 15, Sunday. Saw city of Kiel in morning. Country beautiful. Saw Denmark and Sweden, and many sunken ships in Kiel harbor. German farmers were doing fall plowing.

Sept. 16, Monday. Arrived in Novaport, about 6 miles from Danzig. Tug came and pulled us into port at 2:00 P.M.

Sept. 17, Tuesday. Went to Danzig and saw a whole city bombed out. Kids and men followed us all over Danzig. Saw many wrecked tanks and an anti-aircraft gun.

Sept. 19, Thursday. Sailed [for home] at 9:00 in the morning. We just heard that we are getting into a hurricane, the waves are dashing across bow and midship. Ship rises and lowers about 35 ft. on each wave. Wind 60 miles per hour.

Sept. 20, Friday. After supper tonight a group of us got to talking religion and had some good arguments. Saw a Liberty ship that we gave to Russia in canal and they had women seamen aboard. Don't have to work during day. Received radiogram that we hold the record for least horses lost: seven.

Sept 29, Sunday. Had church at 9:00. Church lasted about 1 1/2 hours. Even had our two mess boys there. First time in 10 years they were to church.

Oct. 1, Tuesday. We sighted land [Newport News] about 11:00 and dropped anchor at about 3:00 in afternoon. Have received my stuff I bought in Poland from Customs and will get on shore tomorrow.

Oct. 2, Wednesday. Went ashore at 8:00. Checked baggage and went to Brethren Service and received check.

After a few days spent visiting Washington D.C., a nearby CPS camp, and Niagra Falls, Nunemaker returned home to Elkhart, Indiana, on October 6. *U*

Maynard Miller was a student assistant in the Archives of the Mennonite Church in the Fall of 1990.

¹ John D. Unruh, *In the Name of Christ: A History of the Mennonite Central Committee*, (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press. 1952), p. 228.

² Melvin Gingerich, *Service for Peace*, (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press. 1949), p. 189.



Heifers unloaded at the docks of Danzig, Poland, in 1946. Photo: United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration

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