

## Art Meyer's Cattle Boat Experience

### Introduction to planned book, dated January 1991

This book consists mostly of the journal that I kept from June 13 to August 6, 1946, while serving as a seagoing cowboy (in this case, horse attendant) taking livestock to war-torn Poland.

World War II had ended just a year before this journal begins. Massive relief efforts were underway. Part of that relief was to send livestock (mostly horses and cows) to European countries which were hard hit by the war.

Recently built supply ships, Liberty and Victory by name, were hastily modified to carry livestock. Attendants, mostly farm boys like myself, were recruited to care for the animals on the voyage.

The operation was in the charge of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), an organization of 44 nations set up in 1943 to relieve some of the suffering caused by the war. Church agencies like Mennonite Central Committee and Brethren Service Committee were asked by UNRRA to help recruit personnel for these relief efforts. That is how I, as a 17-year-old farm boy who had never even been out of the state of Ohio until my senior class trip to Washington, D.C. in May of 1946, became involved in this trip to Poland.

In March 1946 an urgent appeal for cattle boat attendants (seagoing cowboys) appeared in the *Mennonite Weekly Review*, an inter-Mennonite weekly newspaper that came to our home in Wayne County, Ohio. As a young Christian who had been taught to demonstrate one's faith by action, I was intrigued by the prospect of cattle boat service. My parents still had one son away from home in Civilian Public Service (CPS) during World War II and probably were not keen to see another leave on such an adventure.

Eventually both parents agreed that it would be good for me to go. In May 1946, near graduation from high school time, I received a letter of acceptance from the Brethren Service Committee, New Windsor, Maryland. They would let me know about exact sailing date, etc.

From that point on my senior graduation, speech-making there, and a trip to Washington, D.C. became secondary in my thoughts as I prepared for the experience of a life—a trip to Europe as a seagoing cowboy.

After what seemed to me like a long wait, I received a telegram from New Windsor on June 13. I left home the same day to travel to Baltimore to get my seaman's papers the next.

The two-month trip lived up to all my expectations. It served as an introduction to a lifetime of interest in peace and other global issues. It confirmed my desire to become a biologist and an environmentalist. I saw enough of war's devastation in Danzig and the North Sea to last me for a lifetime and encourage me to work for peace.

As you read the journal, remember it is written by a naïve farm boy who has never been away from home except for a few days. Yet I hope the impressions, insights and experiences described will be inspiring and uplifting to all who take the opportunity to read the journal.

## THE DIARY

### Thursday, June 13, 1946

This morning I was quietly working at home sprouting potatoes! At about 10:45 a.m. our mail finally arrived. In the mail was a telegram from New Windsor, Maryland, where the Brethren Service Committee had its cowboy headquarters. The telegram read as follows:

Arthur Meyer  
Smithville, Ohio

Report to Chamber Commerce Building Baltimore June 14<sup>th</sup> for Seamans Papers  
then call New Windsor 105

Benjamin Bushleb

Am I ever excited! This is the first telegram that I have ever received. Tomorrow I must be in “far off” Baltimore.

This afternoon I made final frenzied preparations for the journey. I drove to the county seat (Wooster, Ohio), eight miles away, to check on train schedules to Baltimore. I decided I must leave from nearby Orrville at 6:45 p.m. yet today. It would mean changing trains at the sprawling Pittsburgh terminal and arriving in Baltimore at about 6:15 a.m. tomorrow.

I did the final packing, had supper with my family, bid them goodbye and was at the Orrville train station in plenty of time to catch the train for Pittsburgh. This is only my second experience riding on a train. It's exciting, and I enjoy in an apprehensive way, the hustle and bustle of the train terminal and the atmosphere. I was concerned about making connections in the huge Pittsburgh terminal, but everything went smoothly and I'm on my way to Baltimore.

### Friday, June 14

I traveled on the clanking train all night, arriving in Baltimore at the scheduled 6:15 a.m. After leaving the railroad terminal I roamed about the waking city of Baltimore carrying my heavy borrowed seaman's bag. I gave a dime to a likely alcoholic for a “cup of coffee,” found a small diner where I had some breakfast and asked a kind policeman to direct me to the Chamber of Commerce Building. Fortunately the place was not far and so I walked, arriving there at 8:00 a.m., impatiently waited around all morning and due to various “red tape” didn't get my coveted seaman's papers for the Merchant Marine. I ate lunch in the city and then found a way out to the town of New Windsor (about 20 miles northwest of Baltimore) to secure a room and board until I should leave on a cattle boat.

### Saturday, June 15

I got up bright and early this morning and reported to the food canning section of the extensive relief processing center here at New Windsor. I worked all day as can upon can of various contributed foods for relief were packed for shipment overseas. I enjoyed the work and even got \$3.75 for the day's labor. During recreation hours here I play a lot of table tennis. I'm learning how to put “English” (spin) on the ping pong balls. Great fun! Everything went fine today, so all is well.

### Sunday, June 16

I didn't have to get up until 8:15 this morning, Wow! Breakfast was served much later as this is a day of rest. I went to a Brethren church in nearby Westminster, a town of several thousand, at 9:30 a.m. They had a very satisfying church school and an inspiring church service. I enjoyed making comparisons of this church with my own at home.

This afternoon I rested, watched a double header softball game and played a lot of ping pong.

### **Monday, June 17**

Had to get up at 5:30 a.m. this morning in order to catch the 6:10 train from New Windsor to Baltimore. We wanted to be there by 8:00 a.m. to again be processed for our needed seaman's papers. Fortunately we got the papers by 11:00 a.m. and had good luck hitchhiking back to New Windsor, arriving at about 2:30 p.m. I still do not know exactly when we will sail.

### **Tuesday, June 18**

This morning I worked in the clothing relief center here from 7:30 to 11:30, packing used clothing, I surely ought to know how to pack my own clothes now with all this experience. I puttered around this afternoon getting packed and ready to board the 6:10 a.m. train to Baltimore tomorrow. We are to board a ship called the *Riddle*, which is to sail Wednesday or Thursday. We are to sign the ship's papers at 9:30 a.m. tomorrow, get on board, and hooray, we're off!

False alarm! Learned at supper tonight from Bob Ziegler, cowboy boss here, that the *Riddle* has developed trouble of some sort and isn't sailing as scheduled, so we'll all have to wait for a Victory ship named *Cedar Rapids* to come from Newport News, Virginia. This will take a few days, so I guess we're stuck around here for now.

Played about 15 to 20 games of ping pong this evening and also some volleyball. There are a lot of fellows, "prospective cowboys," around here now awaiting orders to sail.

### **Wednesday, June 19 through Sunday, June 23**

These days are rather uneventful and have been much the same to me. Sometimes I worked at the relief center, sometimes not. All the time I am anxious, eager and impatiently waiting to get going. I am making a great many friends. Otherwise nothing very exciting is happening.

### **Monday, June 24**

I got up early this morning after an enjoyable date with one of my newfound friends here at the center. Girls are few here, but I'm having lots of fun with those few. Responded to a request to help make hay on a farm near here and landed a really "rough" job. It really tired me out. I perked up, however, when I learned this evening that we are finally going to leave this place for the open seas on Wednesday morning, June 26. Can it really be true?

### **Tuesday, June 25**

I missed breakfast this morning—just too tired to get up after the vigorous day in the hayfields. The report about leaving for the sea is really true. Confirmation came from the cowboy office this morning. I must really pack up this time! We are to leave early tomorrow morning so guess how I spent my last night here at the relief center? I walked to a small restaurant with several friends and ate my fill of what I thought I might miss most on this trip—ice cream. So as I go to bed early tonight everything seems to be working out OK.

### **Wednesday, June 26**

Up very early again this morning in time to catch the 6:10 a.m. train for Baltimore. Said farewell to my new friends at the relief center, for a while at least.

A Mr. Hoffman, who is to be one of the cowboy supervisors, boarded our train at Westminster. We arrived in Baltimore safely and after brief minor difficulties we boarded ship at 9:00 a.m. We had to wait until about 11:00 a.m. when Dr. Shock (what a name for a doctor!) gave us physical

examinations. Then we were at last signed on board the ship. In the late afternoon we debarked and some of us greatly enjoyed observing the bustling dock, the oceangoing vessels from many countries and all sorts of waterfront activities. At 5:00 p.m. we reboarded the ship and were then assigned quarters. They say this is a small cargo vessel (441 feet long) but it seems like a small town to me. I am one floor below the deck in very nice quarters at the rear of the ship (old gunners' quarters). Things are working out interestingly as I "hit the sack" for the first night aboard the good ship, *Robert W. Hart*. They tell us we are going to take about 700 horses and 100 heifers to Danzig, Poland. I am excited!

#### **Thursday, June 27**

I walked all over the city of Baltimore with several friends today. The ship is being loaded with all sorts of supplies: feed, hay, water, etc., for the trip. This evening they have begun to load the animals, mostly horses, so we placed hay in front of our assigned horse stalls. The stevedores will continue this loading through the night. I hope it won't be so noisy that we can't sleep as we "hit the sack" tonight.

#### **Friday, June 28**

This morning we scrambled eagerly to our assigned stalls in hold number 1 upper tween deck and excitedly found it full of 70 noisily eating and kicking mares. We gave water to the horses first, placing iron ring bucket holders on the front board of the stalls, then placing the buckets in the rings and filling the buckets with water from a hose. The horses stood facing each other, with a narrow aisle for us cowboys to walk through to attend the animals. Some of the mares are nervous, irritable, and high-strung from their travels to the ship and treatment while boarding. They kick, bite, whinny and snort. It's like running the gauntlet when feeding and watering the critters. Constant alertness and using the hose as a deterrent weapon seems to be our best protection.

After watering and haying our mares this morning we went to chow (breakfast). Got further acquainted with our animals as the day wore on. Went through the feeding, watering routine again this afternoon. We still aren't sailing, and I don't know when we will start.

#### **Saturday, June 29**

Nearly everything is the same as yesterday except that we begin feeding the horses oats in addition to hay. The procedure is similar: put up iron rings, fill buckets with about a half gallon of oats, run the gauntlet delivering the buckets to the rings. Most of the mares gobble their oats undaintily. Some get their big noses stuck in the bucket and give the bucket and perhaps the ring a good toss. We must retrieve the equipment and start all over. A few horses must be coaxed to eat. Some evidently don't feel too well. The hold is very hot. I hope we can get on the high seas soon to get some cool ocean breeze for these animals. After the horses eat their oats, we water them, collect the buckets and rings, and spread hay in the aisles for munching. Byron Reid, an 18-year-old fellow from southern California who hasn't had much farm experience, is my partner in upper tween deck to care for these seventy mares. I think we'll do ok together—I trust so.

This afternoon at about 2:00 p.m., the gangplank was pulled up, we were moved from the dock by several tugboats, and we are on our way at last! Wow! What a sensational feeling to be sailing so effortlessly on such a large ship. After chores this evening I'm going to bed early "sailing down Chesapeake Bay."

#### **Sunday, June 30**

This morning we are out on the beautiful, clear blue Atlantic Ocean. Some of the landlubber cowboys claim to be seasick, including my partner, Byron. I have an unusual feeling myself but

am not seasick yet. (I don't really know what it feels like, never having been on a large boat.) Since Byron is sick, I get to do all the chores. Worked all morning, ate dinner, and then worked most of the afternoon. There were some opportunities to stand on deck and watch the ocean. I am getting accustomed to the pretty blue, the waves, the sea foam. I like it. I saw several spouting whales off the portside this morning. All is well as I hit the sack tonight.

### **Monday, July 1**

I'm still not seasick. I do not hope to get so anymore. Most of the fellows are snapping out of their seasickness by now. Chores went well today as Byron is feeling better. Chores and chow is getting routine. The horses are doing ok. I love the sea more every minute but not the nasty horse bites. So all is well again as I hit the sack.

### **Tuesday, July 2**

Everything went fine today. We get up at 6:00 a.m. (hit the deck), do some chores, go to chow, back to chores and finish caretaking by about 9:30 a.m. Then we have time to visit other cowboys, read, etc. I just like to stand on the deck by the hour and watch the sky and the sea. It's difficult for me to comprehend the vastness of this body of water. I develop a felling of awe and reverence for the Creator during these moments.

Four of the 667 horses on shipboard have died to date. I'm glad none of the horses I care for have died yet. Mares do not seem to be able to travel well. They get upset emotionally, then physically and are a mess. I got my first painful horse bite today. Some of the fellows are all bit up. Incidentally when an animal dies, a ship winch is used to toss the animal overboard—a meal for the sharks and scavengers of the sea.

### **Wednesday July 3**

They tell us we are about 1,300 miles out in the North Atlantic by today. This is the fourth day out on the sea, nothing but sea—pretty azure blue, salty white-capped ocean. Sure is a lot of water, what else can I say! I saw my first flying fish today. It was small (12 inches long), silvery, and would swim out of one whitecap into another, a distance from 5 to 25 feet, I suppose—a beautiful sight.

The cowboys are adjusting now to the routine of ship life. No more seasickness, and the food is ample and very good. It's unfortunate that seven more horses died today. A number are sick. I report sadly that we lost "our" first mare today. She died of the scours according to Dr. Lieberman, the vet. Byron and I now have 69 mares to try to get safely to Poland.

It's time to hit the sack for the night—the order to hit the deck will arrive very fast.

### **Thursday, July 4**

Today at home it is a holiday. I'll miss the annual Meyer family Fourth of July reunion. Out 1,500 miles on the Atlantic on a horse boat is not much of a holiday. Every day seems much the same out here.

This evening for the second time since we began the trip, we change time, move the clocks ahead one hour in accordance with time zones. There are to be 7 changes en route to Poland. That's going to be a long way from home!

It was my turn to clean up quarters today—clean and scrub the place—extra work on a holiday!

The sea remains very calm; it has been remarkably smooth for several days. I like it that way. I don't care to test my seaman's legs right away.

### **Friday, July 5**

My fellow cowboys are talking about getting to England now. According to some calculations, they figure that we should be halfway there by now. We only make 1012 knots per hour on this clunker. Really it's a very new ship (about one year old) but was not made to be speedy.

This evening the sea is becoming rougher. We are beginning to hit swells. A storm is predicted for tonight. I hope it won't be the type that the old-timers aboard talk about where you get thrown from your bunks. I'm a little scared.

We have lost 13 horses and 2 cows to date. "Our" 69 horses look pretty well tonight. A storm won't do them any good. I do hope we'll get these horses there safely. I'm told the Poles can really use them!

### **Saturday, July 6**

We are to change our clocks ahead an hour again this evening. Four more changes and we'll be there. We estimate that we are just north of the Azore Islands, closer to England than the U.S. Everybody is happy about our travel program, anxious to reach England, thence our destination. The "storm" last night turned out to be very light, thank goodness, and our mares seem in good shape today. The sea is calming down, and the weather is much cooler. We are supposed to be near icebergs but haven't seen any. We had to wear coats on deck today and the holds are very comfortable for the animals now.

Captain Anderson made an inspection tour of cowboy quarters and holds. Everything must be OK since we haven't heard otherwise. Our captain is quite young and stern-looking. All the seamen have a deep respect or "fear" of him. It was a bit of a shock to me to realize how autocratic the captain's rule is. He is absolute monarch of the ship. What he says goes. The chain of command is clear-cut and seemingly uncompromising. But I suppose this is the way it must be on a "little island" in the mid-Atlantic.

We've been in the high seas for a week now, and I like it better and better. Still I will be happy when we have delivered these horses.

### **Sunday, July 7**

This is a beautiful cool but sunny day in the North Atlantic. The ocean has again become like a sheet of glass, although there are broad swells that toss the ship ever so gently. Everyone seems to be in a joyful mood tonight. We ought to see land this coming week.

This is Sunday. I sort of miss group worship services. This evening we are to have a vesper service in our quarters here below. I think Rev. Longenecker will be in charge. He is a personable gentleman. I look up to him sort of as a substitute father for a guy far from home. Service is to begin shortly so as Rebel McCall, one of our Virginia cowboys would say, "I'll knock it off" at this point.

### **Monday, July 8**

This evening we lose another hour of sleep as we cross a time zone. This is the fourth time so we should be to England in a few days. I hope so. My routine is getting a bit monotonous, and I will be glad to arrive. It's not that bad though. We can do most of our work now in about two hours morning and two hours afternoon plus a little time for the unexpected.

We had a fire and lifeboat drill this morning. I am assigned to man a fire extinguisher at one of the stations. These drills are sort of exciting at first.

We saw a number of sharks and porpoises around the ship today. I'm glad to be on board when I see those sharks.

One of the heifers died suddenly this morning. The vets did a post mortem to find out that she died of an acute pneumonia. All of us intently watched the autopsy. Those internal organs are massive and interesting. Memories of biology!

### **Tuesday, July 9**

Tonight I am getting anxious to see land. We are supposed to be only 300 miles from England. We should get there Thursday, the 11<sup>th</sup>. Then, I hear, we are to stop at Downs on Friday. It will be almost another week until we arrive at Danzig, Poland, then.

The sea remains calm. Two cargo ships can be seen following us and several more have passed us going the other way. After seeing nothing but sea and our ship for 10 days, this is an exciting event. It seems as though we have been away from land so long—but I think I'll be able to take another 7 or 8 days. The horses seem to be adapting well now. We aren't losing many more. I think the total lost is around 20 head. Some of the fellows have cut rawhide from the dead animals, have tied rope to it and are dragging it through the sea water to "cure" it. They hope to use the hide to make things later.

All is well as I hit the sack once more on the beautiful Atlantic.

### **Wednesday, July 10**

The hottest subject on board this evening is "when will we see land." They tell us that when we wake up tomorrow we can expect to look upon some part of the British Isles—at least sometime tomorrow. As I look toward the eastern horizon tonight, land-type clouds are seen presumably over Eire. It's a great feeling to know that land is that close.

I do believe that I'm falling in love with the ocean, though. It is so calm, so blue, so naturally beautiful. At noon the waves were producing just a few neat whitecaps. The light blue cloudless sky met the dark blue sea water at the distant horizon in an unforgettable picture.

Some of my seamen friends on board say that the horizon is only 3 to 4 miles away. Others say it is up to 15 miles. At any rate, as passing ships appear and disappear on the horizon one can dramatically see the curvature of the earth as the ships rise and sink.

This evening we change time for the 5<sup>th</sup> time as we cross the 14<sup>th</sup> latitude. England is just north and east according to the map. It seems odd to me that though it is 9:00 p.m. on board ship, it is only 4:00 p.m. in Ohio. We have two more of these time changes on our trip. All around the earth there are 24 time zones, so we shall have completed about 1/3 of the way around the world when we get to Danzig. A small world, huh! Goodnight!

### **Thursday, July 11**

Land! The first sight of England came today at 4:00 p.m. About all I could see from several miles out in the English Channel were rock cliffs with lighthouses scattered here and there. The sea was extremely calm all day. This evening a rather dense fog moved in and blocked our eagerly

anticipated view of the British Isles. Rumor has it that we are to stop within the next 24 hours at Downs or Dover for supplies, mine charts and perhaps a pilot to guide us.

We are seeing lots of ships now and hearing their piercing fog horns. Our own blasting is enough to wake the dead. I now know what is meant by London fog. I've never seen so much fog.

All of our spirits are high tonight as we've arrived at England and know that our trip should be completed in another week. So happily I, too, hit the sack upon a calm but foggy English Channel near Ashmedaddleboock, that little English town by the sea (made famous by the World War II song).

### **Friday, July 12**

I looked upon the famous White Cliffs of Dover late this afternoon. I kept humming the song "There'll be bluebirds over the white cliffs of Dover today or tomorrow, wait and see!" that I had heard sung so often during the war. It's hard to believe that I am really seeing those picturesque houses perched upon the banks and cliffs. The sun set behind them as our ship stopped and dropped anchor. A British tug brought out an official who was to inform our captain about channel navigational procedure and minefields left from the war. The crew in the tugboat took on our mail and gave us an English newspaper to read. Needless to say the paper was well read tonight.

We only stopped for about one hour, and now we are on our way once more. I think we have a pilot on board. I caught a glimpse of land on the starboard side of the ship that I assume must be the continent (France). So here I am between England and France as I retire for the night on the good ship *Hart*.

### **Saturday, July 13**

The horses as well as their attendants seem to be getting rather impatient. The horses have been on their feet many weeks now. They appear to be getting somewhat weaker. This morning our beautiful big roan mare went down, sick. This afternoon she died of pneumonia. What a pity, and when we were almost there. On top of this a bit later another bay mare went down also. After moving her and getting medication she too died tonight. We now have 67 mares left to bring through this ordeal. We'll do all we can to get them there!

Overall, though, this trip is turning out to be a pretty swell experience. We are now in the North Sea, a place that I'd only seen vaguely on maps before. Tomorrow we are to enter the Kiel Canal, which traverses Germany connecting the North Sea with the Baltic Sea. The journey through the Kiel takes about 12 hours, they say, so I hope to see some of northern Germany. We are too far from shore to see much of Belgium or Holland except islands.

Today I saw my first mine, the kind that blows up ships. We have passed two now, I'm told. There is one crew member assigned nothing but to be on watch for drifting mines around the clock. The sailors have all sorts of stories about ships being blown up by stray mines since the war, so it is with some apprehension that I say my prayers tonight gliding along the North Sea.

### **Sunday, July 14**

This has been an exciting day. We arrived at the Kiel Canal locks at about 10:00 a.m. It took us just seven hours to go the entire length of the canal (60 miles). We had lovely views of the low, flat lands of northern Germany. The destruction of the war did not come to the German countryside here, but the city of Kiel was badly damaged, as was part of the canal. As we entered the gates, sunken watercraft could be seen in great numbers all over the mouth of the great Elbe

River. The same sight met us at the other end of the canal in Baltic Bay. Right now we are anchored in Baltic Bay because our captain thinks it too hazardous to travel amidst the sunken wrecks and mines tonight.

Germany looked a lot like I expected from my reading. The tidy farms are divided up into small fields and all the land is utilized and well maintained. The farmers are making hay with hand tools and horsepower. The wheat is golden and ready to cut. The canal cuts directly through the neat countryside, hamlets and towns.

On this beautiful warm Sunday afternoon, the villagers, just a stone's throw away, swarmed along the canal yelling for candy, cigarettes, food, etc. From all appearances this was the usual habit of the youngsters along the canal—there were kids all along the entire route. The people looked healthy and clean. There was a noticeable absence of young men. There were women, old men and children out sunning themselves in bathing suits. Some people were having “blanket parties.” Their activities were not well camouflaged. I had heard that war promotes immorality. Now I believe it.

It was, I must say, a great thrill to observe this country, to see these people who just a year ago were our supposed enemies. They really look common and ordinary, just like people back home. How time changes things!

Routine things went well today. It is said to be a 48-hour trip from here to Danzig. We'll be happy to get there now to deliver our horses.

### **Monday, July 15**

This has been a quiet day. Chores went all right, but the horses are a little restless as, I guess, are the cowboys. We are supposed to dock at Gdynia, port city, in Danzig Wednesday morning. All I really know now is that it won't be long.

All along the Baltic Sea today I have seen sunken ships and buoys marking wreck locations. The amount of war destruction is incredible. Every once in a while we see an island or the mainland of East Germany on our starboard. Denmark is too far on our port side to be seen as we journey to our Poland destination.

### **Tuesday, July 16**

Today our trip to that faraway place called Poland was completed. The *Robert W. Hart* docked at the little seaport town called Nowy Port (Newport) at about 7:00 p.m. We were granted land passes shortly thereafter and set foot on good old “terra firma” at 8:30 p.m. The Polish stevedores immediately began the important job of unloading the ship. It is to be a round-the-clock effort. I hope I can sleep with all the commotion.

We had seen land all day today on our starboard, evidently the coastline of Germany and Poland. After arriving in the Gulf of Danzig in late afternoon we thought a tug would never come out to get us. When we finally docked at about 7:00 p.m., a crowd of several hundred Polish women, children and soldiers were there to greet us. All was a confused scene of excitement as the gangplank went down. The people look thin, ragged, unhealthy and sad. They are desperate for candy, food and cigarettes. It appears that the real medium of exchange is not money but cigarettes, which will buy most anything—cameras, binoculars, souvenirs, etc. The extreme poverty of these people shocks me. They appear to be much worse off than the Germans we saw along the Kiel.

At any rate we gave out gum and candy bars and bartered a bit this evening during shore leave. My shore leave was short tonight, but I didn't get to bed until 1:00 a.m. because of work down in the hold.

### **Wednesday, July 17**

I'm glad I didn't have to get up until 7:30 a.m. today. Our horses had not been unloaded yet, so we still watered them this morning. Then, after our breakfast, we went in small groups on an all-day trip to the cities of Danzig (Gdansk) and Gdynia. Gdansk is several miles inland from Nowy Port. Gdynia is twenty-two miles west of Gdansk. This is my first time in a foreign country. How shocking it is to have everyone around you speaking in such a jabbering type of language—at least it seems that way to me. Very few other vehicles are seen here—just a few army trucks and buses.

I did some trinket shopping in the town. The exchange is officially in units called *zlotys*, but the real medium, as I said before, seems to be in cigarettes.

What puzzles me is that the cigarette trading is somewhat furtive (black market), but the police and soldiers do it all the time. Anyway, since I don't smoke I don't want to deal in cigarettes. I'll exchange my dollars for zlotys.

I saw the war destruction in Danzig today. It is unbelievable—tons and tons of rubble. Old women with shovels and buckets are slowly cleaning up the ruins. Cathedrals, churches, opera houses, apartment buildings are skeletons of their former grandeur. Some of the cowboys report seeing the Mennonite Church of Danzig, which was totally destroyed. The poverty of the body and spirit that follows such complete destruction is clearly seen on the faces of the people in the streets here.

### **Thursday, July 18**

Today we took an UNRRA-sponsored tour through the seacoast towns of Danzig, Gdynia and Sopot. We visited various farms where relief cattle and horses had been placed. It is clear the people have great need of the livestock and are most gracious for the gifts. We were told that the people were so hungry after the war that much of the relief livestock was at first slaughtered for food instead of keeping it for re-establishing herds and work animals. I suppose this is just natural. We observed men with knives standing around during the unloading of our ship. I was told that when an accident occurred in unloading the animals, these men would slaughter the injured livestock on the spot.

The Polish government gave us an appreciation dinner today in a hall in Sopot. I felt a little uneasy eating fairly well in such a poverty-stricken place. The hosts seemed eager for us to feel their gratitude for our bringing them relief supplies. After dinner we visited the continent of Europe's largest pipe organ, located in the Cathedral of Oliva. During a demonstration of its playing we observed the interesting movements of the many carved figures responding to the playing.

Got some *lody* (ice cream) from a vendor this afternoon. Wow! It didn't taste like our ice cream. It seemed like little more than frozen water to me. Food is scarce and expensive, as are most things here. The rate of exchange is 400 zlotys to 1 dollar. I am told that wages for common laborers are 150 z a day for women and 175 for men. You can't buy much for 100 z, I've found.

The people seem to be friendly during the daytime, but at least around the docks it seems pretty rough at night. I'm glad to be aboard the *Hart* when I hear gunshots every now and then. The men

all carry cheap steel hunting knives and everyone has an old beat-up suitcase. Russian soldiers are all over the place, and it is clear the Poles dislike them very much.

### **Friday, July 19**

I didn't feel well when I woke up this morning. I don't know what's the matter with me—too much of Poland, I guess. In the afternoon I walked around Nowy Port, shopped a bit for some souvenirs, then came back to the ship and went to bed. I really haven't felt this sick since I can remember. Levi Weaver, our supervisor, and second mate Christy, a very fine gentleman, checked me over and treated me. They debated with me and among themselves whether I should be sent to a local hospital. Since our ship is to leave tomorrow, I would have to get home some other way. That prospect does not interest me. I think I'll snap out of it. I want to stay on board.

Most of my friends have had enough time here in Poland now and are ready to leave, purchases made, money spent. I was disappointed by the behavior of some of our cowboys here in port. You expect some drinking and immorality among the rough regular crewmen, but not from high-minded relief workers. Some of our guys had to experience being drunk and sick, too, I guess. I am most appreciative that I have been brought up with Christian conviction against such behavior at home or abroad. There certainly has been plenty of opportunity to compromise personal moral principles on this trip. I can see the necessity now for adequate moral training when one is young.

Well, I guess I won't have any more personal contacts with the Poles here, since I'm sick in bed and we leave tomorrow. It certainly has been interesting dealing with them. The last haggard gentleman I talked with today was typical of these depressed people. He gestured around the city with a pained expression and said in his broken English, "This is no goot!" Then he brightened as he patted me on the shoulder, "America much better!" My sympathy went out toward this poor man.

### **Saturday, July 20**

I feel much better this morning, thank the Lord, but still don't consider myself well. Cowboys and crew are all aboard except John Lenkiewicz, who went to Warsaw to look up some relatives. He didn't get back in time. Being an older fellow, though, he should be able to take care of himself. I'm sorry he's not with us. I've learned to enjoy him a lot.

We pulled out of the dock here at Nowy Port at about 10:00 a.m. All hands were on deck to witness the departure. I took a final look at the destruction all around and then spent the day resting in my bunk. I ate three meals today but still don't feel right.

I'm told we will stop at Kiel, Germany, for 24 hours. I hope we get a shore leave there. We're supposed to take on water for ballast, then travel back through the canal and home!

### **Sunday, July 21**

We are making fairly good time for this type of ship today—about 12 knots, the sailors say. We have passed numerous islands of Denmark and Sweden to our starboard and can occasionally see Germany on our port. We arrived at Kiel this evening and docked at about 8:00 p.m. We couldn't get our water ballast so the captain decided to go right on through the Kiel Canal tonight. I am sorry for this development because I looked forward to seeing the land again and a shore leave. I can't see much in the dark, so I guess I'll hit the sack early.

### **Monday, July 22**

I got up at 5:30 a.m. to observe the rest of the Kiel sights. We completed the trip by 7:30 a.m. and headed on into the North Sea. I spent the day relaxing, eating, sleeping and reading. We won't

have to clean up the animal mess in the holds until we get to the Atlantic, they say, so I'm going to make myself comfortable. Some of the guys are seasick again, since the North Sea is pretty rough today.

### **Tuesday, July 23**

We are again in the eastern English Channel. Just moments ago I viewed a scene that I don't think I'll soon forget. We pulled out of a rather heavy fog band and had a beautiful sunny view of France on our port side and the white cliffs of Dover on our starboard. The distance across the channel here surely did not seem like the 22 miles it is. As I pondered this scene I was overcome by a feeling of melancholy when I realized only two years ago the great D-day invasion of Europe took place here with tremendous loss of life. Now the little seacoast towns of Dover and Dunkirk slumber lazily and peaceably right before my eyes. And here I am, several thousand miles from home, witnessing a little bit of history. I must admit that tonight I am a little homesick. We are all anxious to set foot in the U.S. again. I hear that we are to return to New York City. That's fine with me. Let's get going.

### **Wednesday, July 24**

This evening we caught a glimpse of what I assume is the western end of England (Land's End). Now we are out of sight of land on the wide open sea once more; the deep blue Atlantic looms ahead. After a foggy, calm, then sunny but cool day the sea is beginning to have large swells, so we are rocking quite a bit in our unladen boat.

I finished reading the gift book, *I Dare You*, today. It reminded me of commencement back home in May, at which time I had received it as valedictorian of my class. Have a lot of time to reflect and think now. I tried to do some fishing off the stern with improvised fishing gear—going after the big ones—but my line broke and I lost my big meat hooks.

Well, in 12-14 days I should again see the States. What a thrill that will be!

### **Thursday, July 25**

Had a nice day, even though the swells on the sea are large. We roll from side to side and the stern goes way up, then plops down with a great smack. Quite a number of the fellows are seasick from the rough seas.

About half of us cowboys cleaned up and worked in the holds today. The rest will finish the job tomorrow. It wasn't as difficult as I had thought it might be. So now we have nothing scheduled to do for the next 10 days. What a life! I'm going to see how much reading I can do. Today I finished the very good book entitled *The Monk Who Lived Again*.

I still have a good appetite and the food seems tasty. I ought to gain some weight on the way home. I can use it.

### **Friday, July 26**

The sea is rough again today—the wind strong and the waves high. Waves splash across the deck. I can see how a sailor could easily be washed overboard in this kind of sea. I am very cautious when on deck. I spend most of my time below during this weather. I don't feel too good on these rough seas, but I haven't missed a meal yet.

I enjoyed reading the book *Philosophy of Life* by Edgar Guest. He is a very good writer in my opinion.

The cowboys content themselves these days by sunning themselves on the deck or in the old gun turrets. Sometimes they read, play cards, or just talk and relax. All of us, I'm sure, will be happy to see our country again in 9 or 10 days.

### **Saturday, July 27**

Today I read, ate, slept and sat around and talked. The food is still really delicious, but I don't have much appetite.

We cowboys are planning a dramatic variety show to be given to the whole ship's crew. Work on this program should give us something constructive to do.

This afternoon the ship stopped for a time. I'm not sure why, some motor trouble, I think. We drifted for several hours. While we were waiting around on the stern, one of the guys was challenged to dive off and take a swim in the inviting deep blue sea. This is strictly forbidden by ship's rules. Yet Bill Rager saw this as his opportunity. A tow rope with a life preserver was rigged to toss out to Bill. I don't know how far the ocean level is below the stern (we're riding pretty high), but when Bill dove off I didn't think he would ever get down there. He went down, down, down, and finally hit the water with a tremendous splash! Fortunately he surfaced quickly and frantically grabbed the life preserver that we had thrown him. Then we vigorously hauled him on board again. I noticed that he was bit shaky after his experience. Just as we got Bill on board the motor started and the massive propeller began to churn the water, and we were on our way. Had the engine been started 5 minutes earlier, I think Bill Rager would still be back there in the Atlantic or he might have been drawn into those mammoth blades. We were thankful that neither of these happened. I hope the captain doesn't find out about the escapade.

### **Sunday, July 28**

This is the eighth day of our return trip. All was peaceful and relaxed until tonight when some of the adventurous cowboys got hold of some homemade brew that they and the crew had been working on. These "alcoholics" have to make their own from whatever they can get hold of, since no drinking is legal on board this working vessel. Once again I am happy that I didn't feel it necessary to join the boisterous bickering party of these cowboys and crew. I played games most of the day with my closest friends, Carroll Miles from Salem, Ohio, and Ralph Shank from Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania. They are two really nice guys. Since this is Sunday, we had our special dinner, which always consists of mashed potatoes, gravy, corn, chicken, apple pie and ice cream. Not bad for a bunch of farm boys out in the middle of the ocean.

Tonight they say we are to pass near the Azores. Wish we could stop and see them.

### **Monday, July 29**

The weather is now beginning to warm up as we head southwest. Today most of us cowboys spent the time sunning ourselves in the after gun turrets (we have fore and aft gun turrets, but no guns are mounted now). The ocean sun burns quickly, so we are careful. The time seems to be moving slowly but surely. All the boys are anxious to hit the States again. We've had a lot of time to play chess, Rook, checkers and card games. I feel fine again, except I am getting rather soft sitting around like this every day now.

### **Tuesday, July 30**

Practically the entire day I spent just looking at the blue and sparkling ocean. I never seem to tire of it. With a clear sky like today and a bright sun the ocean, mixed with small whitecaps, is extremely beautiful. This afternoon I sighted a small school of spouting whales. These mammals

of the sea are exciting to observe as they roll and pitch and surface and spout. I wonder where they have been and where they're going and how they survive out there.

This evening after chow our whole gang of cowboys got together on the top of Hold Number 3 for a picture-taking session. Members of the crew used our cameras to take pictures. I hope my Baby Brownie camera is working OK. After the pictures we just all sat around and talked all night long.

### **Wednesday July 31**

This is the last day of July. If the Young Peoples Institute (youth convention) of the church is held at Sebring, Ohio, the same time this year as last, I'd like to be at home now to be there. I'll just have to miss it, I guess. It was so much fun last year.

The month of July has gone fairly rapidly for me, but it has been full and exciting. I've had more interesting and broadening experiences this past month than any previous month I can remember.

This travel experience, I am beginning to see and feel, has been of tremendous benefit to me. The more I reflect on it the happier I am that I have had the opportunity to participate.

Today I took a long sun bath, too long in fact, so that I am somewhat burned. I'll have to refrain from this for a while now, but I expect to have a real sailor's tan when we hit the U.S. on or about August 6. I'm sleepy—no reason to be—so after a game of Rook I think I'll hit the sack.

### **Thursday, August 1**

Five more days! Then we'll be back to good old civilization if nothing happens. The latest word aboard ship is that we are to arrive back in the Chesapeake Bay area on Tuesday, August 6. Exactly where we are to dock no one seems to know.

I have begun to get interested in the game of chess and learning to play it better each day. Once in a while I even win!

But this life of eating, sleeping, reading and playing is getting a little boring. I guess I can hold out for five more days.

### **Friday, August 2**

Rev. Longenecker, our preacher-barber-cowboy, packed up his barber tools today, he says for the last time aboard ship. I don't know how many free haircuts this congenial guy gave during the trip, but a lot. Everyone is busily studying maps and making plans on how to get home the fastest when we hit port. I think I'll wait until tomorrow to get packed up.

Last night we had the great dramatic variety show given by cowboys and crew under the ship's lights on hatch number three. It was performed before everyone on board, including the officers. Some parts of the show were very amusing, others got pretty crude. At any rate it was a much appreciated diversion for all and promoted good comradeship.

This evening after supper I had the opportunity to visit with the ship's crew in the engine room. The massive diesel engine located deep at midship is amazing to see in operation. It's a little more complicated than our John Deere tractor motor at home! How do they keep that thing running?

### **Saturday, August 3**

In one month I will be 18 years old. It hardly seems possible that I'll have to register for the military draft already; 18 used to seem so far away.

I've been away from home now about two months, the longest ever, and I am anxious to get back, not homesick you understand. Lack of full social life seems to be my trouble though, and I am anxious to see some decent-looking girls again.

I played Carroll several games of chess today. I won some games, too! We had our nightly game of Rook, which is getting to be a regular habit. Carroll, Bub, Tex, Zettle and Emmel and I are the Rook fiends on board. We're playing all the time.

Had one of my many chats with the ship's purser—he handles the details of expendable supplies on board for a trip. He likes to treat me to candy bars and stuff; sort of wants to be like a father to this little boy far from home. He's quite a character, but I appreciate his company.

### **Sunday, August 4**

I got up late this morning and fooled around packing and reading. I never even went topside during the morning. We had some light squalls, so weather on deck was not very good. I did the usual things today. Everyone is very eager now to reach home.

### **Monday, August 5**

The sun was out again today after several days of squalls and clouds. Our officers heard through ships radio today that the cattle boat *Dudley T. Riddle*, on which my crew of cowboys was originally to go, had rammed an American passenger liner in fog on the English Channel causing the liner to sink. The *Riddle* is still afloat, but has put in at an English port. The crew has been sent ashore. That would have been an interesting ship to be on. Coming out of Danzig we had seen the *Riddle* grounded near Gdynia, also. That ship really has had its problems!

As we near port one hears lots of rumors, but we hope this is the last day and night at sea. I'm going to bed early so I'll be ready to disembark from the good ship *Robert W. Hart*, come tomorrow.

### **Tuesday, August 6**

This evening we were able to kiss this good "old" Liberty ship goodbye. Early this morning we saw a big old battleship anchored out at sea. I reckoned then that we were not far from land. As we moved on, more and more vessels showed up. After lunch we spotted a whole convoy of navy ships (probably about 50) evidently out for maneuvers from Norfolk, Va.

We saw lots of porpoises and dolphins all day. I enjoyed watching them at the bow of the ship for several hours. They are really water clowns.

At about 4:00 p.m. land was sighted dead ahead and a cowboy shout went up! After taking on a pilot at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay we learned that we would be docking at Portsmouth, Virginia. After supper a U.S. public health boat came out and we were given a superficial examination. A nice little tug then escorted us into dock at about 8:30 p.m. Customs officials came aboard right away, but never even investigated us or our quarters.

Carroll and I have decided to go home together, since he lives near Salem, Ohio. We called the Portsmouth train and bus stations and decided it would be best to take the 9:20 p.m. bus to

Washington, D.C. We would arrive there at 4:50 a.m. and then wait until 7:30 a.m. to proceed to Pittsburgh, then home.

Our trip home was without major incident. During our 3-hour wait in Washington, D.C., I enjoyed revisiting some of the sites I had seen in May on my senior class trip. The trip to Pittsburgh was scenic. I was very impressed with the growth of farm crops that I had forgotten about since I had left in June. I was very tired when I arrived in Pittsburgh at 4:30 p.m., August 7. I had to wait until 7:20 that night to get a bus to Wooster, where I arrived at about midnight. I wanted to get home quickly, so I hired a taxi to go the 8 miles to the good old farm safe and sound. I went to bed for a long sleep, to dream about that colorful two-month voyage on a cattle boat to far-off Poland.

## **Much later**

Perhaps the cowboy experience on a horse boat remained in Art's mind and led him to suggest that we accept a term with MCC after his retirement from 30 years of teaching. I was eager to accept this new venture. While working in Akron, PA, in the Global Education office, we led workshops and gave talks in community and church settings concerning environmental and hunger issues.

Meeting with a group at a senior center in Lititz, PA, we discussed the depleting sources of gas and oil, using a movie to present facts. Discussion following the presentation raised this comment by one gentleman: "I don't believe God would ever allow humankind to use all the oil he has provided." We had more discussion, but there was no way to change his mind. Discussion ended when we joined the group for lunch.

In the course of informal visiting, one man thanked me for being with the group. I asked his name and he replied, "Levi Weaver." "Levi B. Weaver?" I asked. "Yes." "And did you by chance accompany ships with livestock to Poland?" Again, the answer was "Yes."

Art, who was in conversation nearby, became interested and came to Levi's side. He introduced himself as a member of a 1946 ship to Poland. They found they were on the same ship. Mrs. Weaver soon joined the conversation.

The Weavers and we exchanged addresses and agreed we would get together for more conversation.

Several weeks later a phone call came from a woman who attended church with the Weavers, inviting us to dinner with the Weavers. One of the cowboys on the Hart was her brother. He, Richard Musselman, lived in Souderton, PA. We, along with the brother and his wife, were invited for dinner at the Weavers' home in Lititz.

After a delicious dinner, Art, Levi and Richard spent the evening reminiscing in a corner of the living room. We four women sat in another corner discussing our families, work, hobbies, etc., until we ran out of topics. The men went on and on. Richard had enjoyed his first cowboy experience and signed up for additional trips. He was so fascinated by the sea that he later joined the navy.

Forget that statement about the earth's limitless supply of oil. Meeting Levi B. and Mrs. Weaver was a highlight into the past that made the presentation at the Lititz Senior Center memorable.

Jocele T. Meyer  
January 2014

## The HART-BEAT

Being an account of the fifth voyage of the good ship, SS *Robert W. Hart* on her journey from Baltimore to Danzig with a cargo of vicious horses and frightened men between June 29 and August 6 in the year of our Lord one thousand one hundred and forty-six.

After weighing anchor and inching her way out of Chesapeake Bay, the *Hart* found the Atlantic calm and hot. The warmth from the Gulf Stream rushed down the funnel-less ventilator trunks casting an aura of heat waves about the dimly lighted dungeons where horse bit man and bit back. Curses and shrieks mingled with the hooves on decks and backboards. Feedings and watering times—twice each day—marked daily, though not always gaily, on the field, accepted, albeit somewhat reluctantly at times, and blow for blow returned, flesh for flesh and blood for blood. The scars of battle were manfully received and in turn forgiven.

The first three days presented the major problems. Seemingly the whole of Olympus was arrayed against us and one, complexity followed the bent of the first, stalking about the three hatches with the immemorable determination of an income tax collector. Death crept in, about like Jesse Owens, ably assisted by our two veterinarians armed with scalpel and anti-hemorrhagic serum.

Various and devious were the methods used to coax and wheedle, and otherwise coerce the slaving-jawed renegades into a vacuous ? of amiability. The strength of the halters seemed to be that of a rubber band. Recourse to a lariat was not only an emotional bracer but a lifesaving necessity. City farmers became sensational rope-slingers, and senators sons were not safe from surreptitiously flung dung. Days were spiced by the setions[?] of the leather-lunged and gravel-voiced Bos'n, more than amply provisioned in his store of [?/] epithets who found everything imperfect and nothing well done. But his growl was only a blazon for an emulsified cardiac region.

We crept through the Kiel Canal, where women are women and men like men. As the horses were straining at the bit, we had no time to stop, much to the disappointment to all hands. Soon Poland was sighted and we nudged our way into the dock with the record of 28 horses and 4 cows lost. The last mare upon hearing Polish for the first time gave up the ghost rather than face the arduous task of learning a new language. Poor thing! And she was only five.

Dr. Lieberman reports that the Polish officials commend this group upon their loss of animals.

Dr. Pavlov ?? “When you have homogenized hay fortified with ??, sulfonamides in the hands of Jiggs and Jones, and fellows who feed their own muscle and some to supplement an animals ration, then you are bound to have gratifying results. Honestly though, Dr. Lieberman and I wish to thank all you men for your splendid cooperation throughout the entire voyage. We hope that all of you have in some way profited from this trip.”

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Most of you have made this voyage for an exciting experience. Others have come with the idea of doing what they could to aid the unfortunate people of Europe. It is more than commendable to have seen how each and every one of you did his job despite unfavorable conditions. I hope that all of your expectations have been fulfilled and that you will have many fond recollections of this trip. Levi B. Weaver, Supervisor

## Weaver Poem about Crew

Our Captain Anderson is man of charm  
Especially when the sea is calm.  
Veteran mariner, man with a smile  
Is Chief Mate Sorenson of Staten Isle.  
And, of course, when conditions are misty  
Yonder is our navigator Mr. Christy.  
Mr. Schertle is our excellent Third Mate,  
But will he ever get his first mate?  
Chief Engineer Kennedy is lots faster  
Than that engine of which he is master.  
The apples are piling up in Spark's room  
Sea Biscuit is gone and Mr. Palmer's in gloom.  
Chief Steward Ruth gathers the alien corn  
To provide us fare that none would scorn.  
The "slop chest" is shut for it is vacant and bare  
Mr. Holeridge, the Purser, rests in his chair.  
Baptiste, our "deck" nurses wenches and winches.  
Bos'n Henry Wilson, a benign, noble sort  
Whose alertness and forgiveness are most noted in port.