

# ***MY TRIP TO POLAND IN 1946 WORKING ON A UNRRA SHIP***

***UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND REHABILITATION ADMINISTRATION***

***I sailed on the 350' liberty ship The John L. McCarley with over 800 horses on three decks. I worked Hatch # 2-C deck.***

***This was copied from the diary I recorded every day of the journey.  
The Photos were give to me by fellow seaman.***

***David H. White***

## ***UNRRA***

The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration founding document was signed by 44 countries in the White House in Washington, November 9, 1943. Although the UNRRA was called a "United Nations" agency, it was established prior to the October 24 1945 founding of the United Nations. The explanation for this is that the term "United Nations" was used at the time to refer to the Allies of World War II, having been originally coined for that purpose by President Roosevelt in 1942.

Unlike the Brethren Service Committee, UNRRA had vessels available for the 200,000-plus head of livestock and other relief goods they planned to ship—but they had no hustlers to herd their horses, heifers and mules across the ocean. The problems of both agencies were solved when BSC agreed to provide cattle attendants for UNRRA shipments and UNRRA agreed to provide shipping space for Brethren livestock. BSC extended an invitation to the Mennonites and other denominations to join them in this venture. Nearly 1,000 Mennonite men and boys, ages 16 to 60-plus, responded over the two years of UNRRA shipments that began July 24, 1945.

*It is a miracle that of the 73 UNRRA cattle ships, which made a total of 360 trips, only one was lost*—and that one to a mine in the harbor of Trieste, Italy. The crew was saved, but the cargo was lost.

If the dangers were known ahead of time, it was the invincibility and naiveté youth and the commitment of older men to the purpose of their trips that led them to sign up for the journeys. For their services they were paid one cent per month by the Merchant Marines to make them legal members of the ship's crew, plus \$150 per trip by UNRRA.

Any unpleasanties of the trips were far outweighed for most cowboys by their shore leave experiences. 'We Couldn't believe what we were seeing': The city of Danzig (now Gdansk), Poland, was obliterated in World War II and was still piled with rubble a year after war's end. The weather often created hazards. Ships ran aground or collided with other ships in dense fogs, got stuck in ice in the severe Baltic winter of 1946-47 and were tossed around like corks on angry seas.

"Battlefield scenes sobered the cowboys. "To us young teenagers just off the farm or from small country towns and from very sheltered lives, it was quite an eye opener,"

## From the Diary of David H. White 1946



United States



Poland

In the early spring of 1946 in my sophomore year at Lancaster Mennonite High School, I heard that Brethren Service was hiring 16 year old and older men to work on cattle ships, taking cows and horses to war torn Europe.

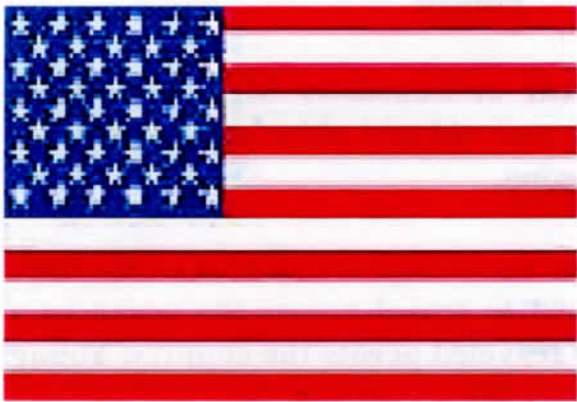
I talked my parents into signing the papers for me to take a trip on a cattle ship. In 1946 it was a great experience for a 16 year old to travel across the ocean to a foreign country . Most people, unless wealthy, ever traveled across the country. Young people were lucky to get farther then the eastern shore for a vacation.

I have many pleasant memories of the experiences, meeting many people, seeing many sights, the ruins of the war and the faces of the children, when we gave them apples and candy. It also gave me a lot of self confidence and courage to try many new things in life.

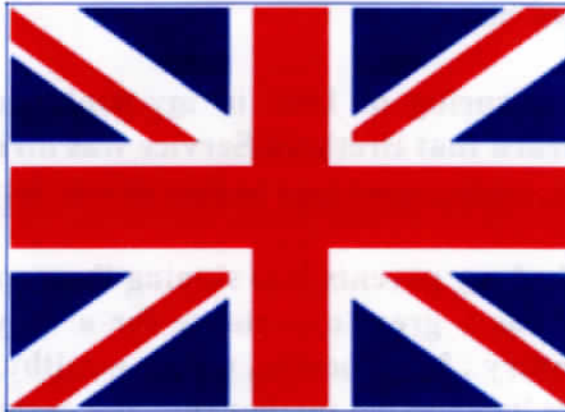
**This was not a Mission Trip but rather a High Adventure with a mission**

This story is from the diary of David H. White and the photos were sent to me by fellow ship mates. I had no camera at that time. I bought a good used camera while in one of the locks of the Kiel Canal from a German man, for two packs of cigarettes. We could get a carton of Camel, Lucky Strikes, PM and other brands of cigarettes for \$1.00 in the ships store. I used that camera until I came home from the Korea War in 1952. All we had at that time was black and white film and not many flash cameras or telephoto lens.

# Flags of Nations on trip to Poland 1946



**United States**  
**Newport News, VA**



**England**  
**White Cliffs of Dover**



**Germany**  
**Kiel Canal**



**Poland**  
**Danzig**

## From the Diary of David H. White 1946

My trip on a UNRRA ship to Danzig, Poland at the age of 16. An outstanding experience

July 13, 1946:

Worked for Henry Nissley. Received a telegram. To Report to the Henry Linder Stockyards, Newport News, VA

June 14, 1946:

Worked around home and got ready for my trip

June 15, 1946:

Worked around home. Grampa and Gramma Hurst and Aunt Kathryn were here for supper.

Sunday, June 16, 1946:

Was at Hammer Creek S.S. and church. Was at home this afternoon. I left for Newport News this evening from Lancaster by Trailway bus, I didn't get much sleep tonight. (I didn't know anyone else on the bus and the people I was with in port and on the ship, were men I met on the trip. No one from home was on the ship.)



June 17, 1946:

Left Washington, DC at 3 A.M. Arrived in Newport News around 9:30 A.M. I took a ferry boat to Norfolk for my passport pictures and Seamen papers. Slept at the Y.M.C.A. in Norfolk. And I had a very good sleep

June 18, 1946:

I was the first one in line for my Seamen Papers. Came back to Newport News about noon and had my name on the list. Slept at the U.S.O. We set up cots in the Gym, Which was also used for dancing. They would only start setting up the cots after 10:30 PM and after 11:30 PM on dance nights and you had to be out by 8 AM because they used the Gym for other actives.. They did serve a breakfast.

June 19, 1946:

Started meeting many strangers. Slept most of the day Stayed at the USO tonight. We had a dance tonight. Was at the BSC to see what is new.

June 20, 1946

Slept at the USO last night. Was at the BSC. Earl Mohler, also a LMHS grad. went aboard ship. Met John Knox from Phoenix, AZ

June 21, 1946

Went to see a show. As a Mennonite youth, this was my first movie in a theater. It was "Casablanca", starring the Marx Brothers. It was humorous. Slept at the Catholic Martine Club. It was a large dormitory with double decked steel bunks and a very quiet

## From the Diary of David H. White 1946

place. You could go to bed at 9:30 PM.. With clean bedding, they also had clean showers, and you could get a very good breakfast. Slept in the next bunk to John Weaver. (He graduated from LMHS this year) Slept good tonight. Getting tired of port.

June 22, 1946

Went to report at the BSC. I was told to report again on Monday at 2 P.M. to be assigned to a ship. Slept at the CMC. Was at a show tonight.

Sunday, June 23, 1946

Clear and warm. John Weaver and I went to the Newport News Mennonite Mission this morning and this evening. Was at a show this afternoon. (wasn't any good.)

June 24, 1946

Stayed at the CMC last night and tonight. Was assigned to the USS John L. Mc Carley a 350' liberty ship. and to go aboard Wednesday. Went to a good show tonight.

June 25, 1946

Hot. Hitch hiked to Williamsburg today. With three other cattlemen ,who were older than me. (I was the youngest cattleman in port without a dad or uncle with him. I was the only kid under 18 on the ship). The Greyhound bus was full going back to Newport News, so us boys from the north sat with the Blacks on the bus. Those proper older southern ladies sure gave us a look of scorn. The attractive young negro girl that I sat next to was a nice pillow After hitch hiking early in the morning and walking all over the free parts of Williamsburg, I fell asleep on the bus. "Hubba Hubba" .

June 26, 1946

Hot with thunderstorms tonight. I got my injections and went on board ship this afternoon. I got a nice bunk room with only 8 in it. It was top side aft and had port holes. Herb Weaver a classmate of mine, and His Dad, from Johnstown, PA came today, met them at the USO.

June 27, 1946

Warm and rainy. Was at the BSC this morning. We are getting good meals on board the ship. Was at the BSC and the USO this afternoon. Talked to Herb Weaver at the Catholic Martine Club, Watched them loading the Paine.

June 28, 1946

Hot. Was out at the BSC this morning. Talked to Herbert Weaver and went shopping this afternoon. Was at the USO. We had a thunderstorm.

June 29, 1946

Hot and rained this afternoon. Went shopping in Newport News this morning. We shoved off from dock. Helped in pulling in the mooring. Wrote some letters tonight.

## From the Diary of David H. White 1946

Sunday, June 30, 1946

Clear, Hot. Was at church services on the ship. Had a turkey dinner and ice cream for supper. Had a sun bath this afternoon and burned my back. We explored the holds. We are going to start working tomorrow.

July 1, 1946

Clear and warm. We prepared the stables for the horses. We were assigned to a fire stations and work stations. I was assigned to Hatch # 2 - C deck. They used three hatches for livestock My hatch had three decks, A-B- C and topside. The Seaman are getting ready to sail. We started to load tonight. We were given a "pep talk" tonight. Went on shore for the last leave.

July 2, 1946

Clear & hot, (heat wave.) Had a thunderstorm this afternoon. They finished loading over 850 horses on three decks and top side about 5 A.M. We had three dead horses. They pulled out into the stream. I was bit on my back by a horse in my hold We are now on the ocean.

July 3, 1946

Rained all day. I was seasick all day, I didn't feel much like working today. I started to eat soda crackers. I am tired of seeing horses and of the waves in the ocean.

July 4, 1946

Rained this forenoon, cleared this afternoon. **I am over sea sickness and love the rocking of the ship.** I am tired of seeing horses and believe I will see them in my dreams. Was bit on my arm.

July 5, 1946

Fair. We must keep water with them at all times and make sure they are standing. We give them hay three times a day. I seen another ship for the first time since we are on the ocean. Clear this afternoon. One horse died in my hold today. Cool this evening We went about 900- miles

July 6, 1946

Clear. Pulled Hay up today. One more horse died in my hold. We put up two large air scoops to cool the holds tonight, .

Sunday, July 7, 1946

Clear. We had church services this morning. Six horses died today. We only had to check the horses every hour. We are 1200 miles from Newport News. I chatted with the Chief Engineer this evening. Hurt my toe with a pitch fork today.

July 8, 1946

Cloudy and colder. The sea is getting rougher. Pulled one of my baby teeth today. Well I must get to bed.

## From the Diary of David H. White 1946

July 9, 1946

Rainy and damp. We almost had a head on collision in the dense fog last night. The other ship didn't want to turn out for us. A horse died in my hold.

July 10, 1946

Cloudy and misty. Two horses died in my hold. We had to sling manure. We picked a "Black Beauty" for a riding horse. We had space on "C" deck which is on the bottom of the ship.

July 11, 1946

Cloudy and cooler. One horse died in my hold. We had an unexpected fire drill this afternoon. We expect to be in Poland by this time next week.

July 12, 1946

Foggy-Cloudy-Rainy. Pulled hay and oats to the upper two decks. I curried some of the horses. We had a regular old hill billy going on in the hold this evening. Expect to see Ireland tomorrow evening.

July 13, 1946

Clear-cool. . We passed the beacon on **Bishop's Rock**, this is the first out-crop of rocks, north west of England. It is almost a four hour ride to the mainland. ,We saw some fishing boats and the southern shore of England this evening One horse died in my hold.

We raided the icebox tonight



**Bishop's Rock is off the Northwest coast of England    White Cliffs of Dover.**

Sunday, July 14, 1946

Clear - cool. We saw land all day. We passed the **White Cliffs of Dover** at twilight. Became acquainted with the Third Mate. Everyone stayed up late this evening.

July 15, 1946

Cold. About 50°. We are now on the North Sea. Land has disappeared again. Pulled oats and hay for the last time. Most of us fellows have a cold. I went to bed early tonight.



## From the Diary of David H. White 1946

July 16, 1946

Cloudy-cool. We saw Germany around 10 A.M. We sailed up the Elbe River towards Hamburg, Germany to the Western entrance of the Kiel Canal. at Brunbüttel, Germany. Where I went on the dock to feel firm ground. We are now sailing in the Kiel. I saw a bombed out oil refinery and several sunken ships. The country side and landscape is beautiful along the Kiel Canal,



Western lock of the Kiel Canal at the Elbe River, Brunbüttel, Germany

**Mid-way through the canal at Rendsburg**



**The Baltic Sea locks at Holtmau-**



July 17, 1946

Clear-cool. We left the Kiel Canal about mid-night and anchored until 8:30 A.M. I saw the coast of Denmark. The trader's were on board last night. We are in the Baltic Sea nearing Nowyport, Poland. The port city of Danzig, Where we will unload the horses..

July 18, 1946

Clear. We docked at Nowyport, Poland tonight. We had shore leave around 11:30 P.M.. Went out town with my friends and the town didn't have any street lights. I saw some other cattle ships and some pretty girls. We walked passed this place and we heard them playing the "Beer-Barrel Pokka". So we went inside and listened to the band. I met a very friendly Russian sailor. I saw the inside of a House of Ill Repute.

## From the Diary of David H. White 1946



The Flag of Poland



July 19, 1946

Cloudy, We are unloading the horses. I went to Nowyport to see the ruins. Some parts are all in ruins. I went to see the Monkam. I talked to John Weaver, he left today. They unloaded the horses into large corrals. When they had about 50 horses they would round them up with a Polish cowboy in front and three other cowboys who could crack a whip and make it sound like a gun going off. When the horses were all excited, someone opened the gate and the front cowboy took off down the road at full speed and the rest of the horses followed while the rest of the cowboys kept chasing them cracking their whips. There were no fences but the horses followed the first horse. They traveled like that for about five miles. It was something to see.

Saturday, July 20, 1946

Clear. Went on the UNNRA tour. We went through the country side to the **Cathedral of Olivia**, which was started in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. They played the organ with 4000 pipes and two consoles for us. We toured the School of Agriculture and Animal Hospital. (This is were the horses from our ship were taken to). It had a Stork nest on the roof. We also toured the ruins of Danzig. 75% of city and population was destroyed and loss in the war. First the Germans pushed the Russian east and then the Russian pushed the Germans west and destroyed the city. The Polish Government had a banquet to thank us for helping them recover. Later this afternoon I went with some older friends to the apartment of a Polish Consulate worker, stationed in Washington, DC, who was home on leave. I read the current issue of the TIME magazine. In the evening I visited the ship



## From the Diary of David H. White 1946

Virginian and talked to Warren Hollinger. (He later owned Hollinger's Market near Ephrata). This evening we raided the pantry of our fresh fruit and candy. We lowered it over the side to the dock. Many families brought their children to see these American ships, we gave some of the fruit and candy to their children. The expressions on the children's faces can never be forgotten and the thank you from the parents was worth the trip and doing without fresh fruit for most of the rest of the trip.. Another cattle man and I saw children standing in the back ground without parents, so we give them fruit and candy also. I often wonder if those folks remember the Americans giving them fruit and candy

Sunday, July 21, 1946

Clear. I went to **GDYNIA** to shop for souvenirs this forenoon. We rode on a double-decker, charcoal fired engine bus . We returned on an old Polish Army truck, packed with passengers. Shore leave expires at mid-night. They have finished cleaning the ship. I saw a lot of pretty girls.

July 22, 1946

Cloudy in forenoon. Clear this afternoon. Every one is on board. Some had a little too much to drink. We left Nowyport at noon. The stalls are washed for us.

July 23, 1946

Cloudy. I saw the Sweden coast line this morning. We put all our equipment on weather deck. I slept most of the day. Saw a lot of ships tonight. Expect to see the Kiel Canal sometime tonight.

July 24, 1946

Clear. We anchored last night and spent all day in the harbor of Kiel, loading ballast with no shore leave. The Plymouth victory ship came in this evening. Slept outside tonight but didn't see much of the canal.

July 25, 1946

Foggy-rained. The Plymouth Victory passed us this morning. We had our group picture taken today. Played volley and medicine ball. Land has disappeared. I'm going to sleep in my cot tonight.

July 26, 1946

Clear. We almost hit a floating mine this forenoon. I saw a floating dead horse. A ship was sunk by a mine about 70 miles east of us today. I saw England this evening. Played Volley and minute ball this afternoon.

July 27, 1946

Clear-cold. Saw England this morning. We have passed the beacon on Bishop's Rock

## From the Diary of David H. White 1946

July 28, 1946

Cloudy and cool. Was at church service this forenoon. Played checkers this afternoon. The Atlantic is rough today. We are getting good shake up.

July 29, 1946

Clear. Rough seas. We are being tossed around like a cork. Played volley and minute ball this afternoon. I was at Vesper services this evening. We only traveled 206 miles in 25 hours.

July 30, 1946

Cold and cloudy.. Rough seas. Read and played checkers. Was at Vesper Services this evening. We are pitching 10 to 15 feet and the waves are about 20 to 25 feet We have 9 foot blades on are propeller and I saw the whole 20 foot propeller out of the water several times. It was fun to walk to the end of the catwalk on the bow of the ship and step off. One time you went up in the air and at other times it seemed like you would never hit the deck. I saw Sharks today

July 31, 1946

Cloudy, rained this afternoon. A strong gale tonight. We made better time today. Slop Chest (ship store) was open tonight, for the last time. Was at Vesper Services tonight.

August 1, 1946

Cloudy and cold. I was on detail this forenoon. The sea is rough again. They made a killing noise tonight. A seaman had appendicitis on a ship near us.

August 2, 1946

Clear today. Had a abandon ship drill. Only one motor ran out the of four boats. We also had a fire drill. The Riddle was badly damaged when it hit another ship. The other ship sank. The accident happened about 200 miles east of us.

August 3, 1946

Clear, cool. Read part of the New Testament this forenoon. Played minute ball this afternoon. Was at Vesper Service this evening. Watched them play cards in Mid-ship later this evening.

August 4, 1946

Clear. The ocean was the smoothest it has ever been on this trip. I was at church this morning and evening. Took a sun bath this afternoon. I saw some sharks this morning.

August 5, 1946

Rained early this morning. Clear this afternoon. Washed our forecastle this forenoon. I was sick today, I got to much sun yesterday. Went to bed early tonight.

August 6, 1946

Clear. We are now headed for Newport News, not New York City. Played medicine & volley ball. Toured the engine room this afternoon. Helped throw water tonight.

## From the Diary of David H. White 1946

August 7, 1946

Clear. We are nearing land. I slept most of the day. Packing my things and read a magazine

August 8, 1946

Clear and hot. Slept and read most of the day. I saw about 100 porpoises this evening. They are very graceful and beautiful to watch. Shaved and showered. Went to the last vesper service on the USS John L Mc Carley. Very touching as we closed the vesper service by singing "God Be With You Until We Meet Again". I have never seen any of the men that were on the ship again or had contact for the last 60 years.

August 9, 1946

We passed Cape Henry this forenoon. Went on shore about 2 P.M. Ate supper at Mrs. Powl and slept at the Catholic Maritime Club. Some of the fellows headed home to night.

August 10, 1946

Left Newport News at noon on a Greyhound bus. Arrived in Washington, DC at 6 PM. We Passed the Capital and Washington Monument. Went to see a show this evening.



U. S Capital



Washington Monument

## From the Diary of David H. White 1946

August 11, 1946

I arrived in Lancaster, PA around 6:30 to 7:00 AM. I called home and told my Dad to meet me at the trolley in Ephrata at 8:30 AM.

I arrived home about 8:45 My baggage was left in York, PA. I went along to S.S. and Church. Most people at church were surprised to see me because they thought I was at sea riding the waves. We went to visit Aunt Mary White this afternoon.



August 12, 1946

Clear. Worked at home today. Applied for a job at the cannery, in Lititz, PA and was told I was too young. **Can you believe that after working on a ship, to Poland.** I returned to my job at Henry Nissley. I have to get accustom to sleeping in my bed at home. There is no rock to this bed. **And home rules are slightly different then in port and on ship.** We picked up my baggage this evening. After a few weeks of working it was back to classes at Lancaster Mennonite High School.

As we were heading home they asked us to sign up for a trip to Greece and then through the Suez Canal to Cape Town, South Africa, for load of Cargo.



Then we would head to New York City. The trip

would take three months at no extra pay. They said if we take this trip they will guarantee us a trip to China, which could take six months.



As I was only 16 I had to get my Dad to sign the papers and give his permission. My Dad's answer was



***"I never had the opportunity for a high school education and all my children will have a high school diploma"***. So that ended my seagoing days.

I did get my High School Diploma as well as all my brothers and sisters

## ***A High Light* of the Trip to Poland**

Saturday, July 20, 1946

This evening we raided the pantry of our fresh fruit and candy. We lowered it over the side to the dock. Many families brought their children to see these American ships. We gave some of the fruit and candy to their children. The *expressions* on the children's faces can never be forgotten and the *thank you* from the parents was worth the trip and doing without fresh fruit for most of the rest of the trip. Another cattle man and I saw some children standing in the back ground without parents, so we gave them fruit and candy also.

I have *often wondered* if any of those folks remember the Americans giving then fruit and candy

By Dave White