

My Cattleboat Experience

by Herbert C. Wenger

I first learned of the cattleboat program in our church paper "The Gospel Herald". I applied by letter and was accepted into the program.

I was taken by car to Philadelphia and from there took a train to Baltimore, Maryland arriving Tuesday December 11, 1945. After receiving my Coast Guard seaman's papers, I was taken to the Church of the Brethren headquarters in New Windsor where I met the 15 other cattlemen and where we spent the night. The next day (12/12/1945) we went back to Baltimore, picked up our completed seamen's papers and got our physical examinations. We were then immunized for typhoid, typhus, tetanus and small pox. Then we boarded the *S.S. Samuel H. Walker*, our home for the next two months. We were stationed in the stern of the ship, in what had been the rear gunner's quarters during the war. We had 3 tiered steel bunk beds.

We spent the rest of Wednesday, Thursday and Friday on board exploring the ship and becoming familiar with the layout. During this time the cargo of hay, oats, fertilizer and straw was being loaded on the ship. Friday evening they started loading the animals.

The Cargo:

Mules- 150

Horses- 150

Cows- 55

Hay- 40 tons

Oats- 27 tons

Fertilizer- 3500 tons

Straw- 11 tons

We sailed at 6 PM Saturday December 15, 1945. By the next morning we entered the Atlantic Ocean and left the Chesapeake Bay behind.

Soon after that is when many of the cattlemen became seasick, including me. It wasn't until several days later that most of the men had gotten acclimated to the rolling and pitching of the ship. From then on seasickness was never a problem no matter how rough the sea became.

That was a good thing because the North Atlantic in the winter has many storms. We experienced storms so severe that waves broke over the bow and the rear of the ship came completely out of the water. During the night in one of those storms I was thrown up in the air and hit the springs of the bunk above me! The ship rolled so far that water came over the sides of the ship. Waves also crashed over the on-deck stalls of the horses and mules. As a result of the cold, wet conditions we lost about 9 horses to pneumonia. Dead animals were thrown overboard. Mules seemed to be made of "sturdier stuff," since we did not lose any mules.

I was assigned to care for mules and horses. I found that horses were easier to care for than mules. When a horse becomes frightened he kicks straight back. However a mule will look where you are and then kick directly at you. We also found out that horses as well as mules will bite! We were fortunate that no one was seriously injured on the trip.

One very difficult job down in the hold of the ship, was walking over stacked hay bales, while the ship was rocking, carrying bales of hay that weighed 150–160 pounds. That was physically the hardest work I had to do.

We were scheduled to go to Athens, Greece, but when we arrived there, the orders were changed and we instead sailed up the Aegean Sea to Kavalla, the seaport for the ancient city of Philippi.

January 9, 1946 we docked at Kavalla, Greece and January 17 we arrived at Heraklion, Crete. At Kavalla and Crete is where the animals and the rest of the cargo were unloaded.

At Kavalla there was extreme poverty. The people were dressed in rags and were very poor. I remember one little boy who came on the ship and went through the garbage can looking for food to take home.

One day we went inland about 10 miles to the ruins of the old Biblical city of Philippi. There were some columns and arches standing and we spent time walking through the ruins. We went through a town just as U.N.R.R.A. was distributing clothing to people who apparently had practically nothing. I was impressed that the women seemed to show the marks of suffering more than the men. Their eyes had a very sad expression and their faces were so drawn. I think that they suffered trying to help their families survive.

I was impressed with the beauty of the island of Crete. The city, however, had extreme damage, but the people seemed to be in better condition than those we saw in Kavalla. Almost all the buildings were damaged: Machine gun holes on the walls and roofs blown off. The Germans bombed the island first and took control, and then the Americans bombed the island and recaptured the island for the Allies. The Cretians were bombed first by their enemies and then by their friends. This is what people told me when I talked with them.

One highlight on Crete was visiting the ruins of the ancient city of Knossos. The records of Knossos go back to about 2500 B.C. Legends say the city was build about 4000 B.C. The city and palace of the King was being excavated and restored. I sat on King Minos throne, a carved stone seat. We also saw the oldest known bathtub, carved out of solid stone!

From Crete we sailed to Casablanca, North Africa stopping on the way at Gibraltar. There were a number of damaged ships in the harbor. Here we took on fuel oil for our return trip. The ship burns 7980 gallons of oil per day. It can carry 504,000 gallons, enough to last 63 days.

We anchored at Casablanca on January 29th. Here we took on iron ore for ballast and water for drinking. We had time to go into the city. The city has a French section and an Arab section. The French part is more attractive and better kept. We saw people of a different culture: Women with their heads and faces covered and both men and women wearing what appeared to be something like sheets.

We took navy men back with us from the war. We were not sure what their attitude would be toward us men who didn't go to war. However, we soon learned that they respected our position and we became friends with some of them. One even gave me his navy work jacket because he didn't have room to pack it. They were so tired of the war and experienced so much death and destruction, that our position seemed to make sense to them. At least that is how I interpreted their attitude.

We experienced a severe storm on the way home and were driven south by the winds. As a result we landed at Savannah, Georgia, February 17, 1946. The next day I received my discharge from the Coast Guard and was soon on my way to Philadelphia on the railroad streamliner the "Silver Meteor." I arrived home on February 19, 1946. This was the conclusion of a very interesting and educational trip. A trip that I hope made life a little better for some war-weary people.

[Cattlemen listed on next page.]

Cattlemen

Robert L. Honeyman
West Milton, Ohio
Church of the Brethren

Edwin E. Yoder
Grantsville, MD
Springs Mennonite

Marvin C. Garis
Souderton, PA
Brethren in Christ

Ernest J. Delp
Larimore, North Dakota
Lutheran Trinity

Otto H. Becker
Mountain Lake, MN
G.C. Mennonite

Otis Yoder
Mylo, North Dakota
Mennonite

Jacob S. Miller
Millersburg, OH
Amish

Henry A. Mullet
Millersburg, OH
Amish

Neil Robertson
Galveston, IN
Brethren

Silas Bowman
Terre Hill, PA
Mennonite

Gilbert R. Merrall
Kokomo, IN
Congregational Christian

Allen Stutzman
Mantua, OH
Mennonite

Paul J. Miller
La Grange, IN
Mennonite

Orval Smucker
Harrisburg, OR
Amish Mennonite

John Kropf Jr
Harrisburg, OR
Amish Mennonite

Herbert C. Wenger
Perkasie, PA
Mennonite