

DIARY OF FIRST VOYAGE TO ECUADOR. FEBRUARY 1939.

Feb. 3rd. Railway journey from Bury tonLiverpool very enjoyable. The snow-covered Pennines glistened in brilliant sunshine. Liverpool, however looked cold, and grey, and uninviting. The sun glimmered over the Mersey, and the tall buildings over on the southern side were just discernible through the thick haze. The s.s. Duchess of Bedford lay at anchor at the water-front; she was flying the "Blue Peter".

Feb. 4th. Very much enjoyed the time spent with Mr. Porter. He and Mr. McMillan of Bootle came to see me off, the latter driving us down to the docks. There I found my luggage dumped in a warehouse instead of being stowed away on board! Not very struck with first sight of ship, and this impression was not improved by the discovery of garbage on lower deck. (This impression however disappeared with better acquaintance, as later the ship was well cleaned up. Ed.) The passengers number ten:- a retired major and his wife, a young engineer taking a large diesel locomotive to La Paz, via Antofagasta, a Scottish merchant returning to the same port, a business man and wife returning to Ecuador, a doctors widow going to her married daughter in Chile, and a very versatile and attractive Frenchman, also a young exiled Viennese Jew.

All aboard at 10 o'clock, anchor weighed, and slowly we are towed out of the Canada dock, No 1 Branch (north) into the Mersey. There is much shouting from officials on land to the pilot on board. An inevitable policeman stands at the end of the jetty. As we passed out into the open water, the officers on land became very excited. A big vessel is proceeding down the Mersey, our pilot implored to slow up, to drop anchor etc., etc. Megaphone messages now become a veritable screech in their urgency, but for all that our pilot might be deaf! On we go. In a few moments it is too late to heed the ~~xxx~~ warning - a large vessel loomed out of the thick fog, amidst many hootings of sirens and much excitement. The two vessels steadily converge, and we are now going across his bows. At the last moment, the other vessel, a large 'Blue Funnel' boat reversed her engines and just managed to hold off until we had passed out of her path. Then both ships dropped anchor, and we had to wait till 2.0 p.m. for our papers. This provided an unexpected last opportunity to get off another batch of mails.

During this waiting time, the fog lifted, and enabled us to watch the many vessels coming and going along the waterway leading to one of the world's greatest ports. 2.0 p.m. At last we are off. Good-bye England. Soon we have passed the docks, and we follow the Lancashire shore with its miles of sand-dunes. After passing the Formby light, however, we strike westwards, and as the evening ~~xxx~~ drew on, we could see the dusky outline of the hills of Denbighshire; still later the Snowdon massif could just be discerned in the failing light, and I thought I could detect Great Orme, and later the familiar outline of Puffin Island passed by, and behind it the mountains behind Conw-ay and Penmænawr. Still later, in the darkness, we passed the lights of Anglesey, Holyhead, Lleyn Peninsula, and finally the Bardsey light.

The sea is slight, and all are feeling well. The strangeness and reserve are beginning to wear off. The wind remains strong and bitterly cold. Retarded watch 46 minutes.

Sunday. Feb. 5th.

Had toast in cabin in lieu of breakfast - for obvious reasons. Felt groggy all day. Ship pitching considerably now. Wind still very strong, but less cold. At ~~lunch~~ lunch, Captain said we were off Queenstown. Visibility not good. Distance run = 220 miles at noon. At about 7.0 p.m. we passed the Fastnet Light - the last sight of Britain. Many passengers would not go out to see it.

Monday. Feb. 6th.

Still very groggy. Seasick once. Barley sugar a great boon. We are now driving across a southerly gale. Ship pitching considerably. Tumblers and many other items take frequent rides across the meal table, and soup in the plate needs careful attention. The diesel loco gave us a considerable list to port side at first, but this has now happily been corrected by water ballast. To-day's run was only 190 miles, and it will be even less to-morrow unless the present gale moderates. The captain (S.C. Grant) and the wireless officer are at our table. They and the major are very interesting conversationalists, the latter telling very interesting and diverting incidents of life in Albania. One vessel seen last night but none to-day as visibility is very poor. Captain says that we shall be on a very unfrequented route, and that he has often made the crossing without seeing any other shipping. The gale is tremendous again to-day. No wonder ~~moisture~~ ocean winds are moisture-laden. One could see the wind literally stripping the surface off the water, and cutting clouds of spray from the crest of every wave and carrying it away as droplets of spray and foam. After tea we ran into a small "bright interval", but the gale persisted and cut our speed down to seven and a half knots. There are marvellous little sea-mountains rising and falling on every hand. The sea is moderating a little.

Position at noon - 50°46' N., 12°41' W. Distance - 190 miles.

Tuesday. Feb. 7th.

A clear morning. Storm clouds round the horizon. The gale continues, and we are pitching heavily. I made my first appearance at the breakfast table this morning. Found it very interesting to watch the apparently effortless flight of gulls into the teeth of so strong a wind. No shipping seen yet, we are off the beaten ~~xxx~~ track. Saw several legless gulls - some fish have had a tough meal.

Position at noon: 49° 11' N., 18° 20' W. Distance 237 miles.
Course S. 66 1/2° W.

Wednesday, Feb 8th.

Position at noon: 47°44' N., 22°34' W. Distance - 190 miles.
Course -

Yesterday, we ~~xxxxx~~ passed a number of secondaries; the ~~xxxxx~~ strong breeze persisted all day, but the sea moderated slightly.

It sounds strange to hear on the English broadcast news about a deep depression out in the Atlantic, and ourselves to be passing through it at the very moment. I much enjoyed standing at the ~~forecastle~~ "foc's'l head" - right up in the bows - this gives quite the best impression of the heaving of the ship. Several times as I faced the stern of the ship, the bows would rise so high that the horizon astern of us would appear above the funnel of the ship. Promenade space here is somewhat restricted - the longest clear straight stretch being only some 30 yds long, hence in order to fulfil the saying 'after supper walk a mile', one must pace up and down some 60 times. What a task after supper!

At about 8.30 p.m. ship's time, we passed the ss. Sandgate, a "tramp" homeward bound from Curaçao. Her light twinkled too much for me to be able to decipher her morse signal to us, but I was able to read our message back to her.

The weather to-day is April-like, but colder, with bright intervals. I have just listened in to the 6.0 news bulletin, but in order to get the signals loud enough, we had to borrow the ship's aerial. For the news, I go to the wireless room; the operator, an Ipswich man, is a very pleasant and entertaining fellow. My legless gulls have become the joke of our table - all are sceptical and whenever anything new or difficult to believe is mentioned, the question comes up - Has it any legs? Also, when we pitch very badly, the bows come up out of the water, and if a wave is just in the right position, it gives the ship a tremendous knock, that makes the whole vessel quiver - the ladies cannot understand this, and the wireless officer just casually remarks, here comes another leg, i.e. dropping on to the deck !!

It has become very stormy and cold this evening, and we are running right into the depression north-west of the Azores, ~~mentioned~~ mentioned on the wireless.

Thursday, Feb. 9th.

Position at noon: $46^{\circ}19' N.$, $21^{\circ}30' W.$ Distance only 147 miles. Course - $S. 55^{\circ} W.$

Last night we ran into a ~~heavy~~ severe gale with very rough seas, and similar weather continued through the greater part of to-day. at times we passed across huge ridges and troughs of water, the distance from crest to crest being from 100 to 300 yards, these conditions last for about half a mile and then we pass a similar distance of choppy water, and then repeat the ridges and troughs. The length of our ship is 140 yards, and as we climb up the approaching ridge, we seem to come to a standstill, and the bows come out of the water; then as we go over the crest, the stern comes out and the propeller traces, though not so much on our vessel with its diesel engines (and governor) as with steam turbines. Huge wave mountains frequent, and often look as though they must swamp the ship. This morning just before breakfast, a large steamer passed us on the starboard horizon, and about six miles away - scarcely visible in the haze. This morning, the captain called me down from the fo'c's'l head, with the remark that he would not want to let a boat down in this sea, etc, etc.

Yesterday, the captain was wondering who could be the "Jonah"

on board his vessel, saying that it was very unusual to have five consecutive days of storms like this!

We ought to have passed the Azores to-day, but we are two days journey behind. The captain now forecasts a long voyage.

There is one other passenger for Guayaquil. We are now threatened with being put off at Colón (Panama Canal), as the MV. Laguna may not call at Guayaquil.

After the gale, only four gulls are left to follow us - or is this connected with the fact that we had "duck" for dinner last night?

It is unbelievable that for the last 24 hours we have only averaged six knots, about seven miles an hour !!

Friday Feb. 10th

Position at noon: $44^{\circ} 35' N.$ $28^{\circ} 33' W.$ Distance 165 miles.

Course - S. $51^{\circ} W.$

A real April day after another gale at night, with "anvil" clouds, night lightning, and atmospheric. Storm clouds followed by long bright intervals, sea moderating. No ships seen to-day.

Saturday Feb. 11th.

Position: (Noon) $42^{\circ} 26' N.$ $32^{\circ} 09' W.$ Distance - 203 miles.

Course - S. $50 \frac{1}{2} W.$

To-day it is just like May, with sunshine all the day long until evening. Air very soft and warm. We passed the Azores 150 miles away on our port beam. Capt. Grant says we are 600 miles behind schedule. The awning stays were put up to-day. This augurs well for the weather prospects; later I heard that the captain has heard from ships ahead that the storms are now out of the way.

Mileage for the first week $\frac{1}{2}$ 1352 miles.

Sunday Feb. 12th.

Position at noon $40^{\circ} 42' \frac{1}{2} N.$ $37^{\circ} 06' W.$ Distance 245 miles.

Course S. $65^{\circ} W.$

After Saturday's promise of better weather, we were ~~disappointed~~ disappointed to be in the thick of another even if the last depression! Another gale, the ship very violent again; once more we have to chase our tumblers and other items of table ~~ware~~ ware across the table. I felt rather "at sea" again to-day!

Monday Feb. 13th.

Position at noon: ~~40° 42' N. 37° 06' W.~~ Distance

$38^{\circ} 37' N.$ $41^{\circ} 06' W.$ Distance 223 miles.

Course - S. $55 \frac{3}{4} W.$

To-day began well, but in the afternoon we ran into another storm, but with less wind. Sea now moderating considerably.

The captain now no longer threatens transshipment at Colón, but has decided to land us at the little oilfield port of La Libertad unless he picks up cargo for Guayaquil at Panama.

A passenger saw two flying fish this morning.

The wind continues chilly, but the ~~sun has~~ sun has been lovely to-day. Passengers were all able to sit out on the ~~deck~~ *the deck.*

and all the passengers have been able to sit out on deck in the sunshine - for the first time.

After such a voyage as this, no one could ever again doubt ~~the~~ the existence of the south-west anti-trades !! We have now had eight days experience of them, and at gale force most of the time too !

Orion is now getting well up in the southern sky, and new stars fill the southern horizon.

As I write this, it is 8.0 pm. by ship's time, and 11.30 pm. at home. We still get time signals and hear Big Ben ~~on the ordinary wave-lengths~~ though the ordinary wave-lengths are now out of range and hopelessly obliterated by atmospherics.

Tuesday, Feb. 14th.

Position at noon:- 36° 07' N. 45° 34' W. Distance 261 miles.
Course - S. 55° W.

Summer at last! A perfect day. Wind veered last night into a westerly quarter, and to-day through north to north-east. Can this be the beginning of the Trade Winds ? With the change of wind, the air is very cool out of the sun, but the sunshine is glorious ! To-night the stars are grand, the Pleiades are nearly overhead. Later this evening, I hope to pick up Quito, Ecuador on the wireless officer's short wave set. Deck games put out to-day. No ships seen for about a week now. One of my legless gulls has been the ships constant companion to-day.

Wednesday Feb. 15th. 1939.

Position at noon:- 33° 18' N. 50° 04' W. Distance 278 miles.
Course - S. 52 1/2° W.

Thursday Feb. 16th. 1939.

Position at noon:- 30° 10' N. 54° 27' W. Distance 292 miles
Course S. 50° W.

Our average speed now at last exceeds twelve knots

We have had two perfect summer days: blue sky, sunshine, light breezes from the north-east. Heard Quito Wednesday night when 1300 miles north-east of the Mona Passage. Saw ten flying fish to-day; two kinds were noted, one very small, about the size of a butterfly, and with a wing-spread of similar shape - whilst others of the little ones resemble dragonflies; the other type are larger - about the size of herring. After prolonged watching, I am satisfied that they do actually fly as well as merely gliding after a fast lump out of the water. Still no ships seen, though visibility excellent, and horizons now more distant on account of the sea being much smoother.

The swimming bath was put up yesterday, and filled with sea water to-day; it measures about 12' x 18' x 6', and takes about thirty tons of water. This morning, the awnings were put out, and the passengers have all adopted real summer attire. The crew have now for some days been chipping off the old paint of the rear part of the ship, and are now repainting it. To-day, we often cut across long lines of sea-weed - gulf weed - which suggest the

the existence in this part of the ocean of a marked current from the west.

The bright star below ~~Antares~~ Sirius is Canopus.

Friday, Feb. 17th.

Position at noon:- 26° 51' N. 58° 38' W. Distance 297 miles.
Course S. 48° W.

At 3.30 am. the ss. Tarapa passed us on our port side and was brightly lit up; homeward bound for Rotterdam. Venus was just rising above the horizon and looked like the light of another distant ship. In the afternoon, a large tanker passed on our starboard side, eastwardbound. Another perfect day; blue sky, small white clouds, little wind, sea calm, very hot. And all the time we go ploughing onwards through this endless ocean at twelve knots, that is roughly fourteen miles per hour. Had a very enjoyable dip this morning. Cabin temperature 80° F.

Saturday, Feb. 18th.

Position at noon:- 23° 27' N. 62° 26' W. Distance 290 miles.
Course S. 45 1/2° W.

Awoke at 2.30 am.; very close; took a cooling walk on deck; air deliciously cool; stars wonderful. Scorpio rising in the east but very much more of it than we ever see in England. Noticeably hotter to-day, cabin 85° F.. Flying fish now very plentiful, and often seen in shoals. The absence of insects in this warm is a great boon.

Captain now tells us that he has NO cargo for Guayaquil, and unless more is shipped at Panamá, we shall have to wait there for another vessel (i.e. at Colón). We crossed the TROPIC OF CANCER a few minutes before noon to-day. (It was not very clearly marked!) Castor and Pollux now pass right overhead at night.

Mileage at Noon, Saturday:- 1352 + 1886 = 3238 in the fortnight.

Whilst sweltering in the heat to-day, one wondered what it was like at home? ? Rain, wind, snow, or frost? Were you sitting over a glowing fire, etc., etc? But at 9.20, I heard the short wave news bulletin which spoke of lovely spring-like sunshine, and I was so glad to think that you were enjoying the sun too. Also, I pictured Graham taking his family out to Sutton Park for the birthday treat!

Sunday, Feb. 19th.

Position at noon:- 19° 53' N. 66° 04' W. Distance = 295 miles.
Course S. 43 1/2° W.

Another sweltering day. We hurry out as soon as possible to get the air on the deck. It is much too hot to have ~~any~~ one's quiet time in the cabin, so one enjoys it in the refreshingly cool breeze that blows across deck each morning. There were many excitements to-day, especially as we are due to sight land in a few hours, but alas, probably not until after dark. Just after lunch, a shark swam alongside for some minutes, its movement was very stately, and without any effort it exceeded our speed. Two vessels passed us to-day, both apparently bound for S. Juan, the principal port of Puerto Rico which we have been passing (though

not within sight) all the afternoon. As soon as we came out of dinner this evening, the rays of the first Mona light were visible and later the light itself came into view, and we passed it at about 7.30 ship's time - exactly a fortnight to the hour after passing the last light on the coasts of Britain. We were surprised to learn subsequently from the captain that we were 19 miles from the lighthouse. This light is the first that ships see as they approach the Mona passage between the islands of Santo Domingo and Puerto Rico, by which they pass out of the Atlantic Ocean into the Caribbean Sea. It was thrilling to feel that there was new land all around us on every hand, and I thought of my many missionary friends, and sympathised with them warmly (in more senses than one!) The first Mona Light is at the north-west corner of the Island of Puerto Rico. We could see a number of land lights on either side of the lighthouse. Thus we have seen our first sight of America. At about 10.30 pm. we passed the second Mona Light, situated on Mona island itself - at about a distance of five miles. During the late evening, torrential rain fell. We have seen two species of ~~new~~ birds that I have never seen before, one the "bo's'n bird" is like a slightly built sea-gull with a very long slender tail, the other was also long-tailed but was larger, and black with a white throat.

Monday, Feb. 20th.

Position at noon:- $16^{\circ} 44' N.$ $66^{\circ} 04' W.$ Distance 295 miles.
Course S. $50 \frac{1}{2}^{\circ} W.$

We are now in the Carriibbean Sea, and very hot weather is promised us here by those who have gone before. The breeze this morning is however definitely fresher. It is very surprising that we have not yet fallen in with the true Trade Winds, as we have already passed the winter limit line on the admiralty charts. The weather continues absolutely perfect, with blue sky and small white clouds as for some days past, except that at nightfall, very heavy clouds collect to the south of us. Sun very hot. Nothing eventful to-day. One again thinks of missionary friends, who have this heat but without the cooling effect of the sea and the steamer moving ~~thru~~ through the water. This afternoon, a tramp steamer eastward bound passed us on port beam, but we have seen no land, and will not now until we reach Panamá. A delightfully cool breeze has sprung up this afternoon from the east or south-east. Between the clouds, the stars are brilliant and beautiful, Orion is now almost overhead, and each night the zodiacal light is very bright, and at 9.0 pm. it extended up the ecliptic from the western horizon as far as the Pleiades. I feel still more sure that in the early morning I can see the Southern Cross in the south, but cannot be certain until I can have access to a star atlas. Venus throws a broad band of yellow light across the sea.

We have passed Porto Rico just too soon to witness the manoeuvres of the U.S.A. Navy.

Tuesday Feb. 21st.

Position at Noon:- $13^{\circ} 38' N.$ $74^{\circ} 20' W.$ Distance 310 miles.
Course S. $53^{\circ} W.$

Last evening's cool breeze persisted through the night, and made sleep much more possible; and throughout to-day we have enjoyed the same current of cool air, so much so that I almost needed a jacket

while sitting out on deck after lunch. This is most unusual for the Caribbean Sea. Signs that we are approaching port are evident on all hands now. Yesterday they took down the swimming bath, and to-day the derricks are being erected for the cranes; all twelve in the after part of the vessel were put up this morning and four in the fore part, and no doubt the ~~remaining~~ remaining eight will be put up later; also the painting is going on apace. Another tanker passed up this morning and undoubtedly had come through the canal. We are now opposite the coast of Colombia, and if it were extra clear we ought to see the mountain range of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta; even though they are a hundred and fifty miles away, I judge that the summits should be above our horizon, but clouds intervene.