

# Box Car Train Loaded With Poles Speeds Over Frozen Russian Wastes

By STEFAN HELLERSPERK

(Continued from Last Week)

In the meantime, Kupla's wife, had learned that her husband had been left in the camp because he was sick, and went in search of him. Melania stood there, quietly, immobile. She did not cry or sob like the others. She just stood there petrified with suffering while her haggard eyes glanced over our cars, over the soldiers spouting the vilest language in the Bolshevik lexicon. These soldiers seemed to vie with one another in the dubious eloquence they could achieve in addressing their heartbroken audience.

Some shots rang out. A few cars away, the soldiers were shooting at some women who had tried to approach the train. Melania instinctively stepped back a few feet. Suddenly I saw one of the provision aides from the transport—a Russian named Nazimov—pass by. He had already been detailed to watch over our company in the camp. He was busily recording the number of people in each boxcar. I asked him to hand me the package Melania was holding. He went up to her, took the parcel and handed it to me through the bars. I could see Melania was pleased. She smiled. Just then Kupla's wife came up to Melania. She had failed to find her husband at the camp. They had already shipped him out.

I was happy to be able to look at Melania, but I also realized what she must be going through. I wanted her to leave, especially since she was risking insults, blows or even being shot at by the brutal soldiers. I requested her to go away. She hesitated. I entreated her to go. I called a few words of such comfort as I could muster to her. What could I say? The evidence of her eyes belied anything I might tell her. She waved to me, whispered something I could not make out, put her arm through Mrs. Kupla's and slowly walked away, turning around frequently for a last look at me. They walked through the field, their figures growing smaller and smaller as the space between us widened. It was an awful moment. I felt unutterably sad and for the first time since my arrest tears filled my eyes.

We had not been scheduled to depart until the following morning, but unexpectedly, around noon, they coupled a locomotive to our transport and began to try out the train. We had not been given anything to drink since we left the camp the day before. So when the train stopped for a moment near some buildings in front of which a group of women had gathered, I asked them to give us some water. They were surprised to hear good Polish, for they had been told the transport consisted of Germans. Taking advantage of the absence of a guard in front of the car, I explained the situation to them. One of the women ran into the house and came out with a big bottle of milk. She ran up to our car to hand me the bottle. At that very moment I saw a soldier strike her with his gun and knock her down. The bottle rolled onto the sand. A well placed kick by the soldier and the bottle broke into many pieces. The woman picked herself up and limped back to the other women. I called out an apology to her for the treatment she had received on my account.

"That's all right, don't worry," she called, "You've been in the Home

Army, you've fought for Poland, you've survived five years of Nazi slavery. God willing, you'll also survive this period of "freedom" now."

They were comforting words. We often thought of them in the long months ahead of us.

The train sped through the frozen countryside. Whether we were bound? None of us knew the answer. Some claimed we were on our way to Lubartow, where there was supposed to be a special camp for Home Army personnel. But, in that case, we couldn't explain the presence of Germans among us. Some—the pessimists—predicted we were being shipped to Russia. I myself began to incline toward the latter theory. I based my judgment on the long-range preparations made for the boxcars.

We passed all small stations without stopping. The city of Siedlce. The train came to a stop and soon pulled out again. Our fate would be decided beyond Lukow, where the railroad lines separate, one set of tracks continuing straight ahead in the direction of Brzesz-on-the-Bug (that is, toward Russia), while the other turns south toward Lublin. If we headed for Lublin, we would remain in Poland. Would we turn south? . . .

Lukow. We passed the station. The tracks separate some two hundred yards past the station proper. We could see the tracks describing a graceful arch southward. Perhaps Providence would let us remain on Polish soil. The bend was drawing closer, ever closer. We held our breath. The locomotive should be turning already. Were we really going to Russia, after all? The wheels of the train clattered over the juncture in the tracks. The southward track grew farther and farther away from us. With it disappeared our forlorn hope that we would not be deported into Russia. A death-like silence settled over our box-car.

My soldiers and I held a council of war and decided to attempt a get-away. Various plans were proposed. In the end, we agreed that we would try to escape by way of the door. One of the men had managed to secrete a sturdy knife during the inspection. We planned to cut a hole near the lock, and put a hand out through that hole in order to loosen the screw holding the lock. We would then jump through the open door. But we had to give up the idea of flight that night for it was too late.

It was a bright moonlight night. We went to bed as usual snuggling close to each other to ward off the penetrating cold. All of a sudden we were awakened by the sound of shooting. The trains screeched to a halt. We were close to Trespel, near Brzesz-on-the-Bug. We could hear the barking of dogs, the shouts of Russian soldiers and the volley of machine gun fire. As we were locked inside, we did not learn until morning what that night's shooting was about. Five persons had escaped from one of the cars by breaking the bars in the window of their box-car. The guards of the transport who were located on special platforms on the buffers on the outside of every other car had seen them. (Each of these platforms held two armed soldiers, each of whom guarded one car.) They killed three in the act of escaping. The other two were

caught after the train had stopped and were clubbed to death. The commander of the transport ordered the door to the delinquent car opened, called out the car leader who happened to be my friend Michael, and shot him on the spot. Michael was shot for not having prevented the flight.

The following morning, the door to our car was opened. A non-com came in and ordered us to walk to one end of the car. We were pressed unbelievably close together, it was worse since we had to stand hunched under the bunks that extended from the sides of the box-car. It was simply out of the question for 55 people to be able to fit in that cramped space. And yet the soldier kept kicking us and prodding us with a stick to make us a more compact mass. Then he made us pass in review before him one by one showing our shoes, presenting our hands for inspection to make sure we had no rings, and turned our pockets inside out so that he might see whether we had anything of value. After he had exchanged his own shoes with those of one of the prisoners, he called in the other soldiers in the vicinity of our car and either made up their clothing deficiencies or outfitted them in a better wardrobe.

After this operation, they brought us a sack of hardtack, while the women in our transport handed out pails of water. They were not permitted to leave more than a six-quart pail of water for a carload of 55 people (the pails were made out of big tins which had contained dilled pickles). Our quota of hardtack per person was a little more than a quarter of a pound. This was supplemented with a small salted fish per person. When we had consumed this—and we were very hungry—our thirst became so acute that the few drops of water we received could hardly satisfy us.

In spite of the shooting and the commotion of the previous night, we went on with our plans of escape. One of us had a small mirror. By extending an arm through the barred window we could see reflected in the mirror the length of the transport and the spacing of the sentries. We also had an outside view of our box-car together with the lock. To our dismay we learned that our hope of escaping by way of the door was unrealizable because the lock was reinforced by a piece of wood at which we could not reach. We immediately changed our plan and decided to cut a hole in that side of the box-car which was nearer the buffer. We selected this wall because the boards were thinner there. Evening was approaching. We had completed our preparations. We had sharpened our knife against the iron hinge on the door, we had picked what we intended to take along with us. We waited for night-fall.

(Continued Next Week)

## Noxen Auxiliary Enjoys Covered Dish Supper

Members of Noxen Fire Company Auxiliary combined their regular meeting last week with a covered dish supper at the home of Mrs. Oscar Fish. Present were Marie Race, Helen Crispell, Cleona Fritz, Louise Boston, Emma Traver, Shirley Sproll, Eileen Gills, and the hostess.

## Party Postponed

A card party planned for tonight by Ladies Auxiliary, Back Mountain YMCA, has been postponed until fall.

## THE DALLAS POST

"More than a newspaper a community institution"

ESTABLISHED 1889

Member Pennsylvania Newspaper Publishers' Association

### A non-partisan liberal progressive newspaper published every Friday morning at the Dallas Post plant, Lehman Avenue, Dallas, Pennsylvania.

Entered as second-class matter at the post office at Dallas, Pa., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Subscription rates: \$3.00 a year; \$2.00 six months. No subscriptions accepted for less than six months. Out-of-state subscription \$3.50 a year; \$2.50 six months or less. Back issues, more than one week old, 10c.

Single copies, at a rate of 8c each, can be obtained every Friday morning at the following newsstands: Dallas-Berks Drug Store; Dixon's Restaurant; Evans Restaurant; Smith's Economy Store; Shavertown-Evans Drug Store; Hall's Drug Store; Trucksville-Gregory's Store; Idetown-Cave's Store; Harveys Lake-Doctor's Store; Fernbrook-Reeses Store; Sweet Valley-Britt's Store; Lehman-Moore's Store.

When requesting a change of address subscribers are asked to give their old as well as new address.

Allow two weeks for changes of address or new subscription to be placed on mailing list.

We will not be responsible for the return of unsolicited manuscripts, photographs and editorial matter unless self-addressed, stamped envelope is enclosed, and in no case will this material be held for more than 30 days.

National display advertising rates 84c per column inch.

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Unless paid for at advertising rates, we can give no assurance that announcements of plays, parties, rummage sales or any affair for raising money will appear in a specific issue.

Preference will in all instances be given to editorial matter which has not previously appeared in publication.

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## ONLY YESTERDAY

Ten and Twenty Years Ago In The Dallas Post

From the Issue of June 23, 1944

Staff sergeant James Hummell, Jr., Dallas, is commended for installing a camera in the tail of a P 51 Mustang, a job considered impossible.

Sunday night saw the heaviest lightning and thunder in this region for many years, but little wind damage.

Carl Brandon, Lehman, takes pastorate at Fairdale.

Arthur Hazletine, 72, Shavertown, dies from injuries received when a team ran away and dragged him. The accident was followed by pneumonia.

Deaths: Morgan G. Thomas, 70, Dallas. Emma Crisman, Kingston, aged 84. Gertrude Schoch, 67, after a long illness, in Noxen.

In the Outpost: Howell Rees, Italy; Bill Stritzinger, England; Bob Price, India; Leonard Hooper, Anzio Beach-Head; Warren Johnson, South Pacific; Robert Considine, Georgia; James Borton, Georgia; N. E. Nelson, Fort Benning; Floyd Garinger, Georgia; Earl Williams, Hunter Field; LeRoy Roberts, Fort Benning; Bill Price, Fort Benning; Allan Sanford, Camp Stewart; Russell Transue, Admiralty Islands; Richard Williams, New York APO; Emory Kitchen, Wales.

No ration points needed for ham, beef, bologna, Frankfurters, perch, cod and haddock. Eggs, 33c per doz.; milk, 4 tall cans 35c.

From the Issue of June 22, 1934

Freight trains, now combined with passenger service on the Lehigh Valley will no longer look the other way when kids hitch-hike from Luzerne to Harveys Lake. Pay your fare and ride in the day coach, says the conductor. Or stay home.

Borough school directors object to Dallas Post's article about impending change of tax collector, pass resolutions. Dallas Post replies the report came from a member of the school board, holds that board members shouldn't talk one way and vote another.

Borough Council halts other road work, concentrates on Davenport Street.

Harveys Lake resorts are doing double last year's business.

Elva S. Kaufman, Wilkes-Barre, is married to Frank Wagner, Huntsville.

Four Dallas folks are injured en route to a wedding, their car skidding in Forty Fort. They are Chauncey Turner, his mother Mrs. A. L. Turner, daughters Jean and Alice.

Noxen Tannery curtails production in protest of contracts for composition shoe soles awarded by State for emergency relief.

Farm values hit bottom, upturn indicated.

William Spencer, Noxen, dies of pneumonia, age 25.

## SAFETY VALVE

### HEARTLESS KILLER

Dear Mr. Risley:

I am writing this in the hope that you will find a little space in The Post to mention it and perhaps cause a few more drivers to be more considerate.

Last Friday evening my two youngest children, 6 and 7, wanted to go down to Mitchell's Stand, across from The Castle for a pop-sicle. We live up on the hill back of Mitchell's.

To make a long story short, our two-year old boxer dog followed them, ran out on the highway and was hit by a car. Now granted, the dog was in the wrong and it was probably unavoidable, but what infuriates me is that the driver never even stopped! What kind of person does it take to hit a child's pet, especially with the children standing right there, and go on? Luckily the children had enough presence of mind not to run out on the highway to the dog, but came running home crying for their father.

Well Duke was dead when my husband brought him home but whether it was the first blow that did it or whether he was hit again after being left lying in the middle of the highway, we will never know. My three children are heart-broken. The tragedy might have been softened a little had that driver just stopped to make sure there was nothing he could do. It made quite an impression on the children and believe me our house is not the same. I hope that driver had as sleepless a night that night as my children did, but I doubt it.

Sincerely  
Mrs. Fay Hopkins

### NEW HEALTH SET-UP

In an official resolution of the Dallas Borough Council, dated May 4, 1954, the State Health Department of the State of Pennsylvania has been requested to assume jurisdiction over the administration of health laws in Dallas Borough. In accordance with the provision of Article 21, Section 2102 of the Administrative Code of 1929, the State Health Department took over the administration of health laws in the Borough on a Voluntary Surrender basis, effective June 15, 1954.

In submitting this Voluntary Surrender application, Dallas Borough has joined Conyngham, Laurel Run, New Columbus and White Haven Boroughs, which have decided, in the interest of better service in the public health field, to relinquish their powers to the Commonwealth. This means service of a trained sanitary inspector under the direct supervision of the District Medical Director of Luzerne County and the saving of tax funds of the Borough.

The reporting of communicable diseases and of public health nuisances should now be reported to the District Medical Director's Office, Kirby Health Center, Wilkes-Barre, Penna.

T. Lewis Edwards, Harvey's Lake, Sanitarian Assistant for the State Health Department, assumed the duties of sanitary inspector for Dallas Borough on June 15.

Respectfully  
C. Hayden Phillips, M. D.  
Acting District Medical Director.

### FROM ALASKA

Dear Editor:

I have received so many letters from friends back home asking me to tell them about Alaska that it isn't possible to answer them all, so I thought about sending one on to you.

I receive The Post and it really gets read. There are four Back Mountain boys up here, two Elston boys, Conrad Honeywell and Donalds Cornell.

Many Thanks  
Bessie Bunsek  
Copper Center, Alaska.

● We are delighted to receive letters from Back Mountain people who have moved away, and are always glad to publish them. Mrs. Bunsek's letter follows—Editor.

Dear Friends:

Have received so many letters asking me to write and tell you about Alaska, so Im going to try and tell all of you how I am enjoying being here. Although I miss my many friends in the States. We have made many new and wonderful friends up here also.

The flight up was very beautiful and I certainly learned that one is quite safe above the earth as we flew at an altitude of 25,000 feet from Seattle to Anchorage. Mt. Rainier was a beautiful sight the sun was shining on the mountain and it was snowcapped. When I reached Anchorage the time was changed five hours from the time in Pennsylvania.

The winter was very cold but we enjoyed it, the temperature was as low as 64 degrees below zero and that is much colder than any I had ever experienced.

The Spring has been beautiful. The wild flowers are abundant, the blue Lupines are like we try to raise and can't, or I never could. We took a trip Sunday, a friend of Chesters' has a Piper Cub plane and he flew up to McCarthy. It was so wonderful flying over all the mountains. Some of the mountains are very

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## Barnyard Notes

The "Susquehanna & Baltimore" had a tragic ending. She had made several trips, one to Danville, and one to Milton. On March 17, she was almost wrecked in a squall when an iron bar broke that was attached to her steering ropes. This mishap occurred while the boat was moving up the river at Hunter's Falls. It was described by one of her passengers, J. W. Patterson, the president of the steamship company that owned the boat, in a letter to H. Buehler of Harrisburg. The letter was printed in the Lycoming Gazette.

Then, on April 17, in attempting to negotiate the Nescopeck Rapids, her overloaded boilers exploded, killing a number of people, injuring quite a few others. Some of the passengers had escaped because they had gone ashore to watch the progress of the ship up the rapids, from the bank. Among these was Mr. Patterson, and other members of the company. Although badly damaged, the "Susquehanna" was later floated down to York Haven with the possible idea of having repairs made, but she never appeared on the river again.

These three steamboats were an important part in the hopes and thoughts of many people living in the Susquehanna Valley in the spring of 1826. Their movements were carefully watched and reported as much as the poor communications of the day allowed, in the valley newspapers. However, even before the disaster and common sense had convinced the owners that their boats would never be maintaining any regular service on the Susquehanna, the Crawford Messenger ran this editorial, which on May 22, 1826 was copied in the Harrisburg Chronicle:

"The citizens residing on the borders of the beautiful Susquehanna, continue to be delighted and amused with the movements of the steamboats, Susquehanna, Codorus, and Pioneer. The Codorus has ascended the North Branch as far as Wilkes-Barre, and is expected to proceed to Oswego in the state of New York. However desirable, and as much as we admire the spirit of the experiments which are being made to navigate the noble river by the power of steam, sufficient evidence we take it, has been disclosed, that although it may be practical at certain stages of water, it cannot in the present obstructed stage of the river, be used with any profit or advantage."

In all probability whoever wrote this paragraph meant Oswego, not Oswego. Other than that, its words ring with truth. It is interesting to note, however, that a few years later Baltimore investors were proposing to make the river navigable all the way to the New York State line, by digging out a channel, at a cost of \$200 per mile. This plan received some support in Harrisburg and other river towns, and its backers tried to interest the federal government to assign the job to the Army Engineers. In the fall of 1833 Hazzard's Pennsylvania Register contains frequent references to this ambitious project. In the issue of September 9, Hazzard quotes an editor as follows:

"Every village on the banks of the Susquehanna, every village on the Cayuga Lake, the Oswego River, and its vicinity, will burst with the hum of business, for they would all become seaports."

Petitions were addressed to Congress and to Lewis Cass, the Secretary of War. These were dated July 14, 1834. A survey was actually authorized, but Mr. Cass died before anything was done, and the scheme was forgotten in the rush to build canals.

"A steamboat is at this moment running 40 mile trips on the Susquehanna, more than 100 miles above this place. The boat cost \$9,000, and was built by the Boston Co. under the direction of W. P. Garand, to tow arks of bituminous coal from the mines in Lycoming County to the Muncy dam."

In the spring of 1834, the citizens of Wilkes-Barre and Owego organized a steamship company, and the following year placed a boat in service between their two communities. Let the Wilkes-Barre Democrat of May 13, 1835 recount that story:

The new S. S. Susquehanna arrived at this place from Owego on Thursday last, amid the general acclamation of our citizens. She made the 130 miles in 10 hours without the aid of her side wheels. Capt. Toby who built the boat, commanded her. On Friday she returned and marched up the rapid current with a strength and velocity that afford reasonable belief of her entire success."

However, this "reasonable belief" was unfounded. She suffered innumerable delays, and finally the company was forced to abandon any idea of establishing regular steamboat service. The ship was subsequently used for excursion rides. She was eventually disabled on a sand bar near Wilkes-Barre.

**Tunkhannock Builds Boat**

Some years later in 1849, a group of Tunkhannock residents financed the building of the largest steamship ever launched on the upper Susquehanna River. She was 127 feet in length, with a 22 foot beam. Her name was "Wyoming" and she was built at a cost of around \$6,000. She did make several trips between Athens and Wilkes-Barre carrying

coal, but was soon given up as unprofitable. Still later, in 1851, the S. S. Enterprise was launched at Bainbridge, N. Y., only to suffer a similar fate.

In 1857 a small side-wheeler was brought to Harrisburg from Philadelphia and used for excursions on the river. Apparently it was not a paying proposition, for her career on the Susquehanna was a short one. Subsequently she was returned to the Delaware.

**Wilkes-Barre Boats**

The S. S. Winohocking, another side-wheeler, was placed in service between Wilkes-Barre and Plymouth in 1859, and for a few years performed her duties without accident.

Following the Civil War, a number of steamboats appeared in the Wyoming Valley, offering local and excursion service out of Wilkes-Barre to Pittston and Plymouth. Among these were the Hendrick B. Wright, a stern-wheeler, the Pittston, a side-wheeler, and the ill-fated predecessor ended her career when, on July 3, 1883, her boilers exploded.

Another segment of the river which saw use by steamboats in the late nineteenth century was the area around Sunbury, where the Shamokin Dam created deep enough water for limited navigation. In 1856 the Shad Fly, a side-wheeler, was in service, towing canal boats and barges. She was built by Ira T. Clement, who later became the steamboat entrepreneur of the river. The Shad Fly was wrecked, but her machinery was salvaged and reappeared on the river in 1876 propelling the Arrow. Down to the turn of the century a number of other steamships were in service here. They were essentially ferries, but like the boats in the Wyoming Valley they were popular for excursions, and did their part hauling crowds of happy folk on Sunday School picnics, moonlight cruises, and other pleasant jaunts for short distances up and down the river. Again we note a steamboat tragedy. The Montour exploded at her dock in Sunbury on July 13, 1901, killing several people.

All of this of course, was purely local, and the opinion of the editor of the Crawford Messenger, were certainly justified by subsequent events. No regular steamboat service was ever maintained for any distance of the Susquehanna. The likelihood that steamboats could have completed successfully with the railroads a decade or so later even if the conditions in the river had been better, is improbable. However, there were two fields where small craft powered by steam were quite adaptable to Susquehanna navigation.

One of these was the use of steamboats as pushers of barges in the river coal industry. This was described in detail in the January issue of The Pennsylvania Angler. The other was the use of steamboats as ferries.

The importance of the ferry boat in the Susquehanna Valley economy is of tremendous significance from an historical viewpoint. From the very first days of European penetration into the valley it had been necessary for the white man to cross the river. The Susquehanna lay directly athwart the path of the pioneer pushing westward from Philadelphia. It and the tidewater South. Ferries were therefore established at a very early date. The first was in operation across the mouth of the river in 1695. By the time the first bridge was built over the river in 1814, there was a total of about two dozen ferry crossings between Sunbury and the Chesapeake, all doing good business.

These early ferries, for course, were flatboats propelled by poles, or rowed by oars. Some were pulled across the river by ropes. Small sailboats were used in the tidewater portion of the river. By the end of the nineteenth century many of these had gone out of business, because of the erection of bridges. The majority of those that remained, however, had turned to steam for power.

There were various reasons for this. One was the physical nature of the ferry sites which were located on the pools of relatively quiet water that lay behind riffles. These rocky barriers, although rendering upstream navigation impractical and downstream navigation extremely hazardous, made crossing the river a relatively simple matter. The riffles served as dams creating pools of slow moving water across which steamboats could be operated with little or no difficulty under ordinary conditions. So we see another connection between the riffles and steamboats on the Susquehanna, this one favorable to their use rather than prohibitive. Some steam ferries operated behind man-made dams. Such was the case at Columbia and Sunbury, where the dams built for the canals furnished deep enough water even in low flow. Another reason for operating ferries by steam was economic in nature. It took a crew of two or three men to row or pull a flatboat across the river, a steam-driven ferry could be navigated by one man, who tended the boilers and fires between crossings. Again, fuel either wood or coal was abundant and cheap. Until the development of the internal

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