at sea
100 miles off Plymouth
England.

Dear mom and Dad,

June 25, 1948

The last day of any voyage is usually filled with packing, packing and packing. I shall have this mailed from our first port of call, Plymouth, England, tomorrow morning. At this time we shall watch the tenders pull into Plymouth to add of our passengers, the rest going to Le Havre, Oslo, Norway, the last two ports of call.

Let me begin with the old jingle by the comment — "magnificent trip" — not because of the weather (surely though for the fog horn has blown many minutes now for 3-4 days of 5 days) famous sun-on deck, nor particularly because of the boat & its accommodations. But because of our "voyage" for the student personalities became of so many of the latter aboard. Ships are all around we run in the latitude (at 2:30 a.m.) — a great mass of us not going to bed before 2-3 a.m. on any night, nor up from the nothing berths at about 11 a.m. — to start the day over & (with constant talk, good talk if you seek it out, music, art, sex, science, religion, any topic in any language, excellent meals, the day mixing in importance and enjoyment as the lengthens, reaching here for midnight over the 3-4-5 cups of tea & coffee with a cigarette (none for me) & made equally beautifully ill second day out with half-a-dozen to catalyze a conversation on French) in the A-deck dining-room.

But as radio-Paris blaring in Chopin into the lounge loud-speaker (recently it has been Radio Moscow blaring forth a valuable propaganda and a strange medley of Russian matches of Peter Ivanovitch, Russian folk music, and ill-interpolated messages of Being Smooth.) I shall give a few details of the ship and its odd cargo of students and the handful of Quakers who compose our "international staff".

The Boat:

The S.S. Nieuw Zuiderdam is a troopship — no doubt of it — but it carries its present load in a dissembling fashion. Those places of "navy ness", "Sick Bay" etc. still adorn its bath rooms, but the 4-deep tiers of hammocks are gone — used for two now, while both offer the berths in its two-berth cabins, and its new-passenger ratio now 2:1 for 200 passengers is much better designed for comfort than it was in troop days. The boat was built by Henry Kaiser, out of Portland, Ore. Beyond that its ancestorship, lineage etc. is a muddled lineage shared by the Dutch, Royal Mail, and U.S. lines. Frankly, though sin in the lowest "cabin" — low priced ("C"), it is a luxury liner compared to expectations. Food is excellent, choice on the menus, good cuts of meat, plenty of veg. & fruit and served by stewards who know what they're doing, and usually least does it well. Passenger decks are C-B-A (but accommodations = only 12-14 in a cabin so compared to about 35 per cabin on troop days. This gives partitions in the former are about the only difference. The cabin is only for sleep & hence it does it rather. A lounge for talk, "D"-deck-recreation hall for dancing (to mix) and frequent recreation restrictions — none of which we need attend unless we wish, a small "library" (a couple of filing cabinets) Fair amount of deck space — a small "A" deck reserved for A deck passengers — if any distinction were observed — more is — "Boat-deck" — on a main promenade, and the sun deck, mainly consisting of hatches and gun turrets sans guns — plus a bridge and various restricted areas — galleys etc. below make up the Zuiderdam — which does carry troops on voyage — now about 300 students — and could carry more a few nations remaining empty.

The voyage:

Left New York harbor at 5:05 p.m. E.D.T. — I missed, thanks to gluttony (dinner being served at the time), a parting wave to the bronze lady who watches over the harbor — and could only bid adieu at a distance over the stern. Beyond that, the beginning of the trip on to calm of the ocean (I have now seen it least, real ultramarine) the red sky at dusk portending good day tomorrow, lazy hours on the crowded sun deck, now rainy, deck with only a few yards of visible ocean on each side — and the interminable blast of the horn, demanding 30 seconds of silence in every minute of conversation, moonlight over the atlantic and mal-de-mer — all can be found in any books on the sea. I must confess I have spent no lonely moments looking over the side — the deep prose proved too full of interest for loneliness.

The personalities aboard:

Here is where my vision and memory are always most clear. The 200-odd passengers may roughly be grouped into: (1) 210 + going to Oslo University in Norway for summer session, a rather dull group of undergraduates who are for some reason going to study Norwegian language, history, marine life, or geology for no discernible reason in most cases. Its good to get ahead etc. But the rest of interesting people are not in this group by any means — (2) The groups getting off at Plymouth various odd lots going on tour in small groups (like Ruth Connelly — a girl whose name I w. Witter gave me — from Carleton College, one of 20 going all year with her group of Swedish, quite lovely, quite young, off to St. Andrews in Scotland for a summer course — names like the Bates of Louisville, Ky. whom I must remember and others including our two travel mates from Michigan Susan Bowen and John Shaw.

(3) the "disorganized group" getting off at Le Havre for France, a large group to Fontainebleau, Milan, Paris to study music (like Bill Graves, a student composer under Ray Harris), art (like Kostan's Diana Metcalf (maybe genius: Diana Hathaway) (took me 5 days and 2 insults to meet this woman — a rather nice untamed gamin-type freckles, beach hair (description for future reference); Jim Rhenberg in sociology (from Conn.), others to study piano under Robert Casadesus like Nellie Wright — others to travel, beginning in Paris like ourselves, Julie Blume and Helen Wicker, two Michigan girls going to study (Ho!) at the Sorbonne (to them two I owe many other things, several windy nights on the bridge and — many very good friends abroard (constant lay at the C.W. Adams, miller, Charleston French Teacher; (ah! Bayer —), Eleanor ——— teacher at Barnard College N.Y. and Charlotte Gilbert, aunt John Lindsine. Like creature constantly in a dirty pair of white-striped pants, long rain coat, ill-kept mustache — history of art teacher at Louisville, Ky — off to Rome for the summer.

I have forgotten Allen Crouch of Baterville, Me. now at Harvard Law School — very interesting and well informed. We shall seek him out in Zurich. August Janssen — of Amsterdam — 2 yrs in Nazi conc. camps, now starting at all, we shall stop at his home. and other more casual acquaintances too many — many gifted, many others very rather and not blessed with great deal more than passage costs, although I know one

no dullards aboard — Everybody in jeans, peddle-pushers, dirty sweaters, old shoes, no protocol, no standards of elegance to envy or strive to equal — all very much students, all easy to meet, most offering worthy conversation, a few good advice while abroad; though for most this is the first voyage. The passenger list contains a very few oldsters — all of whom teach or did so — and our ship's character — par excellence — madam Murret (of Smith, called off to see husband in Paris, and setting a new non-stop record for borrowing cigarettes.). There are many nationals on board, going home again — at the table, one can sit next to a boy going back to Copenhagen, to Toulon, or to Heidelberg, and many of the travelers speak well several languages. Twice a day we have quick practical language lessons in small groups, if we wish — mine with good old Prof. Menge of Carleton College in beginning (the very beginning) French, so that Kaplan bicyclists will not be without disarming phrases like "je suis americain"; "nous faire un promenade avec moi au clair de lune, mon cheri" etc. — although the bicyclists will still be very hopeless for awhile & thrill. Our first meeting of the French peasant will be as memorable for France as 1812. I listen like a parrot to all conversations in French and pester constantly all the initiated for critiques (usually despairing sighs) of my nasalizing.

Women? — not enough attractive ones, although there are adequate representatives of Coed stature from Bowling Green, Ohio — to the ~~usually~~, nay omnipresent, Vassar representation. Most, however, seem to be in groups, pre-arranged — but the voyage has not been dull.

The medical students (I move from Duke are aboard to study pediatrics at Old Guy's in London, were given a tour of the ships hospital — not used to capacity, the surgeon had not yet figured out how to turn on the O.R. lights, but very complete thanks to previous the troops for whom it was built.

Chan & John continued a deck tennis game which keeps most of the passengers from promenading aft on the starboard side of the boat deck — and which fills us movement when all is occasionally dull. I actually haven't been with Jolly or the Michigan group very much, spending most of the time in other heavier conversational groups, meeting new people constantly is always a pleasure — luckily most of the interesting people will return with us on the Tiger!

Odd bits of intelligence — adequate showers, warm-bowls with clean towels and soap — God Bless our ship —

Orientation program extends to various discussions, folk social dancing — and a couple of B-movies — both of which I had the foresight to see before — are shown below, and

the other rather successfully out on the funnel. now, 3 a.m. and more good loud singing groups than ever.

Most of us already are quite brown and should present tremendously healthy specimens of young America to the protein-minus Europeans.

All of western Europe — better, much of — is now before us, most of our fellow-travelers envy our summer for most are "consigned" to definite study somewhere, and will not know our foot-loose freedom. The condition of the bicycles when lifted from the hold will condition my further mood.

Thus — for now, land is one hour away — we are south of Ireland and won't see it — anchorage off Plymouth ("harbour won't hold us"), at 5 — Plymouth groups off at 8 a.m. and next day finds us at Le Havre for our own deborkation — papers for which we obtained today. The assault of Europe is about to begin, and the Morene Jasper, without even a good case of sea-sickness to mar its voyage (provided we negotiate this fog) will soon lose its wonderfully varied cargo of eager people who haven't noticed the hardness of its bunks, its lack of a grand salon, or tiled swimming pool — who are quite self-sufficient in the student tradition — a magnificently comfortable way for those of us to travel who hate social protocol — with the fervor of the emancipated, and who ~~ask~~ nothing more than good companionship and plenty of food — to make a trip like this the time of our lives."

So far, I've loved every moment of it

Happy Father's Day, I've, belatedly

next month — quite likely, from Paris.

Au revoir

D.S.