Polowsky, Joseph
1947-52

Returned 7/30/47

1663 S. Central Park Ave.
Chicago 23 Illinois
July 24, 1947.

Polowsky

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt:

In two weeks I think I shall be on my way.

I arrived in Washington July 11th. With the very kind assistance of the Department of State and the Soviet Embassy, I completed the necessary arrangements incident to my visiting the Soviet Union in less than a week. I drove up to New York City on July 17th, and spent an all in all pleasant five days in New York City, marred by a single minor unfortunate incident. I returned to Chicago yesterday and found the letter of mid-July from your Secretary, Miss Stillman, waiting for me.

One of the nicest things about my Elbe Oath endeavors is the many friendships I have renewed, and the many new friends I have made. I was not alone on my first meeting with the Russians - I had good and hearty comrades-in-arms about me. It is indeed good to know that I am not alone now on this my second meeting with the Russians, but carry with me the hopes, encouragements and good wishes of so many - which stand out so splendidly among my disappointments.

From personal experience, I would say that it is infinitely more simple to see the President of the United States in person, than it is to contact you or your secretary by telephone.

Upon arriving in New York City, I attempted to contact your secretary by telephone. When I enquired of telephone "Information", I was informed, to my astonishment, that all of your telephones in New York City were "top secret" and that it would be impossible to reach you or your secretary by telephone. However, I don't discourage easily. I called up the Roosevelt Memorial Library in Hyde Park - and spent 65¢ in the bargain - and was similarly informed that it would be impossible to reach you or your secretary by telephone, that all listings were "top secret."

I fear that the original proof of "The Oath at the Elbe" is a bit out of place in the Roosevelt Memorial Library - it was written after all by one of the common herd.

I would very much appreciate, Mrs. Roosevelt, if at your convenience you were to have your secretary forward the proof of "The Oath at the Elbe", back to me.

Very truly yours,

Joseph P. Polowsky

confidential

file

1663 S. Central Park Ave.
Chicago 23, Illinois
July 3, 1947

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt:

Please permit me to avail myself of this opportunity to thank you for your very gracious letter of April 29th, in reference to "The Oath at the Elbe".

I expect to leave for the Soviet Union in August. While the immediate objective of my visit will be to meet the Russian soldiers I shook hands with at Elbe, my trip to Russia will probably snowball into my meeting Marshall Stalin. It will be my principle objective to enlist Soviet cooperation for the holding of great combined American and Russian commemorative ceremonies at the Elbe, Berlin, Lake Success and the diplomatic capitals of the world next April 25th, in commemoration of the third anniversary of the meeting of the American and Russian Armies and of the founding of the United Nations.

I am leaving for Washington July 9th. I shall in all probability remain in the East until my departure for the Soviet Union.

I shall be in New York City in late July. In the event you are in the City then, I should be honored indeed, Mrs. Roosevelt, to be able to pay my respects to you in person.

Thank you again for your very gracious letter of April 29th.

Very sincerely yours,

Joseph P. Polewaky

Regret will not be in NYC

The Oath at the Elbe

Two years ago, April 25, 1945 — the day of the opening of the first session of the United Nations Conference in San Francisco — six American soldiers crossed the Elbe River in a small boat, signalizing the military junction of two great Allies of the Second World War: the United States and the Soviet Union. The six American soldiers, members of a twenty-eight man Infantry patrol under the leadership of Lieutenant Albert Kotzebue of Houston, Texas, having left the forward American lines west of the Elbe the previous afternoon with the mission of finding a common meeting ground with the Russian Army, thrust through the thirty mile no-man's land between the Russian and American lines. At eleven-thirty in the morning, April 25, Lieutenant Kotzebue's patrol—followed later in the day by two other American patrols—successfully contacted the forward Russian lines on the east bank of the Elbe. A half hour later, at noon, the river crossing by the six American soldiers heralded the link-up of General Courtney H. Hodges' United States First Army and Marshall Ivan S. Koniev's First Ukranian Army, successfully consummating a great common American and Russian endeavor and unity of purpose and interest.

April 25, 1945, the historic day of the military junction of the two great Allies in Europe, the day of the opening of the first session of the United Nations in San Francisco, marked a high point in American-Russian relations. The two years which have elapsed have seen a precipitous deterioration of relations between the two great war-time Allies. The disappointments and misunderstandings of the past two years have charged the atmosphere with distrust and recrimination. The remembrance of a happier day when, as trusting war-time Allies, they met on a common field of battle, met with hope and enthusiasm at a common conference to help set up the post-war structure, has been almost forgotten.

Unless some great positive and whole-hearted demonstration of conciliation, trust and confidence takes place in the near future, the issues which separate the nations will become irreconcilable. A great primary act of enthusiasm and confidence which can ease the present tension and reverse the present ruinous trend must come from the remembrance, celebration and regeneration of the spirit of a Spring day in 1945 when they met, with high expectation, as brothers at the Elbe and in San Francisco.

We must, all of us—Americans, Russians, and all other peace-loving peoples of the world—ardently hope that April 25 will be set up as a day of friendship and conciliation among nations, and that it be celebrated by all men and women of good will in all countries and areas.

On April 25, 1945, addressing the delegates meeting in session at the first United Nations Conference in San Francisco, President Harry S. Truman of the United States said:

> "We approach our task humbly, but with united resolution. The prayers of the people of the world are with us. They are spoken in many tongues and in the words of many creeds. But they are as one voice, rising from the tragedy and suffering of war, in prayer for lasting peace.
>
> "Thus fortified, and with the guidance of Almighty God, we must and shall fulfil the purpose for which we have come together."

Approaching their task humbly, but with united resolution, the American and Russian soldiers grouped at the Elbe on April 25, 1945 were also attempting to fulfil the purpose for which they had come together.

On the evening of April 22, 1945, a last German Engineer platoon, retreating in panic westward, had blown the span over the Elbe at Strela. A half hour later, a civilian wagon train of some two hundred old men, women and children, streaming westward, and stopped by the blown bridge had encamped for the night, huddled in a two hundred yard radius semi-circle about the bridgehead. At one in the morning, April 23, the advancing Russians saw lights flickering at the bridgehead from a two mile range. Believing German military units were engaged for a last stand, they heavily bombarded the bridgehead with artillery and mortars. At dawn, the Russians fanned out north and south of Strela to mop up German remnants.

At eleven-thirty in the morning, April 25—two days later—Lieutenant Kotzebue's patrol reached the west bank of the Elbe at Strela. Upon being recognized by the Russians on the east bank of the Elbe, they prepared for a crossing. The span over the Elbe was of course blown. The only means available for the crossing was an old wooden boat moored to the shore. The Elbe, flooded by Spring rains, was a swift running river. In order to avoid being swept downstream when making their crossing, the Americans moved the boat some hundred yards up the stream in order to be swept by the river into a fifty-yard remnant of the bridge jutting out from the east bank of the Elbe. Achieving their objective, the six American Infantrymen raced over the remains of the span jutting out from the east bank, crossed the river at noon and were greeted by the Russians.

The greetings took place in the midst of some two hundred corpses of old men, women, and children. After the preliminary greetings, they, all of them—Americans and Russians—looked down at the bodies and fragments of bodies—especially the body of a child with blue eyes and long brown hair clutching play crayons in one hand and a doll in the other.

At this historic moment of the meeting of nations, all of the soldiers present—Americans and Russians—solemnly swore that they would do everything in their power to prevent such things from ever happening in the world again, and that the nations of the world would and must live at peace.

The time has come for the nations of the world to reaffirm that solemn Oath at the Elbe.

As one of the six American Infantrymen to make the boat crossing over the Elbe two years ago, as one of the American and Russian soldiers to take the Oath at the Elbe, I believe I voice something of the thoughts and feelings of all of us in this critical hour.

I therefore call upon the nations of the world for a new birth of concilation and friendship, that the Oath sworn on that hallowed blood-soaked historic ground shall not have been taken in vain.

Joseph P. Polowsky
April 15, 1947

April 23, 1947
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt:

On the morning of April 18, 1947, in Robbinsdale, Minnesota - a suburb of Minneapolis - "The Oath at the Elbe" went to press. I am a biologist by propensity, and the atmosphere of a newspaper press room is a bit unfamiliar to me. Nonetheless, I was certainly thrilled when the first copies began to roll off the presses - I guess I have a bit of printers ink in my veins.

I saved the final proof of the article, and am enclosing it in this letter. I would be highly honored and deeply appreciative if it warranted being placed in the Roosevelt Memorial Library at Hyde Park, as a measure of my appreciation to the living tradition of President Roosevelt.

Mrs. Roosevelt, I think I am holding the Ace of Hearts. If I play my cards well - and I intend to - I think I can make it the Ace of Trumps, and help beat the black Ace of Spades of war. The Infantry taught me how to take what the French call "the long chance" and carry it through with boldness and courage to a successful conclusion.

Whatever the future brings, it is I am sure in the national interest that the United States penetrate the Iron Curtain by peaceful means, and attempt to get through to the Russian people. If the sentiments expressed in "The Oath at the Elbe" get widespread support in the United States in the coming months, I hope to visit Russia this Autumn as a private citizen, attempt to get "The Oath at the Elbe" published in the controlled Soviet press, and attempt to get Soviet cooperation for the holding of commemorative American and Russian ceremonies at the Elbe in April 1948. By then, I believe, the idea of the setting up of April 25 as an international conciliation day will have caught on.

Thank you for your indulgence. I would of course be deeply appreciative if you let me know what you think of "The Oath at the Elbe".

Very sincerely yours,

Joseph P. Polowsky

Joseph P. Polowsky
1663 S. Central Park Ave.
Chicago 23 Illinois