



The BIG Ditch

Chapter Three - by Kay Hively

For a whole week, Doug explored the ship that was taking his family to Panama. The captain invited Doug and his father to tour the ship from top to bottom. They saw the big engines down in the belly of the ship. Doug was fascinated with the machinery that turned the propellers and made the big vessel sail over the water. He and his father also went up on the bridge where the captain let Doug hold the steering wheel for a minute or two.

Being on the ship was exciting. Doug liked to look out over the water, watching for other ships or birds and fish. He met other people who were going to Panama. Most of the other passengers were men who were going to Panama to help dig the canal.

Doug stayed with his father much of the time. His father talked about what life would be like in Panama. Dr. Taylor said he was worried about the health of the family. In tropical lands such as Panama, many people contracted yellow fever or malaria. And many who became sick died. Dr. Taylor said hundreds and hundreds of people in Panama had died of these diseases.

One day, as the family sat on the ship's deck, Dr. Taylor told about meeting the famous Dr. Walter Reed. Doug's father said they first met when Dr. Reed was in Baltimore doing research on diseases like malaria.

Later Dr. Reed went to Cuba to try to find the cause of malaria and yellow fever. While in Cuba, Dr. Reed and his assistant, Dr. William Gorgas, proved that two types of mosquitoes caused malaria and yellow fever.

Unfortunately, not long after his great medical discovery, Dr. Reed died. But, Dr. Reed had told Dr. Gorgas about

Doug's father. Dr. Reed said if Dr. Gorgas ever needed help fighting malaria or yellow fever, he should send for Dr. Taylor.

That is why a letter was written to Doug's father asking him to come to Panama. Dr. Gorgas said Doug's father was needed in Panama to help eliminate mosquitoes. He said the mosquitoes were spreading diseases that were killing the men who were digging the big canal. If the mosquitoes weren't conquered, Dr. Gorgas explained, the canal could not be dug.

After listening to his father talk about Dr. Reed and Dr. Gorgas, Doug thought it was strange that a tiny mosquito was powerful enough to stop something as big as a shipping canal.

As Doug sat on the ship's deck thinking about the mosquitoes, his mother said it was time to have dinner. Doug was hungry, and this was the last big meal he would have on the ship. He wanted to write to his friends in Baltimore before he went to bed on this last night he would spend at sea.

Next Week: Chapter Four - A New Life

Author Kay Hively and Illustrator Billie Gofourth-Stewart are both of Neosho, Mo. Produced by the Missouri Press Foundation. Copyright 2006.

Things to Think About and Do

- Have you ever sailed on a big ship? Draw a picture of a ship. Give the ship a name and put that name on the ship. Color the ship in your favorite color.
- Dr. Reed and Dr. Gorgas worked on the island of Cuba. What is the definition of an island? In what body of water would you find Cuba? What is the capital of Cuba?
- Dr. Walter Reed made an important discovery when he linked mosquitos to malaria. Find an article in the newspaper about a modern day medical issue and research what's being done to solve it.

STANDARDS: G2:1; G2:5; G1:2; SS5; FA1; S5

