

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, April 30, 2018

August 6, 7, and 8, 1946: In early afternoon of August 6, I sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge on the Army Transport *President Buchanan* after a 25-day voyage from Saipan. There was a huge sign on the side of the bridge facing the Pacific thanking us servicemen for our time in the Pacific theater. It had been a slow voyage on our early 20th-century steamship with its triple-expansion engines, as it broke down twice, far from land. At best, the *Buchanan* sped along at 11 knots. We docked inside the bridge at Fort Mason on the San Francisco side of the Golden Gate. On the dock was the young wife of a friend of mine on the ship who had been in the Pacific for 33 months. I did not witness their meeting close up, but what a reunion it must have been!

With all our gear, we were transported on small fast boats across San Francisco Bay to the Oakland Army Base, wherefrom our troop train would bring those of us from the East to an Army Separation Center. We were told that the train would not leave until August 8, so we were given a 24-hour pass. Most of us used this time to enjoy San Francisco. One in our group was a fellow from Cleveland, and he and I set off together. It was about 9:00 P.M. by the time I phoned my parents; I had forgotten that it was midnight in Delaware. We probably went to the movies and then found a room in a poor hotel. The next day we planned to explore San Francisco.

Possibly Hertz had been established as a rental car company by 1946, but if they had an office in San Francisco, we didn't know of it. Since new car production was just beginning again after the war, it's doubtful if they would have had a car on short notice anyway. We found a small parking lot between two buildings that claimed to be a car rental agency, and we rented a heavily used 1938 Dodge for the day. We had no trouble with the car, and we visited the Cliff House, Golden Gate Park, Telegraph Hill, and other highlights. We parked right at curbside on Market Street in front of the Palace Hotel and went into its famous dining room for lunch, where we each had a fabulous chef's salad bowl for 85 cents. Food like that was not available on the islands.

It was early evening when we returned the car. The place was closed up; no one was around. Credit cards were not used in those days, and the car's owner had not charged us anything when we took delivery of his car. We didn't know what to do, so I left my name and address, along with the car key, on the front seat and left the unlocked car in his lot. The bill was to come to me, I would pay it, and bill my friend in Cleveland for half. This worked out perfectly, and within two weeks, all accounts were settled. We returned on the train across the Bay Bridge to our bunks at the Oakland Army Base. Before bedtime, Harry Keegan came to visit a few of his old army buddies. He was in the 55th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, based on Guam (as was I), and had been released from the service a couple of months earlier. His home was in Alameda, right next to Oakland. (As a side note, Keegan ended his working career as one of the top executives of Union Oil Company of California, and his best friend on Guam, Jim Bates, was the top financial man for State Farm Insurance Company. I knew Bates better as we had roomed together on Guam after the Recon. Squadron had broken up late in 1945.)

About noon on August 8, our long troop train pulled away from the Oakland Army Base on the Western Pacific Railroad, pulled by a 4-8-2 steam locomotive. We passed through Stockton and Sacramento, and before dark stopped at Oroville, where a second steam locomotive was put on to pull the train upgrade through the Feather River Canyon. As we servicemen stretched our legs on the station platform, local girls served us ice cream (we never had milk products on the islands). The moon shone over the scenic canyon as we proceeded eastward toward Nevada. Our train followed the route of the future California Zephyr as far as Denver, where it was transferred to the Rock Island. It was August 13 by the time we reached Fort Meade in Maryland for discharge, but it had been a fun trip for one who loved steam railroads.