

Homeward Bound. Osaka, Japan to San Francisco, 1946

The 13th General Hospital in Osaka has been my home since New Years Day, 1946, when I arrived as a bed patient recovering from a hernia operation performed in an Army Field Hospital in Kure. I am a Staff Sergeant in a Combat Engineering Battalion, a part of the 41st Infantry Division. During the period of my recovery here, that entire Division is disbanded. With great good fortune, I am transferred, in-grade, to the Medical Corps and assigned to the enlisted staff of this hospital. I have a variety of assignments, and, fortunately, many hours of free time to explore Osaka and nearby cities and to take photographs of many aspects of Japanese post-war life.

No matter how interesting my days are, my quiet evening hours are filled with thoughts of home, my wife, Betty, and our now two-year-old daughter, Judy. Time moves slowly as I pore over each weekly issue of the Army newspaper, "Stars and Stripes", counting down the days until I am eligible to ship out.

In late June, I am on orders to go by train to the 4th Replacement Depot near Yokohama, for processing and return to the States. I'm one of a group of about eight G.I.'s traveling together. We arrive early the next day.

This is a huge facility capable of handling thousands of G.I.'s at a time. There are many steps in this process but, in typical Army style, the vast majority of our time is spent waiting for whatever will be next.

Our two weeks here seems like an eternity. Time started again when we are told that we will be boarding a troopship, the "General McRae", the next day. I ran to send an RCA cablegram to my wife at her parents' home in Burbank, giving her the ship's name and our expected departure date.

Loading is slow but orderly. No wonder it's slow; there are approximately one thousand of us. We are all smiling.

Once on board, I stow my duffle bag on a bunk in non-com's quarters and make my way to a good vantage point well above the forward deck, just below the ship's bridge. I carry a German-made Rollicord camera which I bought in Osaka.

A long blast on the ship's horn signals the tug boats to ease our ship away from the dock. An Army Band on the dock plays "Sentimental Journey". There are lots of cheers and more than a few tears, including my own. This *is* sentimental.

Once clear of the harbor, our ship sets a northwesterly course on a great circle route towards Seattle. We get reports of our progress over the P.A. system each day. The hot muggy days of Japan give way to much colder air. The ship rolls and pitches on the huge swells, but who cares? We're on our way home.

On one cold and blustery day, the ship gradually slows down and then loses all headway. The voice on the P.A. says: "Not to worry, it's a small problem with the propulsion system". Small problem maybe, but our ship lays dead in the water for two days, rising and falling and rolling as massive swells strike us broadside. We may not be in any danger, but it sure isn't fun.

Finally, we're underway again. What a relief. But there is a change in orders; forget Seattle, we are now headed for San Francisco. I like it!

Each day, we hear how far we have traveled; how much further to San Francisco. After more than two weeks at sea, we got the news we all had been waiting for: "San Francisco early tomorrow morning". Many of us stay out on deck all night, waiting for that first glimpse of heaven.

We would not be disappointed. At dawn, we see land masses and then our first glimpse of the Golden Gate Bridge; miniscule at this distance, but slowly getting larger. The high vantage point that I have enjoyed before is now so packed that I can't get near the front to take pictures. Fortunately, my camera is a twin-lens reflex with a top-side viewing screen. Holding the camera upside-down over my head, I can look up into it and take pictures over everyone else's heads.

Our ship slows and stops, a few miles from shore, to pick up a Harbor Pilot who guides our ship slowly ahead and under that magnificent Golden Gate Bridge. He sounds a long blast on the ship's horn. Trucks and cars on the bridge answer with theirs. This is indeed a moment in heaven! We think of ourselves as rough and tough G.I.'s, but at this moment it is all cheers and tears.

We exchange horn blasts with other ships as the Pilot guides our ship to its destination at the Oakland Army Base. We watch from above as tugboats nudge us to the dock. Hundreds of people cheer our arrival. It is August 29th, 1946, 17 months and 12 days since I shipped out of San Francisco on St. Patrick's Day 1945, on a troopship named "General Patrick". I look up and give thanks.

Debarking and finding our way into assigned spaces in the nearby warehouse with its acres of steel bunks takes almost all day. We are on solid ground. It feels weird. Tables of great food are close by. We gorge on it.

Overnight passes are handed out to those lucky few who live within a few miles of this base, but with a strong warning to be back for roll call at 7:00 AM. One man from our Osaka Hospital Group lives in Oakland. His wife is one of those on the dock as we debark. When they announce this offer of a pass, he's gone in a flash! I awaken at 5:00 o'clock as he steps on my hand as he climbs into the bunk above mine. The P.A. system wakens us at 6:00. "Hot damn", this G.I. above me hollers, "It's still hard". We all roar in laughter!

The next day, those of us from California and nearby states ship out by train to a Separation Center at Camp Beale, north of Sacramento. Labor Day is almost here. They offer week-end passes. I rush forward to accept.

By bus and plane and taxi, I arrive after midnight at my wife's parents' home in Burbank. Betty hears the taxi and greets me at the door. We are both delirious. We hug and talk for hours, waking two-year-old daughter, Judy, and Betty's parents to share in our joy. A week-end to remember.

On Tuesday, I must return to Camp Beale for processing and issuance of my Discharge papers, but I am home, I am home, I am home. Thank you, God.