

THE TRIP HOME FROM GUAM, 1946: From the exciting events of August and September 1945, ending World War II, the 11-month wait to be on my way home seemed like an eternity. Toward the end of September 1945, I went to Okinawa with my B-24 crew, but by mid-October I was back on Guam and permanently grounded because of an asthma condition. The extreme coral dust in the air from the building of Kadena Air Field on Okinawa was the culprit; although I spent 19 days in the hospital on Guam when first returning, I felt fine, and the asthma never returned. From early November 1945 until late June 1946, jobs were invented to keep people like me semi-occupied, although time still hung heavy.

The other nine members of my B-24 crew were on their way home by mid-winter, as they were “flying personnel,” and I was not. New friends included tactical officers and other misfits like me. Over the Christmas holidays, two of us were sent to an abandoned part of North Field that had housed the crews of B-29 Super-Fortress bombers, to get the area ready for occupation again. The problem was there was no one to occupy it, and I ended up closing out the PX at this location, throwing away the spoiled candy and taking the stuff that was salvageable to another active PX on North Field. With the folly of this plan over, I spent from January until late June in a barracks near 20th Air Force headquarters, nearer the center of activities. I was an assistant mess officer for a short time (what a mess!) and was supposed to draw a shift as a weather forecaster at Harmon Field, but I don’t remember much about that except that General Eisenhower, as Army Chief of Staff, arrived one day to spend a day or two with the Island Commander.

One by one, my new-found friends vacated to return to the states. Finally on June 24, a few of us remaining were trucked with our gear the short distance to Harmon Field, where we boarded a C-46 army transport plane for Saipan, about 125 miles away. A ship was supposed to be waiting to start us on our eastward journey toward California. If it was waiting, it was not at Saipan waiting. Three more weeks of waiting, this time in much poorer accommodations than those on Guam, with extremely hot and humid weather and poor meals. Once we tried to explore some nearby areas on foot; the souvenirs we found were abandoned shoes of Japanese soldiers, with the big toe separated from the other four. There were rumors that Amelia Earhart had been brought to Saipan and killed there, but there was nothing to that. We tried to play softball a couple of times, but it was just too hot. We would draw a circle in the sand near our barracks and race snails, of which there were hundreds. Cock roaches accompanied us in the latrines.

All good things must come to an end, and on July 13, we boarded an old Army transport named the “President Buchanan,” which was to take us to San Francisco. The ship was old, probably built in the early days of the 20th century, she had a triple-expansion steam engine, and very weak boilers. The accommodations were cramped, but the food was very good, and we were served by Filipino waiters at long tables. I think we had white tablecloths. Movies shown on the open deck were old but interesting; if a viewer’s eyes moved off to the side of the screen, the ever-present cumulus clouds moved gently up and down. About a week out of Saipan, the “Buchanan” broke down. In the quiet Pacific, we drifted as mechanics and pipefitters worked toward a temporary repair. Twenty-four hours later, we were on our way again, averaging 10 to 11 knots. About 15 days into the trip, we docked at Honolulu, right next to Pearl Harbor. The Matson Line’s flagship “Matsonia,” docked alongside, sailed for San Francisco, 4½ days away on her schedule. We were quarantined on the “Buchanan,” as we “might sail any minute.” Finally after more than 40 hours at the dock, they let us off the ship for four hours. Several of us enjoyed a milkshake at a soda fountain near Waikiki Beach, served by a smiling Asian girl who spoke perfect “American,” including all our slang expressions. After lunch at the Alexander Young Hotel in Honolulu, it was back to our speedy ship.

A band was on the dock playing “California, Here I Come,” as a tug pulled us away from the dock and we headed for Diamond Head and the states. It was about 2,100 nautical miles to the Golden Gate, but halfway there, the “Buchanan” broke down again. As before, after 24 hours or so, we were on our way again at 10 knots. On a blustery morning, we passed the Farallon Islands, 30 miles west of the Golden Gate. I opened a port-hole and threw my faithful G.I. shoes into the Pacific. As we sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge, a huge sign

thanked us for our service in the Pacific. For the first time, we felt like heroes. On August 6, we docked at Fort Mason, between the bridge and downtown San Francisco. As I was peering out the porthole, a friend from California tapped me on the shoulder and said his wife was supposed to be on the pier. I gave him my vantage point, and she was there! He had been in the Pacific 33 months and had not seen her in all that time.

We were taken with our gear on ferry boats across San Francisco Bay to the Oakland Army Base, where, two days later, we started our final trip across the U.S. by troop train. This journey was described in the "News" of April 17, 2006 (Repeated 4/28/14). See also "News" stories of 9/9/13 and 9/16/13.

Work Report: On Tuesday, November 4, the following 11 devotees were on hand: Steve Bryce (in charge), Ted Kamen, Tom Marshall, Dave Leon, Bill Schwoebel, Dennis Dragon, Eugene Maute, Gerhard Maute, Brent McDougall, Mac Taylor, and Ken Ricketts.

The troublesome sight glass on the Cretors popcorn machine was worked on, and it was aligned better and new gaskets made. There is still a slight leak. On the boiler of the Model 87, the hole in the bottom opposite the steam pipe hole in the top was drilled out and tapped for ½" pipe. A new plug was inserted, and the test pump was hooked up to apply a hydrostatic test to determine whether a number of tubes are leaking. Locomotive 401 was cleaned after its runs on November 2.

Punching out of the holes in the burner of the Model 87 continued. New wiring to the many small buildings on the Lionel train layout continued. Work continued in our FAHP library. The superheater in the Mountain Wagon is believed to have a slight leak, and it is planned to by-pass this for the one day remaining (Nov. 29) to run the big car this year.

On Thursday, November 6, eight volunteers were on hand: Jerry Novak (in charge), Ted Kamen, Jim Personti, Dave Leon, Steve Bryce, Bill Schwoebel, Geoff Fallows, and Jeff Kennard. A new glass was cut for the sight-glass on the Cretors popper, and O rings were tried to make the seal. The glass still needs to be trimmed to make a proper fit. The small amount of waste oil still on hand was poured into a 5½-gallon drum, and Lou Mandich will now take it from us for recycling. A compartment door was repaired under the work bench in the shop.

On the Model 87, the cleaning of burner holes continued. Hydrostatic pressure was applied to the boiler, and it was raised gradually to 800 lbs., with no leaks around the tubes in the bottom head. A lot of "crud" was washed out through the center hole. A new steel plug will be obtained to replace the temporary iron plug used for the test. It was discovered that the kerosene drum is about empty. We should have enough on hand to finish out the year, but more will be ordered.

The Model 76 was prepped for its run to Granogue and back on November 8. Jeff Kennard took the main drive axle (with wheels) from Locomotive 402 to his shop to machine the drive pins and also the crosshead pieces from the Model H-5 engine, which require grinding about .020" off the ends to allow more clearance for our new bronze slides.

The Auburn Heights Invitational Silent Auction trip to Granogue on November 8 went well on a clear, cold day, but Steve Bryce lost the hydraulic brakes on the Model 76 just before arriving at the destination. He drove the rest of the way plus the trip home using the hand brake, no problem for an experienced operator. Stan and Kim Wilcox, the successful bidders, and their guests enjoyed a gourmet box lunch delivered by Susan Randolph (with her "goodies" for dessert) in the dining room at the Granogue estate, accompanied by their hosts, Irene and Barbara du Pont, who are celebrating their 70th wedding anniversary this year.