

SHIPPING OUT – CAMP STONEMAN

Over the next few weeks following deployment orders to the Southwest Pacific, the 5th Bombardment Squadron began assembling personnel and equipment at Camp Stoneman, a few miles west of the Port of San Francisco. Camp Stoneman was a United States Army facility located in Pittsburg, California. It served as a major troop staging area for and under the command of the San Francisco Port of Embarkation. The camp operated during World War II and the Korean War. The camp opened May 28, 1942 as a staging point for units deploying to the Pacific Ocean theater of World War II.



"Through these Portals Pass the Best Damn Soldiers in the World." This proud inscription met the eye of each soldier as he passed through the entrance to the wharves at Camp Stoneman to embark for shipment overseas. The major Pacific coast World War II staging area under the control of the San Francisco Port of Embarkation was Camp Stoneman located in Pittsburg, CA. Camp Stoneman was the largest troop staging area on the west coast of the United States for units deploying to the Pacific Theater of Operations. Camp Stoneman was once the principal "jumping off point" for more than one million soldiers destined for operations in WW II's Pacific Theater, and again several years later during the Korean War.

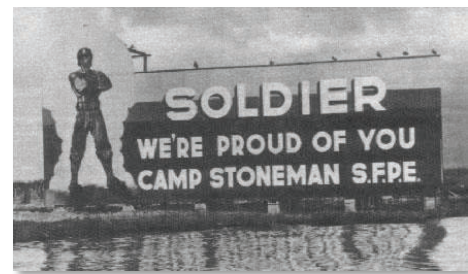


The idea for Camp Stoneman was born soon after Pearl Harbor in response for the urgent need for a large cantonment area at which port processing of troops in transit could be housed, fed and transported. The plans for such a camp were, of course, in the works of War Plans before the Japanese attack. The main requirement was that such areas have available three types of transportation--water, rail and highway. There were two rail lines in the Pittsburg area, Southern Pacific and Santa Fe. A mile from the camp was the San Joaquin River, offering a broad water channel into San Francisco Bay. There also were suitable paved highway routes in the area.

The camp was a permanent base for 125 officers and 2,000 troops. Camp Stoneman could house and mess over 20,000 troops at a time on its 2,800 acres. Stoneman also housed German and Italian prisoners of war.



The first troops to go through Camp Stoneman on their way to the Pacific battlefields arrived on May 25, 1942. A little more than three years later, on August 11, 1945, the millionth man to go through the Stoneman staging area was plucked from a line of men filing up to the gangplank, to take part in a brief ceremony. Three days later Japan surrendered. Over a twelve-year existence covering both WWII and the Korean Conflict, over 1,500,000 troops were processed and shipped through Camp Stoneman. At the conclusions of each war, the camp was converted into a separation center, the function of which was to ensure that returning soldiers could be sent home as quickly as possible.



In addition to almost 346 barracks (63-man), 86 company administrative and storehouses, 8 infirmaries, and dozens of administrative buildings, the 2,500-acre camp held nine post exchanges, 14 recreation halls, 13 mess halls, a 24-hour shoe repair and tailoring business, one post office, a chapel and one stockade. Overall, the camp was a city unto itself. It had a fire department and observation tower, water reservoir, bakery, Red Cross station, meat-cutting plant, library, parking lots and 31 miles of roads.



For recreation, Stoneman boasted two gymnasiums, a baseball diamond, eight basketball courts, eight boxing rings, and indoor pool and a bowling alley. Officer and enlisted clubs provided everything from reading rooms to spaghetti dinners. The camp also contained the largest telephone center of its day, with 75 phone booths and a bank of operators who could handle 2,000 long-distance calls a day. Stoneman even had USO shows featuring stars such as Groucho Marx, Gary Moore, and Red Skelton. Lucille Ball once donned a swimming suit to dedicate an enlisted men's club.



Business boomed in Pittsburg, as did in all "Army towns." During Camp Stoneman's heyday taverns, theaters, night clubs, taxi stands, clothing stores, local bus lines, jewelry and novelty shops, photo studios and similar establishments mushroomed. Most of them flourished-at least for the duration.



Camp Stoneman was the last stop for most soldiers heading overseas and they were usually processed through the base in three days, but the usual time frame was four to five days. A unit was known only by shipment code number. Soon after the men arrived at Camp Stoneman, they were again given medical examinations to determine the fitness of each soldier for overseas combat duty. Last minute dental and medical care, including the updating of immunizations, was given to those who needed attention. Stoneman had approximately 45 dental chairs that were used sometimes 18 hours a day for the various types of dental work. Anyone needing eye corrections were issued two pairs of glasses. Last wills were made and allotments arranged, and updating personnel files were done.

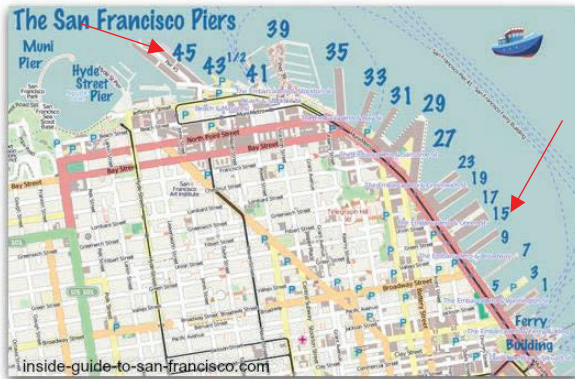
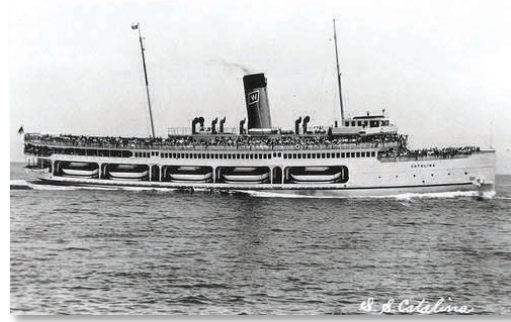
Clothing and equipment were inspected, from shoelaces to helmet liners, in order to correct any defects, shortages, or signs of excessive wear. Shoes were given special attention, as they were perhaps the most important item, next to a soldier's weapons. Weapons were checked out by experts. Each one had to be able to operate without a trace of malfunction. The troops were lectured on security regulations, mail censorship, chemical warfare, conduct aboard a troopship and drills were given on how to abandon a ship. Every soldier was required to attend a daily first-aid class and to go on at least one 10-mile hike. Documents indicate that pistols, rifles, hand grenades, rifle grenades, and rocket launcher grenades (bazooka) were all fired at the camp as troops did their last-minute training before being shipped out to the Pacific. A list of Camp Stoneman training facilities is below.

- a. Abandon Ship Training Decks.
- b. Bayonet Course.
- c. Bivouac and Road March Areas.
- d. Dry Land Ship.
- e. Dry Range (rifle marksmanship).
- f. Gas Chamber
- g. Grenade (hand) Throwing Range.
- h. Infiltration Course.
- i. Known Distant Ranges:
 - (1) 1,000 inch range (machine gun, carbine, sub-machine gun and pistol)--50 firing points.
 - (2) 100-200 yd. rifle range-- 100 firing points.
 - (3) 100-300 yd. rifle range-- 75 firing points.
- j. Miniature Aerial. Target 22 Cal. Antiaircraft Range.
- k. Mock Village.
- l. Obstacle Courses.
- m. Rifle Grenade Range.
- n. Rocket Launcher Range.
- o, Sanitation Display Area.
- p. Training Film Library

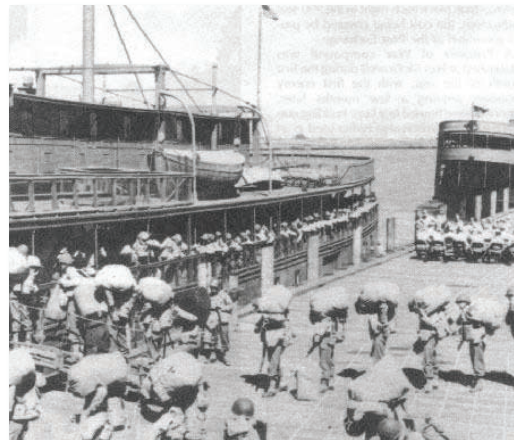
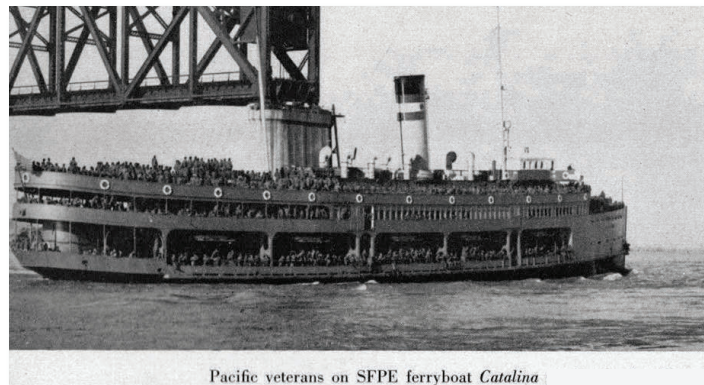
During the height of its activities, Camp Stoneman employed 1,475 civilians and additional military support personnel. It had been estimated the camp's operation represented a \$14,000,000 annual business to Bay Area firms through the troop processing activities. After the facility was declared surplus to the needs of the Department of Defense, all property was disposed of.

MOVING MASSES OF TROOPS

In transporting troops to and from the Army docks in San Francisco, Army harbor boats were employed. The Catalina and Cabrillo, sister ships, were converted from former excursion boats. A later addition to the fleet, the Ernie Pyle, was known as the million-dollar ferry, Yerba Buena, when it operated between San Francisco and Oakland. The usual means of leaving Camp Stoneman was to board one of the ferries at the



Pittsburg waterfront which would carry the troops to Piers 15 and 45 on the Embarcadero in San Francisco. It was a three to four-hour boat ride from San Francisco to Camp Stoneman. Most troops departed the camp by marching down Harbor Street to the waterfront, where the Army operated a small ferry fleet. The ferries took the troops to Fort Mason, where they boarded ships headed for war.





Harbor Street

