

75 years ago, 20 January 1945, my father, CPL Philip Sturm of blessed memory, departed the United States for Biak, then in the Netherlands East Indies. Because dad had graduated from college shortly before being drafted, he was sent to Army Administration School and assigned to the Air Corps where he would manage teletype offices for the Army Airways Communications Service. His first assignment was in Campbell Army Air Field (Fort Campbell) in Kentucky, where he would spend a year. Now he was on his way to work at the large communications station on Biak, the island that had been taken from the Japanese in a bloody, protracted battle 8 months earlier. (See my essay on Biak at [www.mikesturm.com/PacificWar](http://www.mikesturm.com/PacificWar).) In January 1945, just days after the invasion of Luzon in the Philippines and weeks before Iwo Jima and Okinawa, few soldiers on their way overseas believed that the war would end the following August and few expected to survive the expected invasion of Formosa or the Japanese mainland.

My father processed for overseas deployment through Camp Stoneman, the Army's principal Port of Embarkation for soldiers deployed to the Pacific. Camp Stoneman was located in Pittsburg, CA, on the northern reaches of San Francisco Bay. It was a city in itself with barracks, over a dozen mess halls, a meat-cutting plant, a hospital, numerous Post Exchanges, recreation halls, and movie theaters. For combat troops deploying, training facilities such as weapons ranges, obstacle courses and urban mock-ups were used for continuing combat training. All troops were given abandon-ship and survival training for their upcoming sea voyage. Camp Stoneman employed over 1,400 civilians and spawned hundreds of businesses in Pittsburg - bars, restaurants, clothing stores and souvenir shops. By VJ Day, over one million soldiers passed through Camp Stoneman on their way to the Pacific Theater, spending an average of 3 to 5 days there before boarding troopships. After World War II, most of the businesses around the camp had disappeared but a few returned when the camp saw a brief revival during the Korean War. Camp Stoneman closed permanently in 1954 and the Army transferred the POE function to Oakland Army Base (my home away from home during my 18 years with the Military Traffic Management Command.) Today a stone pillar from the original main gate and a Sherman tank stand in a park nearby to mark Camp Stoneman's former location and historic significance.

Dad departed San Francisco for Hollandia, (now Jayapura) New Guinea, on the Matson Lines ship, Monterey, a luxury liner converted to a troopship for the duration of the Pacific War. (My dear friend Ed Sloan who was in the same unit as my father when on Biak, crossed the Pacific on the Lurline, one of the sister ships of the Monterey.) The Matson Navigation Company began with a single sailing ship owned by Captain William Matson delivering cargo and passengers between San Francisco and Hawaii and grew to a giant of trans-Pacific logistics, shipping and port management. Matson Lines ships were instrumental in developing tourism in Hawaii and throughout the Pacific. After Pearl Harbor, Matson's four passenger liners, Monterey, Lurline, Mariposa and Matsonia were converted to troopships, eventually carrying 736,000 troops. Thirty-three Matson cargo ships were also pressed into military service. Later, Matson managed the fleets of military cargo vessels, operating over 100 vessels at one point. Post war, Matson was the first shipping company to operate a dedicated container ship and led the containerized cargo revolution. The old Matson Pier, next to the Aloha Tower in Honolulu, today serves as the cruise ship terminal, its walls decorated by a magnificent mural depicting the grand Matson liners of the early Twentieth Century.

On 28 January 1945, enroute to Hollandia, dad participated in the "Crossing the Line" ceremony. Because of the number of troops aboard, the ceremony was a bit less raucous than the initiation inflicted on U. S. Navy "Shellbacks" when they first cross the International Date Line. During the ceremony, dad was given the souvenir "Domain of Neptunus Rex" card shown in the photograph. I had the honor of exchanging emails with the Transportation Officer who made many voyages on the

Monterey and who authored a book called “Troopship” about his service. He explained to me how he distributed the cards to the individual unit commanders aboard ship, who passed them on to the troops.

After landing in Hollandia, dad transferred to an LST for the 300 mile voyage to Biak. The Landing Ship Tank was one of the most effective designs of the World War II Navy. Various iterations were approximately 350 feet long and 60 feet wide, with a long well deck from which vehicles could enter and exit via large wide doors at the bow. The LST was used in the Pacific beginning with the 1943 Solomons campaign to land troops, vehicles and cargo during amphibious operations. A specialized system of ballast tanks and pumps allowed the bow of the ship to be raised and set down upon landing beaches, eliminating the need for pier facilities. LST’s were known as “Large Slow Targets” because of their slow speed but they were remarkably able to withstand damage from enemy attack. Dad considered the trans-Pacific voyage aboard the Monterey a luxury cruise, fast and smooth. The LST for him was a misery – the shallow-draft vessel pitched and rolled all the way to Biak. Few LST’s still exist today, however LST-510 which participated in the Normandy D-Day landings, has been refitted to operate as the MV Cape Henlopen, one of the fleet of the Orient Point/New London ferries. 75 years after dad’s voyage, Rachel and I often ride the Cape Henlopen to our vacations in Mystic, our trip across Long Island Sound is steeped in nostalgia.

Dad was promoted while on Biak and SGT Philip Sturm returned to the United States, over a year later in March, 1946 – with a fungus called “Jungle Rot” which he could never rid himself of. My father later worked for the Department of the Army and influenced me to make a career in Federal Service – dad and I have 68 years of Federal Service between us. In tribute to my father’s service, I developed a web site of his wartime memorabilia after his passing: <http://www.mikesturm.com/dad>. Only after my own civilian deployment during the Persian Gulf War 50 did I finally come to understand dad’s quirks which arose from devoting three years of his life in World War II service. Unfortunately for Rachel, I took on many of those same quirks. It is difficult for those who have not had the experience to understand how wonderful “home” is after a forced separation – even for a just cause. Many “Boomers” like myself were deliberately protected by our G. I. Generation parents from knowing the tribulations they suffered during the Great Depression and World War II, which is why I am committed to remembering and publicizing their sacrifice through these essays.