

History of Fort Mason, CA and Bill Stewart's three troop ship Voyages

Fort Mason, once known as the **San Francisco Port of Embarkation, US Army**, in San Francisco, California, is a former United States Army post located in the northern Marina District, alongside San Francisco Bay. Fort Mason served as an Army post for more than 100 years, initially as a coastal defense site and subsequently as a military port facility. During World War II, it was the principal port for the Pacific campaign.

Today Fort Mason is part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and the site of several cultural facilities. It is a National Historic Landmark District with over 49 buildings of historic significance, spread over 1,200 acres. The San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park is now located in Fort Mason.

The fort was named Fort Mason in 1882, after Richard Barnes Mason, a former military governor of California.

President Grover Cleveland established the Endicott Board in 1885 for the purpose of modernizing the nation's coastal fortifications. Chaired by Secretary of War William Endicott, the board recommended new defenses at 22 U.S. seaports, deeming San Francisco Harbor second only to that of New York in strategic importance. As a result, an extensive series of forts, batteries, and guns were built on the harbor, including Fort Mason.

The piers and sheds of Lower Fort Mason were originally built from 1912 to warehouse army supplies and provide docking space for army transport ships. By this time, the US Army began to build new bases in Hawaii, the Philippines, and various other Pacific islands. Most of the materiel for those bases was shipped through San Francisco. By 1915, the three piers together with their associated warehouse had been completed, and Fort Mason Tunnel was driven under Upper Fort Mason to connect with the railroad network along the Embarcadero.

During World War II, from December 1941 to August 1945, Fort Mason became the headquarters of the *San Francisco Port of Embarkation*, controlling a network of shipping facilities that spread across the Bay Area. Over the years of the war, 1,647,174 passengers and 23,589,472 measured tons moved from the port into the Pacific. This total represents two-thirds of all troops sent into the Pacific and more than one-half of all Army cargo moved through West Coast ports. The highest passenger count was logged in August 1945 when 93,986 outbound passengers were loaded.

Following are the three troop ships on which Bill Stewart sailed while in the service, the first two after the end of World War II, from Fort Mason to the Pacific Theater and back, and the third from New York to Casablanca during the Korean War.

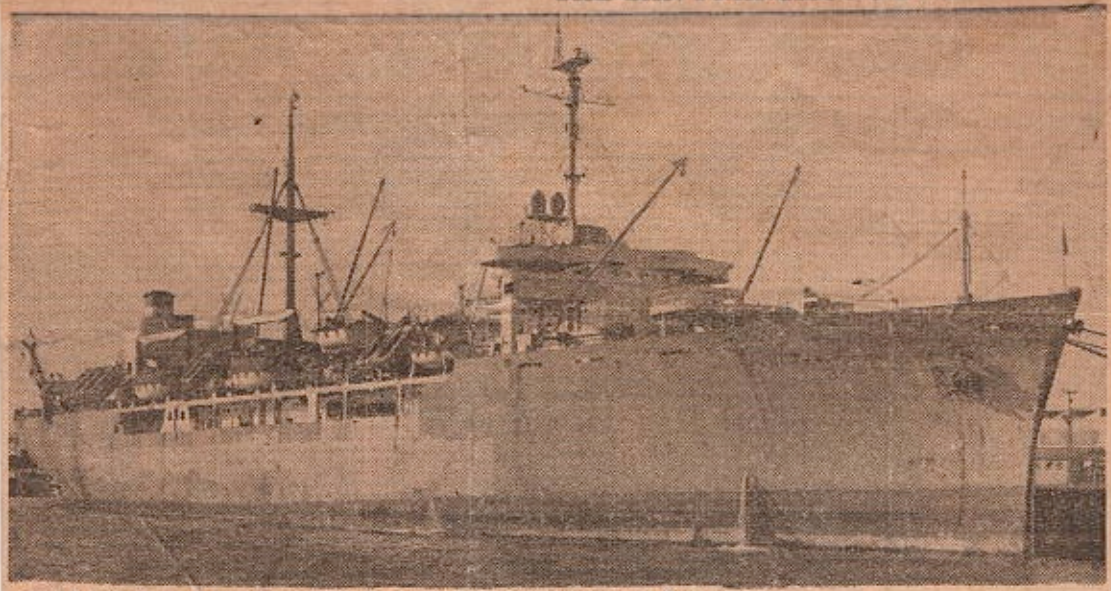
Continue to Bill's three troop ship voyages:

USS General R. M. Blatchford (AP-153) was a General G. O. Squier-class transport ship built for the U.S. Navy in World War II. She was named in honor of U.S. Army general R. M. Blatchford. With Pfc. Bill and hundreds of Army soldiers stacked in bunks three-high, and many Civilians aboard, she sailed as the USAT General R.M. Blatchford from **Fort Mason, CA** on **4/29/47** (Story on Page 1 of THE SAN FRANCISCO NEWS about 4/29/47) for **Honolulu, HI; Naha, Okinawa; and Manila, Philippines**, a 41 day voyage, stopping 4 days in Honolulu , passing close to Iwo Jima, 2 days in Naha, Okinawa, and finally landing in Manila on **6/2/47**. They crossed the **International Date Line** on May 6, 1947 where Bill and the others were issued certificates numbering them as "**Dwellers of the Far East**" by the Golden Dragon, Ruler of the 180th Meridian. Bill Served as **Ship's Librarian** on the trip to be able to sleep on the Library's padded bench to avoid sea sickness, a job he held on his next two troop ships as well.

USS General A. W. Brewster (AP-155) was named in honor of U.S. Army general Andre Walker Brewster. She was transferred to the U.S. Army as USAT General A. W. Brewster in 1946. Bill sailed on **12/22/48** from **Guam** to **San Francisco**, a 16-day voyage including a 2-day layover in **Honolulu**. They spent Christmas aboard and landed in **San Francisco** on **12/30/48**. Bill was again **Ship's Librarian** on this trip.

USNS General H.F. HODGES was named after Major General Harry Foote Hodges who played an important part in building the Panama Canal. She was built in 1944 by Kaiser Shipyards in Richmond, CA. Sgt, Bill Stewart, with the 2nd half of his Active Reserve Unit, sailed 3,150 miles from the **New York Port of Embarkation** on **8/17/51** for Casablanca staying north of the Azores, arriving **Casablanca, French Morocco** on **8/26/51**. Bill is again, for the third time, **Ship's Librarian**, and his closest buddy Clayton Bender operated the Mimio-graph to print the ship's newspaper.

Bill's samples of each of the three ship's newspapers are attached.

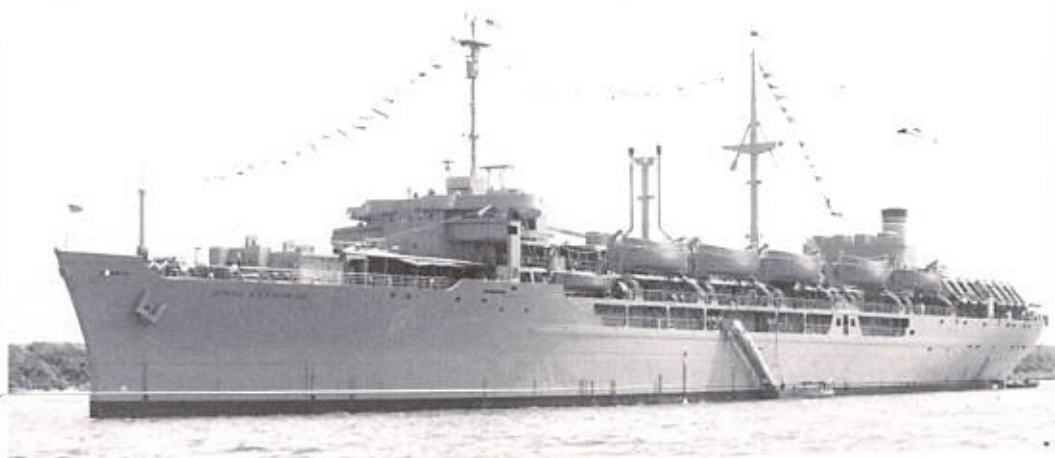


CAST OFF.—The Army transport Richard W. Blatchford sails today from Fort Mason for Honolulu, Okinawa and Manila with Army replacements and civilian workers. (Story on Page 1.)



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USAT General R. M. Blatchford 4/23-5/19/47, 26 days, Fort Mason, San Francisco-Honolulu-Okinawa-Manila

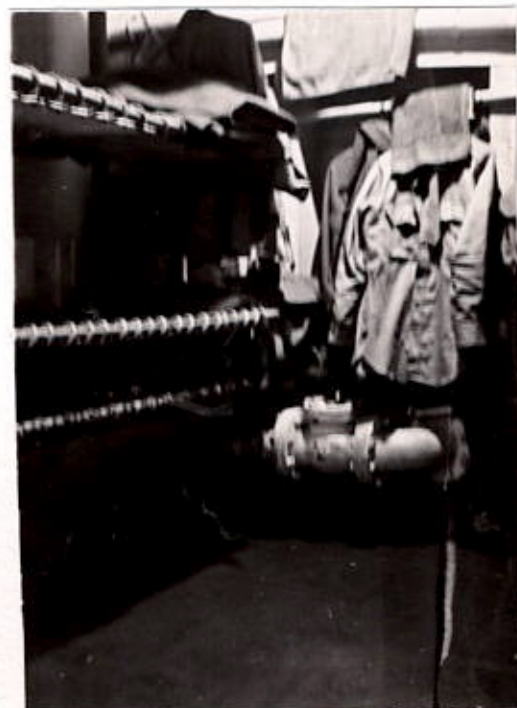


← Lift

On board were about 1,000 soldiers and 200 to 300 civilians



Ship's Bridge



Three-high bunks in troop living quarters



Aft of Bridge



Lifeboat



Ships Mast



Tug pushing in Honolulu Harbor



Bow at sea



Tug approaching in Honolulu



Two troop ships in Honolulu Harbor



From dock in Honolulu Harbor