

YANK

NOVEMBER, 1944: P. 8

HOME TOWNS IN WARTIME

SAN FRANCISCO, Calif.



By Cpl. ANGUS CORLEY

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.—“Dear Ma,” wrote a GI from the Southwest Pacific, “I certainly could use a whiff of that cold, wet San Francisco fog down here. I’ll never complain about it again.” Maybe he won’t, but a lot of other San Franciscans who stayed here did plenty of bitching about the weather this year. Last spring was as cold and wet a season as the oldest Californian can remember. Some people were afraid the rain would continue right on through summer. It did.

Most native sons, though, say this kind of weather adds zest to life, and it may be that they’re right. There’s plenty of zest in the town in other respects even though the wide-open stuff is out. Army and Navy regulations limit men and women in uniform to beer until 5 in the afternoon, and the bars close down for everybody—soldier and civilian alike—at midnight. Liquor is sold by the bottle to servicemen for only three hours a day, between 5 and 8 P.M.

The B-girls (B for bar), who used to hang out in barrooms downtown making friends and influencing people to buy drinks, got the bum’s rush some time ago. The military authorities figured they were a threat to morale and security.

Despite these restrictions, there are probably more night spots now than ever before in San Francisco. GI traffic through the town is heavy and there are long lines of ticket purchasers at every point of departure. Reservations long in advance are necessary in order to leave the Bay Area in any direction and there is now a GI ticket bureau at the Embarcadero YMCA.

The population of San Francisco, city and county, has increased by about 150,000 since the beginning of the war, and the entire Bay Area population has increased from about 2 to 2½ million. The community of Richmond, for instance, went from 20,000 people to 100,000.

There’s just as much traffic along Market Street as there was before tire rationing began, although the paint jobs aren’t quite as bright as they used to be. Taxis are scarce and more dilapidated than ever. The Toonerville Trolley cable cars still rattle up, down and around the hills, and the big open streetcars still clatter up and down Market Street four abreast. The voters last spring authorized the city to buy the Market Street Railway. The 5-cent fare that some lines had is out now and the 7-cent fare is city-wide. Roger D. Lapham, the city’s new mayor, is given credit for putting through the streetcar deal.

There’s so much traffic across the Bay Bridge to Treasure Island and Oakland that there’s talk of building another after the war. Sailors now drill on Treasure Island among the nude statues and fountains of the 1938 World’s Fair, and the modernistic fair buildings have been converted by the Navy into mess halls and barracks.

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MONDAY is really Blue Monday. Most of the night spots shut down on that day because of shortages of food, liquor and help. The International Settlement on Pacific Avenue shuts down almost entirely on that night, and some places close two nights a week.

There's a shortage of beer, particularly the well-known Eastern brews, and only a handful of places serve draft beer. Good whisky in places like the Top of the Mark costs about half a buck a shot and cocktails run a little higher. In some places whisky and cocktails are 35 cents a drink.

The Top of the Mark, incidentally, is one of the places visited by all GIs coming to San Francisco, whether or not they are native sons. The place, which affords a magnificent view of the seaport, is crowded every night with GIs and brass of all ranks. For a little while the place was off limits to GIs because it was charged that a sailor who was under 21 had been served a drink. The case was settled after a few days, but now the management inquires carefully about the age of any beardless youth suspected of being under the age when it is considered proper to drink or vote.

One of the most famous drinking joints in town, the upstairs speakeasy type of barroom that was run by Izzy Gomez on Pacific Avenue, was closed when the 300-pound proprietor died recently. The Black Cat, another favorite gin mill, was closed to GIs for a couple of months because of a battle royal that brought out the gendarmes, but the customers simply moved across Montgomery Street to the Iron Pot.

Most movie theaters have reduced prices for servicemen, and most of the performances in the Civic Center group are free for GIs, including the symphony and chamber-music concerts in the Art Gallery. The Geary and Curran Theaters, side by side on Geary Street, have a nightly fare of legitimate plays and musicals. All but the most expensive seats are sold well in advance for the opera season at the Memorial Opera House. The burlesque houses do capacity business, but followers of this art form insist the best strippers have gone into fields of entertainment where there is more money.

The baseball season ended with San Francisco winning the Pacific Coast League play-off by defeating Los Angeles. The Seals tied with Oakland for third place during the regular season race, in which Los Angeles took the pennant.

In football, Abraham Lincoln High School is favored to repeat this year in winning the championship among the 10 schools of the Academic Athletic Association. Balboa High figures after the Mustangs. And in college ball, Santa Clara, the University of San Francisco and Stanford are still sitting the seasons out. The University of California at Berkeley, however, has a strong team this year, and so has St. Mary's Pre-Flight. Jim Phelan at St. Mary's College, on the other side of the campus from Pre-Flight, turned out one brilliant team of 17-year-olds last season and figures to turn out another first-rate bunch.

ALL over town are USOs, most of them pretty elaborate set-ups. There is a Stage Door Canteen, the CIO has a large canteen open from Thursday through Sunday, and at the Pepsi-Cola Service Center everything is free but the food, which is sold at a nickel an item.

Some servicemen, particularly sailors, make extra dough by helping out along the water front where there is a shortage of longshoremen. The Government encourages this, and the regular union scale is paid.

The longshoremen are proud of their record of not having had a strike since long before Pearl Harbor. The old deportation case against the West Coast longshore leader, Australian-born Harry Bridges, is still in the courts, but that hasn't prevented his union from opening negotiations for a new wage contract with the Waterfront Employers' Association.

You've probably been hearing stories about the high wages received by war workers, but according to credit managers of the department stores, whose business is to know such things, the average weekly pay check in the shipyards is about \$50—and that's before deductions are made for taxes and Social Security.

Theoretically, prices have been frozen at the level which prevailed in April, 1943, and the local OPA has ordered a roll-back in the price of some 20 restaurant items to the level of October 1942. Coffee, for instance, is supposed to be a nickel a cup in restaurants but most of them still charge a dime. The OPA is trying to enforce its ceiling prices but is handicapped by a shortage of investigators. Servicemen have been asked to report all cases of overcharges, and the OPA has

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prosecuted a few chiselers who've been turned in.

Because of the housing shortage, entire new neighborhoods have sprung up. For instance, at Candlestick Cove, near Hunter's Point, a settlement of neat temporary dwellings put up not long after Pearl Harbor is now a self-contained community, with all municipal services provided for its residents. The only thing it lacks is a squad of women police such as was organized downtown to replace cops called to a higher duty.

Temporary barracks for war workers have been built in downtown San Francisco in front of the City Hall in Civic Center. But apartments and rooms are still hard to find, and there is a strict ceiling on rents.

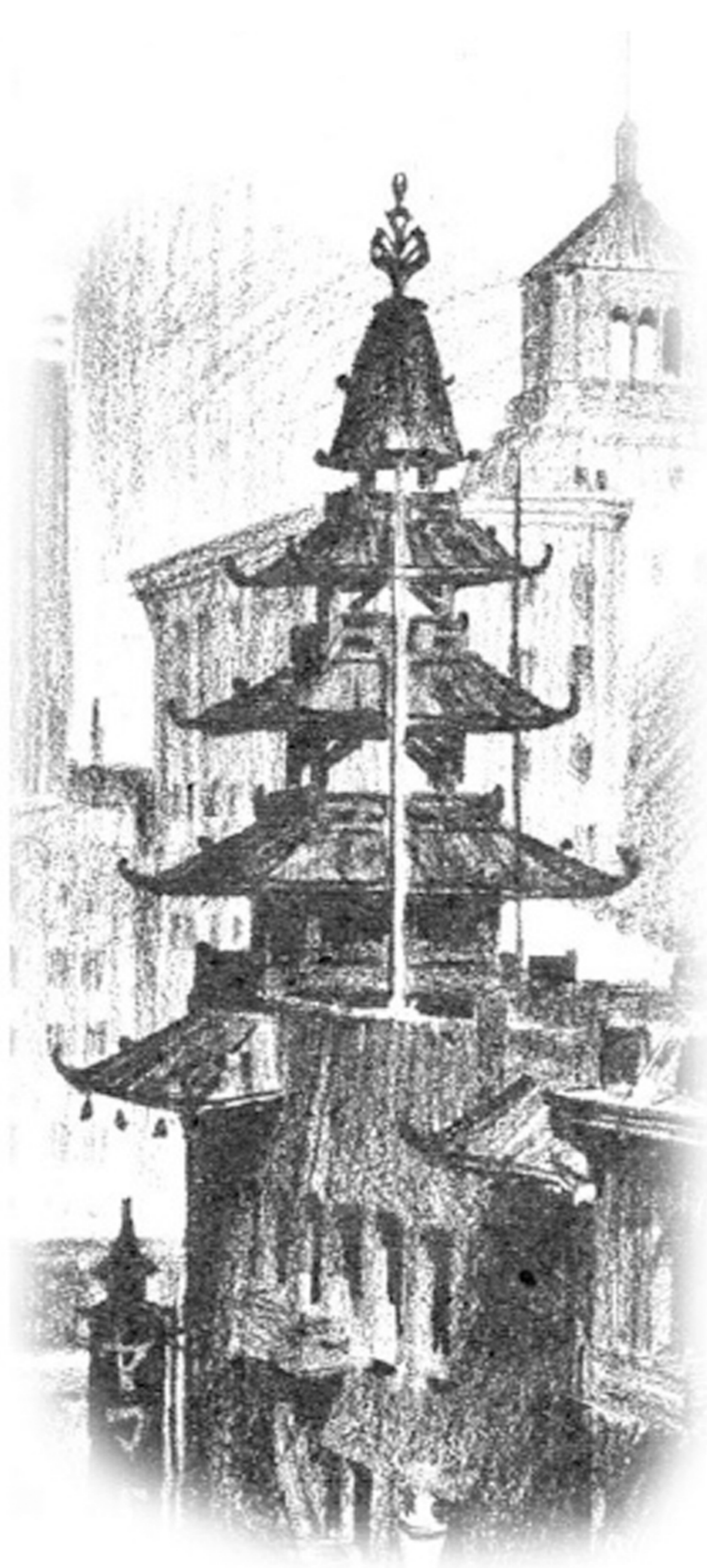
THE skyline has been changed somewhat by the long-delayed completion of the new Federal Appraisers Building at Sansome and Washington, near the old Customs House. The building is of white marble, 15 stories high, and is designed to be earthquakeproof.

Fisherman's Wharf still looks the same as it always did—fishing boats, nets drying, and piles of crabs and shrimp. Part of the wharf area is restricted, however, and Army and Navy guards are posted at the foot of Taylor Street.

A landmark of the rough old seaport days changed recently when the Harbor Police Station at Harbor and Front was closed. The cops were transferred to other beats and their job of patrolling the water-front area was taken over jointly by the Army, Navy and Coast Guard.

Historian Philip Guedalla observed once that if a man rolled a dime down California Street hill, it would gain enough speed to kill a horse when it reached the bottom, provided it didn't knock down a Chinese at the corner of Grand Avenue. Well, San Francisco's Chinese population is as much a part of the picture as ever. The Chinese held a celebration recently in honor of the 7-7-7 feast—the seventh day of the seventh month of the seventh year of the war with Japan. It reminded some people of the Chinese New Year's celebrations, which have been toned down somewhat since the war.

Today Historian Guedalla's dime would be more likely to bowl over a T-5 and his girl rubbernecking near a Chinese lamppost at Grand Avenue. Or it might smash a GI six-by-six to hell and gone somewhere around the Ferry Building. But it's still San Francisco.



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