

BAYSHORE HIGHWAY

By Jacquelyne Kious

“The bottleneck is broken,” declared local leaders in September 1924 at the turning of the first shovel of dirt for the Bayshore Highway. (SSF Police Department 1892-2003)

As automobiles became more and more popular, traffic along El Camino Real was becoming intolerable. The two-lane roadway was the only connection between San Francisco and the peninsula and San Jose.

When the Bayshore Highway opened in October 1929 it was said to be perfectly planned and built to the *highest standards of the day*. The highway was 100 feet wide with three lanes in each direction *but* it lacked a center median resulting in many gruesome head-on collisions. Thirty-eight people were killed during the first year on the steep grade through Visitation Valley (Brisbane) into SSF which quickly became known as Bloody Bayshore. Speeders would actually cross the centerline using the oncoming lanes to pass slower drivers. And we think drivers are aggressive today! Speeding and unsafe driving were huge issues throughout the 1930s for the SSFPD as few drivers heeded the 20 mph limit in business districts and 45 mph elsewhere.

The Bayshore Highway stretched from 10th and Market through Visitation Valley around San Bruno Mountain and through SSF on what is now Airport Blvd. It then cut across what is now Highway 101 and SFO through hotel row in Burlingame. The highway eventually extended to San Jose.

In July 1930, Chief Louis Belloni hired Augustine Terragno, the department's sixth officer. Terragno's job was to patrol the Bayshore Highway on motorcycle (no helmet was required in those days) from Tunnel No. 5 between Brisbane and SSF to Mills Field looking for speeders. Terragno became a local hero garnering the nickname Phantom of the Bayshore for his aggressive ticketing of motorists. (SSF Police Department 1892-2003)

By 1940, traffic congestion and the increasing number of fatalities lead to talk of a new 27-mile *freeway* from San Francisco to Palo Alto. The Bayshore Highway, unlike the proposed freeway, ran through cities and toll roads. The new Bayshore Freeway would be a separate high-speed roadway with a median strip and accessed by on-ramps

Construction on the Bayshore Freeway soon began. The end of WWII brought veterans back home and back to work once again overwhelming El Camino and the Bayshore Highway. As the 1940s came to a close, construction of the Bayshore Freeway from San Francisco to Burlingame was complete.

