



THE CHINA LAKER

Vol. 11 No. 1

Newsletter of the China Lake Museum Foundation

Winter 2005

Early Life at NOTS

by Sig Nakashima

It was a hot afternoon, that August 13, 1945. My husband, Glenn Gallaher, and I drove from our home in Glendale, California, to start work on the Navy Base known as NOTS, Inyokern. We arrived in time to be assigned quarters; Glenn was housed on the second floor of the Marine Barracks and I on the second floor of what was then known as the "elephant huts." These two buildings at the southwest corner of Blandy and Hussey would later become the OinCC Office and then much later, torn down.

What an experience! Life in the "elephant huts" was quite interesting indeed. The quarters were made up of cubicles with four girls to a cubicle. There were no doors, just partitions between each cubicle and two sets of bunk beds in each. Each girl had a bunk bed and a closet about a foot wide with two small drawers at the bottom. We bathed in a community shower; a room with shower heads on three walls. There was absolutely no privacy!

I met my husband each morning at the Navy Mess Hall where we purchased our meals; the cost was 10 cents for breakfast, 15 cents for lunch and 25 cents for dinner. We were served in the line with the sailors and were served by sailors. I had a strong feeling they really did not enjoy serving us civilians!

After about a month, a friend who had a duplex, offered to rent part of his house to us until his family arrived from the East Coast. That was a much nicer arrangement. Before too long, we were assigned a no-bedroom apartment on Dibb Road in the area where the Navy Infirmary now stands. All housing came furnished – everyone had the same kind of Monterey furniture.

At the time we arrived, the duplexes north of Blandy were completed and occupied but the ones south of Blandy were just starting to become occupied. There were no Normacs, LeTourneaus, Hawthorns or Capeharts yet but the Navy had brought in some small wooden units from somewhere around Independence which were called McIntires. These buildings were located north of the duplexes north of Blandy. My husband and I lived in one for a short while and I loved it. They were removed a long time ago. The Prefabs on the south side of the base were also used as temporary housing.

On August 14, the day after we arrived, we got up early and hired on the base, Glenn as a sheet metal worker at \$1.13 per hour, and assigned to the machine shop in one of the Quonset huts. And I, because they had no job sheet to put me on, was hired as a Laborer, Minimum at \$0.78 per hour and was placed in the steno pool. I started work on the second floor of the "new ad building" which was not fully completed. We had to step around a couple of saw-horses in the hallway! They also did not have a desk for me to use and since the Technical Director, Dr. L.

T. E. Thompson, was in Washington, D. C. at the time, they put me at his desk. After about an hour, my supervisor, Miss Mercer, came in and asked, "Aren't you going home?" I said, "It isn't time to go home yet."

(continued on page 12)



The Machine Shop Gang
Sig's late husband is in the front row with a hat.

CHINA LAKE MUSEUM FOUNDATION
P.O. BOX 217, RIDGECREST, CA 93556-0217



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The China Lake Museum Foundation

Fifth Annual Dinner & Auction

Saturday, March 5th - Kerr McGee Center

5:30 p.m. - Cocktails

6:00 p.m. - Dinner catered by Carriage Inn

7:00 p.m. - Welcome & Auction



Combined Federal Campaign

China Lake Museum Foundation

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President's Report, by Paul Homer

The Shrike 50th Anniversary celebration held on the 15th and 16th of October 2004 was a great success, thanks to the outstanding efforts of Frank St. George and his team of China Lakers who planned, organized, designed, and built the parts of the celebration. Readers that missed the events are invited to come to the Museum and see the Shrike exhibit that was developed, and the video products (DVD format) of the events, which are now on sale in the Gift Shop.

During the same period, the dedication of the Memorial to China Lake persons having died in the line of duty was conducted. Some of the supporting citations for this dedication are exhibited in this newsletter. If you missed this dedication, you are encouraged to visit the site, which is across the street to the north of the Museum. Adjacent to the Memorial we now have four aircraft displayed, with a fifth soon to be in place. These aircraft are there due to the great efforts of Jimmie Price and his team of volunteers, and Chief James Jones and his team of Seabees. As of

this writing, the new pavement in the front of the Museum is not yet finished, delayed partly by the nice rain we had in late December and early January. Hopefully, by the time you read this, the new paving is in place, allowing parking in the vicinity of the Memorial Rock, and sidewalk access to the aircraft displays.

The next big event for the Foundation and Museum is the Membership Dinner/Auction, scheduled for 5 March 2005, so mark your calendars, and plan to attend, donate those interesting items for auction, and count on an enjoyable evening. Wayne and Pat Doucette lead the committee planning and organizing the Dinner/Auction, and as one of several projects to raise funding to support the effort, a 50-50 drawing was conducted. Fifty tickets at \$50.00 each were sold, with half of the cash (\$1250) going to the drawing winner and half going to the Dinner/Auction fund. The drawing was conducted during the CLMF Board of Directors meeting held on 17 November 2005. The winning ticket drawn was

Museum Happenings by Barry Lowry, CLMF Museum Manager

As has happened so many times before in this column, there are great changes at the museum to report. You will see elsewhere in this newsletter an introduction letter from Debbie Rios the Navy's new full-time Museum Director. This is the beginning of what will be a regular column in the *China Laker*. Debbie has moved into the front office at the museum and will be working diligently to plot the museum's future. Yours truly has moved into the CLMF Business Office adjacent to the museum store. Many people have asked me how this change affects my activities here at the museum. Other than being much less visible to museum visitors, my activities have remained essentially the same. Truth is, I have always spent the vast majority of my time on CLMF activities and not on museum operation. What I have done for the museum is seen to it that the museum has been available daily for visitors, handled the occasional building maintenance item, arranged passes for visitors, booked tours and conference room use and answered lots and lots of questions. Debbie has many responsibilities which take her away from the building, hence I remain responsible for execution most of these same tasks. Over time I am certain that having the Navy museum staff present with the ability to work more closely with the foundation on a continuing basis will be a win-win situation for the Navy, the museum and the foundation alike. It will provide for a more robust museum operation with new and ever changing opportunities for education and entertainment of the museum's clientele.

Volunteerism at the museum continues to be strong and beneficial to the museum. We have acquired several new volunteers over the last year and seen several familiar faces return. Henry Blecha is back from hip surgery and is deeply involved in several aspects of the museum. In an attempt to fully recognize the contributions of our volunteers we will be publishing a profile of one volunteer in each future edition of the *China Laker*. This began with the piece "A Family of Volun-



Snow at the museum January 2005

teers" in the Fall 2004 issue and continues in this issue with a profile of long-time volunteer Harold Platzek. Remember that Dotsy Cronin is the focal point for all volunteer activity. Call her with your schedule issues, new ideas or just to bug her if nothing else!!

Various improvement and expansion projects continue in the foundation as well as the museum. Your Museum Manager has taken on the task of revising the foundation's web page which has been relatively static since its creation in the mid 90's. People are constantly asking why we don't do this with our page or why we don't have that. In the Fall of 2004 I was presented an opportunity to have the Cerro Coso Community College web design class take on a renovation of our page as a student project. I met with the web design instructor just before the holidays and worked out the basic concept and timing of the project. The class will be ready for the project around April 2005. Between now and then I, along with my team of advisors, will be planning page content, services to be included and all the other things that go into a productive web page design. These will hopefully include an on-line museum store with real-time purchasing, a significant fundraising capability, a better-integrated

Early Life at NOTS (continued from page 1)

She said, "The Japanese just surrendered and the president gave us two days off with pay!"

Because of the tremendous victory (World War II was finally over!) most people wanted to celebrate. A good portion of the people on base headed for Los Angeles and other far off places. But because our 1938 Ford had developed engine trouble, we stayed on the base and celebrated with our good friends, Bob and Mickey Deem. Bob had worked with Glenn at Lockheed Aircraft Corp. in Burbank where Glenn and I both worked during the war. The Deems had arrived shortly before we did.

During wartime, work schedule on the base was 14 days on and 3 days off. As soon as the war was over, the schedule changed to six-day weeks with time and a half for Saturdays. Eventually it was changed to five-day work weeks with Saturdays and Sundays off.

The head of the Machine Shop where Glenn worked was a fellow named Mr. Kelvin Booty. There was no mail delivery on the base; we received our mail in a set of pigeon holes in the shop. Our address was: Glenn Gallaher, Research and Development, NOTS, Inyokern, California; c/o Mr. Booty.

None of the homes on base had telephones. The only calls we received were emergency calls. The call would be received at the Security Office; an Officer would drive to our residence in his gray pick-up truck and inform us of the call; we would then drive to the Security Office to take the call.

For entertainment, movies were shown every evening at the station theater for 10 cents. The base

was quite segregated and since we were "blue collar workers", we were not allowed to attend functions at the Officer's Club. Therefore, we held parties on Friday or Saturday nights in one of the contractor's huts. There was music and dancing but I don't remember what kind of music we had – probably a juke box. And many summer evenings were spent in the stands at the "Beer Hut Diamond" where we watched men's softball. It was most entertaining and we saw many very good ball players. The base pool had already been built when we arrived and was another source of recreation. Parties and dances were also held at a place called "Sandquist Spa" about half way between the base and Inyokern, north of Inyokern Road.

At the southeast corner of Blandy and Hussey Streets stood a Quonset hut which was used as the Base Chapel. Before long, the new Chapel was built and the Quonset hut became the recreation hall. Dances and other community events were held there until the Community Building was erected further west. The Quonset, too, was eventually torn down and the Wreck Center now stands at that location.

There have been many changes on the China Lake Navy Base since I arrived here. It has been interesting to watch the progress and it is probably all for the better. However, I do miss so many of those original folks who lived here and I miss the close feeling of family we experienced at that time.

A BLACK DAY AT CHINA LAKE (continued from page 4)

Sig tells how George Shilberg was planning to go on the flight but his baby had a bad case of pneumonia and he regretfully chose to stay home. Later he said, "My sick baby saved my life." The tragedy struck the close-knit family of China Lake especially hard.

Due to the nature of the work at China Lake, most of the members of the Memorial Wall are military. Nevertheless, civilians here do dangerous work also. Sometimes these people lose their lives in accidents that happen during routine activities. This rou-

tine nature in no way diminishes the sacrifice they make. In a way, the unexpected accidents are even more shocking.

The accident that claimed the lives of these seven men was the worst in terms of numbers in the history of China Lake. They, like the other members of the Memorial Wall, served their country and all of us.

AUCTION-----AUCTION-----AUCTION-----AUCTION

Remember the All New Auction & Dinner Program will be 5 March 2005

Your Foundation's Planning Committee is creating a new program for the dinner and auction. The program will include a variety of new dining cuisines and beverages for your pleasure and all at a more affordable price. But the main event and evenings excitement will be the Live and Silent Auctions, which are planned this year to ensure everyone can participate and take home outstanding and top quality items. The Auction and Dinner Program is a main fundraiser for the Foundation and for it to be successful we not only need your participation at the Auction & Dinner, but we need your donations of items to be auctioned off. Therefore:

START NOW CONSIDERING WHAT YOU CAN DONATE TO THE AUCTION. MARCH 5 IS LESS THAN TWO MONTHS AWAY, SO DON'T DELAY IN GETTING THOSE GOOD DONATIONS UNDER WAY. THEY CAN RANGE FROM: FINE ART YOU HAVE GROWN WEARY OF (AND YOU CAN USE A TAX DEDUCTION) TO -----GREAT BUT NOT NEEDED CHRISTMAS GIFTS (AND YOU CAN USE A TAX DEDUCTION) TO -----ITEMS YOU LOVE TO PURCHASE FOR THE THRILL OF THE SHOPPING TO -----GOOD STUFF IN THE HOUSE OR GARAGE THAT YOU HAVE OUTGROWN TO -----GREAT HOBBY, CRAFT, COLLECTION, ANTIQUES, ETC. ITEMS YOU HAVE. IN OTHER WORDS "USE YOUR IMAGINATION".

Bring donations to the Museum or call and we will pick them up. If you have ideas for making this our most successful event ever, or if you would like to volunteer to participate in preparing



Auctioneer Wallace Martin has some bidding fun with Cecile Biery at the 2004 Auction

Photo by Liz Babcock

for the Dinner Program, please call:

Wayne Doucette at 760-375-5962

or

Lesta Hays at 760-375-5239

A BLACK DAY AT CHINA LAKE

Compiled by Bertha Ryan from the Rocketeer, Vol. V, No. 6, Feb. 9, 1949
(additional information supplied by Signe Nakashima who worked for NOTS at the time)

It was Thursday, February 3, 1949. Five scientists were going on travel to Alameda. They left Armitage Field at 6:30 am in a Navy twin-engine transport, the JRB-4 Expeditor, with a crew of two Navy pilots on board. At 7 am, the crew reported "on top at 10,000 feet over Walker's Pass." That was the last anyone ever heard from them.

More than fifty airplanes started a search, which lasted until nightfall and through the following weeks. The Air Rescue Service coordinated the search with assistance from the National Guard, the Coast Guard, civilian airplanes, the search group from Alameda Air Station and all the airplanes from Armitage Field. A ground search began at the same time. Severe weather conditions and cloudbanks hanging over the peaks greatly hindered the search efforts.

Easter Sunday fell on April 17 in 1949. Signe Nakashima, who lived and worked at China Lake at the time, describes the heavy rainstorm that day that washed much of the snow from the mountains. A few days later searchers located the remains of the aircraft near Owens Peak. At last, the snow had gone from the wreckage and the crash site was revealed.

Pilot of the airplane was Commander A. Minevielle, USN. He was the Executive Officer at



Crash site near Owens Peak

the Naval Air Facility and had been at China Lake since January 7, 1948. The Navy later named a park at China Lake's former NAF Pool in his honor. The co-pilot was Lieutenant (JG) Charles V. Matus, USNR who had reported for duty only five days before the accident. Sig reports that Lieutenant Matus and his wife were expecting a baby who was born just about the time the wreckage was discovered.

The five passengers were civil servants. Dr. J.K.L. McDonald, from the Mathematics Division of the Research Department, had come to the station in the fall of 1948 from New York University where he was the Technical Director of Research and a professor of mathematical physics. Dr. John McKinley arrived in September 1948 and worked in the Explosives Department as a metallurgical engineer and chemist. Rodney Morrin had been employed at NOTS on the scientific staff since December 1946. Myron G. Kellogg was a physicist in ballistics since May 1948. Joseph Vargus, the longest employed, had been a consultant in physics starting November 1945.



SNB—Similar to JRB-4 Expeditor

KERN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

CERTIFICATE OF

RECOGNITION

PRESENTED TO

CHINA LAKE MEMORIAL

In recognition of the dedication of the China Lake Memorial to honor the men and women who died while working at China Lake since 1943; and For exemplary public service and civic contributions to the community and Kern County

October 15, 2004

Signatures of: Jon W. Gusterson (Chairman, Kern County Board of Supervisors), Don Mahen (Supervisor, Kern County), Ray Watson (Supervisor, Kern County), Peter Rame (Supervisor, Kern County), and Barbara Patrick (Supervisor, Kern County).



Message From The Director

By Debbie Rios, NAVAIR-WD Museum Director

Hi

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself. I am Debbie Rios, and I have taken on the very challenging job of Director of the Naval Museum of Armament and Technology (NMAT). I have spent the last 19 1/2 years working in the ARM Program office, here at China Lake, as everything from Quality Assurance Representative to Production Manager. I have taken over the Director position from Bob Campbell who will be (really) retiring from the Navy civilian workforce. Unlike Bob I will be working full time, and there is certainly a lot to be accomplished.

I truly enjoy working in a team environment, and I am looking forward to working with the NMAT Team. I see numerous challenges ahead of us, but I know we will tackle each of these challenges head on. I have two very capable Navy teammates working with me. Leroy Doig is our Historian/Curator, and he has been successfully operating in that position for many years now. When it comes to knowing and understanding the history of China Lake there is no one better than Leroy! Eric Bengtson (who I am sure, many of you already know and have enjoyed his many exhibits) is our new Exhibits Manager. Eric has moved from the Technical

Information Division (TID) to work directly for the Museum. That means we have a wonderful opportunity to upgrade our current exhibits as well as developing new ones! Eric is also looking forward to sculpting for the Museum.

I look forward to meeting all of our Foundation members either here at one of our new quarterly "Potluck" lunches, or by email or phone. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions, suggestions, or we can always use a new Volunteer! My phone number is 760-939-0414 and my email address is debra.rios@navy.mil.

Debbie Rios



Photo by Liz Babcock

Debbie and her staff during the Shrike 50th Anniversary October '04. L to R Eric Bengtson, Leroy Doig, III and Debbie



THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

October 7, 2004

I send greetings to those gathered for the dedication of the Memorial Rock at the United States Naval Museum of Armament and Technology. This memorial honors civilians and military members who made the ultimate sacrifice in service to our country at the China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station.

America is safer because of the brave men and women who serve and sacrifice to defend our liberty. For more than half a century, NAWWS China Lake employees have researched and developed innovative weapons and equipment for our military. Your commitment to excellence helps make our Armed Forces the finest in the world.

As we continue to fight terror and advance peace, America remains grateful for all those who contribute to the defense of our Nation. This occasion honors the heroes who have given their lives. Their selfless service will never be forgotten and will continue to stand as an example of patriotism to all our citizens.

Laura joins me in sending our best wishes. May God bless you, and may God continue to bless America.

Having unfortunately arrived too late for the China Lake Memorial dedication ceremony, President Bush's letter is reproduced here. Letters of recognition were received for the memorial from all of our elected government representatives federal, state and local. These will be printed in the China Laker as space permits until all have been published

Volunteer Profile: Harold Platzek

Your museum exists because of volunteers. Of all the people doing the work that keeps the U.S. Naval Museum of Armament and Technology running, only one is paid. The museum is successful only because of the invaluable help of the volunteers.

The randomly selected volunteer featured in this issue, Harold Platzek, a native Californian, graduated from Taft High School in 1942. He and his wife met in high school and were married that fall as Harold attended freshman year at Bakersfield Junior College where he played football.

Harold volunteered for the Navy with hopes of finishing his first year of college. What a surprise when he discovered himself on the way to boot camp in Idaho far from the ocean in late December of 1942! He served most of his enlistment in the South Pacific aboard the USS Wright.

After his discharge in 1945, he attended Taft Junior College and then studied aerospace engineering at Whittier College. He came to work at China Lake in 1956. He soon earned an advanced degree from UCLA by taking courses on base. He served as Chairman of the China Lake section of the AIAA in the 1970s.

Harold worked at China Lake for 35 years, with an additional three years as a re-hired annuitant. This entire time was in the Propulsion Development Department where he was a designer of rocket motors, specializing in propulsion and power. One of his projects involved a volunteer assignment to Vietnam, where he rode a river patrol boat along all the rivers of the area. Harold received the prestigious Technical Director's Award for outstanding technical accomplishment in 1985. He retired in 1989 after being associated with most of the weapons systems developed at China Lake.

What to do, once retired? Well, he had no

trouble figuring that out. He and Florence, his wife of more than 60 years, did lots of traveling – England, Russia, Sweden, Berlin (where they watched the wall come down and got a piece of it), Greece, Crete, Turkey, the Mediterranean, China, Australia, Mexico and other places.

Harold had a chance to go to Edwards Air Force Base for some work. After thinking about the early mornings, the long drive, the pressure,



he decided to enjoy his retirement. He chose to join the volunteer force of the United States Naval Museum of Armament and Technology – both for his interest and for the museum's good fortune.

When asked why he volunteered, he said, "I worked all those years, and now it is time to give back. I can work at the museum and tell people about those systems I worked on. There is no pressure. It is fun!"

Harold works as a docent. He greets people when they arrive, shows them the videos, and, if they choose, tells them something about the weapons with which he was associated. He enjoys people. However, his experience in Turkey, where over-eager merchants hovered over the tourists, has made him conscious of the depth of escort the visitors desire. He will show them through the exhibits personally or he will follow their lead and

**CHINA LAKE MUSEUM FOUNDATION / CARRIAGE INN
WEEKEND PACKAGE**

When: March 4-6, 2005

What: Includes:
 ~ Two (2) Nights (Friday and Saturday) at the Carriage Inn
 ~ Two (2) Tickets to the Saturday Petroglyph Tour on the Naval Air Warfare Centers North Range
 ~ Two (2) Tickets to the Saturday CLMF Dinner/Auction at the Kerr McGee Center
 ~ Two (2) Tickets to the Sunday Breakfast at the Carriage Inn

Price: Weekend Package - \$146.00 dollars per couple

***For reservations and details contact the China Lake Museum Foundation
(760) 939-3105***