



THE CHINA LAKER

Vol. 13, No. 2

Newsletter of the China Lake Museum Foundation

Spring 2007

BERLIN AIRLIFT EXPERIENCE

By John Ward

In September, 1946 they were still drafting men into the Army. Even though I had gone up for two pre-induction physicals, I had not received a draft notice. I did not want to go into the army so I joined the Air Force. I spent two months in San Antonio, Texas in basic training. After taking a battery of tests four of us were selected for Aircraft and Engine Mechanics School. That was just what I wanted to do. So I was sent to Keesler Field, Miss. to A&E School. I spent four months in basic A&E training and I was selected for C-54 specialists school. The C-54 at that time was a modern four engine transport aircraft. Upon completing this program I was assigned to the Military Air Transport Service (MATS) at Westover AFB, Mass. in April 1947. I climbed on the train to Massachusetts and it stopped in Penn Station, NY for an eight hour lay over. I took advantage of this opportunity to go sight seeing around New York. My walking around took me on a tour in the RKO Bldg. During the tour they stopped in a studio to show us this new technology. Of course they choose the person in uniform to help them demonstrate. I was a star on TV in 1947. I got on the train again and went to Springfield, Mass. There I caught the bus to Westover AFB. Here I am a 19 year old boy who grew up in a small town in Calif., and I had never been out of the state before joining the service. I thought this was a great experience. I found that I enjoyed my job and the base.

One Sunday morning in Sept. I had just been to the Mess Hall and had breakfast. I was back in the barracks getting ready to go into town to see some friends. A fellow from the Squadron Orderly Room came in and said you had better get packed you are flying to Germany tonight. "Airlift"? What is that?. I may have heard about problems in Berlin in passing but I wasn't concerned about problems they were having in Europe. The Soviets had closed off all ground traffic going into Berlin June 24, 1948. They were planning to take over all of Berlin from the French, British and the Americans. These countries decided to begin an airlift to Berlin to provide food and coal to survive. So that night I was one of a plane load of mechanics heading to our first stop in Newfoundland. After a few hours there we were off to some small islands in the Atlantic Ocean called the Azores. There we were fed and rested a bit before we took off again. The next stop was Rhein/Main Air Force Base in Frankfurt, Germany. The flight up to now was reasonably smooth since we were over water even though we were in a Air Force C-54 that was unpressurized and it probably didn't fly over 10,000ft. I have tendencies to get airsick on a bumpy flight and when we hit the coast of France I was beginning to get queasy. We had no plans to stop in Paris to see the sights, but the pilot wanted to fly over the city and he circled the Arc de Triumph. Of course I had to look down and everything was going around and I got sick. We had 2 more hours to Frankfurt over the bumpy terrain. When we landed I don't think I have ever been so sick. However, I did manage to stumble off the plane and we were taken to a nearby Army base to spend the night in temporary quarters. I was awakened the next morning and it was then I realized how lucky I was to have joined the Air Force rather than the Army. At 6 o'clock they shot off a cannon with a trumpet blaring out revelry and all the soldiers had to line up at attention for roll call. After being awakened I went down to the latrine (restroom) and it was there I realized I may be able to understand the German language. A cleaning woman was there and she told me "der hot vasser machine is kaput". I knew exactly what she meant.

In the first few days I was in Germany I learned a lot. Much of the few cities I saw were piles of rubble with a few buildings standing. Of course some of the homes were unlivable as well as the structures that provided a livelihood for the people before the war. Hence there were many "displaced people". I also was made aware that many of the young women resorted to prostitution as a livelihood since their country was suddenly overrun with many "rich" American soldiers. In reality many of the women were looking to establish a relationship with an American soldier since many German men would not be returning to their homes. I was a naive innocent young boy of 19. I found out from two experienced older men of our group who were eager to take advantage of the situation also came down with VD within a few days. You must realize these observations are those of an American service man that has had no opportunity to meet the general population of the community.

Stalwart long-time China Laker John Ward was inspired to write this article by the lead story in the Summer 2006 issue of the *The China Laker*, "A First Hand Look at the Berlin Airlift", by Bernard S. Smith. John and wife Bobbie, both very active in several local community service organizations, are also Life Members and Major Donors of the China Lake Museum Foundation.

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Combined Federal Campaign

We were then taken to the airfield to our permanent "temporary" quarters to begin our mission to maintain and fix the aircrafts that flew to Berlin and back several times a day. When landed they were inspected and loaded for the next flight. They were loaded by the Germans seeking a livelihood in their destroyed cities. When the Germans came aboard to load a plane the first thing they did was go to the cockpit and empty the ashtrays. Tobacco was hard to find in Germany after the war and it was expensive to buy it on the black market. However the American service men had a supply even though it was rationed for personal use. We also had maintenance help from displaced persons who had experience with the German Air Force. All of our inspection sheets were in German and English and each American mechanic had one or two German helpers. This was a good experience since you could establish a personal relationship with local residents of this foreign country.

Working on the line was hard work but we occasionally had time off and we could catch the bus into Frankfurt. It was very depressing to see many buildings uninhabitable and some were piles of rubble. However there were still many businesses open including one I saw with a sign that said FW Woolworth. People were on the streets going on about their business the best they could. In my tour of the city I saw a zoo with happy animals. There was also a beautiful arboretum and a park which the local citizens and families were enjoying. The people seem to be happy on the American occupied side of Germany. However the Russians had blockaded the other half of Germany.

After four months of duty at Rhein/Main Air Base the personnel arriving were classified as "permanent change of station" rather than temporary as I was. Hence the order came down that they were going to start a new base for the Airlift at Fassberg which is in the northern part of Germany near the little town of Celle. The base at Fassberg was a previous German airfield that happens to be in the British Zone. Of course the temporary personnel were sent to Fassberg to prepare for and start airlift operations there. This was totally different experience since the British had done little to upgrade the airfield and there were still some German wrecked aircraft in the woods near the runway. Within the barracks compound there was a British office building and a small Sergeants Club that welcomed the American airmen to come into their club and buy beer at fifty cents a gallon. We were housed in the existing German "barracks" which were beautiful brick two stories buildings with individual rooms of which 2 or 3 men would share. Unlike the American barracks where 20 men shared the same room. The first morning we were invited to the British mess hall for breakfast which consisted of fish and potato patties. The next morning there was an American mess hall. We proceeded to outfit the hangers and facilities to fit our aircraft.

The existing hangers were smaller and our C-54's didn't fit for proper maintenance. Therefore wooden scaffoldings were fabricated for easier maintenance. Then there was a group of aircraft assigned to fly from Fassberg to Berlin. The airfield had a shorter runway as compared to Rhein/Main and Berlin so it required greater pilot skill to land safely. One aircraft went off the end of the runway and broke off the nose wheel. It was a smaller airfield situated in the woods of northern Germany and the area was not well populated. The nearby little village of Celle didn't offer much to explore. One day a buddy and myself went into Celle to look around. After exploring the city we were standing at the bus stop and a British officer pulled up in his car and invited us to ride to Fassberg with him. It was an English car with the steering wheel on the right side. He had a German citizen as a driver. I set in the left front seat. The officer had an interest in how are the U.S. airmen getting along at the Fassberg airfield. I was interested in getting to Fassberg safely with an impetuous German driving on the right side of the road in the right seat who couldn't see anything coming down the other side of the road.

After 3 month it was time for the temporary personnel to go back home. We packed up and headed to Bremerhaven where a troop ship was waiting for us. All the planes were busy on the airlift. When we arrived at the boat dock we didn't see our ship at first. The tide was out and the small boat was below the level of the dock. Another first for me I'd never been on a sea going ship before and here I was going across the Atlantic onboard a ship. It was a beautiful cruise through the Scandinavian passage and then we passed the White Cliffs of Dover of England. That night we entered the north Atlantic in February. It was rough and of course I got sick. They had a big garbage can in the forecastle where we bedded down. It was well used by more than just me. The next morning they passed out this new seasick medicine called Dramamine. It worked and I had a good cruise. Several years later I read a story in Readers Digest about this new seasick medicine they developed during the war. They tried it out on the roughest troop ship in the navy, the General C.C. Ballou - the very ship I took my first cruise on. We landed on Staten Island one morning in New York and then I was bussed back to my home base, Westover, AFB Mass.

Being one of the first to work on the Berlin Airlift I look back at the truly unforgettable experience this young man of 19 years had. It was indeed a monumental effort put force by the American troops to save the people of Berlin from the Russian war machine. On May 12, 1949 the roads were open again. The airlift continued until September 30, 1949. (Continued page 4)

**REMEMBER
THE ANNUAL
DINNER—AUCTION
FUND RAISING EVENT AT THE KERR-MCGEE CENTER
ON
2 JUNE 2007**

China Lake Museum Foundation
P.O. Box 217 · Ridgecrest, CA 93556-0217
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PRESIDENT'S REPORT
By **BOB CAMPBELL**

We are busy on several fronts. The dinner auction, Wall-eye exhibit planning, and membership.

The dinner auction date is fast approaching. Jim and Betty Seaman and team are doing a great job in pulling together the details for the auction. Raytheon has stepped up and offered to sponsor the event this year for which we are very grateful. We still need items for the auction, so if you have some quality items please give us a call at the office (Chris at 939-3530) and we will arrange to pick them up.

In the last issue I mentioned the Walleye exhibit. Dave Livingston volunteered to lead the team coming up with the concept for the exhibit. He, Marc Moulton, Ray Blackwell, Joe Seibold, Chuck Newmyer and Paul Homer are working to come up with the concept. They are working with Eric Bengtson and Debbie Rios on the Museum staff. Mark Pahuta will be helping on the video clips and Leroy Doig will be helping pull together some of the old documentation from the archives after he has moved to his new office spaces. We have had a member Corporation who has offered to help fund the exhibit. So we are making some progress toward a new exhibit for the Museum. Please contact me if you are interested in supporting this initiative and I will put you in contact with Dave and team.

We are also continuing to expand our membership basis. To date we are closing in on 600 members. Pat Doucette (Membership VP) and I would like to see this number double. We will be mounting a membership campaign to attract new members. The money from the membership fees support operations and administrative activities. As we embark on our building program, education initiatives and other out reach activities we are considering the feasibility and cost effectiveness of hiring help in selected areas to leverage the volunteer support we already have.

Sheryl Wilson has volunteered to help us put out the quarterly newsletter. She will relieve Paul Homer who has been doing the letter over the past several years. We look forward to her participation.

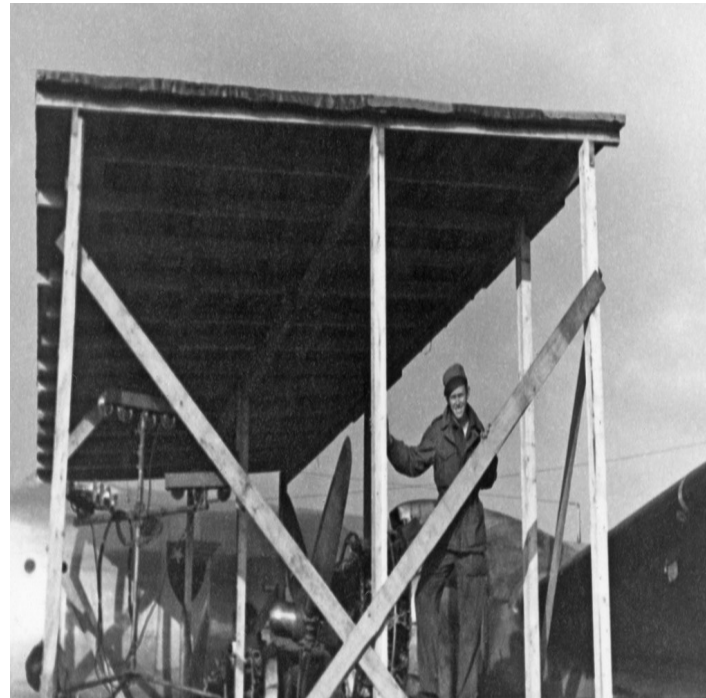
I hope to see you at the dinner auction this year. It promises to be fun-filled. Scott O'Neil is providing another one of his wooden bowls for the auction. Larry Zabel has committed to provide an original painting. There are many other local artists who are participating by providing some excellent items, including Merrie Giles, Betty Spindler, Lois Hinman, Bill McEwan, Skip Gorman and Bob Burrows, to name a few.



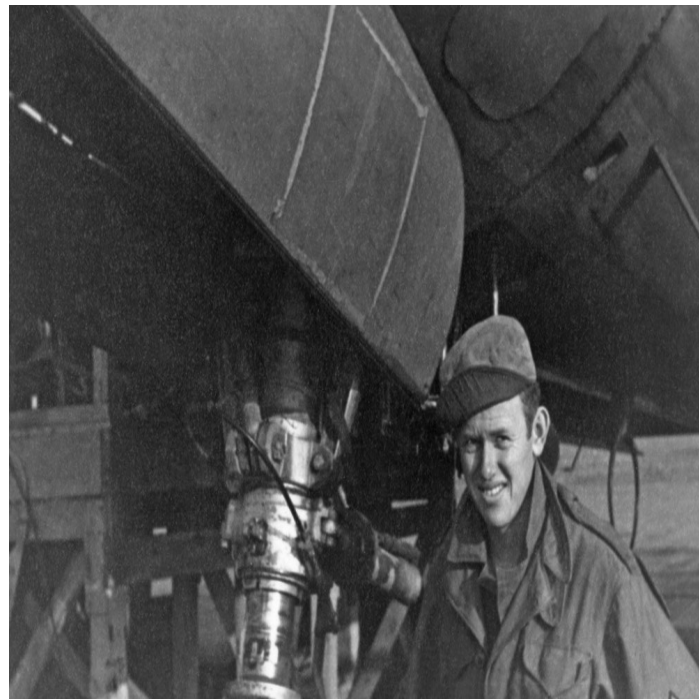
The people of Frankfurt go about their business against a backdrop of the Cathedral of St. Bartholomew, which suffered massive damage from Allied bombing in WW-II. The cathedral has since been rebuilt.



Frankfurt street scene in 1948. World War II damage is still very evident.



work on the engines of the C-54 aircraft taking part in the Berlin airlift. Corporal John Ward at work in 1948 on the wheel mechanism of the C-54 transport aircraft at the Fassberg Airbase.



All photographs by John Ward and the John Ward Collection.

Corporal John Ward stands on scaffolding erected to allow him to

If I may quote the words of Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany – **HELMUT KOHL**

“Germany Remembers the Berlin Airlift of 1948-49”

Forty years ago, on May 12, 1949, freedom triumphed in Berlin.

On that day, the courageous and spectacular airlift of the U.S. Air Force, together with French and British forces, and the perseverance of the Berliners finally broke the eleven month stranglehold of the Soviet blockade. Every thirty seconds, a plane landed in West-Berlin carrying all necessary goods and materials, thus keeping the city free and alive.

On that day, great determination, the commitment to freedom, and solidarity prevailed over brutal repression. Thus, German-American friendship was truly sealed.

We, the government of the Federal Republic of Germany and the German people, remember those who lost their lives and reaffirm our gratitude to the American people.

The airlift will not be forgotten. It will always be a token of German-American friendship and partnership for the cause of free-



John aboard Ballou, in the North Atlantic, surviving the effects of Dramamine, being tried for the first time.

dom, human Troops aboard the USS General C.C. Ballou, the roughest troop ship in the Navy. Leaving Bremerhaven with tug assist.



A C-54 four-engine transport aircraft, part of the Berlin Airlift, lands at Rhein-Main Air Force Base in Frankfurt for maintenance and reloading. Photo by John Ward

New Members received since Winter 2007 Newsletter

Business Contributor Member (\$100.00)
Ridgecrest Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, Ridgecrest CA

Lifetime Members (\$1,000.00)
Burklund, Vernon & Eloise - Ridgecrest CA **Saxton, Les & Nancy. - Ridgecrest CA**
Hopkins, Elvy R. - Ridgecrest CA

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Commemorative—Memorial Brick Program

The China Lake Museum Foundation has a brick purchase program. We have several donors who have purchased bricks as part of this program. We are currently working to place our first order and proceed with the display of the purchased brick at the Museum. The bricks are an excellent way of lasting recognition. They will be moved to the new museum once it is in place. Prices for the bricks are \$100 for a 4x8 brick with three lines of inscription. For \$250 one can purchase an 8x8 brick with more lines of inscription. Please contact the Museum Office for details.

Dinner & Auction Information Sheet

Museum Mission: The U.S. Naval Museum of Armament and Technology, located at the Naval Air Weapons Station, China Lake, California was established on May 12, 2000. The mission of the museum is to interpret and preserve the history of the role played by the United States Navy in the design, development, and technological advancement in military armament and to educate the public of this proud Navy heritage and history.

Auction Objective: The principal objective of the auction is to raise funds for the construction of a new museum building within the next five years. All of the proceeds from the auction will be placed in the building fund.

Why a New Museum? The current facility requires major refurbishment, and because of its location on the base is not easily accessible by the general population. The current facility has limited exhibit space, with a capability of exhibiting only 30% of the collection and story.

Museum Vision: The proposed new museum will have more than 40,000 square feet of inside space plus outside exhibit space, enough to exhibit the collection and have meeting facilities and staff office space for administrative purposes. The museum is and will be a unique national asset with an unmatched display of the weapons systems history of the U.S. Navy. The museum will be located just outside the main gate of the base on 12 acres of land provided by the Navy and the City of Ridgecrest.

Benefits to the Community: Once the new facility is located outside the base, it will serve as a significant tourist draw, which will directly benefit the local community, region, and state. Conservative estimates indicate that more than 60,000 visitors a year could visit the museum and the community.

How the Community Can Help: China Lake Museum Foundation (CLMF) membership and participation in the auction are visible indicators of the community support and provide leverage for gaining outside grant support.

What It Will Cost: The goal of the China Lake Museum Foundation (a 501 (c) 3 corporation) is to raise \$10M over the next four years and to have the building built with new exhibits by that time. The foundation is aggressively seeking outside donor support from aerospace corporations, private foundations, state and federal funding sources, and other interested corporations and individuals.

Additional Opportunities to Participate:

Advertising in the Dinner & Auction Program:

Inclusion in the Dinner & Auction Program:

- \$500 – full-page ad
- \$250 – half-page ad
- \$125 – quarter-page ad
- \$50 – business-card-size ad

Event Sponsorship:

\$1000 Sponsor: includes dinner and table for eight, complimentary CLMF membership for non-member table guests, dinner wine, name displayed in program and in the museum, chance for one of three or more prizes worth \$1000 (Sidewinder giclée, four nights at Mammoth cabin, lifetime personal or one year business membership) , significant advertising in local media for business donor.

\$200 Sponsor: includes two dinner tickets, reserved seating, name in program, 10 raffle tickets.

Membership:

Individual/Family Per Year: \$25, Contributor \$100, Benefactor \$500, Sponsor \$333 (Individual/Family membership plus sponsors one enlisted membership), Enlisted \$8
Business Per Year: Member \$1000, Sponsor \$500, Contributor \$100
Lifetime Individual/Family: \$1000

The China Lake Museum Foundation

Cordially Invites You to the

Seventh Annual Dinner~Auction~Fundraiser

In Support of

The U. S. Naval Museum of Armament and Technology

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Honorary Chairman

Captain Walter Schirra, USN (Ret.)
Honorary Chairman

Saturday June 2, 2007
Kerr McGee Center
100 West California Avenue
Ridgecrest, California

5:30 pm - Cocktails - Start Silent Auction
6:00 pm - Dinner catered by Farris'
7:30 pm - Welcome and Live Auction

Desert Casual Raffle (Must be present) Cash Bar

\$25 Single, \$40 Couple

(Block of 8 tickets purchased at one time
reserves table for eight)

Event Sponsorship Options:

\$1000 Table: Table for 8 with dinner tickets, dinner wine, chance for \$1000 prizes, complimentary one year CLMF membership for non-member table guests, name in program, significant advertising in local media for business donor.

\$200 Sponsorship: Includes 2 dinner tickets, reserved seating, name in program, 10 raffle tickets

FOR TICKETS: By phone, call the Foundation at 760-939-3530 with your reservation. Tickets can also be purchased at the gift shop at the U. S. Naval Museum of Armament and Technology on the Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake, CA or the Ridgecrest Chamber of Commerce located at 128-B East California Avenue, Ridgecrest, CA.

China Lake Museum Foundation Donors Attend Dinner

The New Year was rung in by donors to the China Lake Museum Foundation January 4 at the home of Bob & Alice Campbell in Inyokern, overlooking the Indian Wells Valley. "Donor Dinners" are donated by the Campbells and other CLMF Board Members to Annual Donors of \$200 or more. The Foundation, a non-profit 501 (c)(3) organization supporting the US Naval Museum of Armament and Technology on the China Lake Navy Base, is raising money for a new building in Ridgecrest and for improving the programs and displays of the current Museum. Another dinner was held on 14 April in the Spring for new donors and for those who weren't able to attend the January dinner, at the peak of the Campbells' rose and iris garden blooms. To become a CLMF Annual Donor, a Member, or to obtain pass instructions to visit the Museum on Base, call Chris at 760-939-3530 during Museum open hours 10:00-4:00 daily except Sunday and Federal Holidays. Any size donation to the Foundation is important to show support by the local community for grant funding purposes. You may mail your check to the CLMF, PO Box 217, Ridgecrest, CA 93527-0217.



Above: Some of the happy Donors and CLMF Directors enjoy the January 2007 Donor Appreciation Dinner.



Left: Gates's, Knights, Bellinos, McEwans, and Summers relax after the main courses during the April 2007 Donor Appreciation Dinner.