



THE CHINA LAKER

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Newsletter of the China Lake Museum Foundation

Summer 2011

Naval History of the USS William D. Porter DD-579

From November 1943, until her demise in June 1945, the American destroyer 'William D. Porter' was often hailed - whenever she entered port or joined other Naval ships - with the greetings: "Don't shoot, we're Republicans!"

For a half a century, the US Navy kept a lid on the details of the incident that prompted this salutation. A Miami news reporter made the first public disclosure in 1958 after he stumbled upon the truth while covering a reunion of the destroyer's crew. The Pentagon reluctantly and tersely confirmed his story, but only a smattering of newspapers took notice.

In 1943, the Willie D, as the Porter was nicknamed, accidentally fired a live torpedo at the battleship Iowa during a practice exercise. As if this weren't bad enough, the Iowa was carrying President Franklin D. Roosevelt at the time, along with Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, and all of the country's W.W.II military brass. They were headed for the Big Three Conference in Tehran, where Roosevelt was to meet Stalin and Churchill. Had the Porter's torpedo struck the Iowa at the aiming point, the last 60 years of world history might have been quite different.

The USS William D Porter (DD-579) was one of hundreds of assembly line destroyers built during the war. They mounted several heavy and light guns, but their main armament consisted of 10 fast-running and accurate torpedoes that carried 500-pound warheads. This destroyer was placed in commission on July 1943 under the command of Wilfred Walker, a man on the Navy's fast career track.

In the months before she was detailed to accompany the Iowa across the Atlantic in November 1943, the Porter and her crew learned their trade, experiencing the normal problems that always beset a new ship and a novice crew.

The mishaps grew more serious when she became an escort for the pride of the fleet, the big new battleship Iowa.

The night before they left Norfolk, bound for North Africa, the Porter accidentally damaged a nearby sister ship when she backed down along the other ship's side and her anchor tore down the other ship's railings, life rafts, ship's boat and various other formerly valuable pieces of equipment. The Willie D merely had a scraped anchor, but her career of mayhem and mishaps had begun.

Just twenty four hours later, the four-ship convoy, consisting of Iowa and her secret passengers, the Willie D, and two other destroyers, was under strict instructions to maintain complete radio silence. Since they were going through a known U-boat feeding ground, speed and silence were the best defense.

Suddenly, a tremendous explosion rocked the convoy. All of the ships commenced anti-submarine maneuvers. This continued until the Porter sheepishly admitted that one of her depth charges had fallen off her stern and exploded. The 'safety' had not been set as instructed.

Captain Walker was watching his fast track career become side-tracked.

Shortly thereafter, a freak wave inundated the ship, stripping away everything that wasn't lashed down. A man washed overboard and was never found.

Next, the fire room lost power in one of its boilers.

The Captain, at this point, was making reports almost hourly to the Iowa about the Willie D's difficulties. It would have been merciful if the force commander had detached the hard luck ship and sent her back to Norfolk . But, no, she sailed on.

The morning of 14 November 1943 dawned with a moderate sea and pleasant weather. The Iowa and her escorts were just east of Bermuda , and the president and his guests wanted to see how the big ship could defend herself against an air attack. So, the Iowa launched a number of weather balloons to use as anti-aircraft targets. It was exciting to see more than 100 guns shooting at the balloons, and the President was proud of his Navy.

Just as proud was Admiral Ernest J King, the Chief of Naval Operations; large in size and by demeanor, a true monarch of the sea. Disagreeing with him meant the end of a naval career. Up to this time, no one knew what firing a torpedo at him would mean.

Over on the Willie D, Captain Walker watched the fireworks display with admiration and envy. Thinking about career redemption and breaking the hard luck spell, the Captain sent his impatient crew to battle stations. They began to shoot down the balloons the Iowa had missed as they drifted into the Porter's vicinity. Down on the torpedo mounts, the crew watched, waiting to take some practice shots of their own on the big battleship, which, even though 6,000 yards away, seemed to blot out the horizon. Lawton Dawson and Tony Fazio were among those responsible for the torpedoes. Part of their job involved ensuring that the primers were installed during actual combat and removed during practice. Once a primer was installed, on a command to fire, it would explode shooting the torpedo out of its tube.

Dawson , on this particular morning, unfortunately had forgotten to remove the primer from torpedo tube #3. Up on the bridge, a new torpedo officer, unaware of the danger, ordered a simulated firing. "Fire 1, Fire 2," and finally, "Fire 3." There was no Fire 4 as the sequence was interrupted by an unmistakable whoooooooshhhhhing sound made by a successfully launched and armed torpedo. Lt H. Steward Lewis, who witnessed the entire event, later described the next few minutes as what hell would look like if it ever broke loose.

(Continued Page 4)

China Lake Museum Foundation

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President's Report by Bob Campbell

As you know by now we had another very successful Dinner Auction in early June. We netted around \$100K. The money goes into our General Fund to support our goals: education outreach, exhibit enhancement and expansion, capital campaign expenses, and operational expenses.

Bob Smith and Mike Benton are working to relocate the commemorative bricks purchased by members and others deployed outside the Museum for all to see. Hopefully we will have this effort concluded by this fall. The bricks are currently displayed in the Museum, but are not visible to the casual observer. The new set up will be accomplished in a manner permitting the easy relocation to the new Museum once it is moved to Ridgecrest.

The capital campaign planning is proceeding and we continue to work with the architect, the County, and the Maturango Museum to firm up the actual parcel boundaries for the new Museum. We are gathering a Capital Campaign Cabinet to help guide and assist us in our solicitation process. We continue with our objective to implement phase 1 and 2 as described in my last note as quickly as possible and will keep you posted on the progress. Susie Raglin and Bob Smith again coordinated and held two science camps this summer along with several volunteers. The camps are discussed elsewhere in this newsletter.

I hope to see you at the Annual Meeting at which we hope to be able to share a more detailed description of our building plans, location and fund raising progress.

The History of the Willie D, continued from page 2

Just after he saw the torpedo hit water on its way to the Iowa and some of the most prominent figures in world history, Lewis innocently asked the Captain, 'Did you give permission to fire a torpedo?' Captain Walker's reply will not ring down through naval history... although words to the effect of Farragut's immortal 'Damn the torpedoes' figured centrally within. Initially there was some reluctance to admit what had happened, or even to warn the Iowa . As the awful reality sunk in, people began racing around, shouting conflicting instructions and attempting to warn the flagship of imminent danger.

First, there was a flashing light warning about the torpedo which unfortunately indicated the torpedo was headed in another direction.

Next, the Porter signaled that the torpedo was going reverse at full speed!

Finally, they decided to break the strictly enforced radio silence.

The radio operator on the destroyer transmitted "'Lion (code for the Iowa), Lion, come right." The Iowa operator, more concerned about radio procedure, requested that the offending station identify itself first.

Finally, the message was received and the Iowa began turning to avoid the speeding torpedo.

Meanwhile, on the Iowa 's bridge, word of the torpedo firing had reached FDR, who asked that his wheelchair be moved to the railing so he could see better what was coming his way. His loyal Secret Service guard immediately drew his pistol as if he was going to shoot the torpedo. As the Iowa began evasive maneuvers, all of her guns were trained on the William D. Porter. There was now some thought that the Porter was part of an assassination plot.

Within moments of the warning, there was a tremendous explosion just behind the battleship. The torpedo had been detonated by the wash kicked up by the battleship's increased speed.

The crisis was over and so was Captain Walker's career. His final utterance to the Iowa , in response to a question about the origin of the torpedo, was a weak, "We did it."

Shortly thereafter, the brand new destroyer, her Captain and the entire crew were placed under arrest and sent to Bermuda for trial. It was the first time that a complete ship's company had been arrested in the history of the US Navy.

The ship was surrounded by Marines when it docked in Bermuda , and held there several days as the closed session inquiry attempted to determine what had happened.

Torpedoman Dawson eventually confessed to having inadvertently left the primer in the torpedo tube, which caused the launching. Dawson had thrown the used primer over the side to conceal his mistake. The whole incident was chalked up to an unfortunate set of circumstances and placed under a cloak of secrecy.

Someone had to be punished. Captain Walker and several other Porter officers and sailors eventually found themselves in obscure shore assignments. Dawson was sentenced to 14 years hard labor. President Roosevelt intervened; however, asking that no punishment be meted out for what was clearly an accident.

The destroyer William D. Porter was banished to the upper Aleutians .. It was probably thought this was as safe a place as any for the ship and anyone who came near her. She remained in the frozen north for almost a year, until late 1944, when she was re-assigned to the Western Pacific.

However, before leaving the Aleutians , she accidentally left her calling card in the form of a five-inch shell fired into the front yard of the American Base Commander, thus rearranging his flower garden rather suddenly.

In December, 1944, the Porter joined the Philippine invasion forces and acquitted herself quite well. She distinguished herself by shooting down a number of attacking Japanese aircraft. Regrettably, after the war, it was reported that she also shot down three American planes. This was a common event on ships, as many gunners, fearful of kamikazes, had nervous trigger fingers.

In April, 1945, the destroyer Porter was assigned to support the invasion of Okinawa . By this time, the greeting "Don't Shoot, We're Republicans" was commonplace and the crew of the Willie D had become used to the ribbing. But the crew of her sister ship, the USS Luce, was not so polite in its salutations after the Porter accidentally riddled her side and superstructure with gunfire.

On 10 June, 1945, the Porter's hard luck finally ran out. She was sunk by a plane which had (unintentionally)attacked it from underwater. A Japanese bomber made almost entirely of wood and canvas slipped through the Navy's defense. Having little in the way of metal surfaces, the plane didn't register on radar. A fully loaded kamikaze, it was headed for a ship near the Porter, but just at the last moment veered away and crashed along side the unlucky destroyer. There was a sigh of relief as the plane sunk out of sight, but then it blew up underneath the Porter, opening her hull in the worst possible place.

Three hours later, after the last man was off board, the Captain jumped to the safety of a rescue vessel and the ship that almost changed world history slipped astern into 2,400 feet of water.

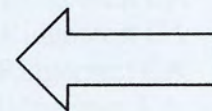
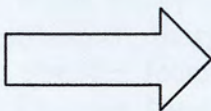
Not a single soul was lost in the sinking. After everything else that happened, it was almost as if the ship decided to let her crew off at the end.

Kit Bonner, Naval Historian

Visit the

China Lake Museum Foundation website!

www.chinalakemuseum.org



**NOMINATION AND ELECTION OF DIRECTORS OF THE
CHINA LAKE MUSEUM FOUNDATION**

The China Lake Museum Foundation adopted by-laws include a provision for electing Directors of the Foundation to three-year overlapping terms of office. This year, up to eight Directors may be elected to three year terms of office. Pat Connell led a nominating committee, and at this writing, the following have indicated their willingness in serving as a Director:

1. Clint Dougherty
2. Jack Latimer
3. Beth Sumners
4. Charles White

Election: The election of Directors shall be conducted at the Annual Membership Meeting held September 22, 2011. The Annual Membership meeting shall begin at 6:00 PM at the Carriage Inn Banquet Room in Ridgecrest. The election and short business meeting will be followed by a program presentation for your interest and enjoyment, and refreshments will be served.

**ANNOUNCEMENT
OF THE
CHINA LAKE MUSEUM FOUNDATION
ANNUAL MEMBERS MEETING
CARRIAGE INN, RIDGECREST, CA
22 SEPTEMBER 2011
6:00 PM**

New Memberships received since Spring 2011 Newsletter:

Business Corporate Members (1,000.00 Annually)

Northrop Grumman - Redondo Beach CA

Contributor Members (\$100.00 Annually)

Muse, Jim & Marie - Arlington VA Peterson, Jeri & Larry - Ridgecrest CA

Sponsor Members (\$33.00 Annually)

Toftner, Christopher P. & Maureen - Ridgecrest CA

Enlisted Military Members ("Free" from Sponsor Memberships)

Draves, Randy & Teresa - Ridgecrest CA Reinhart, Grant & Tori - Ridgecrest CA
Sorge, Robert & Kimberly - Ridgecrest CA

Regular Members (\$25.00 Annually)

Adams, John & Jacklyn - Ridgecrest CA	Bailey, Bill & Michelle - San Diego CA
Batchelder, Ronald & Dana - Ridgecrest CA	Bayarena, Phil - Ridgecrest CA
Bellino, Frank & Terry - Inyokern CA	Bleau, Eric - Ridgecrest CA
Borissenko, Alexj & Mierta, Bonnie - Inyokern CA	Bruce, Rich & Marian - Ridgecrest CA
Callahan, Sean & Tracy - Ridgecrest CA	Clifton, Craig - Bakersfield CA
Conkey, Denis & JoAnne - Newbury Park CA	Cutts, Kelli - Inyokern CA
Crawford, Randy - Ridgecrest CA	Decker, Mark & Cherie - Ridgecrest CA
Delaey, Michael - Ridgecrest CA	DeMay, Tom & Annette - Ridgecrest CA
Dines, Joel & Lynn - Oxnard CA	Doane, Toby - Oxnard CA
Frank, Bill & Susie - Ridgecrest CA	Gardner, Pat & Abigail - Ridgecrest CA
Hamilton, Tom & Mary - Keno OR	Hicks, Hershel & Geri - Ridgecrest CA
Hicks, Sharon - Ridgecrest CA	Hibbs, Joe & Alice - Ridgecrest CA
Hunt, Dick - Ventura CA	Jackson, Gary & Sue Ellen - Ridgecrest CA
Johnson, Curtis & Lois - Ridgecrest CA	Kibbe, Jim & Marion - Whitefish MT
Kuttor, Frances - Ridgecrest CA	Larratt, Doug & Bernadette - Thousand Oaks CA
Leonard, Earnie - Oxnard CA	Lystad, Jessica - Ridgecrest CA
Martin, Calvin & Cecilia - Ridgecrest CA	Matthewson, Russ - Ridgecrest CA
Maxwell, Dave & Lori - Ridgecrest CA	McGinn, Darcy & Peggy - Porter Ranch CA
Mekeel, Kevin - Ridgecrest CA	Mettenburg, C.W. (Zip) & Mary F. - Mt. Pleasant IA
Moore, Michael & Mary - Ridgecrest CA	Moses, Fred & Teresa - Ridgecrest CA
Netzer, John & Paige - Ridgecrest CA	Ogren, Ronald & Mary - Ridgecrest CA
Panasci, Mark & Kimberly - Ridgecrest CA	Phillips, Richard & Ruth - Randsburg CA
Roberts, Charlie & Melanie - Ridgecrest CA	Rossi, Melanie - Ridgecrest CA
Rossi, Nancy - Ridgecrest CA	Schauf M.D., Victoria - Ridgecrest CA
Sherman, Barry - Ridgecrest CA	Smith, Richard & Virginia - Ridgecrest CA
Stauffer, Joanna - Ridgecrest CA	Storch, CAPT Mark & Debbie - Ridgecrest CA
Thatcher, Dave & Kim - Inyokern CA	Witt, Stuart - Ridgecrest, CA
Zamarron, Angela - Ridgecrest CA	

Einar Enevoldson and his Dream of Exploring the Stratosphere by Sailplane

Einar Enevoldson wanted to prove the possibility of soaring a sailplane into the stratosphere. Steve Fossett wanted to set another world record. They had made flights in New Zealand and now Argentina. After many attempts, success seemed elusive. This day was different. The polar vortex was present. They were at 33,000 feet when suddenly Steve's pressure suit pressurized prematurely. Einar was concerned. Should they land when their goal seemed achievable? They descended to a lower, warmer altitude and the suit depressurized. They resumed their climb and reached 51,000 feet. Success! More importantly, they had soared into the stratosphere and demonstrated soaring flight to very high altitudes is possible. The next step is to build a new sailplane capable of taking them farther up into the stratosphere – to 90,000 feet, possibly eventually to 100,000 feet.

Einar Enevoldson (left) and Steve Fossett After their Flight to 51,000 Feet

(Perlan Project Photo)



What was Einar's background that ignited his curiosity and made him an explorer of the air? He learned to fly sailplanes in high school and, with the informal attitudes of the time, was soon teaching his fellow classmates to fly. But he wanted more. He wanted to explore and understand the atmosphere at very high altitudes. So he joined the Air Force and learned to fly fighter jets. Along the way he set time to climb world records in an F-104 reaching as high as 89,000 feet.

The Air Force sent him to the prestigious Empire Test Pilot School in England where he stayed after graduation to complete his exchange tour at Boscombe Down. In 1968 he joined NASA Dryden Flight Research Center at Edwards AFB where he tested and flew just about every aircraft in the NASA inventory including the YF-12A, YF-17, U-2, the X-24B lifting body and many others. Among his exploits was a peripheral and unexpected adventure of a forced land-out in an F-104 which happened while he was returning from an air show where he had exhibited the airplane.

One of his favorite programs at NASA was testing and learning to understand the stall/spin characteristics of the F-14 for the Navy. The list of aircraft he has flown far exceeds 200 but is incomplete as Einar tends to ignore paper work unless it has something to do with airplanes, the atmosphere or safety of flight.

He left NASA in 1987 to join Grob Aerospace in Germany where he became the chief test pilot for the development of very high altitude surveillance aircraft – the Egrett and Strato 2C. It was there that he learned about the polar vortex and accompanying stratospheric polar night jet. He theorized that, under the right conditions and with the right sailplane, this high altitude effect could take him far into the stratosphere -- if he could climb high enough in the wave formed by an optimally aligned mountain range, through the tropopause, into the stratosphere where maybe he could contact the polar vortex and soar still higher.

On August 29, 2006, Einar and Steve achieved their goal and proved it is possible to reach the polar vortex and soar on up further into the stratosphere. Project Perlan had initial success and now it was time to move on to phase 2. Meanwhile, Perlan's funding was lost when Steve Fossett inadvertently flew into the side of a mountain. Einar and others worked as they could without funds in designing a sailplane to go beyond the possibilities of Perlan 1. Good fortune was with them. Along came Dennis Tito, a paying space tourist who had trained in Russia and flown to the International Space Station and

was also a sailplane pilot. He joined the program and provided financing. Perlan 2 was back on track.

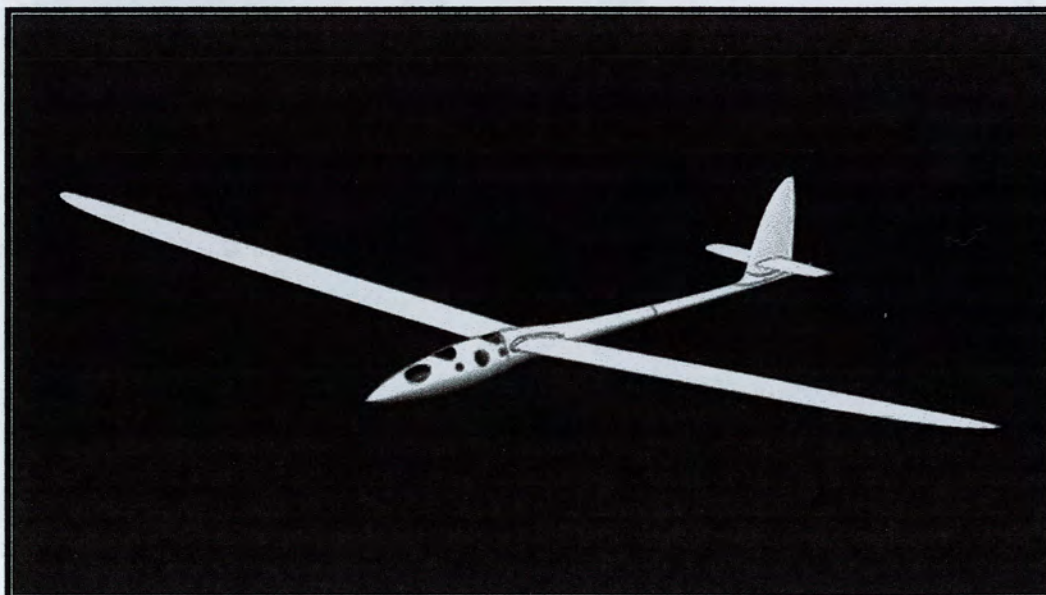
Perlan 2 is well along in design and construction at the company (Windward Performance) in Bend, Oregon, and may have its first test flights at Inyokern in about a year, soon to be followed by an attempt to fly still higher into the stratosphere.

Einar's awards include – Soaring Badges (Silver #193, Gold #629, Diamond #207), Distinguished Flying Cross for time-to-climb records, NASA Exceptional Service Medal for F-111 Supercritical Wing and F-15 RPRV, NASA Exceptional Service Medal for F-14 stall/spin resistance tests, Aviation Week Laurels for assessing post-stall flight control characteristics of the F-14, NASA Associate Fellowship for individual sustained innovative and creative contributions to research, NAA's One of Ten most Memorable Aviation Records of 2006. He was elected to the United States Soaring Hall of Fame in 2010.

CLMF and AIAA will co-sponsor a presentation by Einar Enevoldson on December 1, 2011 at the Carriage Inn. At that time you will hear something of the current status of the program and future plans. There will be an opportunity to ask questions about all aspects of Perlan – past, present and future. Mark your calendar!

A book containing additional information on Einar Enevoldson's background and experience is available for purchase at the CLMF gift shop: *Soaring Beyond the Clouds - Einar Enevoldson Reaches for 100,000 Feet*. He will be available to autograph books after the presentation.

Artist's Rendering of Perlan 2 (Perlan Project Photo)



SECOND SUMMER SCIENCE CAMP A SUCCESS

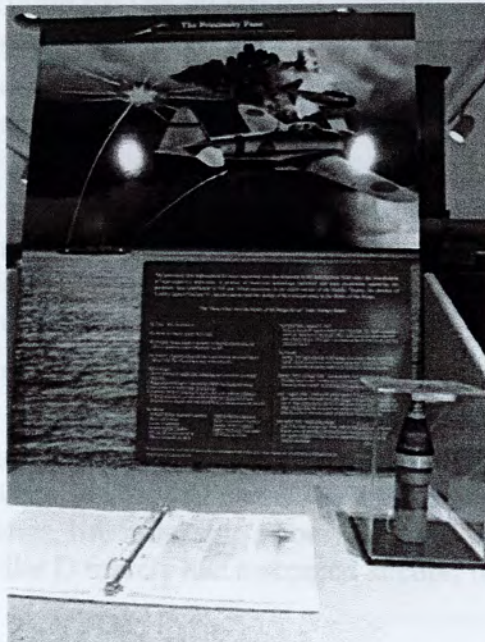
The China Lake Museum Foundation with support from the NAWC-WD Educational Outreach Program conducted its second Summer Science Camp. This week 12-14 July, the camp was for 26 5th grade students and 19-21 July there will 20 6th grade students all from the "Movin On Up" (MOU) program here at China Lake. The camp's theme this week was the science of flight, and focused on aircraft and rockets. The second camp will be focused on aircraft and rockets along with some basic programming of TI Calculator Robots.

Students learned the basics of aircraft flight from classroom lectures and gained "hands-on" experience using computer simulations. A "take off and land successfully" contest was conducted using the simulations to stimulate interest and competition. A flight demonstration of a radio controlled model completed the aircraft science portion of the program.

The science of rockets was explained with classroom demonstrations and exhibits. Hands-on experience was gained using 2-liter bottle water rockets. Each student personalized a rocket and launched it as part of the program. To add interest and excitement, a tennis ball was set on top to the water rocket bottles. This "second stage" flew two to three times as high as the first stage bottle, and typically remained in the air over six seconds. Experiments performed with these rockets included, determining the best amount of water to put in the rocket, and the performance of different weight and diameter second stage balls.

The final day of the class featured a field trip to the Range Control Center (RCC) and Armitage Airfield. At RCC the students visited the air traffic control center and the bays where range tests are controlled and monitored. At the airfield, students were met by one of the VX-31 pilots who toured them through the facility and gave them an overview of a pilot's mission.

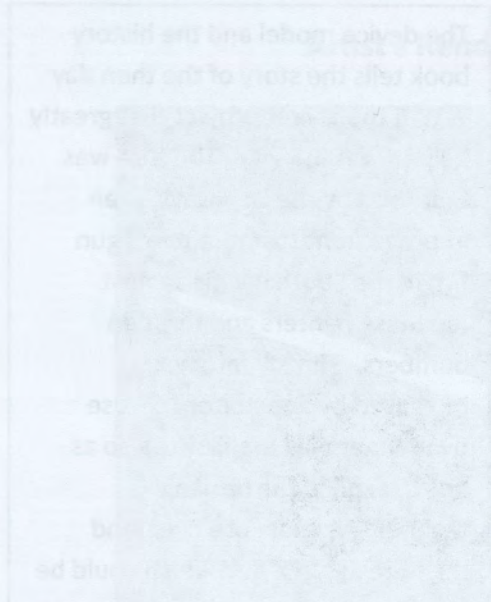
PROXIMITY FUZE NOW ON DISPLAY IN THE SOUTH ROOM OF THE MUSEUM



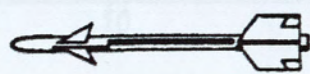
The device model and the history book tells the story of the then day WW-II top secret project that greatly helped win the war. The fuze was first used by the U.S. Navy as an improvement to anti-aircraft gun fire in the South Pacific against Japanese fighters and torpedo bombers. The kill rate was increased by a factor of 10. Use over water was the first use so as not to expose the design technology, while use over land might result in a dud which could be exploited by the enemy.



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