



THE CHINA LAKER

Vol. 3 No. 1

Spring 1997

ARMAMENT AND TECHNOLOGY MUSEUM ON-LINE: A VIRTUAL PREVIEW

<http://www.nawcwpns.navy.mil/clmf/frontpage.html>

↑ This Internet worldwide web address provides entrée to an electronic preview of the China Lake Armament and Technology Museum we're working to establish as an unparalleled historical asset for our nation and a prime cultural resource of our unique desert valley.

Visitors to the website are hosted to an appealing batch of information on the proposed official Navy museum. The homepage features an attractive graphic showing some types of items that will be displayed in the facility. It also displays basic facts about the Museum Foundation and the present Exhibit and Conference Center. Moreover, clicking on the words "China Lake Museum Foundation" and "China Lake Exhibit and Conference Center" takes the visitor to detailed information on these topics.

An assortment of electronic links keyed to eye-catching icons invites the visitor to explore a little further. Clicking on a button labeled "What Will You See in the China Lake Museum?" zaps the viewer to a supplemental page which explains that exhibits will highlight China Lake's achievements in technology development and application, as well as describe the R&D and T&E facilities, techniques and processes that underlie China Lake's products. Links from this supplemental page offer access to more detailed information on "Weapon Systems", "Aircraft and Aircraft Systems", "Technology Programs & Unique Equipment", and "The People, the Community & the Corporate Culture."

Another homepage link, "China Lake History, Projects, Information", takes the viewer to an electronic gateway opening onto a number of data sites. These deal with such topics as a 50-year historical overview of China Lake, the base's military leadership, and up-to-date information on the current China Lake commands—the Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division, the Naval Air Weapons Station and the Naval Weapons Test Squadron. The remaining links transport the visitor to the Foundation's own information page and to information on the "Secret City" videotape that's available in the Foundation's Gift Shop, illustrated with dramatic "stills" from the video production.

Designed by China Lake Historian Leroy Doig and Eric van Bronkhorst of NAWCWPNS' Research Department, this wealth of electronic information is available at the click of a keystroke to Internet users world-wide.

**FOUNDATION CO-SPONSORS
PRESENTATION BY
TRAILBLAZING NAVY PILOT**

On the evening of January 23 your Foundation joined the Historical Society of the Upper Mojave Desert in hosting a slide-illustrated presentation by Capt. Thomas F. Pollock, USN (ret.), who played an historic role in development of the earliest Navy aircraft rockets. Fifty-four years ago then-Lieutenant Commander Pollock, a seasoned WWII combat pilot, had flown a single-engine Avenger torpedo bomber, on loan from Britain's Royal Air Force, to launch the first forward-firing test rockets for the U.S. Navy at Goldstone Lake July 14, 1943.

The Way It Was

A sizable crowd gathered in the Ridgecrest City Hall Council Chambers to hear Pollock's first-hand account of this milestone event, which was followed by vivid reminiscences of his subsequent services to the fledgling Naval Ordnance Test Station, Inyokern. Titling his presentation "China Lake: The Way It Was," the veteran test pilot made a convincing case for the cutting-edge importance that the rockets developed here exerted in bringing the global conflict to a victorious conclusion for the U.S. and her battered principal ally, Great Britain.

The 85-year old "living legend" recounted how, as Officer in Charge of the special aircraft ordnance unit known as the Aviation Ordnance Development Unit at San Diego, he coordinated the equipping and training of the first three Navy squadrons with 3.5-inch forward-firing rockets for combat deployment. Some six or seven months later, when NOTS Inyokern had "come into being," AODU-1 relocated here, and Pollock "was in the heart of the action" as rockets rapidly became accepted as a prime air weapon.

Historical "Greats"

Pollock literally rubbed shoulders with many of the "greats" in U.S. rocket history, including NOTS' brilliant first

Commander, Capt. Sherman E. Burroughs, and CalTech's Dr. Charles Lauritsen, whom the Navy entrusted with chief responsibility for bringing America's wartime Navy into the forefront of combat rocketry.

Send Us More!

The speaker's eyes glowed as he recalled the pleasure he took in helping to develop the 5-inch high velocity rocket familiarly dubbed "Holy Moses." "Our troops in Europe were crazy about it," he chuckled. "General Spaatz [Commander of U.S. Strategic Forces in Europe] cabled Washington: 'Send us more Navy rockets. Repeat: Navy rockets.'"

A meaningful footnote to Pollock's genial, informative talk was the presence in the audience of Bill Camp, AODU-1's first machinist mate, who had accompanied his Officer-in-Charge on the trek north from San Diego to "the wilds of the Upper Mojave" to make Naval rocketry history.

**THREE JOIN
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Since publication of our previous issue, your Board of Directors has added three very welcome members: Charlotte Bulard, Bob Campbell and Wayne Doucette. Charlotte's offer to serve as Foundation Secretary has been enthusiastically accepted.

Phil Arnold recently left the Board in order to meet the increasing demands of his multiple responsibilities for the not-for-profit IWV 2000 Community and Economic Development Corporation.

**GIFT SHOP MERCHANDISE
INVENTORY TO EXPAND**

At their February meeting the Board of Directors approved the ordering of an initial stock of unique T-shirts to start filling the shelves that were recently installed in the Foundation's Gift Shop.

Cont'd. =>

GIFT SHOP

Cont'd. from p. 2

An impressive chestful of the names of renowned China Lake-developed weapons will blazon one model, serving as background for the vivid proclamation *China Lake RDT&E of Naval Air Weapons • Weapons Technology and Systems for the Fleet*.

A Proud History

A second model will feature a design incorporating the colorful "patches" of the 4 commands that have guided air weaponry development at China Lake for the past half-century-plus: NOTS (1943-1967), NWC (1967-1992), and NAWC and NAWS (1992—), complemented by the slogan A Proud History of Support to the Fleet.

Made of sturdy-quality fabric and imprinted by a local supplier, these shirts will probably carry a \$10 price tag, discounted to \$17 for two. Steve Sanders coordinated development of these initial graphics. The Board welcomes suggestions for additional designs.

NWC Plaques

The Board also authorized procurement, for Gift Shop sale, of plaques bearing the NWC name and insignia. This responds to a desire some recent and prospective retirees have expressed for NWC memorabilia in addition to the retirement items currently provided by NAWCWPN/NAWS.

Availability dates for both the plaques and T-shirts are unknown as of press time. If you want to check on this before the summer edition of *The China Laker* comes out, give Foundation Office Manager Jeanie Copeland a ring at 939-3530.

The Shop is just off the principal weapons display area of the China Lake Conference and Exhibit Center (in the former "O" Club building), adjacent to the Foundation's administrative office.

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

Office Manager Jeanie Copeland reports she's quite encouraged by the response of Foundation members to her recent round of notices for annual dues renewal.

Also encouraging is the addition of 32 new memberships since publication of the preceding issue of *The China Laker*.

These include Contributing Members Robert and Doris Stirton and Evelyn Callaway-Helm.

The 30 new Regular Memberships are:

Manny Baker
 Billie & Mickie Benton
 Henry Blecha
 Dick & Bernice Boyd
 Milton Burke
 Woodrow & Betsy Chartier
 Marguerite Dean
 Earl & Mary Donaldson
 Anne Etheridge
 Melvin Etheridge
 Edna Everett
 Harvey & Ruth Farrington
 Elvy Hopkins
 Vernon Hurley
 Joan Langley
 Capt. R. B. Lanning
 William Leone
 Albert Lepie
 Marc & Susan Moulton
 Claude Owen
 Edward Price
 Capt. Wm. E. Scarborough
 Bud & Carol Sewell
 Dot Shull
 Irwin "Bud" Shull
 Edward & Colleen Simmons
 Ruth Stewart
 Robert & Betty Wilson
 Robert & Patricia Wilson
 Wayne Zellmer

Welcome aboard!

COMING UP FOR AIR: A SUBMARINER THRIVES AT NOTS

The thoughtful communication we received from Mary Agnes Sellars, widow of Capt. Robert F. Sellars, (see **LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**, p. 7) prompts the following reminiscences about one of NOTS' most popular military leaders. The primary source of this information is news coverage in contemporary issues of *The Rocketeer*.

"[During WWII] While hunting enemy shipping in the Pacific Ocean as commanding officer of such submarines as the USS S-34, the USS Blackfish and the USS Remora," reported the July 1, 1955 edition, "Captain Sellars had little reason to expect that one day he would be the first submariner to head [this] huge [R&D] station...Customarily the position is filled by a naval aviator."

Stepping-Stones to NOTS

Sellars first became acquainted with NOTS in 1950 when he began a two-year tour as Bureau of Ordnance Technical Liaison Officer at the Pasadena Annex. He took a short break to command the Atlantic Fleet's Escort Squadron Sixteen, returning to the Annex in 1953 as Officer-in-Charge. His success in this assignment turned out to be a stepping-stone to his appointment in June 1954 as the Station's Executive Officer.

The seasoned submariner's brief stint as Station Commander came about the following summer, in the 6-week interval between the retirement of Capt. David B. Young and the arrival of Young's intended successor, Captain F. L. Ashworth (who was the "traditional" naval aviator.) Actually, however, Sellars' top-job leadership had begun several months earlier when he shouldered command responsibilities during an extended period of illness on the part of Capt. Young.

High Moment

A high moment of Sellars' China Lake experience occurred in early June 1955 when, as related in the June 19 *Rocketeer* of that year, he "was honored ... with forty other Kern County leaders at the annual awards dinner of the Kern County

Board of Trade ..." The award citation termed NOTS' well-liked Exec "a man with a sincere, deep-rooted approach to community problems and personalities." He was commended for "his aggressive leadership in fostering [excel-lent] relations between the Naval Ordnance Test Station and neighboring Ridgecrest" and "helping to create a relationship between the military and civilians that stands out as a national hallmark ..."

At NOTS/NWC's 25th Anniversary celebration in 1968 RADM Sherman E. Burroughs reminded China Lakers of another reason to remember the former, short-term Commander with affection. It was Captain Sellars, he told a sizable audience in the Officers' Club, "who started the golf course."

A native of Minneapolis, Sellars grew up in Portland, Oregon. He was graduated from the Naval Academy in 1934. During his cadet years he played on the Academy football eleven and returned in 1938 to serve on the coaching staff.

Good Preparation

A rich variety of duty assignments prepared Sellars well for the responsibilities he eventually undertook when he reported aboard the Navy's "desert ship." In addition to the assignments previously noted, he served peacetime details at a naval air station, guided missile school, and the electronics teaching faculty at the Naval Academy. His surface vessel postings included command of the USS Harwood.

It seems clear that Sellars drew the best of lessons from all these experiences in order to achieve his reputation for keen sensitivity to the mission of a unique RDT&E station like China Lake.

"It is not my pleasure to leave NOTS," he said as he departed to command the Navy's first guided-missile ship, USS Norton Sound. Surely, many in the unusually large change-of-command crowd—townspeople as well as base employees—reciprocated the short-term skipper's sentiments.

NOWADAYS AT NAWC JOINT STANDOFF WEAPON

The current flight testing program for the Joint Standoff Weapon is typical of China Lake's ongoing contribution to U.S. military preparedness. JSOW is under development as a low-risk, low-cost family of air-to-ground glide weapons for round-the-clock, all-weather use against a variety of land and sea targets. The program elements being performed here by the Naval Air Warfare Center's Weapons Division are crucial to moving this vital interdiction weapon into the nation's joint-service arsenal.

Superlative Standoff Range

Designed for launch from Navy, Air Force and Marine fixed-wing aircraft, with an integrated Global Positioning System and an inertial navigation system for superior accuracy, JSOW will provide a superlative standoff range. This stretches from 15 miles with a low-altitude release to over 40 miles with a high-altitude release. Such a capability will significantly enhance aircraft survivability by enabling launch from a point outside the range of most surface-to-air defense systems.

The program passed a major milestone with initial free-flight tests at China Lake in late 1995. Under the leadership of 29-year China Lake veteran Dr. Lloyd H. Smith, NAWCWPNS' involvement continues to span technical management operational analysis, risk management, integrated test team development and weapons integration.

Seamless Teamwork

In the tradition of NOTS' and NWC's finest work, the program focuses on low-risk, low-cost engineering solutions to meet demanding operational requirements at low unit-procurement cost. Reflecting the challenges of the present-day weapons-development environment, the JSOW team has been lauded as illustrating the seamless teamwork of individuals from NAWC Aircraft Division Patuxent River, the NAWCWPNS sites of China Lake and Point Mugu, and prime contractor Texas Instruments.

FAREWELL TO TWO NOTS/NWC PIONEERS

A single week late last summer saw the passing of two leaders who wrote significant pages in the history of Naval air weaponry at China Lake. Frederic A. Chenault, NOTS' Executive Officer from 1955-1958, died August 30 in Oceanside. Just 6 days later, on September 5, Dr. Newton Edwin Ward, Associate Technical Director on his retirement from NWC in 1973, passed away in nearby Vista.

A veteran of WWII and the Korean War, Chenault retired as a Navy captain in 1965. The following year he returned to China Lake as Assistant Technical Director for Engineering and Head of the Engineering Department. He was a

member of the American Ordnance Association and recipient of a Presidential Unit Citation, the Secretary of the Navy Commendation Medal, and NOTS' esteemed L.T.E. Thompson Award.

"Newt" Ward also received the Thompson Award, in the same year as Chenault. Ward had left MIT in 1945 to come west and head up the Aviation Ordnance Division's development group. In the course of his NOTS career he headed the Aircraft Projects Section and served as Head of the Aviation Ordnance Department, Assistant Technical Director for Development (Weapons Systems), and acting Deputy Technical Director of NWC.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

With regard to the Foundation's request for approval of the proposed China Lake Armament and Technology Museum as an official Navy Museum, I'm still experiencing the sense of simultaneous encouragement and frustration I shared with you in this column last time.

I take major encouragement from the numerous expressions of support members have given the Foundation leadership during this protracted period of flailing about in a veritable web of red tape. And a very promising development is that the request has finally cleared the signature hurdle in the Naval Air Systems Command. It's now on its way down the track toward the next hurdle. This is in the bailiwick of the Chief of Naval Operations, where we anticipate fewer hold-ups than we've experienced in preceding echelons.

However, I'm not frustration-free. Our request is still not exactly burning up the track in a cloud of cinders. Progress into the current approval phase has been accompanied by a demand for a plethora of specific points of information. The Board of Directors consider that we've already supplied this input in copious amounts of previous paperwork, and we chafe at the delay imposed by what

seems to be a repeat requirement.

Nonetheless, we've been working diligently with Scott O'Neil, the NAWS Museum Advisory Committee representative, to compile/re-compile the data in the required format. We take heart from the support shown for this effort by Capt. Douglass, NAWS Commander.

It was also good, at the February 20 Board meeting, to hear Scott report that he got a favorable response when he briefed OpNav's Adm. McGinn on the Museum. Also, according to Scott, the Navy Historical Office in D.C. has agreed to review the rewritten proposal prior to its submission. This should enhance its progress through the review-and-approval chain. Scott told the Board he expected the request to reach the appropriate office in OpNav in a couple of weeks.

The Board is impatient to undertake a substantial membership and fundraising campaign, but we think it's wise to hold off until final SecNav approval is in our hands. In the meantime, we certainly appreciate the way the sustaining membership is hanging in there, and we're very happy to see new members continue to come on board (see **MEMBERSHIP**, p. 3.)

I'm quite pleased with a proposal to add a significant feature to our plans for the Museum. This is a memorial display which will commemorate individuals who have donated their time, energy and talents to NOTS and its successors over the past half-century-plus.

The spark for this development is a recent donation to the Foundation, requesting a memorial to honor recently deceased former NOTS Executive Officer Fred Chenault (see **FAREWELL**, p. 5.)

The program is not limited to employees who've passed on. The intent is to enable relatives or friends to request a memorial for any employee in good standing, past or present. Anyone who wants to nominate someone now may do so by sending the nomination to the Board for review.

The Board's memorial committee is designing a procedure that will include verification of approval by immediate family members. It's probable that donations will be accepted, but definitely will not be mandatory. The committee is considering a memorial wall or corner where memorial plaques can be mounted. Pending installation of the display, names of memorialees will be published regularly in *The China Laker*.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

7 December 1996
Orlando, FL

From: dmcbeth@salnet.org
Posted-Date: Sat, 21 Dec 1996 11:43:24
-0800 (PST)
To: billb@ridgecrest.ca.us
Subject: Greetings

I'm sorry to have to tell you that my husband, Robert F. Sellars, Capt. USN (ret.) died 4 November 1996 after a long illness.*

We enjoyed our association with NOTS, both at the Annex in Pasadena and on the desert. And we were fortunate to be able to attend the "Birthday Bash" several years ago. We even had our picture taken standing under the "Sellars Circle" street sign. He was proud that he, a submariner, had commanded the station, even for a short time.

We made many friends while we were at China Lake, and continue to hear from them.

In the constellation Orion, there is a star named Robert Frederick Sellars—my birthday gift to him on his 85th birthday. Look in the eastern sky toward Orion's Belt and give a wave.

Best wishes for continued success with the China Laker.

*Sincerely,
Mary Agnes Sellars*

Saw your E-mail address in the Fall, 1996, "China Laker". That led me to drop you an "E" just to say hello and say, keep up the good work. It's always nice to hear from the high desert.

I was an Aviation Radioman/Radar Operator 2/C and an "Early Timer" at Harvey Field and then later, at Armitage Field. I remember being sent from NAS North Island, to "Inyokem" for two weeks temporary duty in 1944. I left the Navy, and China Lake in May or June of 1946. In some ways, it was a long "two weeks" but in others, it was a short two years.

I have returned several times, including the grand "50th" and hope to return again.

*Don McBeth
Salina, KS*

*See COMING UP FOR AIR, p. 4

THE CHINA LAKER is published quarterly by
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LIVING WITH NATURE

Excerpts from *Magnificent Mavericks*
by Elizabeth Babcock

- You will probably be as excited as we were when it happened, to know that on 7 June, last Monday, we had a cloudburst accompanied by hailstones, the size of birds' eggs! Besides, some of the near mountains were quite white for a while, and Mirror Lake is now half full of water. ... Perhaps these unexpected happenings are the reason why living here is quite interesting.

Dr. L. T. E. Thompson

Visitors frequently expressed the view that the Indian Wells Valley, located in the Mojave Desert 150 miles north of Los Angeles, was nothing but sand and dust. However, life on the desert improved with familiarity, and Thompson's perception that "living here is quite interesting" was shared by many of his neighbors.

Balmy summer evenings with brilliant star-filled skies were among the pleasures of life that for many balanced out the discomfort of the howling desert winds and stinging clouds of sand that could blast away paint, etch automobile windshields, and deposit a coat of grit on all surfaces indoors and out. When visitors complained of the three-digit summer temperatures, residents countered that these conditions weren't so bad, since "It's not the heat, it's the humidity."

Rainfall averaged only 2.4 inches a year, and this dribble of precipitation usually occurred in late fall through early spring. Valley residents—except for hay-fever sufferers—rejoiced when winter showers were sufficient to ensure the springtime miracle of a desert in bloom. On an especially spectacular spring, according to *Rocketeer* Editor Don Yockey, Short Canyon in the nearby Sierra foothills would be

covered so densely with poppies that the canyon's walls "looked like a tile roof." Beginning in 1945 the Women's Auxiliary of the Commissioned Officers' Mess presented a wildflower show every spring. Vernon and Annabelle Carr, pioneer Inyokern residents, were prominent among the wildflower enthusiasts visiting the most obscure niches of neighboring desert canyons to bring back dozens of species of blooms for this public display. In years when the winter rains came in enough quantity, the show included Fremontia, mariposa lily, and other rare blooms. Masses of the more common varieties of

wildflowers, such as lupine, desert primrose, apricot mallow, desert hyacinth, indigo bush, wild lilac, blue sage, and desert candle, were displayed every year. Attracting huge crowds as always, the show offered a suitable inaugural activity when the China Lake Community

Center opened on May 1, 1954.

A rainy year had its drawbacks as well as its joys, as residents discovered to their horror in 1952, when an unusually wet spring inspired a horde of caterpillars to migrate across the blooming Upper Mojave Desert. Without the natural selection that sparse vegetation normally exacted, the proliferating caterpillars rampaged onto China Laker's arduously maintained lawns. Members of the Public Works Horticultural Branch worked overtime to fight off the unwelcome intruders. Waves of caterpillars were succeeded by waves of ground beetles, which Darwin Tiemann, curator of the China Lake Museum, assured the community were "beneficial, eating butterflies and moths, though a nuisance."

Such invasions were also likely to disrupt the Station's test and evaluation activities. In a 1954 article describing the

Magnificent Mavericks is Volume 3 of the official history of the Naval Ordnance Test Station. It covers the period from 1948 through 1958 and is now undergoing pre-publication review by Navy Department authorities and individuals quoted in the text. The final, published version of these passages may differ from the excerpts as shown here.

photoelectric stations installed at the suggestion of range engineer Duane Mack on the new C Range flight line, the *Rocketeer* noted that Mack "has experienced only minor difficulty with ravens flying over his photoelectric stations but he is fervently hoping that the heavy rainfall this winter will not be a forerunner of a caterpillar and butterfly invasion similar to that experienced two years ago, as the flights of butterflies will trigger the photoelectric stations."

ENCOUNTERS WITH THE NATIVES

- Horned rattlesnakes, or sidewinders, are more numerous in this area than ever before this summer, according to the safety office.

The Rocketeer

Although the desert appeared lifeless to those who didn't know where to look, the Indian Wells Valley was actually home to more than 620 species of amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals. In a community surrounded by raw nature, memorable encounters with snakes, scorpions, and other desert wildlife abounded. Small boys relished these adventures, while their more cautious elders learned to accept such incidents with a degree of equanimity. "We used to have horned toads and lizards in the refrigerator because if they'd cool them down, they'd ride the electric train without running away," according to Guy Throner. Harold H. "Pat" Patton remembered an unnerving experience at the home of Beulah and Levering Smith (known to their friends as Boots and Rosie):

- My son Bruce was then about 5, I guess, and we were going to eat out on the patio, and Boots and B. J. [Patton] were in the kitchen working on dinner, and Rosie and I were in the living room talking about something or other, and Bruce, who was a great naturalist, who was always coming up with ants' nests under his bed, came in and tugged Boots' skirt and said, 'Mrs. Smith, do you want that snake under the table?' And she said, 'WHAT? Rosie!' Sure enough, under the table on the patio where we were about to sit down and eat dinner was curled up a sidewinder. And Bruce wanted it. He wanted it for his collection. Rosie and I went and got an old-

box or something and collared the sidewinder.

Perhaps even more unnerving was a nighttime adventure famed Swiss-born balloon designer Dr. Jean Piccard reported to the *Los Angeles Times* after he visited China Lake in June 1952.

- In a story relating his hopes of eventually ascending to a height of 10,000 feet in a new balloon that he had designed, Dr. Jean Piccard reported that his latest problem, aside from raising \$250,000 for the balloon ascension project is to identify a peculiar animal or insect he found in his bed while visiting at a nearby military base. ... He described it as having 12 legs and being three or four inches long.

When a *Rocketeer* reporter asked the China Lake Museum for information on Piccard's experience, curator Tiemann suggested that the nocturnal visitor might have been a solpugid, a nonpoisonous member of the scorpion family... His explanation that such creatures were quite common, having been "found in beds on the Station on previous occasions," was probably not all that reassuring...

In 1953 NOTS closed its ranges to hunting, and Station officials began cooperating with the California Fish and Game Department in a program to manage the population of chukars, small, docile wildfowl imported from India and planted in the Indian Wells Valley area by California wildlife officials in 1933. Chukars had adapted so well to the Mojave Desert that they experienced a survival rate of nearly 100 percent. State game wardens entered the ranges annually to trap chukars—about 450 each year between 1953 and 1956—and transport them to nearby hunting areas for the benefit of local sportsmen.

Although chukars lived harmoniously in the delicately balanced desert ecosystem, the same could not be said for another introduced species, the canny feral burros, descendants of hardy pack animals of the gold-rush days. The Navy's worst problems with burgeoning herds of burros were still in the future, but conservationists were already concerned that these inquisitive, intelligent animals were encroaching on the hard-scrabble existence of other desert wildlife.

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