



THE CHINA LAKER

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Winter 1997-98

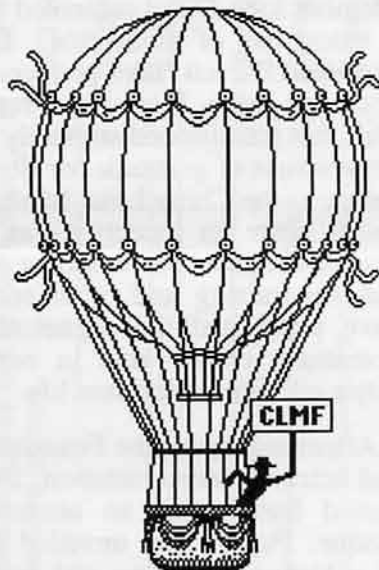
EXHIBIT CENTER PROVES STRONG DRAW DURING BALLOON FESTIVAL WEEKEND

A steady stream of visitors—some 500 in all—circulated through the Weapons Exhibit Center Saturday and Sunday, November 8 & 9, the weekend of Ridgecrest's first annual Balloon Festival. It was a mix of out-of-towners, enticed to the Upper Mojave to watch the brilliantly colored "gentle giants of the air" drift along the Sierra Nevada skyline, and Indian Wells Valley residents, filling in the hours between the Festival's early-morning and late-afternoon main events. More than one "local" was overheard to say something like, "I never even knew this place was here!"

The official Balloon Festival Committee had contacted the Foundation some weeks earlier and requested that the Exhibit Center be open as one of the sites the Committee had identified as prime IWV visitor attractions. CLMF Board Member John DiPol took the lead for our participation, first of all arranging through NAWCWPNS-NAWS' Public Affairs Office for the additional hours of public access. He improvised some directional road signs and posted them during the weekend along the route from the Main Gate to the Exhibit and Conference Center at the east end of Blandy Avenue.

Board Members Dick Boyd and Jack Russell teamed up with John as docents. From 10 to 4 Saturday (when approximately 350 visitors came through) and from 1 to 4 Sunday afternoon (when the visitor count was about 150,) docents were on-station in the 2 display areas and the entrance lobby. They welcomed people as they came in, pointed out water fountain and restroom locations, and responded to questions like: "How did the Navy end up here in the middle of the desert?"—a great lead-in for an impromptu review of the origins of the Navy's WWII rocketry program at Cal Tech, and the continuing advantages of our unique environment for air weaponry RDT&E.

Many visitors were drawn to the videotapes that ran continuously on the conference room's large-screen videoplayer. These included a taped helicopter tour of China Lake's far-flung facilities, and a survey of the full-spectrum capabilities that have empowered the base to make so many invaluable contributions to our nation's military preparedness. Several times it was standing-room-only for these video presentations; occasionally a viewer approached a docent and shared reminiscences of serving here.



(See BALLOON FESTIVAL, p. 4)

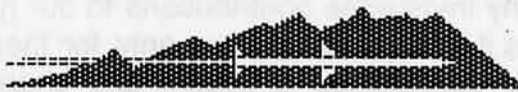
STEVE SANDERS HONORED AT FAREWELL DINNER

The screening of "Hideaway Plains Drifter", a video "mockumentary" of Steve Sanders' career at China Lake, was a highlight of the program Paul Homer emceed for the Foundation's dinner honoring Steve on September 19. Farris' at the Heritage was the setting for the event, which commemorated Steve's valued services to the Foundation and expressed the participants' wishes to him and his wife Nancy for happiness in their life as retirees on the slopes overlooking Nevada's Topaz Lake.

In a similar vein to that of the video (which had been prepared at the time of Steve's retirement earlier this year) Board Member John DiPol presented Steve with a mixed bag of mementos. Foundation President Burrell Hays prefaced his presentations with humorous remarks, as well, but transitioned smoothly to sincere expressions of gratitude for Steve's dedication to the China Lake Museum Foundation since its inception—as long-term Treasurer and as prime mover for numerous fundraising and other services that have positioned the organization for a potentially crucial role in our community's educational/cultural life.

After reading out the Foundation's official letter of commendation, Burrell presented Steve with an attractive award plaque. Paul Homer unveiled the portrait of a Native American girl painted on a sun-bleached buffalo skull—a gift from Western artist Larry Zabel, who was for many years a stalwart of Steve's Technical Information Department.

Steve assured the Board Members and other long-time friends and associates present that "There will be a museum here; it's going to happen! This place is invaluable; it can't be repeated. We can't allow this history to disappear!"



COFFEE MUGS JOIN GIFT SHOP INVENTORY

China coffee mugs have joined the collection of CLMF Gift Shop merchandise decorated with full-color NOTS and NWC logos. White mugs are available with either the early-days NOTS Inyokern "jackrabbit" insignia (see **LETTERS**, p. 4) or the official NWC logo with the Navy eagle clutching crossed lightning bolts, anchor, and 2 NWC-developed missiles. The official NOTS China Lake design and the China Lake Museum Foundation's logo come on mugs with a Navy blue background.

All four designs are reproduced (in black-&-white) on the reverse of the order form collated into this issue of *The China Laker*. The form lists prices for these and other frequently-requested items, along with the Foundation's mailing address, phone and FAX numbers.

Business hours for the CLMF Office and Gift Shop are 1000-1400 Monday through Thursday, and the same hours on "non-flex" Fridays, i.e., every-other Friday, when NAWCWPNS & NAWs are staffed for normal work operations. In February "non-flex" Fridays fall on the 13th and the 27th.

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

Office Manager Jeanie Copeland reports 9 new memberships and 30 renewals since publication of our preceding edition.

We appreciate Henry R. Blecha's renewal in the form of a new Contributing Membership. New Regular Memberships have been issued to:

Glenn A. Beach, Jr.
Jim & Eleanor Campbell
John Defriest
Vincent & Evelyn Helm
Mitchell Kanowski
Warren K. Legler
Leonard T. Lesniak
Dottie Dunn Saunders
Michael K. Stringham

Welcome aboard!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

In our ongoing effort to secure official Navy status for the proposed China Lake Armament and Technology Museum, it appears we have significant support from RADM Rand H. Fisher, NAWCWPNS' new Commander. Scott O'Neill, base liaison with the China Lake Museum Foundation, tells us the Admiral has directed that the base's request to convert the Weapons Exhibit Center to an official Navy museum be finalized and submitted via NAVAIR for SECNAV approval.

Scott also informs us that RADM Fisher's predecessor, RADM John V. Chenevey, has indicated his willingness to help usher the proposal through the NAVAIR chain of command. Chenevey is now NAVAIR's Assistant Commander for Logistics at Patuxent River, MD.

Also under preparation is a Memorandum of Understanding between NAWCWPNS-NAWS and your

Foundation. It addresses responsibilities for action, once official Navy Museum status has been secured. These responsibilities involve such activities as providing an office site for the Foundation and the creation of new exhibits.

We're eager to see official status implemented so we can start transitioning from what is now an impressive weapons display facility to a museum that projects the historical significance of China Lake. Only such a museum can make a comprehensive, educational, presentation of the whole China Lake story. Once official status and the MOU are in place, donations of artifacts, written and visual materials, volunteer services, and financial contributions can be applied directly toward this end.

Since my last message, several members of the Board have taken important steps to preserve the proposed museum as a vital element of our commu-

nity's future. Among these are John DiPol, who coordinated arrangements for the Exhibit Center and Gift Shop during the weekend of the first-ever Ridgecrest Balloon Festival. Thanks, John, to you and those who lent you their strong helping hands. (See **BALLOON FESTIVAL**, p. 1.).

We also say thank-you to Paul Homer for representing the Foundation at the annual Community Dinner on September 6. Paul enthusiastically promoted the museum concept one-on-one with other Dinner participants. He sold more than 40 T-Shirts there, yielding welcome revenue for Gift Shop operations. Paul also deserves our thanks for organizing and emceeding the farewell dinner for Steve Sanders on September 19 (See **STEVE SANDERS**, p. 2.).

And Steve, we're counting on your promise to keep involved, even from a distance.

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LETTERS

10 September 1997
Monrovia, CA

Dear Mr. Homer:

I have just received the impressive T-shirt with the Aviation Ordnance Development Unit insignia by way of Ms. Liz Babcock. I want to thank you and the China Lake Museum for this meaningful memento.

I do not know whether you are familiar with the history of this insignia. When the six-man Experimental Unit at NAS San Diego was suddenly expanded into the Aviation Ordnance Development Unit of about 200 men, it was decided that an appropriate insignia should be developed. A contest was held with a reward, as I recall, of \$10. It turned out that the wife of one of the enlisted men submitted a sketch that the informal "insignia committee" considered the most appropriate. With minor modifications it became the official insignia, and the lady received the \$10.

It is regretted that her name has not been recorded for posterity, but the people involved were engrossed in get-

ting a lot of advanced weapons into combat, so—like a good many other things during the war years—this slipped through the cracks.

I sincerely appreciate the most appropriate reminder of our early days at China Lake. It brings back many memories—both fond and perhaps some not so fond. It means a very great deal to me.

Sincerely,
Thomas F. Pollock

Sat, 4 Oct 1997 06:31:39 -0700 (PDT)
To: billb@ridgecrest.ca.us

Just received "The China Laker" in the mail. Thanks for finding me & sending it. Looks like lots is happening. I am looking forward to reading Liz Babcock's history, albeit, a short episode in the life of NOTS. Save me a copy. pleeeeee. I still look at my tenure pins with joy and fond memories.

Sincerely,
Jerome Zaharias, Lancaster.



BALLOON FESTIVAL (cont'd. from p. 1)

Major credit for the Center's weekend success also goes to CLMF Office Manager Jeanie Copeland, who staffed the Gift Shop both days. Top-selling souvenirs included Larry Zabel tiles, *Secret City* videotapes, and T-shirts with NOTS/NWC/CLMF insignias. Sales totaled nearly \$500.

In John's mind, "lessons learned" include: (1) There is extensive interest in seeing/hearing the full China Lake story presented in the far-reaching way that only a full-fledged, sensitively developed museum can provide; (2) The Museum will have a strong, positive impact on our community's economy; IWW 2000 has recognized the Museum's potential as a major addition to the area's economic base; (3) The present Weapons Exhibit Center and—even more—the future Armament and Technology Museum we are striving for have an important role to play in major community events involving visitors; (4) A richly rewarding experience awaits volunteer docents, once official Navy museum status acts to trigger development of a docent program.

"YOU'RE BETTER THAN THAT. TRY!"

Vivid Recollections of Early Days at NOTS

by Chris S. Hinzo

I was discharged [from the U.S. Marine Corps] Jan. 5, 1945 and went back [home] to Bakersfield. I told the bus driver, "Let me off at the midget racetrack." I didn't know they tore it down in 1944. Off at 3rd Street, then home. Frank and Manuel and Lawrence also were discharged, and we did nothing except play pool.

They (the Government) were giving us what we called the 52-20 Club, and so we were just spending the 20s till the 52 came up. I couldn't stay out of a job, so I got a job at San Joaquin Grain filling grain sacks. ... After 3 weeks I quit, and Frank and I both got jobs at San Joaquin Brick Co. making bricks. About this time a friend of mine named Sonny Lopez told me about China Lake. Where in the hell is China Lake? "In the desert," he said.

So we both got on this Harley 45 of his, and off we went to the desert. I had 50¢ in my pocket; that's all. ... They used to hire you there at the main gate and assigned you a sack at B-1-B or B-2-B. They were Navy bunks at \$1.50 a month and clean linen once a week. Meals at the Navy mess were 20¢, 20¢ and 30¢ a day. Not bad. We ate what the Navy guys ate.

I went to work at Warehouse 109 as a general helper at \$1.01 an hour. ... if you had a diploma, you hired in at \$1.30. I did pick up and delivery for the Explosive Department and got to know all the bosses. ... I'd drive down to the Base from the Pilot Plant, pick up packages, take them to 109, type the trans-shippers and deliver them all over the Base. I really put on the miles.

I used to go to Bakersfield on the weekends, and when I didn't go, I'd go into town. All there was then was one large

bar and dance hall. It's the big red building on the corner of Ridgecrest Blvd. and China Lake Blvd. You'd go in and there was a long bar to your left, tables to the right, and if you walked to the rear and went around a protruding wall, there was open gambling: crap tables, poker and roulette wheels. Open gambling! I always had a lot of silver dollars in my pockets.

We'd drive to the "Y" for a good grilled steak. ... Then we'd go to Randsburg, and

I belonged to the VFW, and we had our meetings at the White House Cafe. That was in 1947. Also we'd go to Trona to the dances and swimming at the pool there.

Also, at the Base we'd catch a bus and go to Sandquist Spa to outdoor dances. The bus also took you to Ridgecrest. It would travel along the fence and stopped at Drummond and at Ridgecrest [Blvd.] where Denny's is. Go to town, shop, gamble, or whatever, and get the bus back to Bennington Plaza at 4:30. No charge. I'll tell you: Ridgecrest was exciting!

On the weekends sometimes we'd go to Bakersfield, and there I'd go to dances and visit my friend Frank. Frank had a brother and two sisters. In 1948 I married Frank's sister Mary, and we moved onto the Base into a one-room dorm room. No kitchen, table or stove, just a central shower and restrooms. One for men and one side for women. I did build a fold-down small table onto the door and bought a 2-burner hot plate to make coffee and whatever on. In the meantime I talked Frank into coming to China Lake to work, which he did, and he hired in as an ordnanceman. He had a '47 Plymouth, and so now we had transportation.

He worked at Salt Wells, and I worked at Warehouse. 110. I did pick-up and delivery. By driving all over the Base I got to

Chris Hinzo served in a variety of positions at NOTS/NWC from 1945 to 1976. With his permission, these passages have been excerpted from his handwritten reminiscences. This month's selection starts just after Chris completed WWII combat service as a U.S. Marine in the South Pacific.

know about everyone that was anyone (i.e., bosses.)

So in early '49 I was now at my max wage for a chauffeur, \$1.48 an hour. So I went into Personnel and told the man: "Look! I need another job that pays better." He said, "Well, Chris, you never got a high school diploma; you only went 1 year." I told him I knew that, but I was sure I could do anything those guys at Salt Wells were doing for more money than I was getting. He said, "OK, go see what you are qualified to do."

COURSES PAY OFF

Now, when I was in the 7th & 8th grade, I took English and math as electives, and while in the CCC¹ I took typing and bookkeeping. So even though I had no diploma, I knew I could do 'most anything I set myself to. I always said, "You're better than that. Try!"

Well, I took that truck that was assigned to me and drove all over all the places that I'd delivered to. Talked to a lot of people and shook my head. Those ordnancemen didn't need any schooling, just strong backs. Not for me. I kept looking and finally got to the Inspection Section. Now, those guys did their figures in algebra, and two guys did the lifting, not only one. Hey, this is for me!

I went to see the man at Personnel. "Well, Chris, I don't know. Without high school training, I don't know." He said he'd call J. P. Vanderbeck, who was the head man in Inspection. I told him I knew J.P. He called for an appointment.

I went to see J.P., and he said, "OK, Chris, I'll give you a chance. I'll tell Battles to give you a try for 2 weeks. If you work out, you can stay." Hot dog! Now I was an Inspector, an Ordnance Inspector.

In the meantime, Mary and I had a daughter, and we named her Yvonne. We also moved into a prefab on Sangamon St.

I worked the graveyard shift one month, [then] the swing, then days. And also, I now had 3 more pay raises. I worked as an Ordnance Inspector until I

was called back to the Marines during the Korean War.

The Commander of the Base called the Commandant of the Marines and asked that I be relieved of my one-year duty because I was an Inspector on a very critical project (AEC.) I was there when this phone call was in process, and the Marine Commandant said, "Hinzo is a Marine and must serve his year, but he will be given a 6-month deferment. Then he should report to Camp Pendleton." I said good-bye to all my friends and left for Camp Pendleton.

Our smallest daughter Gay, who was born in 1950, had been very sick, and the doctor wrote a letter to the Marine general in charge of Camp Pendleton, and I was given a home, 1/2 of a Quonset hut.

I reported in and was assigned to an infantry platoon. I was a corporal at the time, and when I wore my green uniform, I was required to wear my ribbons, which showed where you served during WWII. The sergeant was a young man, younger than myself, and he kept saying, "I have to get me some of those." So he volunteered and was sent to Korea. I took over and had the best platoon during training. Afterwards I was called into the office. How come I had a letter saying I could not be sent to Korea? I had worked for the AEC.

STAFF SERGEANT HINZO, NCO

Well, I made sergeant after 1 month and then was sent to 21GF-2, Del Mar. There I was in charge of supply for Headquarters Company. I passed the test for Staff Sergeant with an IQ rating of 135. The only one that had a higher rating than I had been a professor when he was called in. Now I was Staff Sergeant Hinzo, NCO in charge of 21GF-2.

Just before I was to get released after my year, a sergeant came by and said, "Sergeant, they are having GED tests tomorrow at the library. I went over and asked the Sergeant if I could take the test also. He questioned me about whether I had been taking classes or going to night school, and I said no to both of his questions, but can't I take them? He said, "Yes." ...Next day I took the tests, did them all in 4 hours. Good-bye, Camp Pendleton! Hello, China Lake!

¹ Civilian Conservation Corps, a New Deal-era jobs program

RABBIT LOGO



NWC LOGO



US NOTS LOGO



CLMF LOGO

