



THE CHINA LAKER

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Newsletter of the China Lake Museum Foundation

Summer 2002



World Record Setting Aircraft

By Jack Russell – Director Emeritus

Most visitors to the Naval Museum of Armament and Technology are probably not aware of the illustrious backgrounds of the two historical aircraft displayed in front. Both are two of a kind experimental versions of two Fleet fighters that were produced and deployed in the 1950's and early 60's.



The first of the two aircraft is the bat-winged Douglas XF4D-1 Skyray. The one on display is the second of two that were built and first flown in January of 1951. This particular aircraft set a world speed record of 753.4 miles per hour over a low-level, straightaway 3-kilometer course on October 3, 1953. Thirteen days later it captured the 100-kilometer closed-course world speed record of 728.1 miles per hour. The first of these records was set on a course laid out near Southern California's Salton

Sea while the second was at Edwards Air Force Base.

Toward the end of their life times the two XF4D-1's were used as the original test bed for the famous General Electric J79 engine. Finally the two prototypes were transferred to China Lake. Our display aircraft was used for static environmental testing before being refurbished for display at the Naval Air Facility. It's sister aircraft was destroyed in fire fighting exercises. Incidentally, on May 22 and 23, 1958, a standard production F4D-1 set five time-to-climb world records at Point Mugu.

The other display aircraft is the Grumman F11F-1F Super Tiger. As was the case for the XF4D-1, this is the second of only two that were built. It is a derivative of the F11F Tiger that was mass produced and went into the Fleet. The F11F was also a Blue Angel aircraft for a number of years. The Fleet F11F was under-powered with a Curtis Wright J65 engine. This was remedied in the Super Tiger with a General Electric J79 engine that was tested in the XF4D-1 mentioned above. It appears that the J79 engine along with a few relatively minor changes to the airframe nearly doubled the speed capability. In fact our display Super Tiger unofficially exceeded both the world speed record and world altitude record on the same flight on May 2, 1957.

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President's Report—June 2002

By Paul Homer, President

The first issue of this newsletter was issued as Volume 1, Number 1, in December 1994. The China Lake Museum Foundation preceded the first newsletter issue by a couple of years, and throughout this ten-year period, Burrell Hays served as President of the foundation. We are all deeply indebted to Burrell for his tremendous efforts in support of the foundation, all of which led to the establishment of the U. S. Naval Museum of Armament and Technology.

An aspect I note when I read the first newsletter and compare it to the Spring 2002 newsletter is that the focus and objectives have essentially not changed in the 10 years of the foundation's existence. That focus and consistency is a characteristic of the "China Lake Way", and with Burrell's perseverance and expertise, it has ensured the success we have had. Thanks! Burrell.

Along with Burrell's leaving the position of President of the foundation and my election, other changes in the Board of Directors include Tex Hoppus, VP for Fund Raising, and Betty

Seaman, VP for Public Relations. Continuing are Frank St. George, VP for Operations, Ray Miller, VP for Facilities, and Alice Campbell, VP for Membership. Joining the board are three new Directors: Iris Bachmann, Sharon Goad, and Henry Blecha. Ed Brooks is also returning to the board as a Director after being away for several months.

Our focus and efforts remain the same, with the major efforts being the operation of current facility in the former Officer's Club and acquiring a new building near the main gate at China Lake, with public access a prime objective. In support of these objectives, the foundation received a grant of \$1,000 from the Kern Co. Community Foundation, which will be used to prepare drawings and artist's concept of the new building design, and another \$3,000 + grant from the City of Ridgecrest, which will be applied to the purchase and outfitting of a portable "pop-up" display booth that the foundation will use at fairs and other expositions.

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Gift Shop Stocks Wide Variety of Aircraft and Ship Models

By Liz Babcock, Director

Did you know that our museum gift shop stocks 25 to 30 different kinds of aircraft and ship models? Not only can you purchase great gifts for your favorite model-builder, but you can also request types of models that aren't in stock.

Our stock of models is a labor of love for CLMF member Henry Blecha, who not only makes sure popular types of models are available but also places special orders on request.

The events that led Henry to become our model czar began back in the 1990s when Jerry Lloyd was managing the China Lake Exhibit Center. Henry joined the Foundation and became one of the exhibit center's earliest volunteer tour guides.

A longtime member of the High Desert Scale Modelers Association, Henry soon saw the compatibility of his two interests. He began suggesting displays incorporating models.

"About a year ago, I suggested that we should sell models in the gift shop," he said. "Typically other museum gift shops have models on sale, along with books, T-shirts, and so forth."

The Foundation Board readily agreed to give Henry the responsibility for models to be stocked in the gift shop. He began with a few models, and the project has grown and prospered since then.

"I started out with the idea of staying with aircraft that flew here in China Lake," he said. "Then a couple of folks in town asked for some ship models, and those are selling well. I started to pick up a few other aircraft, including a couple of helicopter models." Best sellers are the F-4 and F-18 models, but there has been a market for all types of military aircraft and ship models.

A recent donation of models from Dave and Phyllis Booth will expand the stocks even further. "If anybody else has models they'd like to donate, we can provide letters that will let them deduct their gifts as charitable contributions," Henry pointed out.

Henry's connections in the modeling world are proving valuable to the Sidewinder



Henry Blecha

50th Anniversary effort too. He started out with the idea of displaying every type of aircraft that flies Sidewinder. That's proved to be a daunting assignment, since more than 40 nations have used the missile since its 1957 introduction to the fleet.

Through the network of Southern California members of the International Plastic Modeling Society of the United States, Henry is going a long way toward meeting the challenge.

Among the modelers working on Sidewinder-equipped aircraft models are members of the Desert Scale Modelers here in Ridgecrest and of the Antelope Valley chapter in Rosamond.

If you don't find the exact model you're looking for, let us know, and Henry will see what he can do.

Henry said he has an excellent working relationship with Steve Ginter at the Sentai, the model supply company with which the museum store does business. Ginter also has his own business called Naval Fighters. Through that business he markets close to 60 illustrated books on naval fighters, and he just started a series on Air Force aircraft. At Henry's suggestion, the gift shop also stocks some of those books – on the QF-86 aerial target, the F-11F Super Tiger, and the F4D Skyray.

Museum Happenings

By Barry Lowry, Museum Manager

The 3 months since the last newsletter have been a busy but stable time at the museum. There have been no personnel changes or unusual situations to report.

We've done a lot of work in the gift shop to increase the selection of merchandise and we've added a lot of shelving to accommodate the new offerings. New merchandise selections have been made both based on customer suggestions and to support the Sidewinder 50th Anniversary celebration.

Development of the old kitchen area as a Sidewinder Display Gallery continues, with the installation of "fuzzy board" on the walls for display and storyboard mounting. A pedestal is being built over the old stove well to house the "shooter model display" of aircraft that have fired the Sidewinder missile. Hardware display racks are starting to appear, and various groups are starting their "cut and paste" activities to organize their storyboards around the area.

Museum staff has done a lot of work to clear out broken and unneeded equipment and to clean up storage spaces in anticipation of storage requirements to support the 50th Anniversary activities.

April and May turned out to be big

months for special request tours of the museum. During the period, tours were arranged for 2 RV clubs, one from the IWV and one from the eastern reaches of the Antelope Valley. Tours were also arranged for 4 different classes of 3rd grade students from Pierce School, a Montessori school from Huron, OH and for the Desert Manager's Working Group, which coordinates inter-agency management issues regarding desert areas in the region. Volunteers Henry Blecha and Jerry Saholt, who did a commendable job for each of the groups, handled all of the tours. The museum also continues to be a popular stop for the Distinguished Visitors Office to showcase China Lake's accomplishments for VIP's.

Visitor statistics continue to improve. First quarter visitors totaled 1,088 people a 24% increase 1Q2001. Second quarter visitors to date total 1,344, an 18% increase over 2Q2001.

Although the 50th anniversary continues to be a significant part of our activity, many other issues and activities go on at the museum everyday. Operating schedule for the museum continues to be 10am to 4pm Monday-Friday (including flex-Fridays). We do close on selected holidays so call us at 760-939-3530 if it happens to be a holiday.

***Be sure and check out all of the new
Gift Shop merchandise
the next time you
are at the museum***

World Record Setting Aircraft

(continued from page 1)

With Grumman test pilot John Norris it achieved Mach 2.04 on its way up to an indicated altitude of 82,000 feet. Since "official" instrumentation was not used for measurements it did not go down as an official world record. On April 12, 1958, the other Super Tiger *officially* raised the world altitude record to 75,550 feet as measured with instrumentation at Edwards Air Force Base. The Russians were the previous holders of this record.

The above material on the altitude record came from a book on the F11F-1F Super Tiger by Corwin "Corky" Meyer. Mr. Meyer was one of the Grumman project pilots for the aircraft and went on to become CEO for Grumman and later for other companies. In July 1999 I called Mr. Meyer and told him of our restoration efforts on the Super Tiger at China Lake. I asked him if he could provide any additional information on the altitude record(s). He referred me to the above mentioned Grumman project pilot, John Norris. In the course of the conversation with Mr. Meyer, I mentioned his book statement that in May 1957 one of the Super Tigers had reached an indicated 82,000 feet. He verified that and said it was an accurate measurement. When it came time for the official record attempt the Navy insisted that it be with a Navy pilot. He said that the Navy pilot failed to follow directions from himself and John Norris and only reached 75,550 feet for the record.

On August 9, 1999, I contacted former test pilot John Norris who now lives in Camarillo, California. He stated that our Museum display aircraft was the higher performance of the two Super Tigers and went on to verify the flight he made in it to an indicated 82,000 feet. He was quick to state that this was not an official record. However, the Edwards AFB theodolite information that was used in the official record flight was used to verify the accuracy of the indicated 82,000 feet. During its life time our Museum Super Tiger was used in weapons compatibility testing at China Lake. After it was retired it was put on display at the Air Facility main gate along with the XF4D-1. Both aircraft eventually were placed in the Air Facility bone yard for stricken aircraft. After a number of years a group of civilian and sailor volunteers repaired and repainted them for display in front of the



Museum. The Museum is particularly indebted to Willie Goodman and Dick Bauers for organizing these efforts.

The Museum Gift Shop has the full stories behind these fascinating aircraft in two books. They are "Douglas F4D Skyray" by Nick Williams and Steve Ginter and "Grumman's Mach-2 International F11F-1F Super Tiger" by Corwin "Corky" Meyer.

President's Report - June 2002

(continued from page 2)

Perhaps the most significant event of the last two months is that the City of Ridgecrest, the City Council and Mayor, have agreed to transfer for \$1.00 about 5 acres of land to the China Lake Museum Foundation for adding to the Navy's 7 acres of land immediately south of the main gate. The City's 5 acres, adjacent to the Navy's land, is in the north end of the proposed industrial park planned for the area of vacant land east of China Lake Blvd. Thus, about 12 acres of land will be available for the new building, outdoor exhibits, and parking areas.

The community and City of Ridgecrest support is greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your support and participation in this great endeavor. I wish you and your family the best July 4th, and a relaxing and productive summer.

Don't forget the
Sidewinder 50th
Anniversary Celebration
Oct 31-Nov 3, 2002