Den Mother of China Lake dies Dec. 19, 2007

By Elizabeth Babcock

Author of the forthcoming book, "Magnificent Mavericks"

For thousands of Naval Ordnance Test Station alumni, and their families, Edith LaVerne "LaV" McLean exemplified the very spirit of China Lake. With her death at home in San Diego in the early afternoon of Dec. 19, 2007, one of our community’s most influential and beloved leaders is gone.

The McLean family is planning a memorial service in San Diego sometime in February.

As the wife of Dr. William B. McLean, technical director of the Naval Ordnance Test Station 1954–1967 and of the Naval Undersea Center 1967–74, LaV offered hospitality to everyone from the newest recruit to the Chief of Naval Operations.

"She treated everybody the same, knew everybody’s name, loved individual people, asked about the kids, used their names, and never appeared to think about herself, but to genuinely be interested about your situation," said Dr. Walter B. LaBerge. "And she applied that attitude to at least a thousand different families over the course of the time that I was on the base."

LaV spent nearly 91 years on this earth, overcoming any adversity by approaching it with her trademark optimism. "She lived a good full life," said her son Don. "She was ready to join my father." (Bill McLean died on Aug. 25, 1976.)

Born Edith LaVerne Jones on the family farm in Brookfield, Ohio, on Feb. 17, 1917, LaV graduated from Brookfield High School, then in 1935 entered Santa Barbara College (now the University of California Santa Barbara) where she majored in education.

She began attending the services led by Rev. Robert N. McLean at the First Presbyterian Church of Santa Barbara. There she met Bill McLean, the pastor’s shy, brilliant son. Soon Bill and LaV were courting — looking at the stars through a homemade telescope and surfing with big muslin surfboards, with both telescope and surfboards designed and fabricated by Bill.

The young couple married on June 25, 1939, just two weeks after he received his Ph.D. from the California Institute of Technology. Bill accepted a job as a research associate with Dr. Alexander Ellett at the University of Iowa.

Then Ellett was called to Washington as part of the pre-World War II mobilization of science. Bill took over Ellett’s classes — and made the valuable discovery that he much preferred research to teaching.

In summer 1941 Ellett invited Bill to join him at the National Bureau of Standards and the young McLeans happily moved into a large, old house in Washington, D.C. Bill immediately became engrossed in his work, and LaV managed a noisy, happy household, moving Bill’s co-workers into each of the extra bedrooms.

As Bill and his colleagues tested toss-bombing equipment at NBS, they realized how unsuitable Washington was for rocket tests. Dr. L.T.E. Thompson, first technical director of the Naval Ordnance Test Station, was also
large transportable bins in which residents deposited their trash.

At china Lake Bill immediately began spending long hours in the lab and on the range, and LaV entered with zest into the social life of young china Lake.

"It was a whole new life," recalled LaBerge, "and Bill and LaV McLean made it just a wonderful beginning of a marriage and of a career."

LaV got a job teaching physical education at Burroughs Junior High School (renamed Murray School when Burroughs High School moved to its current site in 1959), where she impacted the lives of hundreds of youngsters, teaching them how to dance and in many cases motivating them to become teachers themselves. Juggling home and school responsibilities with ease, she also raised three boys and managed a daunting array of social responsibilities.

Close friends Peter and Polly Nicol teased LaV by calling her "General Bullmoose" because she generally ran the show. But she was a benevolent and effective leader, playing a crucial role in formation of the China Lake Ski Club, the American Association of University Women and the Maturan Museum.

She also participated actively in the Women's Auxiliary of the Commissioned Officers Mess (now WACOM), served on the board of the Desert Area Family Counseling Service, taught Sunday school at the All Faith Chapel and spearheaded community efforts to raise funds for construction of an outdoor pool at what was then the Officers' Club and made countless other contributions to the healthy growth of the young community.

LaV spent at least an afternoon a week visiting patients in the hospital, even insisting on taking home one out-of-town family stranded in Ridgecrest because of a serious highway accident. "There was no question about their background ... who they were and what they were. She just opened her doors to them," said Polly Nicol.

Among the hundreds of parties she threw to celebrate both successes and failures, the impromptu bash on Sept. 11, 1953, is perhaps best known. After the first successful test of Bill's invention, the revolutionary Side-winder missile, she received the word sometime late in the afternoon that "it worked." LaV of course had no idea what her husband and his colleagues were working on, but she knew it was important. Bill immediately began spending long hours in the lab and on the range.

For many years she hosted a big party at the family home and school responsibilities with ease, she also raised three boys and managed a daunting array of social responsibilities.

Among the many comments received on LaV's passing, this note is from Capt. Glenn Tienrey, USN (Ret.), now the Senior Sidewinder Pilot:

"THANKS FOR THE SAD INFO ON LA V. SHE WAS ONE OF MY FAVORITE LADIES OF ALL TIME. WE ARE STILL GRATEFUL TO HER FOR TEACHING US TO PLAY 'CHARADES'...AT ONE OF WALT LA BERGE'S FAMOUS PARTIES CIRCA 1955. -(.-

VER FRIENLY FREN _GLENN TIERNEY"
### The China Laker Winter 2008

(Continued from page 2) Don remembers that his mom had maybe 400 teacups and that he would frequently arrive home to find hundreds of ladies sipping tea in the backyard. As for dinner parties, LaV would tell people, “We always have plenty of food, so just come over.” One advantage of that spontaneity, she explained, was that she didn’t have to worry about cleaning house.

On one occasion she was entertaining a visiting admiral at a formal dinner party when two Navy families, formerly stationed at China Lake, called to say hello. She insisted that the families join the party and seated the new arrivals, including several children, at a picnic table brought in to make the table long enough and with paper plates to supplement the family china.

Her charming personality attracted many a Washington VIP to China Lake and such visits helped her more reticent husband obtain necessary funding for numerous NOTS projects. Vice Adm. P. D. Stroop, a former China Lake commander, praised LaV as “Bill’s public-relations man.”

She supported her husband in many other ways too. Bill’s fascination with the underwater experience, which would lead him to pioneering technical work in underwater transport and attack vehicles, also extended to experiments with homemade wet suits, which he tried out in the NOTS indoor pool, using LaV and her friends as guinea pigs for his experiments.

In 1967 a major reorganization led to the disestablishment of NOTS and the formation of the Naval Weapons Center and several other Navy laboratories, including the Naval Undersea Center in San Diego. With his interest in underwater technology, Bill was a natural to head the new lab, so LaV packed her household possessions (this time insisting that Bill take only a representative sampling of his growing collection of Sears, Roebuck catalogs).

In typical LaV fashion, she expressed regret at leaving her desert home, but cheerfully looked forward to new adventures in San Diego.

She always maintained her ties with China Lake, making a notable recent appearance at the Sidewinder 50th anniversary in November 2001. Bob and Alice Campbell, who visited her this October, said they encountered “the same LaV” with the same sparkle in her eye even though by then she was bedridden.

She also recently agreed to contribute a blurb to the back cover of the forthcoming “Magnificent Mavericks,” Vol. 3 of the history of China Lake, a book that covers the period 1948–58.

“This book tells the story of an exciting time, a fun time,” she wrote. “The military and the civilians of China Lake—they played hard, but when they worked, they worked even harder. I’m proud to be known as the Den Mother of China Lake, and I know people will enjoy reading about those days almost as much as I enjoyed living through them.” In tribute to LaV’s importance to NOTS, her picture is featured on the cover of the book.

She is survived by sons William of Porterville, Donald and wife Patricia of La Canada and Mark and wife Meredith of Davis; grandchildren Rhonda, Richard, Ryan and Scott; and great-grandchildren Cortney, Trevor, Spencer, Ashley and Brandon.

The family asks that in lieu of flowers, memorial contributions in LaV’s name be made to the China Lake Museum Foundation, P.O. Box 217, Ridgecrest, CA 93556; or to the William and John McLean Scholarship Fund at the California Institute of Technology. Write your check to Caltech and reference the name of the scholarship fund in the memo line. The envelope should be addressed to California Institute of Technology Development Fund in the memo line. The envelope should be addressed to California Institute of Technology Development Fund at the California Institute of Technology. Write your check to Caltech and reference the name of the scholar-

### The China Laker Winter 2008

#### Junior High Basketball Team with P. E. Teacher LaV McLean, Darlene Todd Baker, Annie Majors Gibbons, LeAnn Cole, Unidentified, and Annie Jaggiello Wallen. The girl holding the basketball is Jerri Koch Nelson. Baker and Nelson live in the area, while Annie Gibbons lives in the Bay area. Thanks to Cathie & Tom Doyel & friends for the detective work!
Navy Secretary Names Two New Auxiliary Dry Cargo Ships  04 March 2008
USNS Wally Schirra, T-AKE 8

Secretary of the Navy Dr. Donald C. Winter announced the naming of the seventh and eighth Military Sealift Command Ships of the Lewis and Clark-class Auxiliary Dry Cargo ships (T-AKE) as Carl Brashear and Wally Schirra.

The selection of Wally Schirra, designated T-AKE 8, was chosen in honor of Capt. Walter “Wally” Schirra, a U.S. Naval Academy graduate and former Navy test pilot who served in both World War II and Korean War. The naming of Carl Brashear and Wally Schirra continues the tradition of the T-AKE Lewis and Clark-class of honoring legendary pioneers and explorers.

The ship’s design is 689 feet in length, has an overall beam of 106 feet, a navigational draft of 30 feet, and displaces 42,000 tons. Powered by a single-shaft diesel-electric propulsion system, the ship can reach a speed of 20 knots. As part of the Naval Fleet Auxiliary Force, the ship will be designated USNS, the United States Naval Ship. Unlike their United States Ship (USS) counterparts, USNS vessels are manned primarily by civil service and civilian mariners working for the U. S. Navy Military Sealift Command.

Pioneer astronaut’s ashes committed to sea during ceremony aboard Ronald Reagan

Walter M. “Wally” Schirra, early China Lake test pilot and Sidewinder Shooter

MCZN TORREY W. LEE
USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76) Public Affairs
15 February 2008

USS RONALD REAGAN, At Sea - The ashes of retired Navy Capt. and astronaut Walter M. "Wally" Schirra, along with eight other Navy veterans, were committed to the sea Feb. 11 during a special burial at sea ceremony on board USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76). Schirra, a former Navy test pilot who was one of the original seven Mercury astronauts, died at the age of 84 on May 3, 2007. He holds the distinction of being the only astronaut to fly in each of the Mercury, Gemini and Apollo space missions. Schirra also had special ties to Ronald Reagan shipsmates, visiting the aircraft carrier and signing autographs for the crew in 2005.

In 1962, Schirra became the fifth American in space and the third American to orbit the Earth, circling the globe six times in a flight that lasted more than nine hours. Schirra once wrote, "We shared a common dream to test the limits of man's imagination and daring. Those early pioneering flights of Mercury, the performances of Gemini and the trips to the moon established us once and for all as what I like to call a spacefaring nation. Like England, Spain and Portugal crossing the seas in search of their nations' greatness, so we reached for the skies and ennobled our nation.

Ronald Reagan's command religious ministries department, along with help from the ship's honor guard, organized the morning ceremony.

"I'm in awe of these people in their commitment to their country, their service, and especially their families," said Cmdr. Lee Axtell, Ronald Reagan's command chaplain. "It's Navy tradition to stop for the day and pay tribute." Ronald Reagan shipsmates eagerly took time out of routine carrier operations to put on their service dress blue uniforms to take part in the ceremony.

Fire Controlman 2nd Class Christopher Gronde, a Ronald Reagan Sailor who was previously assigned to the presidential honor guard, said that despite all of the funerals he's take part in, each one still affects him deeply.

"I get this proud feeling about being up there," said Gronde. "I take a lot of pride in Navy tradition," said Gronde.

In addition to Schirra, some Ronald Reagan Sailors had other ties to the military veterans. Aviation Boatswain's Mate 3rd Class Scott Toupin, from Ronald Reagan's air department, committed the ashes of his uncle, Senior Chief Quartermaster William Dawson, to the sea during the ceremony.

Toupin said he was honored to give his uncle his final resting place and found himself moved by the ceremony and holding back tears.

"He never spoke to me about his time in the Navy," said Toupin recalling that his uncle was a quiet and reserved man. "He had served in World War II, Korea and Vietnam, but I didn’t know he was in [the Navy] until three months before his death."

With the firing of three symbolic volleys for each of the nine Navy veterans, Ronald Reagan Sailors bid a final farewell to these former shipsmates.

Ronald Reagan was commissioned in July 2003, making it the ninth and newest Nimitz-class nuclear-powered aircraft carrier. The ship is named for the 40th U.S. president; its motto, "Peace through Strength," was a recurring theme during the Reagan Presidency.

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The U.S. Naval Museum of Armament and Technology is located on the Naval Air Weapons Station, China Lake, California. The Museum, which was established by the Secretary of the Navy (May 12, 2000), is a national asset with an unmatched display of naval armament and technology.

Museum Mission: “To document, preserve, display, and interpret an assortment of artifacts, papers, and memorabilia that depict China Lake’s history and the history of the development of naval armament and technology.”

Auction Objective: All of the proceeds from the auction will be placed in the new building fund.

Why a New Museum? The current facility needs major refurbishment and expansion to accommodate the extensive collection, which currently resides in warehouses. Its current location on base is not easily accessible by the general population.

Museum Vision: The proposed new museum is a 40,000 square feet museum quality building to be located outside the Navy security perimeter on land provided by the City of Ridgecrest and the Navy. The new museum will serve as a science and engineering educational resource, as well as an historical resource for the community.

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

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.

Opportunities to Participate:

Event Sponsorship:
$1500 Corporate Table or $1000 Small Business/Family Table: includes dinner and table for eight, complimentary CLMF membership for non-member table guests, dinner wine, 20 raffle tickets, name displayed in program and in the Museum, significant advertising in local media for business and corporate donors, and major advertising at the event for corporate donors.

$250 Sponsor: includes two dinner tickets, reserved seating, name in program, 10 raffle tickets.

Advertising in the Dinner & Auction Program:
$500 – full-page ad
$250 – half-page ad
$125 – quarter-page ad
$50 – business-card-size ad

Membership:
Individual/Family Per Year: $25, Contributor $100, Benefactor $500, Sponsor $33 (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 is a 501 (c) (3) corporation. Donations are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law.
AUCTION-----AUCTION-----AUCTION-----AUCTION

Remember the All New Auction & Dinner Program will be 31 May 2008

Your Foundation’s Planning Committee is creating a new program for the dinner and auction. The program promises to be bigger and better each year, so don’t miss it! The main event and evening’s excitement will be the Live and Silent Auctions, which are planned this year to ensure everyone can participate and take home outstanding and top quality items. The Auction and Dinner Program is a main fundraiser for the Foundation and for it to be successful we not only need your participation at the Auction & Dinner, but we need your donations of items to be auctioned off. Therefore:

START NOW CONSIDERING WHAT YOU CAN DONATE TO THE AUCTION. May 31 is LESS THAN THREE MONTHS AWAY; SO DON’T DELAY IN GETTING THOSE GOOD DONATIONS UNDER WAY. THEY CAN RANGE FROM: FINE ART YOU HAVE GROWN WEARY OF (AND FOR WHICH YOU CAN USE A TAX DEDUCTION) TO -----GREAT BUT NOT NEEDED CHRISTMAS GIFTS (AND YOU CAN USE A TAX DEDUCTION) TO ----- ITEMS YOU LOVE TO PURCHASE FOR THE THRILL OF THE SHOPPING TO -----GREAT HOBBY, CRAFT, COLLECTION, ANTIQUES, NOTABLE BOOKS AND HISTORICAL ITEMS, ETC. ITEMS YOU HAVE. IN OTHER WORDS “USE YOUR IMAGINATION”.

Bring donations to the Museum or call and we will pick them up. If you have ideas for making this our most successful event ever, or if you would like to volunteer to participate in preparing for the Dinner Program, please call:

Betty Seaman at 760-375-6070
seamanb@aol.com

Or

Alice Campbell at 760-377-0056
alicerbob@verizon.net

Or

Call Chris McKinley at the Museum
760-939-3530
clmfl@ridgenet.net

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**CHINA LAKE MUSEUM FOUNDATION / CARRIAGE INN WEEKEND PACKAGE**

**When:** May 30—June 1, 2008

**What:** Includes:

~ Two (2) Nights (Friday and Saturday) at the Carriage Inn
~ Two (2) Tickets to the Saturday Petroglyph Tour on the Naval Air Warfare Center’s North Range
~ Two (2) Tickets to the Saturday CLMF Dinner/Auction at the Kerr McGee Center
~ Two (2) Tickets to the Sunday Breakfast at the Carriage Inn

**Price:**

Weekend Package - $250.00 Two nights package for two people all inclusive
$175.00 One night package for two people all inclusive Tours and Dinner Auction (no lodging) - $50.00 per person Tours available Saturday only & include snacks, drinks, & guide!

**For reservations and details contact the China Lake Museum Foundation (760) 939-3105/3530**
New Members received since Fall 2007 Newsletter

Preserving Bill to accept a job at China Lake.

After a visit to NOTS in spring 1945, Bill brought his family here to live that July. He was responsible for moving the family household essentials to the desert, and LaV dealt cheerfully with the realization that to him

MAJOR ANNUAL DONORS of 2007

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|-----------------------------------------------|
|  **Lifetime Members ($1,000.00)**             |
| Saholt, O. J. “Jerry” - Ridgecrest, CA        |
|
|  **Contributor Members ($100.00 Annually)**   |
| Francois, Robert & Linda - Tucsoi CA          |
| Mettenburg, C. W. & Mary F. - Mt. Pleasant IA |
|
|  **Enlisted Military Members (Free, from Sponsor Members)** |
| Billings, AZ3 Christina - Ridgecrest CA        |
| Japp, SK2 Nicole & Neil - Ridgecrest CA        |
| Dexter, AM Eric & Melissa - Ridgecrest CA      |
| Phillips, AOAN Derek - Henderson NV           |
| Drummond, CMSGT Luis - Edwards AFB CA         |
| Wright, AM2 Christopher - Ridgecrest CA        |
|
|  **Regular Members ($25.00 Annually)**        |
| Alden, Edwin & Cam - Ridgecrest CA            |
| Schwarzbach, Sandra - Ridgecrest CA           |
| Caufield, John & Suzette - Ridgecrest CA      |
| Strong, Robert & Fay - Inyokern CA           |
| Harvey, Charles & Beatrice - Ridgecrest CA    |
| Wilson, Casey & Florence - Ridgecrest CA      |
| Hattersley, Larry & Pat - Henderson NV        |
| Zerbini Tino & Julie - Ridgecrest CA          |
| Law, Ray & Shirley - Ridgecrest CA            |
| Moen, Rex - Tehachapi 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. |

Well, what do you know happened ‘way back in 1956? China Lake was featured on the Mickey Mouse Club television show. Highlighted were the Sidewinder missile and a SNORT test. Go to: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MofnEPyTQGA and view the program excerpt. LaV perhaps organized this early exposure of Sidewinder? Note also the close proximity of the viewing stand to the SNORT breach.

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ANNUAL DONOR PROGRAM

Continued

Friend ($200—$499)

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Tony & Cynthia Damiano
Douglas & Tammy Davis
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Farris’ Diner/Ashley Furniture
Frey’s Gunshop – Ron & Katie Frey
Assemblywoman Jean Fuller
Skip & Denise Gorman – JP Gorman Metal Fabrication
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Harold Manning CPA
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Ridgecrest Area Convention & Visitors Bureau
Tommy T’s
VCA Crestwood Animal Hospital
Windows, Walls, ‘N Floors

Wills & Trusts

The China Lake Museum Foundation now has a process by which you can include consideration of the Museum as a part of your will or estate. It is a fairly simple and straightforward process which involves adding a sentence stating your attention to your will or trust with an appropriate witness (not a Foundation officer or staff member). Please consider providing a gift to the China Lake Museum Foundation in your will and/or estate. Gifts can include monetary (fixed dollar amounts or percentage of residuary estate), property items, artifacts. Tax benefits can be realized through the reduction of the size of your taxable estate. Family needs are met first. Special instructions can be stated. Otherwise the donation will be applied to the general fund, which can be used to support new facilities, exhibits, operations and education initiatives. If you have any questions, please call the Foundation office. The process was provided courtesy of the law office of Steve Boster.

!!!!! WE NEED YOU !!!!!!

The China Lake Museum Foundation is seeking volunteers to help plan the upcoming Annual Dinner Auction Fundraiser on May 31.

Volunteers get to meet new people, learn new skills, create deep friendships, and never say “I am bored and have nothing to do”!

We have volunteer opportunities large and small in the areas of advertising, publicity, donation solicitation, auction planning, program planning, logistics, data base input and management, decorations, invitations, program publication, reservations, and more! Please come be a part of this opportunity to help “Share the Dream” of our future Naval Museum of Armament and Technology building.

Contact:
Betty Seaman 760-375-6070 seamanb@aol.com
OR
Alice Campbell 760-377-0056 alicerbob@verizon.net