



President's Message



Richard B. Rothwell

Welcome aboard to **Lieutenant General Anthony Luke-man USMC (Ret) and Mrs. Luke-man**, who

have accepted our invitation to join the CPHS Council of Advisors. The Lukemans lived in the Ranch House in the 1980's when he was Commanding General, Marine Corps Base, Camp Pendleton. On behalf of the Board of Directors I thank them for joining our effort to preserve the history of Camp Pendleton and tell its story.

A significant part of the Camp Pendleton story is embodied in The Ranch House, which began as a two-room mission adobe in about 1827. It has been the home of senior Marine Corps general officers since the 1940's. This beautiful and historic property will enter yet another chapter later this year when the current and final resident, Major General Michael R. Lehnert, Commanding General, Marine Corps Installations West, moves to newly built quarters in another part of the Base. The Base is developing plans to maintain the property when it is no longer an official residence. CPHS is working with the Base to determine if there is a supportive role for us in the transition. I will report more on this in later newsletters.

I invite all CPHS members to visit our web site at www.camppendletonhistoricalsociety.org and spread the word about CPHS. There is much to do. Every member get a member!

Richard B. Rothwell

Conversation with Major General Michael Lehnert, Commanding General Marine Corps Installations West

By Howard G. Blair



Major General Michael Lehnert

CPHS asked the General if he would grant us an interview to discuss his impressions and his thoughts of the future of the historic Ranch House. General Lehnert took time from his busy schedule and sat down with me one Tuesday morning and we discussed the future of the Camp Pendleton Historical Society and the historical sites on the base. The following are my impressions and excerpts of that conversation.

Marine Corps Generals can be intimidating individuals. General Lehnert walked out of his office to greet me, and as we entered his well organized office, he sat down at a small conversations table, rather than behind his desk. This action was designed to make the visitor feel comfortable and that the General was not trying to impress you with his rank or status.

After a few pleasantries the conversation turned to his interest in history, which led to discussions about the history of the base. The General indicated that he and his wife Denise enjoyed living in the Ranch House and understood the significance of its place in the history of the area. He mentioned that the location of the Ranch House was in one of the coldest spots in that area in the winter, and one of the warmest in the summer. The reason for the location originally was the proximity of water, which is what a working ranch needs. He also noted that if you study the history of the area, you will see how the Ranch House, the Estancia at Las Flores and the San Louis Rey Mission all functioned as kind of "bookends" for the history of the area. It was very apparent that General Lehnert knew the history of the area and was concerned about its preservation.

His long term goal for the historical sites is to have them preserved and managed with the dignity that they deserve. He wants to work toward making the Ranch House and Las Flores more accessible to the public. He feels that with the right historical organization handling both areas, and with a lot of publicity, the Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores could become a very important historical site for public display and visitation. He also believes that CPHS will have a very important roll in preserving the Base history. He appreciates the membership of CPHS having a commitment to history and will do what he can to show support for the organization.

(Continued next page)

Memories of Camp Pendleton

On a personal note, I asked the General to tell me the two or three things he is most proud of. His first response was his pride in his wife and family. He said, "You can never give your wife enough credit for the success of your children, and my wife is no exception." The second thing he mentioned was the fact that he was proud to have the opportunity to improve the life of Marines and their families. He is in charge of seven Marine Corps installations in the West, including Camp Pendleton and Miramar Air Station. The third area the General mentioned was being proud of how he and his staff handled 16,000 Cuban refugees when he was in charge of the Cuban Migration Camps at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. He indicated that the vast majority of Cuban refugees that came through those camps were treated with dignity and successfully assimilated into the United States. Some, he said, became Marines, and he still hears from many of those folks today.

I came away from the interview with the feeling that not only does Major General Lehnert have the necessary toughness and grit it takes to be a Marine Corps General, but he also has the necessary skills to be an accomplished leader. His empathy for his people and his other leadership skills are an example of what we need more of in many of our current high placed officials. We are privileged to have the support of such an individual.

The letter below was received from Col. Richard Rothwell USMC (Ret) who served in the Marine Corps from June 1936 until June 1961. He participated in the Battle of Roi-Namur, Saipan, and Tinian and among his many medals was awarded the Silver Star for his actions on Iwo Jima. Col. Rothwell now lives in Maryland with his wife Rebecca and both have become members of the Camp Pendleton Historical Society.



Richard Rothwell

Dear Mr. Blair;
Appreciate very much being among those recipients of the first issue of the CPHS News-Letter. May its circulation grow fast with future issues. I'm sure your e-mail addressees are mindful of the tremendous task ahead and will spread the word of obvious needs.

My time at Camp Pendleton consisted of approximately the last 5 months of 1943 with the 4th Mar Div and again a tour with the 1st mar Div in the late 1950's. The 1943 tour was indeed a part of an historical happening, unrealized at the time. The 4th Mar Div trained and combat loaded in Camp Pendleton, embarked into its amphibious shipping in San Diego and from there directly into battle against the enemy on Roi-Namur, Kwajalein Atoll. In route San Diego-Roi Namur we paused off Maui to practice debarkation and communication exercises. This was the first and only instance of a combat unit combat-loading in the USA mainland and then going directly into an amphibious landing against enemy opposition.

The 4th Mar Div commenced movement from Maui, HI to Camp Pendleton mid 1945. 2/24 had the honor of being the first of the infantry battalions to depart. It returned aboard

the aircraft carrier ATTU along with miscellaneous supporting units. The Division was deactivated in August '45, a process in which I participated. Activation of the Division had been in Camp Pendleton in August of '43, as I recall.

My second time on Camp Pendleton, while pleasurable from the training and social aspects, was relatively uneventful. That tour, however, became eventful 30 years later when son Richard took command of the 5th Marine Regiment, the one I had commanded – same camp-Camp Margarita and same office. "Same" ended with the quality of the office furnishings. The office of the C.O. 5th Marines in the late 1980's had well appointed furnishings – a mahogany type large desk and padded leather chairs for the visitors. In contrast, my office had a battered old Q-M issue desk and folding chairs for visitors.

Semper Fi,

Richard Rothwell

We invite our readers to contribute stories of their experiences at Camp Pendleton for publication in future issues. Humorous pieces would be particularly welcome. Please e-mail your 300 words or less to anneestes@adelphia.net. Submissions may be subject to editing.

Founding Families of the Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores Continued: The Forsters Move In

By Anne Estes

When he was only 15 years old, John Forster's family sent him to Guaymas, Mexico, from England, to work for an uncle in the trading business. Young John adapted and learned and saw an opportunity to prosper in his new country. In order to own property, he became a Mexican citizen and converted to Catholicism. He took the name Don Juan Forster, and in 1837 married Isidora Pico, sister of Pio and Andrés, of the prominent land grant Pico family.

Initially, Don Juan and Isadora lived in Los Angeles near the old pueblo. Through the influence of the Picos as well as his own enterprise, Don Juan was able to acquire large tracts of land. He purchased the Mission San Juan Capistrano after it was secularized, and lived there with his family for twenty years while building his cattle ranching empire. Despite the fact that he was a Mexican citizen, and brother-in-law of Andrés Pico who led the Mexican resistance, Don Juan provided support to the American Army in their successful fight in the 1840s to take over California. Ever cautious, he gave Andrés and Pico assistance as well.

In 1864, Don Juan assumed the mortgage on the vast Rancho Santa Margarita y

Las Flores from Pio Pico, and moved his family into the adobe ranch house. There were subsequent disputes between the Picos and Forster as to intent of ownership, but Forster



Twenty-three year old Don Juan Forster with his bride Isidora Pico Forster (six years his senior) circa 1837. Photo in the collection of the Camp Pendleton History and Museums Office.

prevailed. Although he had great land wealth, he was forced to take on heavy debt to offset the uncertainties of the cattle market and the costs of the strict new state fencing law. Forster's dream of subdividing the vast rancho was to go unrealized. Before he died

in 1882, he was to experience other tragic losses. His great friend, Cave Coats of Rancho Guajome, in what today is the town of Vista had died in 1874. Andrés Pico died in 1876. Then his second son, Francisco ("Chico"), was murdered in 1881 by a woman he jilted.

Don Juan Forster was widely respected. His funeral was one of the largest ever seen at the time, with an estimated 2,500 people in attendance. After his death his surviving sons were forced to sell the ranch to cover the debts.

Anthony ("Tony") Forster and his brother Patrick, who serve on the CPHS Advisory Council, are direct descendents of Don Juan and Isidora Pico Forster. Tony served for many years as president of the San Juan Capistrano Historical Society.

Next issue: The O'Neill & Flood Era.

Recommended Reading: *Forster vs. Pico*, by Paul Bryan Gray (Spokane: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1998).

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Welcome to our newest members. They join our growing organization and will enjoy the special privileges of Charter Members. Please visit our website for a description of membership categories.

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Get on Board

One of the keys to building awareness of CPHS is networking with our friends. To help members become familiar with our story, we are offering two brochures for distribution. Please order your free copies by e-mail to Howard Blair at hgblair@cox.net, or phone 858-583-0067.

Check Out Our Website

www.camppendletonhistoricalsociety.org.

Lt. Col. Jerry Broeckert, USMC (Ret) another of our hard-working volunteers, has done a great job pulling together a first class site. Before returning to his native Minnesota, Jerry was Executive Director of the Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego Historical Society.

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