



President's Message

Richard B. Rothwell



Our SSgt. Reckless monument project took another step forward since my last report. The Commandant of the Marine Corps approved the donation offer and forwarded it to the Office of the Under Secretary of the Navy. I do not expect difficulty in obtaining a favorable endorsement, although the time it will take for the review is unpredictable.

I would like to introduce you to five new members of our Board, each of whom will make us a stronger organization.

SgtMaj. Bill Birnie, USMC (Ret.). Bill is currently the CEO of Eagle Community Credit Union in Orange County. He has made time in his busy schedule to serve as our financial officer.

Col. Gregory L. Goodman, USMC (Ret.). Greg is a former commanding officer of Marine Corps Air Station Camp Pendleton. I have asked him to start up a speakers bureau to increase the knowledge of Camp Pendleton history and our society in nearby communities.

Col. Robert (Bo) Hellman, USMC (Ret.). Bo is a former assistant chief of staff, facilities at Camp Pendleton. He brings an in-depth knowledge of current Marine Corps policies in areas of our interest. He is serving as our membership director. Bo has also developed our first Facebook page. Check it out at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Camp-Pendleton-Historical-Society/381120642062008>. He will value your feedback.

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Camp Pendleton: A Window Into Our Past

by Col. Richard B. Rothwell, USMC (Ret.)

Editor's note: This was the first in a series of stories about the colorful history of Camp Pendleton written by the Camp Pendleton Historical Society's president for publication in the local newspaper.

Almost everyone knows that it is there even if it is a bit puzzling. You can't miss it if you travel the 17 miles of Interstate 5 between Oceanside and San Clemente. Even so, there is not much to see. With the exception of tidal lowlands marking the mouth of the Santa Margarita River, a narrow strip of coastal plain on the west ends abruptly with cliffs that rim the ocean. To the east your eyes can follow the plain for about a mile until a line of rugged hills blocks your view. What lies beyond is a mystery. The hills turn a lovely light green in the spring, but for most of the year they are shades of brown. Firebreaks—wide swaths cut through the vegetation on their steep slopes—remind us of an ever-present danger of wildfires.

Even at a distance we often know it is there. Concussions from exploding artillery shells rattle our dishes, tilt pictures on our walls, and startle our animals. We know this place today as Camp Pendleton—125,000 acres of prime real estate, a land developer's dream denied by the presence of some 40,000 U.S. Marines and sailors and a sizeable civilian contingent who live or work there.

To some, Camp Pendleton is a geographic godsend—a barrier protecting San Diego from the creeping over-development that has consumed so much of Orange County. To others it is an enigma. What is going on in that vast, but largely unseen, area? Why can't it be done somewhere else?

There is no doubt that Camp Pendleton is a powerful and important member of the northern San Diego County community in both a regional and national sense. Locally, over the last several years there has been over \$3 billion worth of work performed on the Base. Much of that has flowed to the local economy. From a broader perspective, Marines and sailors trained there have answered our country's call from World War II through Iraq and Afghanistan.

There is another aspect of Camp Pendleton that is not so well understood or appreciated: It is a window into our past. The Marine Corps presence is just the latest chapter in the long history of the land. For thousands of years it was home to Native Americans. Franciscan missionaries performed the first Christian baptism in Alta California while passing through with Gaspar de la Portola. The land was once part of Mission San Luis Rey, the largest and arguably most successful of the Spanish missions. If you can accept the idea that not all battles are ferocious, it was a battlefield long before the Marines came.

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As Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores, it was part of a huge and hugely successful cattle ranch under the flags of Mexico and the United States. At its grandest, the ranch encompassed over 220,000 acres, extending from Oceanside north into Orange County, past San Juan Capistrano and encompassing present day Mission Viejo and Rancho Margarita. Famous California families—the Picos, Forsters, Floods, and O’Neills—are part of the story. The Magees, though lesser known, add to a history of success and perseverance. Historic buildings preserved by the Marines at Camp Pendleton remind us of those times and people.

One of the most endearing and enduring features of Camp Pendleton is that, unlike so much of surrounding Southern California, the men and women who lived those stories would recognize large tracts of the base if they could walk them once more. The two photographs below illustrate this feature. Many of the hills and valleys of Camp Pendleton remain virtually the same as they have always been throughout the history of the land.



Many of Camp Pendleton’s valley scenes are reminiscent of past eras.



Camp Pendleton hills would be recognized today by the men and women who lived on the land in bygone days.

The Camp Pendleton Historical Society is dedicated to helping the Marine Corps preserve and tell the history of this land. We hope you enjoy its stories.

History Writers Group Formed

A new group of history writers for the Camp Pendleton Historical Society has been formed. This group will become the principal contributor of feature articles for our *Groundbreaker* newsletter. Joining the group are four veteran newsletter feature article writers: Dick Rothwell, Jim Williams, Bill Parsons, and Cal Frantz. Faye Jonason, the Camp Pendleton museum director is also joining the group, as is Capt. Jack Sautter (USMC), who was recently assigned to the Western Area Counsel Office at Camp Pendleton. As a group these writers represent a wide spectrum of knowledge and skills that will be brought to bear in researching the colorful history of Camp Pendleton. We look forward to many interesting and informative articles from them, as we continue to fulfill our mission of discovery, preservation, and sharing of the history of Camp Pendleton.

The formation of this group is also a new opportunity for our members to actively support our mission. If you would like to join this group, please send us a brief synopsis of your experience in history research and writing, and an indication of your area of interest. Welcome aboard!

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MGySgt. Mike Lewis, USMC (Ret.). Mike was an outstanding recruiter—not only in the field, but also as an instructor at the recruiter school. He will be working with Greg Goodman in establishing a speakers bureau.

Maj. Dal Williams, USMC (Ret.). Since leaving the Marine Corps, Dal has been an adjunct faculty member at a local community college and has been very active in North San Diego County civic affairs, including the Vista Planning Commission, Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, and Elizabeth Hospice. He will be a great resource for spreading the word about CPHS.

In an effort to give members and guests an easier way to contact us, we have established a post office box. You can reach us there with any questions or comments. Our secretary, Bill Parsons, will direct correspondence to the right place.

CPHS
P.O. Box 5497
Oceanside, CA 92052

You can also reach Bill by email: cphs_info@yahoo.com.

Thank you for your continued support of our efforts to keep the history of Camp Pendleton alive. I look forward to reporting to you again in the *Groundbreaker*.

Richard B. Rothwell

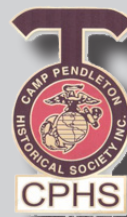
CPHS NOW ON FACEBOOK

Thanks to new director Bo Hellman, we are now on Facebook at



<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Camp-Pendleton-Historical-Society/381120642062008>.

This is a significant step for CPHS in modernizing our communications outreach to both our members as well as to anyone who may be curious about who we are and what we do. Bo will be the site administrator for the foreseeable future, and as such welcomes suggestions from CPHS members for items to be posted on the site. Please send your ideas to our new contact address at cp_hellman@yahoo.com. This is a good opportunity for members to actively participate in a new CPHS initiative, so we hope to hear from you soon.



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Event Alert: April 25th at Annie's Cafe in Temecula



Mark April 25th on your calendar for a CPHS fund raiser at Annie's Cafe, located at 27313 Jefferson Ave. in Temecula, CA. Annie's will host a fun event for members and friends that day, so we look forward to seeing you there. Details will be sent out in an event flyer.



Camp Pendleton Historical Society
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Oceanside, CA 92052

*Camp Pendleton Historical Society
...preserving a rich and colorful history*