

*"If You've Never Lived  
in a Quonset Hut"*

First home: 724-A Homoja Housing, Camp Pendleton. Photo courtesy of the author.

by Pat Gracey

My first experience living in a Quonset hut was, as a bride, in 1950. The tunnel-like buildings were one of hundreds-of-thousands that had been constructed to house military personnel and families on bases during World War II. Our group of huts, called Homoja Housing, was just inside the main gate of Camp Pendleton. The one-thousand or so huts were located on the west side of Vandegrift Boulevard as it proceeded into Camp Pendleton, a giant base encompassing over 126,000-acres that swept from the Pacific Ocean inland. We had a great ocean view for we were no more than a mile, as the crow flies, from the Pacific Ocean. I think the term Homoja was a

reference to the style (and I use the term lightly) of the hut itself. It was probably 48-feet long and 20-feet wide, but with a divider in the center that made two separate apartments per hut. There was a front door on either end and no other exits. The interior wall separating the two apartments was not soundproof and neighbor's voices could sometimes be heard. Still and all, there's no place like home!

I have read that the "tunnel-like" design of a hut was fashioned after the American Indian Iroquois style lodges. The World War II huts were made up of semi-circular steel ribs covered with corrugated sheet metal. The ribs sat on a low, steel frame foundation. The floors were

some sort of plywood or fiberboard. Not pretty. The small kitchen had a tiny strip of some sort of linoleum covering the plywood. An apartment size electric range, an icebox (not a refrigerator), a sink and small counter filled the space which was definitely a one-person work area. There was a living room, two small bedrooms and a bathroom that was directly off the living room. I mention all of this because the bathroom door was 6-inches too short, so there was a gap between the door and the floor in all huts. Embarrassing for guests.

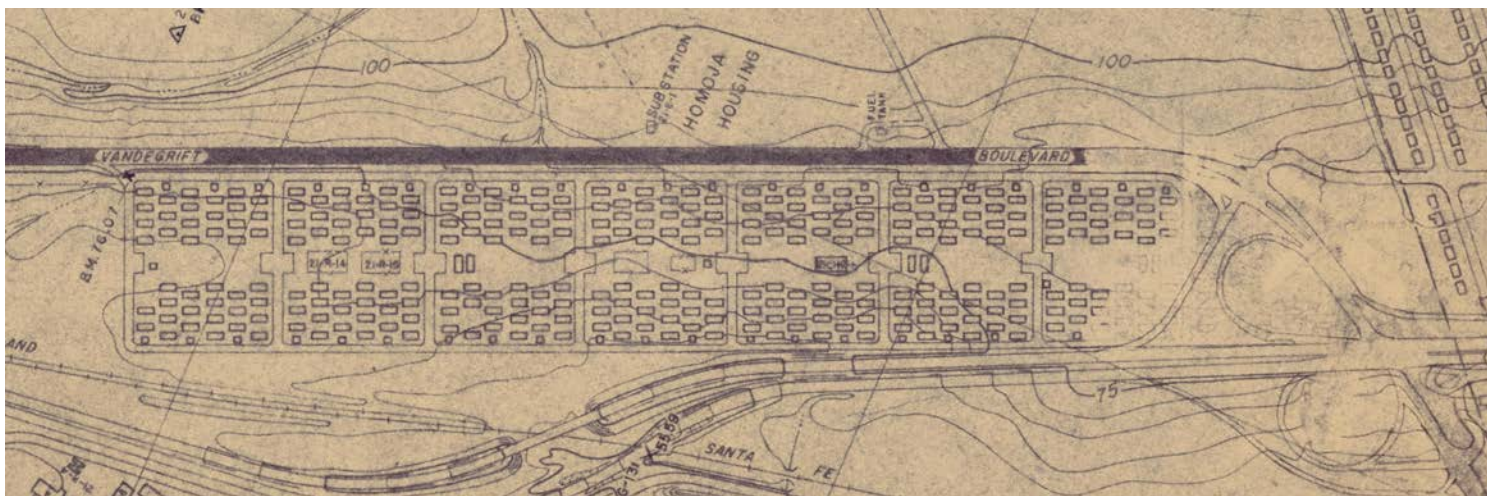
What to do with a plywood floor the color of putty and hard to clean? I was not very imaginative but many Marine wives had absolutely genius ability in their skill of making "a hut a home". Not allowed to paint them, they put shoe dye into a can of floor wax and after umpteen coats those old plywood floors were a deep reddish brown and had a luster that would make Martha Stewart green with envy.

The curtains, of course, had to be fastened both at the top and bottom of the window due to the curved outside walls, they would have otherwise hung straight down. Those same curved walls were a detriment to anyone of any great height. Walking near the wall could mean a sharp smack on the noggin when getting too close to the slanted wall.

None of the above really mattered though for it certainly wasn't hard to "keep up with the Joneses" next door; all homes exactly alike. No washers

*Continued page 2, Quonset Huts*

## Quonset Huts, Cont.



Blueprint showing the layout of the Homoja Housing area, located between Vandegrift Blvd. and Highway 101, inside the Main Gate at Camp Pendleton

or dryers. There was a laundry hut where one could, for a dime, do a load of clothes and then take them home and hang them on a clothesline that was provided. Drying time near the ocean begins about 10 a.m. after the dew departs and ends at 2 p.m. when the dew returns.

We had our own post office and it was nice walking there each day and conversing with those who also happened to be calling for their mail. It was especially nice to view the beautiful Pacific Ocean as we walked along. That is where this "mountain girl" discovered the many moods of the ocean. On a sunny day it was a deep blue, but overcast days made it sage green. Windy times made cute little white caps on a grey sea. One could glimpse ships sailing by. The sunsets with the sun going down into the sea made a beautiful sight.

One met people from all states and countries. I saw grits cooked for the first time. I had heard of Hominy Grits but had never seen any. Soft, southern accents as well as New Englanders who dropped their Rs as if they were hot to the touch. I heard Texas drawls and the mid-western folk pronouncing those Rs that the New Englanders didn't. I guess my California accent was new to some. One friend was from New Zealand where it's winter in July and summer

in December in that "land down under".

I never regretted being a military wife. Of course, there were a few disadvantages as having one's husband shipping out for a year at a time. I am glad they have shortened deployment time for the men now serving. One of my sons, who was not quite three when daddy came home from a year in Vietnam, told me, "Him's a nice guy, Mom!"

The land for Camp Pendleton was purchased on March 10, 1942. During the early days of World War II the Marine training bases were limited to Quantico, VA., Parris Island, S.C. and M.C.R.D., San Diego. The vast acreage, reaching to the sea, was perfect for amphibious training facilities and it became the west coast's largest military camp. The property was once a thriving cattle ranch: Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores.

After nearly a year in our "tunnel" house we moved to another military housing tract with all straight walls! The streets of the complex were all named after World War II battles. I recall some of them: Guadalcanal, Guam, Saipan, Iwo Jima, Tarawa, Okinawa, Peleliu, Bougainville, Kwajalein, etc. Two months later, in August of 1951, my husband

received orders for Korea. Never underestimate the power of Uncle Sam! My baby boy and I came home to Tehachapi for a year, 1952, just in time for the Tehachapi earthquake!

It sounds like life in the military is unsettled and precarious. Maybe so, but it didn't seem so, especially when you live near those who are experiencing the same sort of life. It was the norm for us. We had Little League, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and the boys had paper routes just as civilian people. Of course, people get transferred sometimes and your neighbors change. We finally moved off base and bought a house that even had a view of the ocean. We'd probably have retired there, in Oceanside, but the State of California bought our house and the land became part of a freeway. So, upon retirement we moved to Tehachapi where I grew up. A good decision.

The Quonset huts are gone now. Don't know where they went. Don't really care.

*This article was first published in The Loop Newspaper (Tehachapi, Calif.) in 2018. Pat Gracey contributes to a column, "The Spirit of Tehachapi", in The Loop (theloopnewspaper.com). She experienced 27 years of Marine Corps family life with her husband, Chief Warrant Officer 4 Doyle Gracey, Jr., USMC.*



# What Do You Know About Quonset Hut Family Housing?



Homoja Quonset Huts were divided into two separate units, housing two families.

- Each unit had a completely furnished apartment consisting of two bedrooms, kitchen, living room, and bath with shower facilities. A stove, refrigerator and all necessary kitchen utensils and linen were supplied. Bed sheets and other linens could be traded in for fresh laundry; the laundry bill was only \$2 a month.
- Maximum period of occupancy was 60 days; rent was \$1 a day, payable at the end of each month
- Differences between officer and enlisted Quonset hut family housing: the number of windows. Officers would get an entire Quonset hut and it would have three windows on each side. The huts with four windows were for enlisted families; a wall across the middle separated the Quonset hut into duplexes.

## TIMELINE

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- Base Commanding General, Maj. Gen. Charles Price, suggested the construction of Homoja Quonset Huts.
- The first Homoja Housing project was in the 24 Area; consisted of 20 duplex style huts. Each hut would accommodate two families; opened in September 1944.

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- Jan 1945 - approval and construction of 306 Homoja huts near the Main Gate to house 600 transient personnel.
- Quarters were available on a 24-hour notice.
- Priority of assignment was for Marines and Sailors awaiting orders for overseas duty; able to house their families in the Homoja Housing huts.
- 595 Homoja Quonset Huts were completed in 1945.

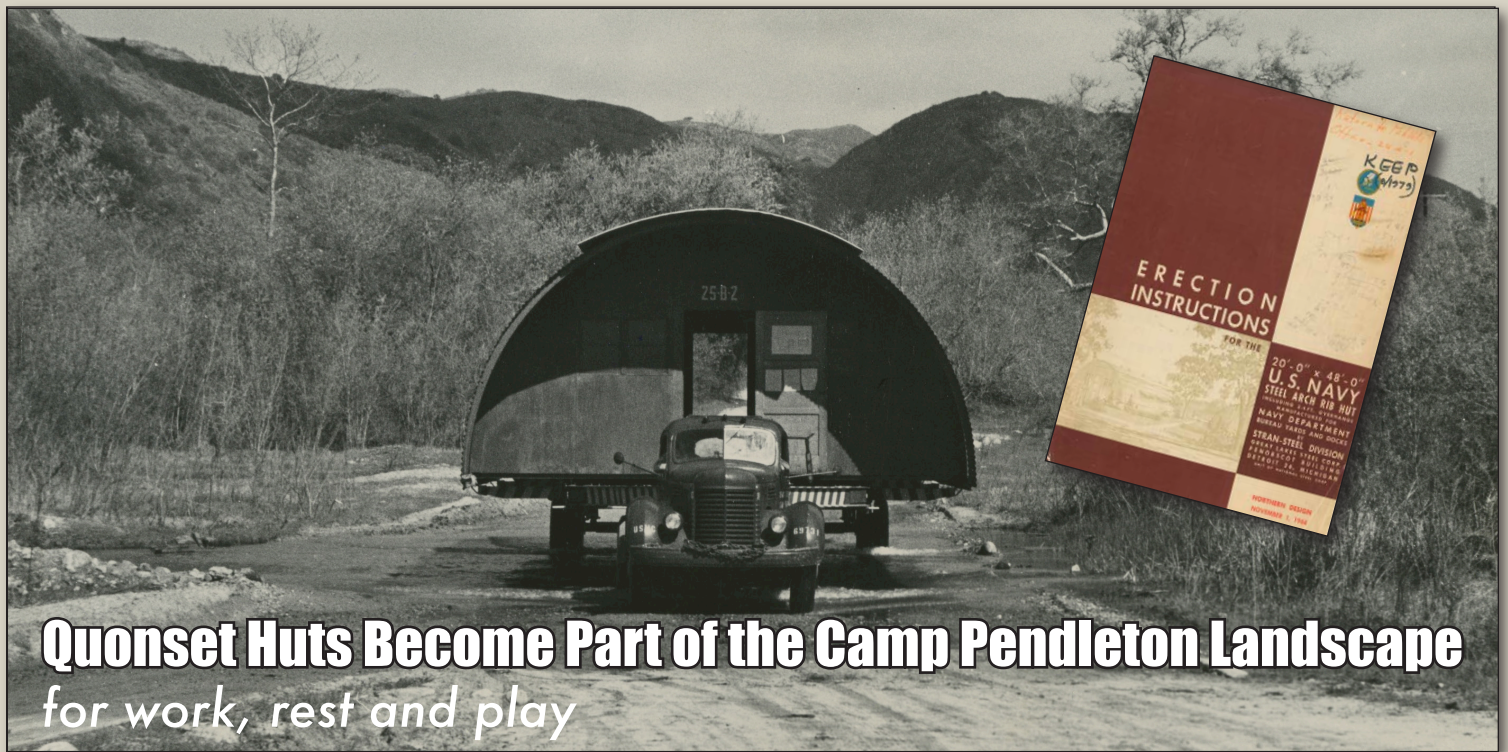
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- Through May 1949, it was estimated that as many as ten thousand families have lived in the Homoja Quonset Huts.
- Rented for \$40.50 a month; tenants were able to make them a permanent residence after the 60-day option clause was lifted.
- Residents decorated the exteriors with flowers, vines, and shrubbery.
- The housing area included a tennis court, two handball courts, and a children's playground fully equipped with swings and slides.
- A Navy Relief Visiting Nurse made daily rounds, offering her assistance wherever requested.
- A Post Exchange (PX) was located in the Homoja Housing area as well as a Bendix laundry facility.
- "Homoja (housing)...is the largest of its kind anywhere in the country", Post Housing Officer, Capt. G. K. Reid, USMC, 1949.

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- March 1956 - Quonset Huts from the old Homoja Housing area near the Main Gate were moved to a former tent camp location at Camp Las Pulgas, a distance of 17 miles, taking 2-3 hours to move each Quonset Hut; these served as quarters for the Reserves.





Moving a Quonset Hut on a trailer, Camp Pendleton (1949). Photos courtesy of the Camp Pendleton Archives



Quonset Huts at Headquarters, 2nd Infantry Training Regiment, 52 Area, Camp Pendleton



THE GANG'S ALL HERE - Children at play in the Homoja Housing area stop and cast curious glances at the Scout (newspaper) photographer, their eager faces wondering what it's all about (1949)



Quonset Hut, Building #64386, 64 Area, Camp Talega, Camp Pendleton



U.S. Marine sitting at a table inside a Quonset Hut barracks, Camp Pendleton (1964)



U.S. Marine relaxes on the couch in a Homoja Housing Quonset Hut, Camp Pendleton (1946)





Crane from Camp Pendleton Maintenance Engineering Section lifts Quonset Hut to set it into place, Camp Pendleton



Interior of Division Schools Quonset Hut classroom, 52 Area, Camp Pendleton



Division Schools "Brownville" Quonset Huts, 1st Marine Division, 52 Area, Camp Pendleton



Marine Corps Exchange Barber Shop Quonset Hut, Bldg #2267, 22 Area, Camp Pendleton



Margaret "Peggy" Fountain, wife of Marine Master Sgt. Dorman Fountain, standing outside of Quonset Hut family housing quarters # 528-B, 21 Area, Del Mar, Camp Pendleton (1948)



## President's Message

Richard B. Rothwell



COVID-19 has had significant effects on CPHS activities this year as I am sure it has with yours. Rather than risk coming together, we have conducted our Board meetings by teleconference. The good news is that no Directors have been infected. I hope that our members share that same good fortune.

Because of State and County-imposed restrictions, we canceled our 2020 Old Corps Birthday Celebration. Our annual "Golf with a Hero" golf tournament, originally scheduled for April 2020, has been re-scheduled for Oct. 29 at the beautiful Carlsbad Omni La Costa Resort and Spa. Our Events Committee of Charlie Kershaw and Mike O'Neil and led by Mike Lewis has been working hard to make it another great event. Let's hope that virus

restrictions will allow golfers to enjoy the fruits of their labors.

Our annual Military Children's Golf Clinic that CPHS sponsors along with partner First Tee/Pro Kids is a wonderful opportunity to introduce children of military families to golf. Experienced instructors help youngsters learn the fundamentals of pitching, putting, and driving. COVID-19 restrictions permitting, our 2020 event will be on either Nov. 24 or 25.

Your Board of Directors approved a CPHS sponsored essay contest for 2021 on the history of the land known today as Camp Pendleton. The scope includes pre-history (archaeology) of the land, its Native American occupants, the Spanish exploration and mission era, the rancho era, and the history of the Camp as a significant cultural and economic institution in San Diego County since 1942. All full-time students enrolled at a San Diego County college or university will be eligible to enter. Entrants must submit an application letter by Dec. 31, 2020 to be followed by their essay of not

more than 5,000 words, which will be due by May 31, 2021. The winning author will receive a \$1,000 prize with the runner up receiving \$500. Former CPHS Board Director, Cal Frantz, has donated the prize money for this initial contest.

If you have not read the lead article in the last edition of Groundbreaker, "Welcome to Tent City" by Kristen Mai Pham, I encourage you to do so. It is the touching story of a young Vietnamese refugee's experiences at Camp Pendleton during her introduction to the United States. Even today, many years later, she holds a warm spot in her heart for the Marines who helped her and her family.

Thank you for your continued support of CPHS. It is vital to our efforts to help the Marine Corps tell and preserve the history of the land we know today as Camp Pendleton. I look forward to reporting to you again in our next edition of Groundbreaker. Until then, protect yourselves, those you love, and those around you.

*Richard B. Rothwell*

### *Camp Pendleton Historical Society* **2021 Essay Contest**

**Who is eligible?** College Students Enrolled in a College/University that is located in San Diego County.

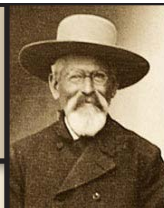
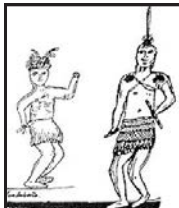
**What is required to compete?** Seeking papers on the history of Camp Pendleton both pre and during Marine Corps ownership. The scope includes the pre-history (archeology) of the land, its native American occupants, the Spanish exploration and mission era, the rancho era, and the history of the Camp as a significant cultural and economic institution in San Diego County since 1942. Not included in the scope is military history of Marine Corps units stationed at the camp.

**When are the deadlines for submissions?** Initial applications are due by Dec. 31, 2020, and Papers are due by May 31, 2021.

**What can you win?** \$1,000 - 1st Place, \$500 - 2nd Place

For more information, please visit:

**[camppendletonhistoricalsociety.org/education](http://camppendletonhistoricalsociety.org/education)**



## Upcoming Events



Save  
the  
Date!

### ***The 4th "Golf With A Hero" Charity Golf Tournament***

On Oct. 29, Camp Pendleton Historical Society (CPHS), partnering with the Omni La Costa Resort, will conduct the 4th "Golf With A Hero" Charity Golf Tournament. With this tournament, each foursome will be composed of one (1) active duty Marine and three (3) other golfers.

The event provides an opportunity to converse with Marines who have recent experience in every clime and place carrying out the missions of the Marine Corps. The tournament theme differentiates this tournament in San Diego County where 1,000 charity golf tournaments are conducted annually.

The tournament will be played on the Champions Course at the Omni La Costa Resort (2100 Costa Del Mar Rd, Carlsbad, Calif.). This renowned course has hosted 37 PGA events and was recently refurbished (to include the complete redesign of four holes).

The tournament will start at 9 a.m. with foursome starts with staggered tee times to ensure social distancing. Your registration also includes food service and golf carts.

The following options exist for you to support this effort:

1. If you are a golfer, you can afford yourself the opportunity to play on this challenging course. Registration cost is \$150 per golfer.
2. If you are not a golfer, you may want to consider sponsoring a Marine golfer for this tournament. The cost of each sponsorship is \$150.
3. If neither of these options suits you, we would welcome a donation from you to support this effort.

To select one of these options, please go to the Eventbrite site URL:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/4th-golf-with-a-hero-charity-golf-tournament-tickets-94561567193>

If you desire to pay by check rather than credit card, please send your donation to the following address:

Mike O'Neil  
Attn: 4th Golf With A Hero Charity Golf Tournament  
2614 Lewis Lane  
Carlsbad, CA 92008

The proceeds from this golf tournament will support the multiple CPHS projects that are currently either underway or in planning.

If the COVID-19 reopening policy changes in San Diego County and this golf tournament is not permitted, we will ensure your registration fees and donations are fully refunded.



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# MEMBERSHIP NEWS

**Welcome aboard to our newest members who recently joined our cause:**

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Michael McIntosh

**Many thanks to our loyal members for their recent membership renewal:**

Daniel Beach

Mike Bray

Carol Childs

Marlin Doody

Yvonne Fedeyko-Kirby

Pete Hammer

Jennifer Hiatt

Peter House

James Johnson

Kevin and Evelyn Leahy

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