

Taft, California

Greetings from Pete Gianopulos, Class of 1942, The Taft Newsletter for Dec. 9, 2007

Readers Responses

From Steve Barber, Class of 1964 (Regarding Readers Responses in Taft Newsletter of Nov. 24, 2007).

Pete: A note to Linda Talbert, sister of Lee Talbert: Her dad, also named Lee, was a scoutmaster to many of us who were in the classes of '64-'65. It was a Sea Scout (now called Explorers) troop. Mr. Talbert, with the help of Neal Mitchell as his co-scout master, introduced a handful of us to a love of the sea and boating. I can recall our fabricating wet suits out of raw neoprene on the floor of the 1-C clubhouse. We'd lie down on the floor, trace a pattern around our bodies and then cut and glue the neoprene. They worked ok at Anacapa and Santa Cruz Islands as we learned to snorkel and scuba in what was then a paradise of wildlife underwater. It still is rich in sea life in comparison to other areas, but the Channel Islands have been decimated by recreational over fishing and "take" of Abalone as my recent dives there can serve to witness.

Anyway, Mr. Talbert (Linda's dad) arranged for us to stay on the Seabee's base at Port Hueneme which is where we were allowed to keep the boat. When we didn't sleep on the boat due to its being hauled out for the chronic repair to the hull we stayed in the barracks, ate in the mess, and attended the 10 cent admission, first run films at the base. The Channel Islands harbor and marinas and up scale homes/condos/yacht clubs/hotels etc. had not yet been built.

The other members of the Sea Scouts -- from Taft of all places! -- included Jon & Dell Newsom, Neal Mitchell, Gary Rasmussen, Ron Parham, Robin Hook, John Gibson, Barry Mathis, and others whose faces I picture, but whose names have slipped away. We suspected in our later years that what we really did was serve as cheap labor to keep that old WW2, converted landing craft of Mr. Talbert's alive and floating, but really, that didn't matter then or now. We had a ball, learned a lot, and were introduced in person to a much wider world than we might have otherwise discovered. Linda, it is with much warmth, laughter, and affection that your dad is held in our memories and "remember when" stories whenever we get together or simply go sailing or boating.

Steve Barber

(NOTE: Does anybody have Robin Hook's e-mail address? E-mail Pete G. I don't have his correct e-mail address.)

From Michael Enault, Class of 1963, from Yuma, AZ (Regarding Taft Newsletter of Nov. 17, 2007 about Gardner Field).

Pete, great article on Gardner Field. My dad was a pilot instructor there. We used to go there in the late 50's early 60's and shoot rabbits and Dad would point out where different buildings were. There was a large dance floor with the Army Air Corp insignia and also still there was the swimming pool (no water, just sage brush). The runways were still there also and we used to drag race on them in the middle 60's..

Michael Enault Class of 1963

From Bill and Dora Mae (Epply - Class '43) of Thousand Oaks, California

This was one of the greatest e-mail I've ever received (Nov. 17, 2007 -- Gardner Field).

On Thanksgiving 1942 my mother sent me to the Armory next to the Coliseum to invite five service people over for Thanksgiving dinner. One of the five who attended was fellow from Brooklyn, N. Y. named Francis McCarthy. Fran would come over in the evenings and play cards. I had enlisted in the Army Air Corps but would not go until I turned 18. Fran told me how he washed out of pilot training because he could not take the Morris Code. So, I went to Manual Arts High School Night School and took Morris code. I could send and received better than 20 words per minute so I never had to take the class in cadet training.

Francis was trying to get back into the Army Air Corps and was sent to Gardner Field, Taft, California.

I Graduated from Washington High in Los Angeles on Thursday, June 24, 1943. On Friday my sister and I drove to Taft to see Fran. Fran and my sister went to the USO Dance. I could not

attend because I was a civilian so I went to the Hippodrome Theater. (NOTE: The Hippodrome Theater burned down and when rebuilt in 1952 was called the Fox Theater.) After the movies were over I met six girls coming out of the theater. I asked them where they knew where a service station was open as I needed to fuel up.

They said follow us, and I did. They took me by their high school, and we went to one of the girls house for cokes and cookies.

Dora Mae Epply was one of the six. I got back to my room at the Taft Hotel about 2 am and woke my sister up and told her of my evening and that I met the girl I'm going to marry. (NOTE: The Hotel Taft was located at 508 Main Street.) We have a date tomorrow for you to meet Dora, she will get a watermelon, and we will have a picnic in the park. (NOTE: In those days the city park was located just north of the Taft High School Music building and where the County Library is now located and beyond the library to Emmons Park Drive on the north and bounded on the east by the Roosevelt School playground.)

We returned to Los Angeles Sunday after the picnic to find that I had orders to report to Sheppard Field, Texas in two weeks.

Saturday I returned to Taft to asked this lovely lady if she would wait for me and she said yes I December I was back in Santa Ana for classification. I was classified a pilot and, Christmas eve I gave Dora a ring. For primary flights training I was stationed at Alan Hancock Santa Maria, and then was transferred to Gardner Field for Basic flying. (All of my buddies thought that I knew the president of the USA.) I then transferred to Waco, Texas for Advanced Flying School. I graduated on December 23, 1944, and got a ride with another instructor to Long Beach and arrive at 8 pm.

We were married in the Methodist Church in Taft by Rev. Stocking. Milton Ross sang at our wedding. (NOTE: Milton Ross started in the Taft City Schools as an Industrial Arts teacher in the 1920's. He later became the principal of the Lincoln School and eventually the superintendent of the Taft City Schools, a position the that he held for many years. Ross was my teacher at Lincoln School in the 1937-38 school year. He was the one who hired me for the 1950-51 school-year after I graduated from college, and after one year at Lincoln School was hired by Taft Union High School where I finished 35 years before retiring.)

After a few days we reported to Pecos, Texas and then sent to Denver -- Son Antonio, Texas -- Salt Lake City and then to Guam. The war had ended and I was part of a crew bringing war weary B-29's fro Guam to Hickom. I was sent to Japan as the 7th ASAC was moving their headquarters from the Philippines to Japan.

As you know Dora and I started a business in Taft "Taft Awning Co." in 1949 (808 Center Street). It became Taft Awning and Linoleum then "Ebbert's from the floor Up." Then in 1958 we moved to Lompoc and opened "Ebberts from the Floor Up." Then, in 1960 we started with Vandenberg Village Dev. Co and later built houses on the V Village County Club. We built approx. 1000 homes over the next 20 years -- retiring in 1983 moving to Oxnard on the water, then Lake Tahoe then back to Thousand Oaks in 1999

We have owned and lived in 28 homes over the past 63 years and are now living in a retirement community called University Village on property bought from Cal-Lutheran College.

Thanks so much for all the wonderful e-mail.

Dora and Bill Ebbert

From George Gianopulos, Class of 1945, of Fresno, California (NOTE: My little brother George worked for the JPL facility in Pasadena for 30 years and was among other things the Director of Mission Control for the first two space shots -- the orbiter and the Lander -- to Mars in 1976.)

Gardner Field was a special period in my life.

It was the summer of 1944. I was between my junior and senior years in high school. Gardner Field was in full swing. Of course, Taft was invaded by the military. Soldiers, their families, the trainees – the cadets – all permeated our lives. It was at that time that Jack Sigel (NOTE: One of our neighbors in the 500 block of Lucard Street) and I got jobs out at the air base. He worked in the salvage yard. I worked in the propeller shop. (NOTE: Jack Sigel went through college and became the chief librarian for the State of California Supreme Court In San Francisco and is retired and lives in San Francisco.)

In our shop, propellers from the BT-13 (the Basic Trainer) were brought for overhaul. We took them apart, cleaned and replaced worn parts, inspected parts, replaced seals, lubricated and put them back together. They were then balanced and returned to the flight line. I had a great boss and worked with some fine people. And you know what? It was at Gardner Field that I experienced my first airplane ride – on a BT-13 on a *test flight flown by a test pilot*. What ride that was.

The place was a beehive of activity. Military people were all over the place. Of course we had the cadets learning to be pilots. There were soldiers who had returned from overseas, from combat, from missions over Europe, and they told their stories. The entertainment industry came to Gardner Field and put on programs for the military. A parade of folks like Bob Hope, Jack Benny, Danny Kaye, Dinah Shore and more put on programs there. Big Bands came. But the Gardner Field Band was no slouch. Many musicians from those same big bands, now in the military, were stationed here and formed the nucleus of the Gardner Field Band. Boy, they were really good. They played dances in town and programs at the USO Club on Main Street (300 Main Street)..

Pete, that was 'my' Gardner Field. George

From Mike Petty, Class of 1966, from Sante Fe, California

Pete: Fun to hear about Gardner Field. Side Bar on this topic - my folks first home on "F" street in Taft Heights was in fact a lube shack from Gardner Field which my dad and uncle converted into a small but habitable dwelling. (According to the 1949 City Directory, an A. K. Petty lived at 403 F Street.) To think, my mom, dad, brother and I lived in this micro dwelling for about 3 years before our family went upscale to the BIG home at 726 "B" Street. It is my guess, that this "F Street dwelling" is in fact the last Gardner Field building still standing, unless there are other hidden treasures in Taft. Little bit of fun history. Mike Petty, Class of 1966

(NOTE: Just Friday I heard of another two houses in Ford City that were moved there from Gardner Field. The store in Valley Acres was a building that was moved from Gardner Field.)

From Larry Hildebrand, Class of 1966, from Phoenix, Arizona (Regarding Taft Newsletter of Dec. 1, 2007 about Taft High Wildcats winning Valley Championship)

Pete - Please pass along my congratulations to the '07 Wildcats (and the whole community of Taft) on their fantastic win in the Valley championship game against Corcoran last night to finish off an incredible 12-1 season.

Lawrence Hildebrand, #50 on the '65 'Cats

From Dick Snyder, Class of 1955, of Bakersfield, Californian (Dick became a PhD and the head of the Social Science Department at the University of Wisconsin at Lacrosse, WI.)

A great write-up, Pete. Other news coverage did not have your detail or historical perspective. I am very happy for all of those kids. They will never forget this game (The Wildcat win for the Valley Championship). Dick

From Thelma (Beck) and Wally Green, Class of 1942, of Reno, Nevada

Great news Pete about our Wildcats winning the Division Valley Championship. Just wish that we had been there to join in all the fun and celebrations.

Congratulations to all the young men on the team for their efforts and persistence in bringing this all about.

Thanks so much for relaying the news.

Sincerely, Thelma & Wally Green

From Phyllis (Johnson) Solberg, Class of 1963, from Redding, California

Pete, We are all ecstatic. What a great way for Taft to send its season !!! If I were closer, I would have been there !!

Phyllis (Johnson) Solberg

From Trice Harvey, Class of 1955, from Bakersfield, CA. -- former County Supervisor of the 4th District and former State of Californian Assemblyman from our area.

Big Brain: What a game for our Wildcats!! Wow, are we proud or not?? Yes, Yes and YES!! I was the losing quarterback for the Valley, at Ratcliff (Stadium where the old Fresno State campus was located in Fresno) against Fresno High, in 1955. I was on the crying end for the Wildcats then!! How sweet it is!?? Little Brain (NOTE: Radcliff Stadium is now where Fresno City College now plays.)

Stan Freitas, Class of 1972 or '73), from San Jose, California (Note: Stan Freitas is the

brother of my son-in-law, Ron Freitas, of Frisco, TX. Stan is the pastor of a Church of Christ in Sunnyvale, CA.)

Hi Pete, I'm wrapping up my sermon a little later this week than usual. That's because I drove down for the game. You captured it wonderfully! What a sight to behold. I shed a couple tears to as I reflected on my six years on that field while watching our 2007 team (at their championship game Friday night.)

I remembered how Monty Jr. played with Ron (Freitas) in 1970 and they lost on Thanksgiving Day to Dos Palos. I thought of how Monty Reedy Sr. was the first coach to send me in my freshman year. He was always good to me. Even though I was fat and slow he seemed to see something good in me and it made me want to do better. He sent me in for my first play and said "now go in there and hit somebody!" My first play in a real game, I was at nose guard. The center put his helmet between my legs and I responded by punching his helmet. The ref rightly kicked me out of the game. When I came off the field Monty and JP were laughing and Monty said "I didn't mean hit them that way!" I will never forget my first play and who sent me in. (NOTE: JP or John Patterson, who I have had coffee early in the morning every day for years, tells that story about Stan getting kicked out of that game and says he told Stan "to go in there and hit somebody but not to hit him that way!")

I have now coached the JV line here in Sunnyvale for four years while my son, Zach played ball. Zach was all league this year as a tight end and our varsity went to playoffs and got beat in the semi finals. I can appreciate how special it is for the Wildcats to win it all. I'm amazed at how my years as a Wildcat and a Cougar helped me to coach the boys and I try to encourage them like Monty and other men in Taft encouraged me.

Taft is a special place in my heart and I'm so thankful we have had you all these years to remind us of our wonderful heritage.

Back to the sermon.

With Love and Thanks,

Stan Freitas

Kathryn (Lopey) Simoni, Class of 1939, of Martinez, CA.

Thanks so much Pete for your wonderfully written article on the game. I shall print it and keep it. Don't know what we would do without you..... Also, enjoyed your article about the girl's softball era (Taft Newsletter Nov. 24, 2007). Had I stayed in Taft I would probably have played for TASCOS (Taft Auto Specialty Co.). Our team here in Northern California was called "The Payless Girls" sponsored by the Payless Drug Store of course. One of our teammates was named Chris Lombardi, who was the niece of The Great Vince Lombardi. We were champs in 39, 40 and 41 up until Pearl Harbor then were revived after the war in '46. I didn't realize that the Windmill pitch was in existence before about '38....so keep up the good work and always keep me on your address list...Thanks.

Sincerely, momkat1939

From Dick Snyder, Class of 1955, from Bakersfield, CA., retired professor and Dept. Head University of Wisconsin's social science dept. at Lacross, WI., now writing lyrics, having released his second album full of Christmas songs.

Never tire of hearing about Gardner Field...my little story of it had to do with a soldier/airman and his buddy who were hitch-hiking from Taft back to base. They happened to station themselves on the edge of the sidewalk in front of our house at 141 Center Street. I wandered out to look them over. It was 1942. I was 4 years old. One of them being jovial, said, in effect, "if you can make a car stop to take us to base, I'll give you .50 cents". So, I stepped up to the curb and waved at cars, and sure enough, one stopped and I got .50 cents. Never forget it.

Merry Christmas, Pete. Dick

From Shirley (Porter '58) Aney of Hacienda Heights, California

GREAT NEWS - CONGRATS to Taft and to the Wildcats !!!!!

From Kent Estabrook, Class of 1955 and retired passenger plane pilot.

Dear Pete: Reading Steve Barber's comments regarding the Taft Sea Scout troop, prompted me to send you this picture. It was taken in 1954 in the Scout Hall (a converted bunk house) in 11-C.) (NOTE: The Standard Oil 11-C lease or camp was located north west of Ash and Lincoln Street.) Mr. Lee M. Talbert is standing by the Post flag. Seated around the table (l to r): ?, Kent Estabrook, Lee Talbert, ?, Pete Magee, and Jim (Gus) Freeze. I do not recall the names of the 2

standing scouts. Perhaps some of your readers will know the missing names. I remember them by sight, but can't come up with the names. (NOTE: The picture was too large to be sent with this newsletter.)

We all had many great experiences with the troop and did most of the same adventures Steve talks of, though no wet suits! It seems to me the old landing craft name was the "Dot Morris", and I don't know any of us knew why it was named that. Maybe it was donated to the troop with that name.

I enjoy your weekly chronicles immensely, look forward to the next one, and pass them all on to my sister Jean.

Best regards, Kent Estabrook, class 1955

From Chad (Rocky '57) Hensley, Class of 1957, of Mareno Valley, CA

Rocky Hensley, class '57 Just a little note. There is an indirect connection for the fireworks. Pat, my wife, is the accounting manager for PyroSpectaculars, the company who does most of the firework displays for Taft. They also do the 4th of July for Taft.

From Jim Summers, Class of 1970, from San Ramon, California

Pete- Thanks so much for your coverage of the Wildcat Football team this year. I felt like I was there. I played on the 1970 team with Monty Reedy, Jr. as our featured tailback. What a gifted player he was. I drove all the way down from the SF Bay Area to see the Dos Palos playoff game (this year). I was very impressed with the condition of Martin field and the football team. In the late 60's, we'd call up about 10 or 12 students and we'd come down and jump the fence on Sunday afternoons for a game of football. Those were the days! Say hello to Valerie for me (I don't know if she'll remember me; I was very shy and reserved around girls in high school.) Best of luck and Good Health to you and your family. Your friend, Jim Somers (Class of 70)

From Pete Magee, Class of 1955, from St Paul, Minnesota, BS from Yale College, 1959, PhD from University of Calif., Bekeley, 1960, retired Chair. Dept. of Genetics, Cell Biology. and Development at Univ. of Minnesota, world travelor and lecturer, author and listed in top ten, men swimmers, by United States, Masters Swimming for men 60-64 .

Dear Pete: I was pleased that Michael Enualt mentioned the drag races out at Gardner Field. In the early 50s they were quite common, and the atmosphere at those gatherings was an anticipation of NASCAR before it got too respectable. I managed to get out there once or twice to watch hot cars from all over the southern end of the Valley go up against each other (the Olds 98s were particularly successful) and to see the rivalries between cars from various towns and cities. Some of those rivalries were pretty intense, and with all the beer that flowed there was an underlying feeling that something explosive might happen at any minute. It didn't the times I was there. It was a unique atmosphere, and it won't return.

I also want to point out that the Sea Scouts were going strong in the early 50s, when both Lee Talberts, father and son, were part of the troop. I was amused to hear that the boat was still docked in Port Hueneme in the 60s. Kent Estabrook and I were reminiscing about those days the last time we met.

Pete Magee, Class of 1955

From Neal McCabe, Class of 1958, from Chico, CA

Hello Pete, Thanks again for all the information you make available regarding the old days in Taft. Gardner Field has always been intriguing to me. When I was a kid, we lived at 507 F Street in Taft Heights. I believe Mike Enault and his family lived in the same block, but I can't remember which house. (NOTE: According the 1949 Taft City Directory, a J. L. Enault lived at 502 F Street.) I didn't remember that Mike's dad was an instructor at Gardner Field. Another pilot stationed at Gardner Field lived next door to us, and I remember (I think) planes from the field flying overhead when I was in kindergarten at the Taft Heights School in 1945. Later, in the 50's, there were drag races on the old runway. I don't know who organized those races, but there was good attendance. I don't recall any admission being charged. It was very casual. After the drag races were discontinued, the runway was still a great place to run go-carts and fly model airplanes.

Neil McCabe. Class of 1958