**Upcoming Meetings Schedule**

**Oct 22:** Landrum Wayside, Judith Hassen, 7 p.m.

**Nov 15:** Potluck: 2 p.m. bring utensils and side-dish

**March 24:** Membership meeting, subject TBD, 7 p.m.

**April 28:** Membership meeting, subject TBD, 7 p.m.

**May 26:** Membership meeting, subject TBD, 7 p.m.

**Museum Events**

**Oct 29:** Glass from the past, special program on obsidian, 7 p.m., County Museum, Presented by Museum staff

**Nov 10:** The Pilgrim story—what most people haven’t heard. 7 p.m., County Museum Presented by Don White

Check the County Museum or Klamath County Historical Society websites for a list of events

**See Inside "Remembering the Forgotten Heroes" by Ryan Bartholomew**

Klamath County Historical Society
Meetings are held at 7 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of March, April, May, September and October in the Armory-Museum at 1451 Main Street, Klamath Falls.

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**September 24 Membership Meeting**

**WORLD WAR II LEGACIES IN SOUTHERN OREGON**

About 60 people attended the Oregon Historical Society’s program "World War II Legacies in Southern Oregon" at the Ross Ragland Cultural Center. After moderator Eliza Canty-Jones introduced the three panelists Jeff LaLande, Linda Tamura and Laura Jane Gifford, each gave a brief presentation.

LaLande provided a general overview of long lasting impacts of World War II facilities in Southern Oregon such as Camp White, the Naval Air Station and Marine Barracks. He concluded by discussing the 1942 Jehovah Witness State convention held in Klamath Falls and how the convention almost led to martial law being declared.

Tamura focused on the Tulelake Internment Camp and how the loyalty questionnaire led to the camp’s selection as the nation’s only Japanese Segregation center. She also discussed the viewpoints of many local towards the camp and those incarcerated within.

Laura Jane Gifford focused on the balloon bomb and how the voluntary media censorship led to the cancellation of the project by the Japanese. Afterwards, Cora Conner, telephone switchboard operator at the time of the bombing, shared her memories of that day.

The evening proved to be fun and educational. A big thank you to the Oregon Historical Society for choosing our community for their presentation.
Remembering the Forgotten heroes
By Ryan Bartholomew

After Pearl Harbor and the U.S.’s entry into WW II, the Navy set up a series of Air Stations along the West Coast. The mission of these stations was to give aviators their final training before reporting to the Pacific Theater. A number of stations were having issues sticking to the stringent training timelines due to poor weather, such as rain and fog, along the coast.

Serving at one of the stations was Lieutenant Commander William Randle. Randle, former airport manager at Klamath Falls, suggested the Klamath Airport would be a perfect place to set up a training base. Randle explained that Klamath had more Visual Flight Rules (VFR) flying days than any other airport in Oregon; VFR flying days means good weather for flying where the pilots do not have to rely on his/her instruments for navigation. In addition, Klamath Falls was surrounded by federally owned lands, including large reservoirs, which could be used as training areas.

In 1943, negotiations between the Navy and Klamath Falls began and the Navy broke ground on the Klamath Naval Air Station on November 1. Three short months later on February 12, 1944, the station was commissioned.

The Navy set up four ranges where torpedo bomber crews could hone their skills. Crews constructed giant wooden rafts and placed them in Clear Lake, Goose Lake, Gerber and Drew’s Reservoirs. The rafts were simulated battleships that the crews would dive bomb during their training. Between Clear Lake and Goose Lake, the Navy established an air-to-air training area known as Military Operations Area (MOA) Goose. A rocket training area was also set up south of Macdoel.

By 1944, the United States was firmly embedded in the greatest naval conflict of all-time against Japan. The main objective of the naval air stations along the west coast was to get as many aircrews as possible into the combat zone as quickly as possible. To achieve this objective, corners were often cut and safety often was not the priority. Student pilots showing up at Klamath for their training kept getting younger and younger with less and less flying experience.

The inevitable result of this rush to train aircrews was that training accidents became an unfortunate, but accepted fact of life. Klamath Naval Air Station was not spared from this harsh reality. With history’s greatest Naval battle raging in the Pacific, the OPSTEMPO at KNAS was extreme, nearly 2000 flights per week. This level of production came with a very high price. From February 1944 to August 1945, 28 Airmen were killed and more than 50 aircraft were lost in training accidents.

Dorothy Saunders Fields was a child during World War II and recalls the Navy training mission and crashes:

A Japanese balloon bomb floated near Bryant Mountain for several hours, while planes from the base in Klamath Falls tried to shoot it down. A group of us kids stood in front of the garage and watched it. There was also a midair crash south of Merrill in a field. The government did not restrict the areas around these crashes, and many people went to see them, after the airmen were removed. My father and mother, Bill and Margaret Saunders decided to go to Clear Lake to have a look at one of the crashes. It was very muddy and we got stuck on the way back home to Malin. We walked forever it seemed and arrived at a farmhouse about 1:30 in the morning. I can’t remember whose farm it was, but the man drove Pop to Tulelake where he had relatives who took him home to the garage in Malin. The Farmer’s wife put quilts on the floor in the living room and a very tired bunch of kids fell asleep until Pop came back the next day with a tow truck. My brother John took some pieces of aluminum and plexi-glass and made some jewelry from it. I wore out a new pair of shoes on that walk, and since shoes were rationed at the time, I went barefoot for several months.
Less than three weeks after the field opened, two pilots lost their lives in a mid-air collision over the airfield. Three more men died July 3, 1944 when their TBF Avenger crashed on the shore of Drew’s Reservoir. With the winter of 1944-1945 setting in, more accidents were expected and more accidents occurred.

One such accident occurred November 24, 1944, when two TBF Avengers collided over Clear Lake. The two pilots survived but four crewmen were killed. The following is a letter written in the late 1990s by one of the surviving pilots:

I have delayed in writing this letter because of the hurt and responsibility I still feel over the collision 53 years 2 months and 14 days ago. I woke up at 4 a.m. and couldn’t get back to sleep. I re-live it every year during the month of November. My thoughts drift back automatically to that cold November day. I was not close to my crewmen, both of whom were a year younger than me. On that day years ago, neither one of them had any control over their future. They were just along for the ride doing a job assigned to them. As often happens, I feel there is a time and place for all of us, theirs just came too early.

During the glide bombing run on the target, in Clear Lake, my airspeed hit the redline mark of 220 knots. I slowed down and the number 3 man overran me. He joined with the lead plane and pulled back about 100 feet. I came up under them and started pulling up into my position. There was a bright sun to the east and I never saw McGee’s plane above me. I was concentrating on getting into my position. The first thing I knew of a collision was a thud behind me and my plane went into a spin. The 13 ft prop of McGee’s plane hit six feet behind me, striking my ball turret gunner severing my control cables and crushing my tail control surfaces. I vividly remember sliding my hatch back, undoing my shoulder and seat belt and calling my crewmen. It was pure reaction and training that allowed me to get out.

The two surviving pilots, Barney Weaver and H.C. McGee landed safely south of Clear Lake near Mowitz Creek. Several hours later, an ambulance picked them up and they returned to the base. Ralph Skidmore, Richard Hartwick, Edward Grohs and Benjamin Kaufman all died in the collision.

Ten days later, the unthinkable happened when another Avenger crew was lost. Lieutenant Robert Pinz failed to pull out of a dive and his plane plummeted into the depths of Clear Lake. The only civilian eyewitnesses to the tragedy were Betty and Herman Vowell who were watching the planes from Carr Butte, two miles north of the lake.

In a 2004 interview with Herald and News Regional Editor Lee Juillerat, Herman recalled that fateful day:

It was a crystal clear day and the lake was like a sheet of glass. My wife Betty and I had just stopped for lunch on the south slope of Carr Butte. We saw five or six planes coming around for a dive on a target raft so we stopped to watch. The first plane in line dove almost straight down to the raft. It kept going straight down very fast. There was no attempt of the plane trying to pull out of the dive. it just went straight into the water, right next to the raft. There was really not much of a splash and the water smoothed back out. We could see some steam coming off the water in the spot where the plane went in. The plane just disappeared. The other planes, one at a time, dove on the raft and dropped their bombs. When they were done, I noticed the planes flying around like they were looking for the missing plane.
The pamphlet “Nine out of Fifty,” vividly recalls that day from the view of the Naval personnel:

The following conversation was heard by all our planes on a bombing hop.
“Navy Klamath, Navy Klamath, this is King Three-Six, Urgent.”
“Navy Klamath, Navy Klamath, this is King Three-Six, Urgent.” (Dammit, why don’t they answer.)
“King Three-Six, this is Navy Klamath over.”
“This is King Three-Six, there has been a crash at Clear Lake....TBF crash at Clear Lake, over.”
“Klamath tower to King six-three-two-nine....give location of crash and details, over.”
“King six-three-two-nine to Klamath Tower, TBF crash.....Northwest end of Clear Lake....plane hit water...no survivors can be seen.....out.”

Everyone rose, hurried out to the front of the shack, and headed individually for their previously assigned emergency crash posts. One to the tower to relay instructions to the squadron in the air, one to the line of parked planes on the ramp to assign crewmen and mechanics to the rescue planes, one to the squadron office to draft up crash reports. Two pilots hurriedly donned flight gear, one ground officer checked all emergency food, medical and life-saving gear, which was to be dropped by the ready rescue planes. The duties completed and the emergency planes on their way, all hands stood by to await further word. From the tower radio, from pilots coming in from the crash area, the story gradually took shape. It was plane number 34. The crash occurred during dive bombing maneuvers. The pilot dove too steeply, the plane hit the water from the dive and exploded upon impact.

Navy divers quickly arrived from Seattle to search for the bodies. After a few short days, the Navy search team left never to return. The following summer, the body of David Herget, a crewman, washed ashore, but for 50 years, no sign of Lt. Pinz or the plane were found.

Pinz and the aircraft probably would never have been found if not for the work of two men, Jerry Maxwell and John Prosser. A few years ago the two men set out to research the mysterious crash. It did not take long for the project to become a labor of love. After thousands of hours and hundreds of phone calls, John and Jerry recruited a force of volunteers and equipment to help locate the plane. Their dedication paid off, after many days searching Clear Lake, the aircraft was found. Pinz’s body had long been assimilated into the muddy lake bottom. In the summer of 2006, Robert Pinz finally received a funeral at the site where his body was laid to rest, complete with military honors.
With the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, World War II ended. The need to train aircrews diminished significantly and as a result, the Navy closed Klamath Naval Air Station on January 1, 1946.

The incredible loss of life in training accidents was not unique to Klamath Naval Air Station. From December 1941 to August 1945, less than four years, 14,903 Airmen were lost in training accidents in the U.S. 52,651 aircraft accidents were recorded resulting in the loss of 13,873 airplanes. That is nearly 40 crashes a day. Many of these men have been forgotten by everyone except immediate family members. Below we pay tribute to all who were lost in local accidents:

2-27-1944: Wallace Cervenik and Louis Gahre = collision over airfield

5-14-1944: Lewis Johnson = Mahogany Mountain

6-13-1944: James Klemgard, James Bagwell and Clyde Worley = Montague

7-3-1944: Max Weinberg, Joseph Casterot and Stephen Warnick = Drew’s Reservoir

7-9-1944: Richard Baker = Klamath Marsh

7-25-1944: Valentine Goehring = Goose Lake

8-9-1944: George Holinka and Douglas Andrews = Sheepy Ridge

11-24-1944: Ralph Skidmore, Richard Hartwick, Edward Grohs and Benjamin Kaufman = South of Clear Lake

12-4-1944: Robert Pinz and David Herget = Clear Lake

2-15-1945: Paul Rogers killed in Lakeview working on plane

6-19-1945: Robert Kern and Lawrence Kahnke = Goose Lake

6-30-1945: Leonard Swenson = Klamath Naval Air Station

7-10-1945: William Price (ambulance driver killed in roll over responding to a mid air collision east of Gerber.)

8-3-1945: A.W. Ainsworth and Donald Allen = Dorris

8-14-1945: Louis Tetreault = Goose Lake

12-3-1945: Frank Lupo = Mt. Scott

A dry Goose Lake reveals the remnants of a Navy bomber wreck that killed Kern and Kahnke (U.S. Air National Guard Photo by Tech. Sgt. Jefferson Thompson)
It did not take long for the US military to regain interest in the Klamath airport. By the mid 1950s, our adversaries had developed strategic bombers with the ability to strike the mainland U.S. In response to this, the Air Force built a protective ring of radars and alert bases along all four borders. The Air Force chose Klamath Falls as the location of one of these bases. Kingsley Field served in this capacity until the early 1980s when the Air Force downsized and handed the base over to the Air National Guard.

At about the same time, the Air National Guard was looking for a place to train F-4 pilots. The infrastructure was already in place and with plenty of available air space and great flying weather (the same advantages that grabbed the attention of the Navy during World War II) Kingsley was chosen as the new training site.

Much had changed in pilot training since World War II. In the early 1980s, the U.S. was not at war and not in a rush to put pilots into battle. Jets were much safer, pilots were given more time to learn and crews were trained better to take care of the aircraft. During peacetime, safety became the emphasis and the result was a dramatic decrease of mishaps.

For the first ten years of training pilots at Kingsley Field, there was not one major accident, an outstanding achievement for a training unit. Kingsley Field had even converted from the F-4 jet to the newer F-16 jet without a hiccup. This impressive record unfortunately came to an end on November 29, 1993.

It was a Monday and the student pilots had just returned to Kingsley Field from the long Thanksgiving weekend. Class 93-DBK was about one-third the way through their seven months of training. 2nd Lieutenant Stephen Taylor, a student from Vermont, was scheduled for an afternoon training mission. The weather was not perfect, but nothing out of the ordinary for the time of year.

Taylor and his instructor pilot wingman left Kingsley Field at 1:30 and headed southeast to the Goose MOA. The two men completed an air-to-air refueling exercise and were practicing some maneuver drills. At 2:40, twenty minutes before the men were due back at Kingsley, Taylor’s wingman lost radio and RADAR contact. Hoping it was an equipment failure and not wanting to believe what his gut was telling him had happened, he radioed Kingsley Control; they too had lost contact. Hoping that Taylor had safely ejected, a rescue team was sent to the area. Their worst nightmares were realized the next morning when a search team came upon the wreckage ten miles east of Clear Lake. Taylor’s body was amongst the wreckage.

Due to the accident, Kingsley established even more stringent safety standards and has not lost another student to a training mishap; a true testament to the men and women serving at the airfield.

Be sure to visit the Klamath County Museum’s webpage for more information on these heroes, as well as all the local men who gave their lives for freedom.
The Pacific Terrace Historical Tour

On June 14th, Carol Mattos and Jackie Bonner led an excellent tour of Pacific Terrace, starting at Roosevelt School and proceeding north to Van Ness. The tour capped an action packed weekend that also included the Historical Society’s annual bus tour.

The crowd begins to gather behind Roosevelt.

Great interest in the topic is evident by the large crowd that participated in this year’s tour.

The Ehlers share the history of their house built by Cap Collier

Photos by C. Tipton

The tour’s final stop. A house built from the bricks of the old Central School.
Lost Creek covered bridge, Oregon's shortest and oldest covered bridge.

Lake Creek General Store.
A great place to eat!

Photos by C. Tipton

Tour participants chillin on the front porch of the Butte Creek Mill!
KCHS Officers
President: Ryan Bartholomew
Vice President: Vacant
Secretary: Sally Bailo
Treasurer: Avis Kielsmeier
Board members:
Phyllis Goebel
Jack Inman
Carol Mattos
Jackie Bonner
Bill Lewis
Sue Fortune, Past President

Memberships for 2016 are due!

Membership fees are due at the end of each year.

Individual $15.00
Supporting $30.00
Life member $125.00

Make checks payable to the

Klamath County Historical Society.

Mail or drop off at
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Klamath Falls, OR 97601