

The hometown
newspaper for
Menlo Park,
Atherton,
Portola Valley
and Woodside.

The Almanac

SEPTEMBER 9, 1998 ■ VOL. XXXIV, NO. 1 ■ 50c

News This Week

RECREATION

Growing strain on programs prompts Menlo Park to hold public meetings.

Page 5

AIRCRAFT NOISE

Residents listen to NASA researchers, but say they want noise relief now.

Page 8

LEAF BLOWERS

Fate of Menlo Park's proposed ban on leaf blowers rests in hands of voters.

Page 5

CELEBRATION

Menlo Park Presbyterian Church celebrates its 25th anniversary.

Page 27

SECTION 2

Health & Fitness:
Octogenarian doesn't intend to hang up his running shoes any time soon.

Old-time cowboy

Harry Conley tells remarkable stories about running cattle and horses here for 50-plus years — with time out to fly bombers over Normandy on D-Day. *See Page 12.*

Visit our website at: www.calmanac.com

0.5

TIF-50

WEDDING INVITATIONS

20% OFF

any order of \$50 or more
With This Ad— Offer Expires December 31, 1999

VILLAGE STATIONERS

719 Santa Cruz Avenue, Menlo Park • (650)321-6920
516 University Avenue, Palo Alto • (650)326-7970

HunterDouglas Window Fashions

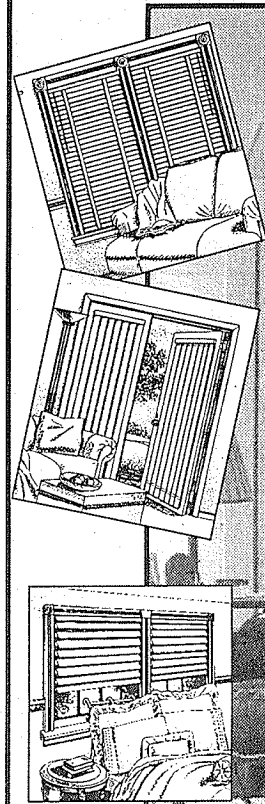
Ends September 30th!

up
to

65% off!

Selected Window Coverings. Ask for details.

* Manufacturer's Suggested Base Price. * Discounts do not apply to Silhouette® & Vignette®.



Silhouette®

Vignette®

Duette®

Country Woods®
Wood Blinds

Pleated Shades

Vertical Blinds

Metal Blinds

HunterDouglas
WINDOW FASHIONS

• FREE SHOP-AT-HOME SERVICE
...call for an appointment

• MEASURING AND INSTALLATION SERVICE

*6 MONTH FINANCING - O.A.C. - DETAILS AT INTERIORS & TEXTILES.



INTERIORS & Textiles

PALO ALTO'S DESIGN CENTER

RESIDENTIAL • COMMERCIAL
Serving the Peninsula since 1955.

3960 Fabian Way • Palo Alto, CA 94303

(650) 493-1700

cover story

When the Midpeninsula was cow country

(Continued from page 13)

lease on its foothill lands. "I got in the cattle business and have been there ever since," he says.

He also kept 40 brood mares at Stanford where he bred and trained them. "We had quite an extensive operation," he says.

Mr. Conley remembers when John Francis Neylan offered him the lease to pasture cattle on his 2,500-acre estate that now forms much of the western backdrop to Portola Valley. Mr. Neylan was an impressive man, Mr. Conley recalls, very big and tall, with a shock of white hair, and a voice that carried to Oakland.

Everything went smoothly at first. Mr. Conley drove the cows out Portola Road and let them in the gate to the Neylan estate.

That night at dinner, Mr. Conley recalls, the phone rang, and it was Mr. Neylan in the voice that could reach Oakland: "There are 200 head of cattle on my lawn. What are you going to do about it?"

Someone had forgotten to close a gate, says Mr. Conley, who still chuckles about it.

The cows stayed on the Neylan ranch for 20 years; some belonged to actor Gregory Peck, who used to join Mr. Conley at the Circus Club for lunch.

The relationship with Mr. Neylan soured later when Mr. Conley, who lived on Westridge at the time, joined a group that worked to incorporate Portola Valley as a town, in order to control its own zoning. "We were an orphan child of the county," he says. "The thing that spurred us on was when John Francis Neylan and Ry Kelley wanted 1/4 acre lots on Windy Hill."

They succeeded. Portola Valley became a town in 1964, and Windy Hill, the landmark hill overlooking the Peninsula, is now a public open space preserve, popular for hiking, riding and even hang gliding.

Lost history; lost art

A morning at a Woodside farm shows there's still chemistry between Mr. Conley and his horses.

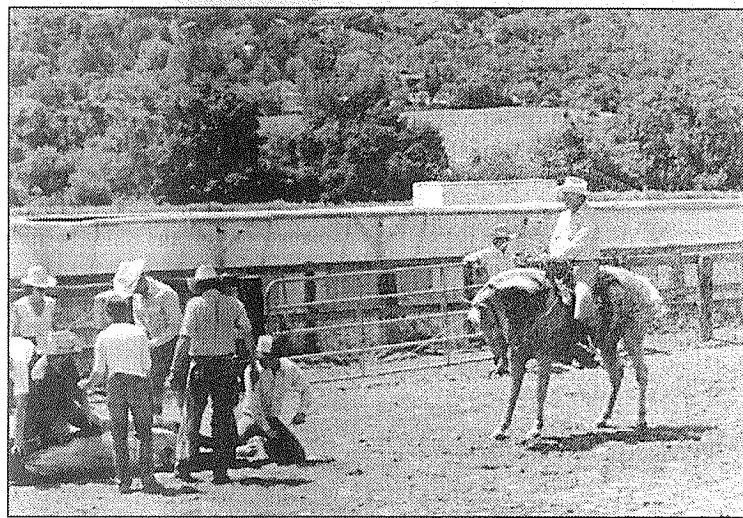
The palomino mare, Bunny, is another old-timer. She may be 25, but she is in the paddock twirling and dancing as Mr. Conley shows off her cow-handling technique, and playfully ropes a nearby stump. "She's the best mare I ever had," he says happily as he relishes his first working session or horseback in years. "She's never been pulled, never been jerked. I can take her out today with a silk thread and say whoa, and she'll slide to a stop."

Bunny also exemplifies the old Spanish tradition of training and working horses. "You had a lot of time in those days. They made polished horses," Mr. Conley explains. "Now it's a whole different ball game."

In the Spanish' days — and under



Branding on top of Windy Hill. From left: Janet Linfoot, Gail Rathbun, Glen Burks, Linc Clark, and Harry Conley. According to Spanish tradition, brandings were social occasions followed by a big barbecue and party.



Harry Conley and his horse, Bunny, hold a calf at the last branding at the old headquarters corral at Stanford about 1982.

Mr. Conley's direction — horses never had iron in their mouth until their teeth were fully developed, at about 5 years old. Before that, they were ridden with hackamores, a kind of halter with reins. Even then, since every mouth is different, bits are fitted individually to each horse, Mr. Conley says, carefully sliding the big spade bit — called la paleta — into Bunny's mouth.

Mr. Conley continues to extol Bunny's virtues. She was a great gate horse, the horse that stands at the gate of a corral while the cows go on through, and separates out the calves for branding. "She was like a ballet dancer," he says fondly.

Full of lore about Spanish riding, Mr. Conley warms to a favorite subject. Their great horsemanship derived from the Moorish invasion of Spain in the Middle Ages, when Moors from North Africa brought their Moroccan berber horses into Spain where they were mixed with Andalusian stock. During their 700-year occupancy, a unique style of horsemanship developed, Mr. Conley says.

When Cortez conquered Mexico, he brought a company of Andalusian horsemen to Veracruz in the New World — and started the tradition of horsemanship that accompanied the Spanish occupation into California. "It's a lost history; it's a lost art," Mr. Conley says.

About the same time, he relates, the King of Spain gave his cousin, the Emperor of Austria-Hungary, another company of Andalusian horsemen. These became the famous Spanish Riding School, which developed the magnificent Lippizan stallions and the formal roots for today's dressage.

You can almost see the riding technique as you watch Mr. Conley take Bunny through her paces. A pressure by the legs, a shift of weight, just a touch of the reins, a gentle tap on the flank with Mr. Conley's vicious-looking Spanish spurs, or a soft voice command — and Bunny will spin or back up or canter or stop short. "She's like a dressage horse," he says proudly. "She does all the same things, but she does them at speed."

80 missions over Europe

(Continued from page 13)

for the 93rd Bomb Wing, with 500 four-engine bombers. "We put up 3,000 bombers every day, and the British put up 3,000 every night. It took 2 1/2 hours to pass in review," Mr. Conley recalls.

With more than 6,000 planes, the air armada for D-Day was so large the longer-range planes, including Col. Conley's, had to take off the night before and circle the Irish Sea in order to hit the beach at 6 a.m. His unit took off at 10 p.m. in a horrendous rain storm.

After a week of ferocious weather, the skies cleared just in time for the invasion. Mr. Conley remembers looking down. "The entire channel was filled with boats. It looked as though you could step from one to another," he says.

Col. Conley led his unit of 54 bombers over Normandy four times on D-Day, June 6, 1944. They attacked and eliminated four targets: a major bridge into Caen, a large artillery emplacement, a railroad bridge, and a concentration of tanks and armored vehicles.

Amazingly, they encountered no opposition in the air. "By that time the Germans had only 700 operational airplanes. There wasn't a single German plane over Normandy that day," he says. "It was like flying over Menlo Park."

How did you stand flying mission after mission under enemy attack?

"You become very professional; you become very callous," he replies. "It was just like watching a movie. You'd hear stuff exploding like cats on a tin roof. You never got really frightened — until you got home and could think about it."

"There's an old saying, 'There are no foxholes in the sky.' But if you survived, you also got home to a good bath and a drink and dinner."

Christmas present

"Gen. Le May gave me a Christmas present," Mr. Conley recalls.

It was Christmas Eve 1944, by which time Col. Conley was chief of staff for the famous general. When he asked his boss for Christmas leave, Gen. Le May personally flew him to Prestwick in Scotland and sent him back to San Francisco on temporary assignment to the local air force. The general had even arranged a night in New York at the Waldorf Astoria and a reservation on United Airlines to San Francisco — where he was greeted by a delighted family.

Three weeks later in the Pentagon, he ran into Gen. Le May in the corridor. As a result, he never returned to Europe, but was assigned to assist Gen. Le May, who had taken command of air action in the Pacific. "He was the hotshot. He was selected to lead the assault on Japan," Mr. Conley says.

Col. Conley became deputy commander of the Second Air Force in charge of training replacement pilots and crews for the Pacific. He also became project officer for the 509th Bomb Group. This was stationed at Wendover, Utah, and destined to deliver the atomic bomb. Col. Conley was training them in the tactics developed in the European theater to deal with heavy enemy attack. "We were far more accurate," he explains, noting the skies were emptier in the Pacific where planes were mostly island-hopping.

Col. Conley, who knew about the A-bomb, but couldn't say, used to fly to Guam once a month. This caused him some problems because at the same time he was courting Jane Anne Vischer, a neighbor of his bombardier, who was then a lieutenant in the Navy stationed in Washington, D.C. "I used to keep disappearing, and I couldn't say where," he chuckles. "I almost lost a wife."

Mr. Conley urges people to see "Saving Private Ryan" for its authentic portrayal of wartime horror. "People have no concept what went on. That was the greatest war the world has ever seen. I hope we never see another."

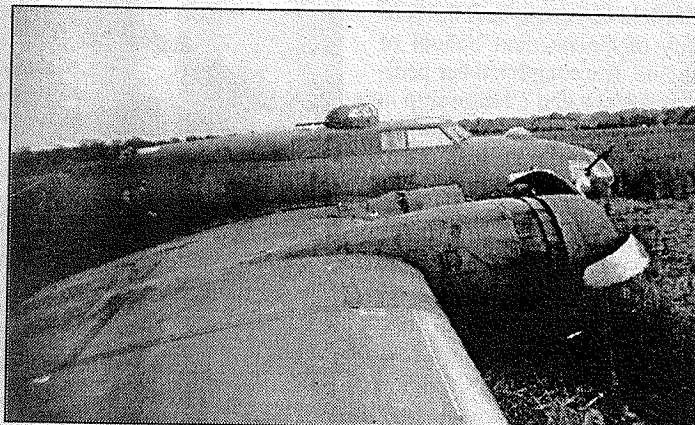


Photo by Harry Conley

The B-17 "Blondie III" in an English field after it was flown by Capt. Harry Conley in a harrowing bombing run to destroy German submarine pens. The other 15 of the 16 B-17s in Capt. Conley's squadron were lost.