

the Country Almanac



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Retired General Homer Boushey of Portola Valley made this first manned rocket powered flight by an

American in August 1941. The rocket powered plane took off with a heavier payload in half the

distance than the non-rocket powered plane in the foreground.

Retired general seeks nuclear freeze

by Marion Softky

Why would a retired Air Force general with an impressive military record devote himself to promoting a freeze and mutual reduction of nuclear weapons in the United States and Russia?

"I have 12 grandchildren," is the first answer given by Brig. Gen. USAF Ret. Homer Boushey of Portola Valley.

"If I can do anything, it is to try to persuade people that nuclear weapons are not ordinary weapons. They are awesome and they must be controlled," Boushey goes on. "Omar Bradley—no peacenik—said the only way to win a nuclear war is not to allow it to happen."

Boushey can hardly be labelled a "peacenik" either. He has been at the forefront of rocket development from the 30s, when rockets were still considered "Buck Rogers stuff," to the 60s, when he headed long range planning for the Lockheed Missiles and Space Company.

Yet he is one of a growing number of experienced military officers who are convinced that the arms race must be limited—that the nuclear genie must be contained and, if possible, stuffed back in its bottle.

The Bousheys' peaceful suburban living room with its view of rain clouds lowering over Windy Hill hardly seems the place to be discussing Armageddon. Yet Boushey is expressing a growing national and world-wide fear as he says, "The first person that uses nuclear weapons may touch off an escalation that can't be stopped. However, if both sides negotiate in good faith, we both may avoid catastrophe—the end of civilization has we know it."

Boushey's military career gives added weight to his message.

In the 30s he bucked the Army Air Corps' massive disinterest in rocket propulsion to become one of its top experts in the field.

In the 40s he was the first American to make a rocket-powered take-off. He went on to command the first American jet-propelled squadron in England in World War II.

In the early 50s he headed weapons systems at Wright Field. This included responsibility for early development of the giant missiles that are the basis of the United States' nuclear deterrent and space program even today. In this position he directed the process of integrating all

the components—including payload—of the Atlas and Titan intercontinental ballistic missiles as well as the smaller Navaho, Matador, Snark, Thor and other missile systems.

Following the successful launch of Sputnik and the jolt it gave to national confidence, the 48-year-old Boushey, by Douglas 0-46 near Mount Rainier at about 27,000 feet sucking oxygen out of a wooden tube, when there was a big jerk and both ailerons fell off. He managed to steer the plane back and land it with only the tail controls. Examination of the plan solved several unexplained crashes.

The only problem, he recalls, was that he had to land during a tense moment in the World Series; so no one on the ground noticed him. He tried to gain their attention by dropping equipment and clothes out of the plane. "When my pants came down, they noticed," he commented. Then they brought out the ambulance and fire truck and he landed safely.

During this period, Boushey pursued his dreams of space despite official indifference. "I figured the use of rockets was to fly high and fast," he says.

While he was in charge of jet propulsion and rockets at Wright Field, he met Robert Goddard, the father of scientific rocketry, who became his friend and mentor. The young lieutenant managed to wangle a \$50,000 contract for Goddard to supplement the small private grants which were paying for his research in New Mexico.

Because of his interest in rockets, Boushey was assigned to Cal Tech to become the first project officer on rocket and jet propulsion. Here the famous picture was taken of Boushey making the country's first rocket-assisted takeoff of a manned airplane. A small Ercoupe plane was fitted with six 28-pound thrust rockets, which helped the Ercoupe take off using less than half the then a general, was transferred to the Pentagon. There he took charge of space matters for the Air Force staff, and helped promote the transfer of space exploration out of the Air Force to an independent agency.

"Then I decided I preferred civilian life," Boushey commented with characteristic brevity. He moved with his family to Portola Valley which he had learned to love during his undergraduate days at Stanford. "I used to ride my \$10 motorcycle to Portola Valley—and get stuck in the

mud hill-climbing," he recalls.

REMINISCENCES

Boushey recounts memories of his early career with understatement and vivid wit.

A native San Franciscan, he dropped out of Stanford during the depression and joined the Air Corps as a flying cadet. During one memorable February, one of the worst on record, he flew the U.S. mail in an open cockpit plane through "Hell's Acre" between Newark and Cleveland.

Back in the Air Force with a commission after finishing Stanford, Boushey won his first medal, a Distinguished Flying Cross, in 1936. He was flying a runway required by a plane with a regular engine.

"The only problem was, some of the rockets exploded before they burned," Boushey recalls. "They sent fragments into the cockpit, but they missed me." This happened twice during earlier tests in the air before the famous takeoff.

Later, Von Karman, another of the great names in rockets and jets, suggested they take off the propeller and try to fly over an obstacle using only rockets.

With understandable caution, Boushey refused to fly over an obstacle but tried the experiment on a runway. Just as well. Removing the propeller changed the balance of the plane so it climbed uncontrollably during the few seconds the rockets were on, and plunged steeply after they burned out. "I was lucky to keep it low. I couldn't stop it from climbing," he commented.

What Boushey remembers with most pleasure about that period was that it was his honeymoon. He had finally married pretty Eleanor Boyd of Hillsborough, who used to pass notes with him during Stanford history classes. They had a honeymoon cottage on Balboa Island nearby. "I would get up at 3:30 a.m., shoot the rockets while the air was still, and be back by 10:30 to lie on the beach," he remembers fondly.

Boushey's wartime career eventually took him to England where he commanded the first jet-propelled group and taught pilots to fight the German jets. He was never sent into combat because of "security"—he knew too many secrets to risk having him shot down and captured.

Boushey's second medal, the Air Medal, therefore, Continued on Page 2

Boushey answers questions about freeze



Gen. Homer Boushey of Portola Valley points to the rocket engines on a model of the plane in which he tested a rocket-assisted takeoff.

Nuclear freeze

Continued from Page 1

was also won in peacetime—for piloting a squadron of 31 jets on the first long overwater flight from the Philippines to a pinpoint landing on Okinawa.

His recollections of the flight are vivid and painful. He was flying the "hangar queen"—the airplane that had been cannibalized for spare parts to keep other planes flying. They flew at 36 to 38,000 feet to make the distance. The radio wasn't working; the pressure went out; he got the bends. On top of that, the landing gear dropped out and he kept having to crank it up by hand.

Back at the Pentagon, Boushey later was awarded the Legion of Merit for staff work.

Since retirement, Boushey has pursued less spectacular activities: a stint with Lockheed, several inventions, a couple of companies, work with the church and Stanford, as well as golf and tennis. He also helped Portola Valley prepare its first disaster plan.

In fact, since he moved to the valley, Boushey's profile has been so low that many people in the south county know him only as the husband of Eleanor Boushey. She has made a local name as a charter member of the Portola Valley Town Council who served for 14 years and was mayor three times. She is also known as one of the strong early members of the local conservation movement and a prime mover in establishing the Skyline Scenic Parkway.

Both Bousheys are now concentrating on the movement to control nuclear weapons.

"Unless we're willing to accept defeat, we'd better not use nuclear weapons. Otherwise it might turn into an all-out nuclear exchange," Boushey concludes.

"That's where my 12 grandchildren come in."

What is the proposed nuclear freeze?

"For the Soviets and U.S. to stop development, testing and deployments of nuclear weapons immediately. As

part of that I would hope we could get a bona fide means of verification. Satellite photos, electronic intelligence and covert intelligence make it very difficult for them to do something we are not aware of."

Why do we need it?

"We need it to maintain civilization as we know it today. The extinction of the human race is a possibility; but a major nuclear war would put us back, if not in the Stone Age, in the Middle Ages with consequences awful to contemplate."

As President Reagan and others have suggested, should we seek nuclear parity first? If not, why not?

"No. In my opinion we have essential parity now. Both sides have such overkill capability that "the need for parity" is meaningless. Just two of the U.S. nuclear armed submarines could destroy the industrial capability of the Soviet Union."

For example, the Soviets are said to have medium-range nuclear-armed missiles based in Eastern Europe, while the west does not yet have the equivalent...

"We do have smaller battlefield nuclear weapons, we have aircraft, and nuclear submarines of which 12 to 14 are always at sea. And don't forget the nuclear force of France, England and China."

Is the freeze the same as unilateral disarmament?

"Absolutely not. I do not believe in unilateral disarmament. I do believe in effecting a drastic mutual reduction in the number of all nuclear weapons."

"The thing that has kept the peace for 37 years is mutually assured destruction. We are hostage to each other."

What about conventional weapons, conventional warfare?

"I'm optimistic about the development of conventional weapons. Our short-range guided weapons, for example, guided anti-tank weapons, "smart" land mines, etc. appear to be swinging the advantage to defensive forces in conventional warfare."

Are nuclear weapons really that different?

"Emphatically yes. The power of nuclear weapons is expressed by their ratings—so many kilotons, so many megatons—People don't stop to think what that means. The explosive power of one kiloton is 1000 tons of TNT, a megaton is a million. In addition there are the horrendous radiation effects and radioactive fallout of nuclear weapons which do not occur in conventional explosives." May we not need to use nuclear weapons for tactical or defensive warfare?

"Yes we may. I hope we don't, but we may. If the answer is no, the credibility of our deterrent would disappear. I would hope that no nation would risk forcing us to make that choice."

"The first person to use nuclear weapons will have to face the real possibility it will escalate into an all-out nuclear exchange. If any power starts a limited nuclear engagement, it has to be prepared to say at what point it will accept defeat. The only alternative is escalation."

If we get the freeze, then what?

"Then I'm hopeful that both the Soviets and the U.S. can begin actual reduction of nuclear armaments. This will require verification and tough, patient negotiations." Won't the Soviets view this movement as a sign of weakness and take advantage of us?

"I doubt it. From their viewpoint, they would be thinking we were trying to take advantage of them. Again, both sides must be reasonable and patient and work out nuclear arms reductions which are beneficial to both." What's in it for the Russians?

"It is to the mutual advantage of both sides to survive. But there is also a real economic advantage if they do not devote such a large fraction of their gross national product to non-productive military expenditures. Their standard of living will improve."

Does this mean we trust the Soviets?

"Not necessarily. Any treaty which is negotiated should be to the advantage of each party to abide by."

How long do we have?

"Nobody knows. But we must begin negotiating as soon as possible. The advent of nuclear cruise missile will make verification even more difficult than it is now."

What could be the effect of reduced defense expenditures on the U.S. and U.S.S.R.?

"It would benefit both countries not to have the drain of military expenditures. It would be of greater benefit to them than to us. We are talking about three kinds of war: armed conflict, ideological conflict, and economic conflict. My hope and personal belief is that in the long run we are going to win the last two and avoid the first."

What can people do?

"First become educated. Then recognizing the immense danger, take advantage of the democratic way of life to inform our government representatives how you feel and what you think they should do."

Nuclear news

"Ground Zero Week" is a nationwide week of non-partisan discussions and events designed to educate and involve the American people on the issue of preventing nuclear war.

Midpeninsula activities will open with a "Run for your Life" scheduled to begin Saturday, April 17 at 10:30 a.m. in front of Hoover Tower on the Stanford campus.

A discussion on "The Psychological Causes and Effects of the Nuclear Arms Race" will be held the same evening at 7 p.m. at Fairchild Auditorium, Stanford.

"The Soviet Union: Permanent Enemy or Co-existing Neighbor in our World?" will be the topic of a talk by Jack Massen Monday, April 19 in the Main Theater of Canada College. A debate on "Preparing to Fight a Nuclear War: Security or Catastrophe" will pit Sidney Drell, deputy director of SLAC against Robert Barker of Livermore Laboratory

that evening at 7:30 p.m. at Stanford's Annenberg Auditorium.

Education evenings regarding the nuclear situation will be held on the following dates: Wednesday, April 14, at 8 p.m., call Barbara Kyser, 851-1712; Friday, April 16 at 7:45 p.m.; and Friday, April 23, 7:45 p.m.; call Juliet Helft.

The Russian Peace Committees will be the subject of a talk and slide show to be given following a lunch at Christ Church in Portola Valley Wednesday, April 21. The speaker will be Anne Stein, one of a delegation of Bay Area residents who recently visited in three republics of the Soviet Union to meet with local peace committees.

The noon luncheon will cost \$3.50. Reservations are limited and may be secured by calling Elizabeth Gaman at 851-1958 or Eleanor Boushey at 851-0674.

For additional information on Ground Zero Week call 497-3114.

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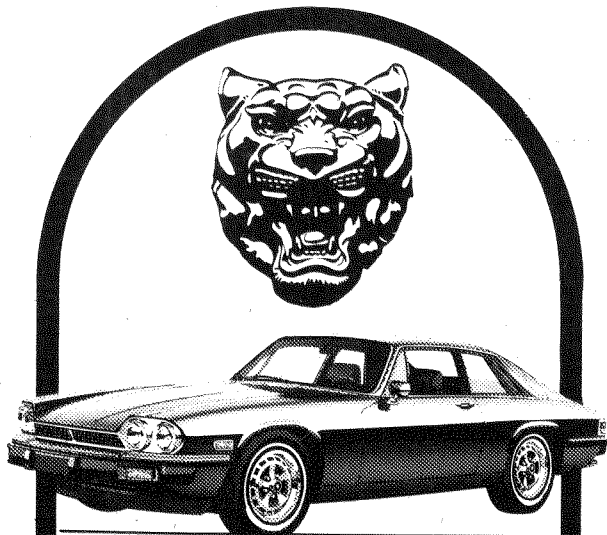
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