"Secret City" Reveals Accomplishments

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CHINA LAKE, Calif. (NNS) -- Since 1943, The Naval Air Weapons Station (NAWS) at China Lake lay on the cutting edge of technology under a shroud of secrecy.

Now, more than 50 years later, the accomplishments of this once "secret city" comes to light at the U.S. Naval Museum of Armament and Technology at China Lake, Calif.

The museum uniquely displays the weapons station's important contributions to the country, as well as an extensive collection of aviation weapons and delivery systems. These contributions began with crudely pointed air-to-ground rocketry during World War II, and continue today with the latest in precision guided weapons.

At the height of World War II, there became an increasing need for a location to safely and secretly test and develop aviation ordnance.

In November 1943, the Navy established the U.S. Naval Ordnance Test Station at a remote desert location called China Lake. Everything required to sustain a working community from homes to schools was erected on base, making the installation completely self-sufficient. It was this military city in the desert that earned the nickname "secret city".

From weather modification to satellite-delivery systems, the contributions of NAWS have not stopped with armament.

"If you're familiar with the chemical luminescent light sticks that are carried by special forces troops (that are actually sold as toys for kids today) - that technology was designed and patented here (at NAWS) in the late '60s and '70s. (...that technology is still with us.

Visitors have the opportunity to get a close-up look at rare artifacts that can't be seen elsewhere. The "Bat" glide bomb on display, complete with vacuum tubes and lead-acid batteries, is considered by some to be America's first guided bomb. The "Bat" is credited for sinking a Japanese merchant ship during World War II. According to Lowery, the U.S. Naval Museum of Armament and Technology is the only place in the world where a complete example of the "Bat" bomb can be seen.

An entire room is dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the Sidewinder air-to-air missile, also a product of China Lake. The exhibits detail the Sidewinders progression, from inception to the modern Sidewinder, which remains an important element of the Navy's arsenal.

Through photographs, videos, dioramas and cutaway models, museum visitors are shown the inner workings and advancements in aviation weapons technology, as well as a behind-the-scenes look at a once "secret city" in the desert.

The museum is open to the public Mon. through Fri. from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is free. Special tours can be arranged by calling the museum at (760) 939-3530 during normal business hours, or visit www.chinalakemuseum.org for more information.

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