

Oral History by Thomas J Boyes

Editor Note: WOLAA received two interesting letters from Thomas Boyes, who worked at NOL as a fireman. Thomas has recently joined WOLAA. He now lives in Hartland, WI.

Letter of October 2010.

Dear Sir or Madam:

Your address was given me by a perceptive employee of the National Archives, when she'd noticed my letter of request for photographs and blueprints of what I knew as the Naval Ordnance Laboratory at White Oak, Silver Spring, Maryland.

Though I only worked at "the lab" a relative short time----the summer and fall of 1970---it left quite an impression on me, and I have many vivid memories of my days there. I was delighted to learn of your organization, hope you might send more information about it, including membership requirements.

I joined NOL's fire department in late June or early July of 1970, but the drain of family, friends and past associations----I guess I became a bit "homesick---proved too strong, and I returned to Wisconsin. I eventually was hired by a fire department in the Milwaukee area, and there I remained for twenty-six years. But, as I stated I carried many memories of NOL with me, and will continue to do so until my last day---and beyond that if possible!

Over the years I kept in contact with one of the fireman I had worked with at NOL (Richard Palman), who retired back in the 1990's and resides now in Maine. Earlier this year Richard wrote that he had come down to see his son, a DC firefighter, and since he was not so very far away on this visit, he decided to visit his former place of employment. What he found on that visit to the erstwhile NOL upset him greatly. That wonderful "green space"/golf course which led up to the stately Building 1 was marred by new construction; the fire station was a vehicle repair shop, and some of the buildings were no longer there, etc. (I must say when I received this news from him that I felt rather like I had just gotten word on the passing of an old, dear friend.)

His letter initiated my renewed interest in NOL, and the way we once knew it. I recalled the many fine brick/masonry structures, built in sort of "art modern" style of the 1940's, and their fine workmanship.

A number of the men I worked with at the NOL Fire Department were WWII or Korean War veterans and have since passed-on, such as Captain (and later) Chief Stoane; Capt Molesworth, and Tom Kandle, to name three. (Also, FF Ennis.)

I have several photographs that may be of interest to WOLAA, they are fire department related subjects and were taken during---or just prior to----Fire Prevention Week, October 1970.

Several members of the department are plainly visible in some of them, including Tom Kandel; Mr. Gilson (fire inspector); FF Jim Meetre; FF Richard Palman and FF Ennis. I could go on and on with memories and impressions of the NOL of forty years past, but I fear boring for you. Besides, I have to end this letter if I am to get it into tomorrow's mail. I have no "PC," so my communication will always be written; so a "web site" is of limited use to me. Does your organization maintain a photo archive on NOL? I am especially interested in photography of NOL under construction, or even before construction commenced, and of its history in general. At any rate, I look forward to your reply with considerable anticipation.

Most sincerely,

Thomas J Bores

November 2010 Letter

Dear John

Thank you for the most informative letter, it was most welcome. Thanks, too, for those copies of WOLAA's newsletter, and also that gift. (I will keep it as a keepsake; it will never be used to open any jar.)

I was most happy to learn that my letter seems to have been well received. Its subject was tad esoteric; I wasn't certain if anyone cared for the recollections of an old, former fireman at the Lab, especially as I was there only for a relatively brief time.

The writing of that letter prompted me to elaborate, in more detail and at length, on my memories of NOL. I am putting the "finishing" touches on a quasi manuscript of them. Much of the information is similar to my first letter, with perhaps a little more detail. But, much is "new" and not mentioned in my initial letter. I am hoping y second offering might also contain a nugget or two of interest for the reader. I hope to have a copy mailed out to you in the not too distant future.

PS. Several photographs---with informative captions---of the NOLFD vehicles can be found amongst the pages of "Navy and Marine corps Fire Apparatus 1836-2000" by William Killen by Dconogrfix Publications.