

United States Navy Convalescent Hospital

United States Naval Special Hospital

Sun Valley Ketchum, Idaho

July 1943 - January 1946

Compiled by Gayle Alvarez
Idaho Military Historical Society
USS Idaho Commissioning Committee

Formerly known as the Challenger Inn and owned by Union Pacific Railroad, The U.S. Navy Convalescent Hospital was commissioned on 1 July 1943. The title was changed on 29 June 1945 to United States Naval Special Hospital, by order of the Secretary of the Navy in order to more clearly describe the wide range of its functions.

The hospital's commissioning on 1 July 1943, was covered by the Twin Falls newspaper, The Times News, which noted that attendees included "U.S. Senator John Thomas and



Photo from The Sun Valley Sage, the hospital's newspaper. It named some of the leading citizens of nearby communities in attendance: John W. Cramer, Mayor of Hailey and Fred Turner, Mayor of Ketchum

leading citizens from Hailey, Ketchum and the surrounding country. The ceremonies surrounded the raising of the U.S. flag of the former pleasure resort." The first group of patients, approximately 40 in number, arrived at the hospital on 3 July 1943 as the Navy had stated.

According to a book published by the Navy in 1947, the facility was leased. This was more than just a cost saving measure. Dr. Thomas Snyder, Navy retired, at the time, said, "anyone who

wanted to create new hospital beds had to get



Photograph from archives of Bureau of Medicine and Surgery (BUMED)

From the Director's Desk...



"We're back!" After experiencing pandemic numbers for the last year, the museum is seeing an increasing number of visitors. Our education outreach program is back in full swing and many groups are taking advantage of our facility. We once again were honored

to fire the 21-gun salute at the Idaho Veterans Cemetery on Memorial Day. We also held an open house at the museum in commemoration of the June 6, D-Day landings. With the help of some great volunteers, we've been able to get caught up on most of the work around the museum. A new addition to our staff is Pvt. Malarky. He's a white rooster that showed up at the museum and quickly adopted us. He's a great conversation starter for our guests. We hope to see everyone in the near future.

Jeff Packer, Executive Director



Idaho Veterans Cemetery 31 May 2021



D-Day Open House 5 June 2021



Pvt. Malarky


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approval from a federal hospital construction board. This was a throwback to earlier years when people worried about having too many hospital beds and the effects this might have on medical economics. And, the word was anyone who wanted to create new beds had to get approval. Even though Surgeon General Ross McIntire sat on that board, there were still the slow-moving jumps through bureaucratic hoops. McIntire's answer was to find pre-existing beds – typically in resort hotels that had fallen on hard times during the Great Depression.”

According to the hospital's 1945 Sanitation Report, the Sun Valley facilities “being idle as a result of restriction on travel, was considered to be an excellent opportunity for the Navy to acquire hospital beds.”

The Sanitation Report continued with, “Arrangements were rapidly completed between Union Pacific and the Navy to take over these facilities, including beds, mattresses, small operating room suites, X-ray, physical therapy equipment, as well as many sport facilities.



Photo from The Sun Valley Sage, listed as a Teca bath under the Physio-Therapy Section

Union Pacific contracted to maintain the facilities. Bed capacity when taken over by the Navy was about 1,400 of which 1,035 were considered available for patients, the remainder being used for staff and a few rooms being converted into office space.”

The organization was controlled by the Secretary of the Navy; Chief of Naval Operations; Bureau of Medicine and Surgery; Bureau of Naval Personnel; and Commandant, Thirteenth Naval District. The establishment of the hospital was noted in a July 1943 report from the Commander Northwest Sea Frontier to Commander-In-Chief United States Fleet. “The U.S. Naval Convalescent Hospital, Sun Valley, Ketchum, Idaho, was established this date [1 July 1943] with Captain J.T. O’Connell as Navy Medical Officer in Command. Forty-three patients were due to arrive there on 3 July.”

Quoting the Sanitation Report, “The hospital opened as a convalescent hospital for patients who had received essential definitive treatment but whose necessary hospitalization was not yet completed. This, plus elimination of psychotics, acute rheumatic fever patients and etc., resulted in a limited number of patients who are eligible to be transferred to a convalescent hospital. It further resulted in a relative[ly] high number of patients being discharged from the Naval Service rather than being sent to duty.

“Subsequently more and more patients were received in incoming drafts from West Coast Hospitals, who required definitive treatment, especially orthopedic surgery. As a result of this, facilities for their care were expanded. This hospital was designated as a Naval hospital for the care of obstetrical patients and for admission and care of Navy dependents, which resulted in enlargement of facilities for this work.”

The hospital worked hard to see to the many

needs of the patients. The final edition of *The Sun Valley Sage* detailed the hospital's history and accomplishments. "Any man who has served aboard our combat ships in time of war in the Atlantic or Pacific Oceans can understand why a person who has participated in several Naval or Marine engagements needs a period of quiet and rest. At Sun Valley this type of patient received carefully supervised attention from an excellent neuro-psychiatric staff. Sun Valley was one of the few hospitals which successfully used group therapy for combat fatigue patients.

"Medicine, surgery, and neuro-psychiatry were vital parts of our Convalescent Hospital, but many other departments and factors entered into a man's treatment before he was once again fit to take his place in military or civilian life.

"Education Services gave him a chance to browse through the books he may have known in high school or college. Occupational Therapy furnished machines and molds so that he



Photo from *The Sun Valley Sage*

could again make use of his creative instincts.

"At Ship's Service, the man who had been away from the States and the corner Drug Store could at long last order his favorite sundae or milkshake."

The *Sun Valley Sage* continues: "Physical Fitness gave corrective exercises to add new zip to injured or little-used muscles, and Physio-Ther-

apy worked marvels in the art of massage.

"Kindly chaplains lent an understanding ear to the patients and administered spiritual guidance. And next door, at Red Cross, one could always find a cheerful, homey atmosphere. Behind the scenes, diligently burrowing into the miles and miles of red tape which accompany any large organization, the Executive Office, Personnel, Disbursing, Property and Accounting, and Maintenance busily pursued the affairs of state.

"San Francisco and New York City liberties may have been nonexistent at Sun Valley, but the ladies of Ketchum, Hailey, Bellevue, Shoshone, Carey and Twin Falls USO's did all they could to brighten the time men spent off the compound." [One newspaper article noted that current issues of the magazines were being accepted from the public for the patients.]

"The natural resources of Sun Valley offered the enterprising patient a wide variety of self-made recreational activities. To augment these the Welfare and Recreation Department promoted tournaments, athletic events, dances, plays, movies and ski lift rides, and furnished various types of sports and recreational equipment so the All Hands might enjoy seasonal attractions."

Various newspaper articles noted the wide-ranging activities available for those at the hospital. There was a bowling alley, open air swimming pool, tennis courts and an ice rink. Golf, tennis, swimming, horseshoe tossing were also available. One article even noted that fly casting lessons were offered if anybody was interested.

Bing Crosby visited the hospital in June 1945, he poses here with Captain Toulon. The *Sun Valley Sage* reported "nearly a thousand Sailors, Soldiers and Marines gathered to hear Crosby Sunday. The crowd, which filled the Opera House to overflowing, was transferred to the



lawn outside the lodge. When asked where he preferred to sing, Crosby answered with the nonchalance which has made him the idol of millions, "I'll sing anywhere; inside, outside or on the roof."

At least one wedding took place at the hospital in February 1944. It was announced in the Twin Falls newspaper and noted that WAVE Dorothy Newberry and Marine Pfc. Paul Amody were wed. The article did not include a photo but noted that both wore their uniform and the bride was given away by Captain Rohow.

The Bureau of Medicine and Surgery (BUMED) reported "A special problem was always present at the Sun Valley hospital owing to its isolation. Transportation facilities were never good and liberty towns were comparatively small and distant. The small towns of Ketchum and Hailey were inadequate to furnish proper diversions for liberty parties. Liberty parties were sometimes formed to travel to Twin Falls, Idaho which was 98 miles distant and Boise, Idaho 185 miles from the hospital. These liberty parties were accomplished by special arrangement with local civilian transportation officials."

By mid-1945, World War II at an end, the staff knew that the hospital would soon close. An official closure notice had not yet been received but Twin Falls' The Times News reported in their 2 January 1946 edition that "The Sun Valley Naval Convalescent Hospital is now in the process of disestablishment and personnel

and equipment are rapidly being reduced to a minimum." Captain Toulon was quoted "We are reducing personnel to the minimum number needed to keep the place up and to pack up equipment which we are shipping out." The number of patients then stood at 15. They were awaiting orders and expected to leave within the next week to 10 days.

The Sun Valley Sage noted that by the time the doors closed in January 1946, the hospital had treated "the physical and mental wounds of 6,578 Naval and Marine patients. These men had seen action all the way from the early memorable battles of Corregidor, Coral Sea, Midway and Guadalcanal to the final bloody stands on Iwo Jima and Okinawa before Japanese capitulation." The proceeding report also stated that one of the most prevalent mental wounds the hospital treated was Combat Fatigue.

Although the Secretary of the Navy announced the disestablishment on 7 January 1946, the official notice didn't arrive until 12 January 1946. It was dated 1 December 1945, long after Washington and Union Pacific had both announced that the hospital was being discontinued. The resort was to be turned back to Union Pacific but Captain Toulon did not expect that to happen before April. Union Pacific planned to reconvert the hospital "to a mecca for vacationists in time for the 1946 summer season."

Originally built in 1937 and known as The Challenger Inn, the resort now goes by the name Sun Valley Resort.

This article has been condensed for purposes of our newsletter. The article, in its entirety, can be found at this link: <https://ussidahocommittee.org/history#navy-convalescent-hospital> Once on the site, click on "Idaho Naval History Brief Summaries" and then scroll down until you reach "U.S. Navy Convalescent Hospital (1943-1946) Sun Valley, Ketchum, Idaho."

M1 Machine Gun Cart Restoration

By Rob Lytle
Board Member



The Idaho Military History Museum received a call from J. Ferguson who asked us if we would be interested in a trailer that she had in her garden. She thought it was military because of a brass plate that was on the trailer. Board Member Robert Lytle contacted her and visited to look at the item. The data plate revealed it was a rare M1 Redstone Arsenal manufactured Machine Gun Cart. These were used in the early to late 1930s to transport the M1917A1 water-cooled heavy machine gun and could be moved via horse or by troops.

The cart required extensive repair work and the board approved the expenses necessary to bring the artifact back to its original configuration.

As the cart was designed to transport ready am-



munition in addition to the gun, six ammunition boxes were needed. The Museum already

possessed two so Rob Lytle manufactured four additional boxes.

The Cart required restoration of the tow frame and lunette in order to replace parts that were cut away when it was converted to a utility cart. This included points where the Lamson tripod was affixed to the cart. The museum provided the M1917A1 tripod for dimensional purposes and future display of the cart.

The finished product is shown here. The Museum board is currently searching for a Browning M1917A1 machine gun to complete the display.



Many thanks to Rob Lytle for all of his hard work in saving this historic artifact for future generations.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Don't forget to renew your IMHS membership!

A renewal form is available on our web-page:

<https://museum.mil.idaho.gov>

Annual renewal rates are:

General Membership:	\$ 25
Senior (60 and older):	\$ 15
Associate (Spouse):	\$ 10
Student:	\$ 10
Lifetime Membership:	\$ 375

(Lifetime payment may be spread out over a one-year period)

The Idaho State Tax Commission offers a tax credit for contributions to Idaho's educational entities which include "An Idaho public or private nonprofit museum."

The Idaho Military Historical Society is such an organization and donations to the Society qualify for this credit. Please remember the Museum as you plan your donations for the year.



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SAVE THE DATE!

Notice of Upcoming Annual Meeting

The Idaho Military Historical Society Board has scheduled the Annual Membership Meeting for October 28, 2021 at 6:30 pm to be held at the Museum, 4692 W. Harvard Street, Boise, ID.

At the meeting, elections will be held for three members of the Board of Directors to serve a three-year term.

Along with the annual election, you will also be brought up to date on the various plans and activities the Society/Museum are involved in. Please mark your calendar and join us on October 28, 2021 at 6:30 pm. See you then!

PASS IN REVIEW

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Comments or article suggestions are welcomed. Call the Museum at 208-272-4841 or visit us online at <https://museum.mil.idaho.gov>