Torrance's Busy Airport Once Part of Early Farming Empire

A one-time farming area at the foot of the Palos Verdes Peninsula, crossed by a raging creek during winter rains, has become one of the Torrance area's busiest spots in recent years.

It is Torrance Municipal Airport, operated now by the city and the home of industries, shopping centers, theaters, commercial businesses, and scores of important aviation and related businesses.

During the early months of 1942, following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the State of California through its Bureau of Public Roads acquired the land and began construction of an airport as part of California's defense program.

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KNOWN THEN as the Lomita Flight Strip — in fact, known as such until very recent years—the airport became part of the U. S. Army Air Force system before the state could complete work on it. The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers moved onto the site, raised the airport grade to ward off inundation in rainy weather, and installed drainage channels and box sections under the runway and taxiways.

The natural creek bed which ran across the property disappeared before the heavy equipment of the Army Engineers, and the new drainage system replaced it. Parts of that drainage system still exists on the airport.

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ON COMPLETION of the airport, it served as an advance training base for P-38 pilots, and the twin-boom planes were a daily part of Torrance skies. The field also served as a staging area for fighter pilots going overseas until the field was shut down by the Air Force early in 1946.

After the end of hostilities in the South Pacific, the War Assets Administration took over the field and in 1948, it was acquired by the city of Torrance. In gaining title to the field, Torrance had to agree that the U. S. Government could claim rights to the field in the event of a national emergency.

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USE OF THE field for other than airport matters is a recent development, but its beginnings stemmed in the original release to the city which has since been modified a number of times through diligent action by the City Council and administrative experts.

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FOLLOWING abandonment of the airport by the federal forces after the war, it sat in relative quiet for several years. It was the home of a Civil Air Patrol group who used one of the abandoned barracks as an office; and some emergency housing was provided on the east end of the field in the late 1940s.

E. Y. Tarkington looked after the field for several years and was retained by the city when it took over the field in 1948. Management of the field, however, was given over to the firm of Collins-Dietrich Air Services, Inc. as the result of competitive bidding. Ed Dietrich, who still operates a private business at the airport, was manager under the contract from April, 1949 until March 1, 1958 when the city took over management with its own department.

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JACK EAGAN, who had held a top position in management at Los Angeles International Airport, was selected to head up the city's airport staff and has been in that post since. William Critchfield now is his assistant.

The federal government participated in the construction of a new control tower and for the past two years, the Federal Aviation Agency has manned the control tower on a daily basis, providing the latest procedures and controls for a safely operated air facility.

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WHAT DOES the future of the airport hold? Other stories in today's Golden Anniversary edition of The HERALD may have a hint about tomorrow's airport.

One thing is certain—it will never again be a quiet rancho crossed by a wild creek which strained its banks each winter during the rainy season.

Fire Department Organized Early

One of the first thoughts in any new town is safety of its occupants and property, and Torrance was no exception.

Organization of a Torrance Fire department was completed on Nov. 12, 1912 at 8 p.m. in the tent of D. W. Gregory, general foreman of the Dominguez Land and Water Co.

Signing the membership roll were H. S. McManus, Ed Kenny, Al Kirby, O. M. Erickson, George Blake, Charles Callahan, and Gregory.

McManus was elected chief, Kenney and Blake hosemen, and Erickson and Callahan hydrantmen.

First Industry in City Is Still a Major Local Asset

Since it was established 52 years ago, the Torrance Plant of National Supply Division, Armco Steel Corp., has grown into the largest completely integrated machinery manufacturing facility in the West.

Located on a 39-acre tract bounded by Western and Border Avenues and Carson and 213th Streets, the plant produces drilling equipment which is used by the oil industry throughout the free world.

The plant also is geared to the manufacture of heavy machinery and, maintenance and operating equipment for many other basic industries, such as steel, aluminum, mining and cement. Special steel products manufactured here also go to the aircraft and shipbuilding industries.

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TORRANCE-MADE National rigs have been consistent in setting depth records throughout the years. National rigs were the first to drill below 15,000 feet, below 20,000 feet, and below 25,000 feet. A Torrance-made rig holds the present depth record of 25,340 feet.

As part of a continuing program of modernization and improvement, the plant recently added a new vacuum degassing unit for production of high quality "super steels."

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OTHER OPERATIONS performed at the plant include forging, machining, heat treating, plating, welding, and assembling.

Construction of the plant began when the present City of Torrance was little more than a developer's dream. In 1911, Jared Sidney Torrance bought a tract of 3,530 acres and had plans drawn for what he hoped would be a model city with residential, industrial, and commercial areas. His first major sale was to the Union Tool Co., a manufacturer of oil field equipment, which had outgrown its quarters in Los Angeles. Work on the Union Tool plant began before the layout of the town site had been completed.

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THE PLANT became a part of National Supply in 1920. It has been expanded and improved since that time. The plant now includes 33 major buildings and employs approximately 600 people.

The plant has won a steadily increasing collection of safety awards. The foundry department won the highest honor safety award of the Steel Founders Society of America for several years in succession. The plant has also won Armco's "Iron Man" safety award for an outstanding record of man-hours worked without major injuries.

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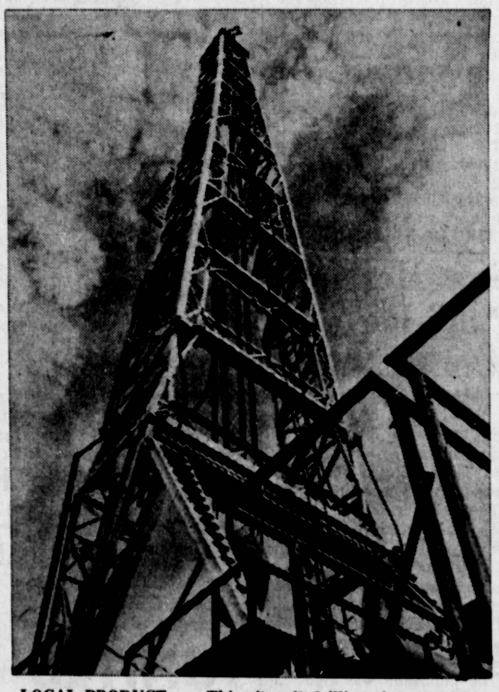
THE NATIONAL Supply Torrance Plant is the major facility in the West for Armco Steel Corp., one of the nation's largest steel-makers. The company currently ranks sixth in ingot capacity and fourth in profits among domestic steel producers. Corporate headquarters are in Middletown, Ohio.

National Supply, which became a part of Armco in 1958, operates plants in Los Nietos, Calif., and Houston and Gainesville, Tex., besides the Torrance facility. General offices of the division are in Houston.



LOCAL PRODUCT . . . This oil well drilling rig, owned by the Drilling & Exploration Company of Dallas, was made by National Supply in its Torrance plant. It is now drilling near Port Harcourt, Nigeria. National Supply engineers designed it for easy assembly after shipment overseas.

They Always Knew Smith From Smith

The carrier boy making his rounds in Torrance with spanking white copies of the first Torrance Herald half a century ago may have had a momentary problem at the corner of Carson Street and Gramercy Avenue.

R. R. "Dick" Smith lived on one corner and George Smith on the other. Two Smiths on the same corner might have confused that earlier carrier, we say.

But, the two Smiths didn't confuse his elders . . . they had them straightened out.

Dick Smith built his home like the others along the street: a one-story wood-frame house.

George Smith built a similar home but added half a story above the house, making it stand out, as one early resident described, "like a bandage on a man's thumb."

Whenever the question of which Smith arose, Torrance oldtimers could settle it easily if they knew it was Dick or "Story-and-a-Half" Smith.

That's right — George Smith was known for many years as Story-and-a-Half.

The death rate from uterine cancer has dropped 50 per cent in the last 25 years. The American Cancer Society says that much of this is the result of more women having annual health checkups.

MADE IN TORRANCE . . . Army artillery trainees of the 2nd Gun Battalion, 32nd Artillery, go through pre-firing exercises beside a huge 175 mm gun at the army's Fort Sill, Okla., firing range. The huge barrel for the gun was specially made for the U.S. Army by National Supply at its Torrance plant (U.S. Army Photograph)