

# Letters

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## EDITOR:

The Winter 1990 issue featuring the Loma Prieta earthquake is a masterpiece. It interested me for several reasons. My Master's Degree research and thesis was a primitive study of the response of buildings to earthquakes and other vibrations. The first six years of my engineering career was working in the California State Bridge Department, now part of Caltrans, and I knew some of the engineers who built the San Francisco Bay Bridge. Professor R. R. Martel was the one who inspired me to make structural engineering my specialty, and awakened my interest in earthquakes. Most of all, friendship through many years with George Housner and Don Hudson made this magazine fascinating reading.

*James H. Jennison, BS '35, MS '36*

## EDITOR:

I am writing to ask whether you are planning a special article in *E&S* this fall to commemorate the founding of JPL on its 50th anniversary. If so, I might contribute a few recollections. Frankly, the whole business had slipped my mind, until I recalled it last night while reading the recently received Winter issue of *E&S*. I don't know why it prompted me to recall it, but I did. I was one of the four "regular" employees of the newly started project, which had a hush-hush name. The name was hush-hush for avoidance of questionable

publicity about the Buck Rogers group at Caltech, not for military security reasons.

I guess I was employee number one at the newly acquired acreage in the wash of the canyon near Oak Grove Park. I was left there all alone one day, I think it was September 1940, and I was told to cut the grass so that a slab could be laid to start construction of a shed (unheated, unlighted), in which a gaseous fuel rocket apparatus (5-lb. thrust) could be tested; and because the terrain was rocky, I was given a scythe to cut the weeds, not a lawn mower. Being a newly minted physicist and not a mechanical engineer, I had to first learn how to swing a scythe, but I learned, and the grass (weeds) was cut properly and the slab was poured successfully.

*Martin Summerfield, MS '37, PhD '41  
President, PCRL, Inc.  
Professor Emeritus, Princeton University*

*E&S commemorated the beginning of JPL in the November 1986 issue—50 years after the first test-firing of a liquid-fueled rocket motor in the Arroyo Seco near the future site of JPL—Ed.*

*E&S welcomes letters from readers in response to material appearing in the magazine. We will publish relevant letters as space permits, but reserve the right to edit for length and clarity. Letters should be sent to E&S, Caltech 1-71, Pasadena, CA 91125.*