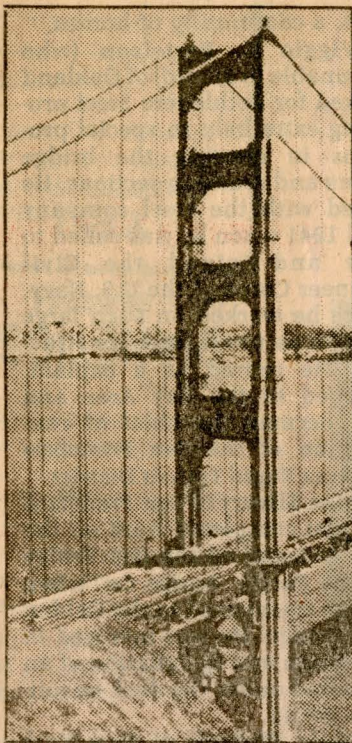


PROGRESS

today:

Guide to 50th
anniversary
activities



Golden Gate Bridge
50th Anniversary Supplement
Inside today's Progress

IF
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WE HAVE IT!

AUTO SHOWCASE

Jerry Disque's 'Beyond 60'
column will appear Sunday

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in brief

san francisco

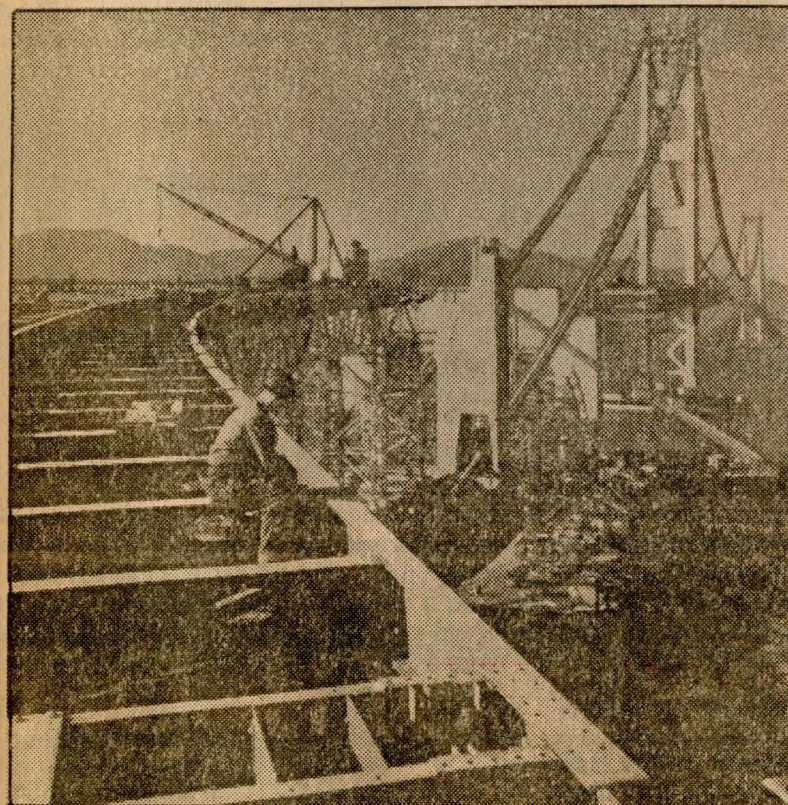
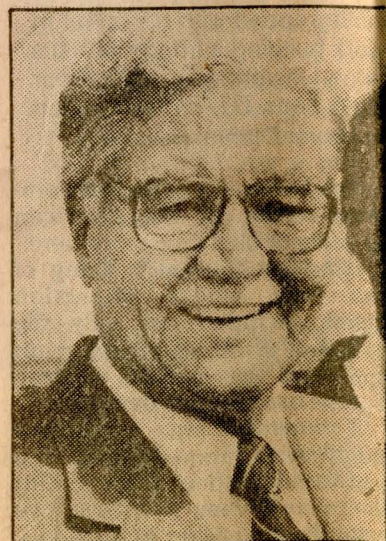
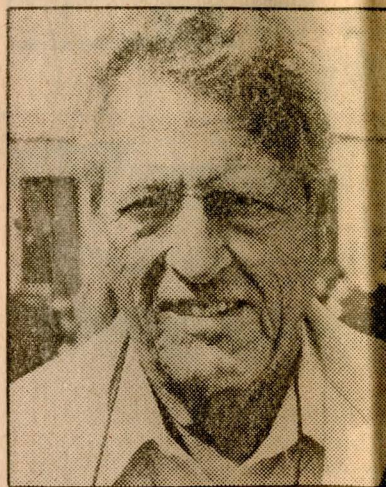
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Our 64th Year, No. 61

Good Morning! It's Friday, May 22, 1987

25¢

Bridging the decades

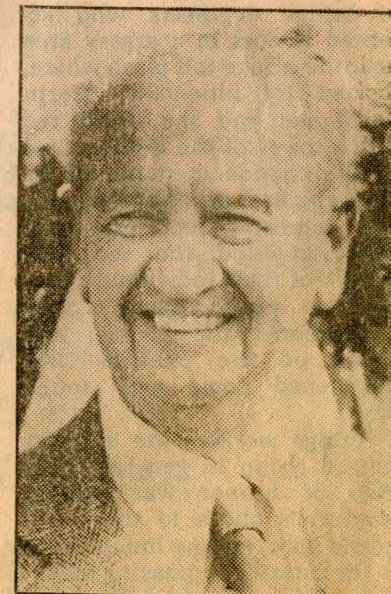


Old photo by Charles Hillier

Progress photographer Bob Clay was on hand Wednesday when (clockwise from upper left) E.C. "Slim" Lambert, the only survivor of the 1937 scaffolding collapse that caused the death of 10 co-workers on the bridge, and engineers Charles Kring, Mac Silvert, Blair Birdsall and Ed Davenport gathered in San Francisco. Below left, Engineer J.G. "Buzz" Wright autographs programs for Roosevelt Middle School students Joan Wong, 12, and Thao Huynh, 11.

Engineers relive a golden opportunity

See story, Page A2



INFORMATION FILE

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7
DAY
BOOK

S.F. - Golden Gate
Bridge

Engineers bring bridge-building memories back to life

By ROBIN EVANS
Staff writer

Seven known survivors of the more than 100 civil engineers who worked on the design and construction of the Golden Gate Bridge received keys to the City, replicas of the original one that opened the Mission Dolores, in a ceremony Wednesday marking Bridge Builders Day.

An eighth survivor who could not attend the ceremony was also honored.

The event not only highlighted the contribution these men made in constructing the world-renowned structure, but marked a renewed friendship among men who 50 years ago shared a special camaraderie.

"You tend to drift away after a job is over, especially in the construction business where you travel from one job to another," said Wesley Getts, 76, of Burlingame, who among other things oversaw cable spinning and inspected the steel bridge parts as they arrived in Bethlehem Steel's Alameda yard. "We might keep in touch now."

Getts, a civil engineering graduate of UC-Berkeley who also worked on the Hetch Hetchy dam, and Ed Davenport of Scotts Valley, an engineer and hard-hat diver who inspected the rock foundation beneath the South tower, were among the handful of bridge engineers who accepted honors in a grassy area near the bridge toll plaza where, framed by blue sky, Marin headlands and the burnt red South tower of the Golden Gate Bridge, stands a statue of its chief engineer, Joseph Strauss.

To inquiring reporters these men provided the technical details of their individual roles. Alone together, they remembered the people, and some of the pranks that brightened some very tough days.

"Bridge workers are a pretty rugged group in general. Their idea of humor was nailing someone's shoes to the lunch house floor, nailing lunch boxes to the catwalk or greasing the inside of someone's jacket sleeves," recalled Getts.



FUTURE ENGINEER — Blair Birdsall was 9 years old when he was photographed with his father in 1914. A budding engineer even then, young Blair was already hard at work building a bridge with his Erector set. Birdsall received a degree in civil engineering from Princeton University in 1929. Four years later, he became a field and office engineer for John A. Roebling's Sons Co. on the Golden Gate Bridge project. On Wednesday, he received the key to the City from Mayor Dianne Feinstein.

Howard Schirmer, 86, an Oakland native and resident engineer on the Marin tower of the bridge, told about the time he got stranded on the top of the tower.

As Schirmer tells it, his supervisor asked him to come to the top of the North tower one day to check out something that didn't quite fit. He was carried to the top by a "traveler," a contraption Schirmer himself had designed for carrying heavy equipment and material up and down the

tower.

"I got off the traveler, about 746 feet above the water, got off on one leg of the tower and while I was up there somebody lowered the traveler about 30 feet. So I couldn't get back down," he said. "The bridge men thought that was the greatest joke — the resident engineer of Bethlehem Steel marooned on top of the Golden Gate Bridge... it took too long to move the traveler, so they had to bring up a ladder to get me down."

Also honored by the San Francisco section of the American Society of Civil Engineers were:

• **Charles U. "Doc" Kring** of San Jose, whose inspection duties included not only the spinning of cables on the main span and the erection of steel, but the use of safety devices.

"I remember once testing the safety net. I jumped into it. You had to jump about three to four floors, and when you hit it, you went down another 10 to 15 feet. It was a very substantial net... it saved more than a dozen lives."

Kring became a leading expert on destructive bombing and analyzing target vulnerability for the U.S. Air Force during World War II. He is currently the owner/developer of the Foxworth

Altos, a community of homes.

• **Viggio C. Bertelson** (who was unable to attend) of Oakland worked for Bethlehem Steel providing extra help in special problems in erecting the bridge towers and roadway sections. He stayed with the steel company until 1941 when he was called to duty and joined the Civil Engineer Corps of the U.S. Navy, where he worked on such large projects as naval base construction. He retired as a captain, returned to the Bay Area and later became the chief of construction of the San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District.

• **Mac Silvert** of San Francisco had just completed work on the west caissons of the Bay Bridge for the Pacific Bridge Co. when he was transferred to the Golden Gate Bridge. He was involved in the design and installation of an improved under-the-deck travelling scaffold.

• **Blair Birdsall** of New York was a field and office engineer for John A. Roebling's Sons Co. He provided all cable calculations for main cables,

suspenders and catwalks on the bridge. He has worked as a civil engineer ever since and has been a partner in the New York firm of Steinman Boynton Gronquist & Birdsall for the past 21 years.

• **Buzz Wright** of Kensington came to the Golden Gate Bridge project as a UC-Berkeley graduate with 12 years' engineering experience. He worked with Pacific Bridge Co. on the large concrete piers and the fender.

He was a founding partner of the San Francisco-based civil engineering firm of Earl and Wright.

"The hardest part of building the thing was the exposure," he said. "Direct exposure is severe on a contractor's equipment. I remember once in high seas a ship ran right through the construction pier."

Getts said it was hard on the workers, too, who typically wore as many as six layers of sweaters, peeling them off as the day warmed.

"One guy told me he wore wool underwear," he said.

Sole survivor: Lambert hit the water feet first

E.C. "Slim" Lambert, 77, of Honolulu, the sole survivor of the most tragic accident during the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge, flew in to San Francisco this week to unveil and cast to the seas a wreath in memory of the 11 men who died. Ceremonies, sponsored by the San Francisco section of the American Society of Civil Engineers, were held at the Strauss statue in the toll plaza area of the bridge.

Safety was an essential element of the four-year construction job and many devices and procedures, like hard hats and safety lines, made mandatory for the first time. The project had a nearly perfect safety record before Feb. 17, 1937, when a tragic accident claimed 10 of the 11 lives lost on the job.

Lambert was one of 11 men standing on a traveling scaffold being used to strip forms from the underside of the concrete deck at the midspan of the bridge when it suddenly gave way, slicing through a safety net.

"The net was built to catch a man. This staging weighed several tons. It tore through the net like tissue paper," said Lambert, who was 27 at the time of the accident.

The key to his survival? "I hit the water feet first."

Lambert suffered a number of broken bones, but survived and continued in the construction business. He worked on Treasure Island and later started his own construction business in Honolulu. Today, he is involved in the travel industry.

Lambert, a former rodeo cowboy, came from Arizona to work on the Bay Bridge and then the Golden Gate Bridge.

He said he felt lucky to have the job: "It was the height of the depression. The competition for jobs was tough. Thousands of men would be outside the gates every day waiting for someone to get fired or killed."

(For more on the accident, see Page 4 of the Progress' 50th