

On the Origin of the Name of the Tiny Tim Rocket

The following letter from Mr. Edward Price was received at the Naval Museum of Armament and Technology in August 2006. Mr. Price worked at NOTS Inyokern/China Lake from 1944 through 1975. His letter was in response to an article in the Summer 2006 issue of the China Laker, which contained an article about the Tiny Tim rocket.

I noted in an article in the Summer 2006 China Laker that you are interested in the Tiny Tim rocket. I thought you might be interested in the origins of the name Tiny Tim. I helped pick out the name in December 1943, while I was with the Cal Tech Eaton Canyon project, but I don't think you will find this early history on the Web or in NOTS – NWC ---NAWS histories.

The Cal Tech team had completed development of the 5.0 inch HVAR (Holy Moses) in 1943, and the design team was looking for something bigger. The design team (R. N. Wimpers, William Corcoran, Quentin Elliot, and Edward Price) was guided by some very practical considerations, two of which were wartime urgency and the need for a "really big" aircraft rocket that could penetrate hard targets. The 11.75-inch diameter was chosen because commercially (or reclaimed) oil well casing was available in that size. The propellant charge could be made from four modified Holy Moses charges. The size was suitable for a payload adapted from shells for 12-inch naval guns. With these considerations in mind, preliminary design drawings were completed "surreptitiously" in late December without inputs from the chain of command. The design team decided to present the design to their supervisor—Bruce Sage—as a Christmas present, and in the spirit of the season they named the rocket "Tiny Tim."

The first Tiny Tim motor was static-fired in the Eaton Canyon test bay about six months later. Although the test was successful, the test bay was severely damaged by the big motor, and it was decided that all future tests would be carried out in the larger Cal Tech-designed facilities at China Lake. This was a time when Cal Tech was playing a major role in the development of NOTS. Many members of the Cal Tech team stayed on at China Lake when the Cal Tech program was phased out near the end of the war. This transition included transfer of the pilot production program of the Tiny Tim to NOTS, where it became a major weapon development program, most widely known for the heroic development of air launching technology for this 30,000-pound thrust rocket.

Ed Price
NOTS 1944-1975

Note: *The Grand Experiment at Inyokern*, History of the Naval Weapons Center, China Lake California, Volume 2 (page 98) describes in more detail the damage caused by the first Tiny Tim test firing at Eaton Canyon test facility: "the blast from one of the completed four-grain motors lifted the concrete roof off the wall of a static firing bay at Eaton Canyon and flattened the calls outward. From that point on full-size motors got their static tests in the open desert at Inyokern."