

Memorial Coliseum



Sorrells's front yard
Shoshone – Death Valley
Bill Turk Field



Sorrells's home & field

**HISTORY OF THE CALIFORNIA
INTERSCHOLASTIC FEDERATION
SOUTHERN SECTION (CIF-SS)**

113th historical “tidbit.”
Dr. John S. Dahlem

SMALL AND BIG CIF-SS FOOTBALL VENUES

Sorrells’s Front Yard (Bill Tulk Field) – Shoshone, Death Valley... **“Small”**
Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum ... **“Big”**

NORTH PREPS STUN SOUTH BEFORE 85,931

On July 31, 1957, in the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, the largest crowd (85,931) to ever witness a high school football game in California saw the North dominate the South in the 6th annual Shrine football game. The largest football venues in California were the Rose Bowl and the Coliseum which could both hold close to 100,000 spectators (largest crowd ever to watch a high school game was 115,000 at Soldier Field in Chicago – 1937).

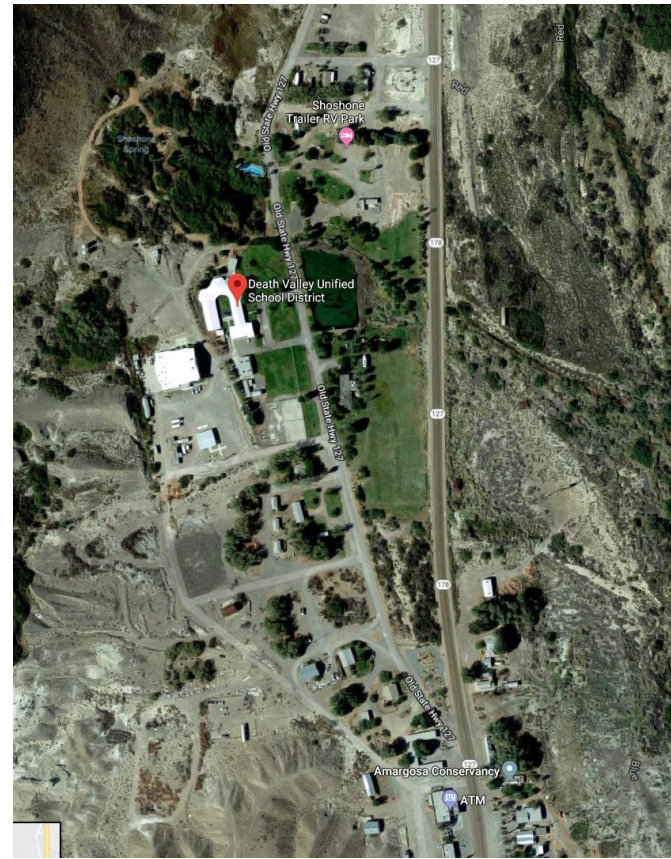
The CIF-SS has always been proud of the number of schools in their membership and the fact that both large and small schools can participate in interscholastic competition. Currently, with over 585 schools in the CIF-SS, the largest school has over 4,000 students and the smallest 15 students. In 1944, the Death Valley High School “Scorpions” opened in the Shoshone, California desert. The population has fluxuated over the years from a high of 70 students to a current population of around 15 students. From 1968 to 1985 Death Valley H.S. (Academy) played football in the 8-man division against schools like Indian Springs, Big Pine, Owen Valley and Lee Vining (sometimes playing those schools two times a season in the Hi-Lo League). Travel was not easy as the distance to Lee Vining is 285 miles with a six-hour drive one way.

Unfortunately, due to current low attendance, the Academy is not fielding athletic teams. The school covers an area of 4,200 square miles in the Death Valley National Monument area. Susan Sorrells inherited the town of Shoshone when her mother Bernice died...close to 1,000 acres. Her grandfather was a mule-team freighter and started Shoshone’s first business. Susan attended Smith College, UCLA and has returned to her home to revitalize the community and make Shoshone a blend of the old and new.

Bill Tulk Football Coach at Death Valley H.S.



Susan Sorrells



During the time that Death Valley H.S. fielded a football team it was often difficult to find a suitable field with grass in the desert conditions. The Death Valley H.S. Scorpions used the **Sorrells's front yard** to play their 8-man football games which were played on an 80 X 40-yard makeshift field with a temporary bleacher holding up to 75 fans. Baseball, track and other sports were also played on the grass field just southeast of the Sorrells's home. The field was later named **Bill Tulk Field** in honor of the football coach at Death Valley High School. Games were played in the afternoon and the locals would pull up in their cars and park right by the field. Everyone enjoyed the competition and the town took a great deal of pride in their team. The Sorrells's home was a Richard Neutra classic home referred to as a "three generation home." The first graduates of Death Valley H.S. were in the class of 1946 and at their 50th Reunion (1996) all the members were present...all two (2) of them.



The desert hamlet of Shoshone offers clean air and quiet, but few jobs; most high school graduates leave town to find work.



Team photo from 1975 and game photos from the 1969/1972 Death Valley High School Yearbooks



FOOTBALL IN A FURNACE

Death Valley High Enjoys the Home-Desert Advantage

BY EARL GUSTKEY

Times Staff Writer

SHOSHONE—"A few years ago Tonopah High came here from Nevada to play us," the coach of Death Valley High's football team was saying.

"The week before they'd played a game in 43-degree weather. Here it was 120. Their kids just melted. You could just see it. They were whipped by halftime and they weren't a bad team. We won, 39-0."

Death Valley High's Scorpions are used to blazing heat. They live in it, work out in it and play their games in it—at 1:30 p.m. on Saturdays.

"We're a very small school," said the coach, Bill Tulk. "We couldn't possibly afford lights for night games."

Shoshone is a dot on the Mojave Desert just east of Death Valley National Monument, and its high school serves the valley and other wasteland waypoints. Although the school is small (56 students are expected to enroll this month) some of its problems are big because of its isolation. Such as travel.

Death Valley High is in the Hi-Lo League, which plays eight-man tackle football. The league roster, with enrollments in parentheses, and distances from Shoshone:

—Death Valley High (56 students).

—Independence High, Owens Valley (85), 180 miles.

—Big Pine, Owens Valley (96), 200 miles.

—Lee Vining, Mono County (220), 290 miles.

It's not just opponents who have to travel far. Death Valley High's students spend a lot of time on buses. Only half a dozen students live in Shoshone (population: 150). Some come from as far as Furnace Creek, 68 miles away in the heart of Death Valley. The Death Valley Unified School District is America's second largest, with 4,200 square miles.

Paying game officials is a problem.

"The officials are from Barstow (110 miles) or Victorville (140 miles)," Tulk said. "They get \$17 a

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"Los Angeles Times"



Death Valley's Edge: the Heat

Continued from First Page

game. We can handle that OK. But we have to pay them 8 cents a mile, too. We've tried everything from raffles to spaghetti feeds and we still have a hard time coming up with their mileage money."

Admission is \$1.50 to the Scorpion home games, which are played in Mrs. Bernice Sorrells' front yard. In addition to a football field-sized yard, Mrs. Sorrells owns the Shoshone Standard Oil distributorship, the Shoshone Motel, the town restaurant, the bar and the market.

"We owe a lot to Mrs. Sorrells for letting us play on her yard and to a lot of

other supporters in our community," said Tulk, who also coaches the basketball, track and baseball teams.

Bill Tulk, 35 is a small-town, small-school guy.

"My first coaching job was at Stanford, Nebraska," he said. "We had 55 students and once won 29 football games in a row. I coached at Gaylord, Kansas, before coming to Death Valley in 1965. I grew up in Horton, Kansas, and went to school at Peru State Teachers College in Nebraska."

On a recent morning, in Mrs. Sorrells' front yard, Tulk conducted a pre-season condition workout. It was 7:30 and the temperature was in the 80s.

"We avoid the heat of the day now because the idea here is to get their legs and wind in shape," Tulk said. "After that, we practice in the middle of

the afternoon, just like any other school.

"That way, they learn to pace themselves in the heat."

His players, he said, consume about 5,000 salt tablets a season.

While Tulk talked, seven — that's right, seven — players were running wind sprints and performing calisthenics.

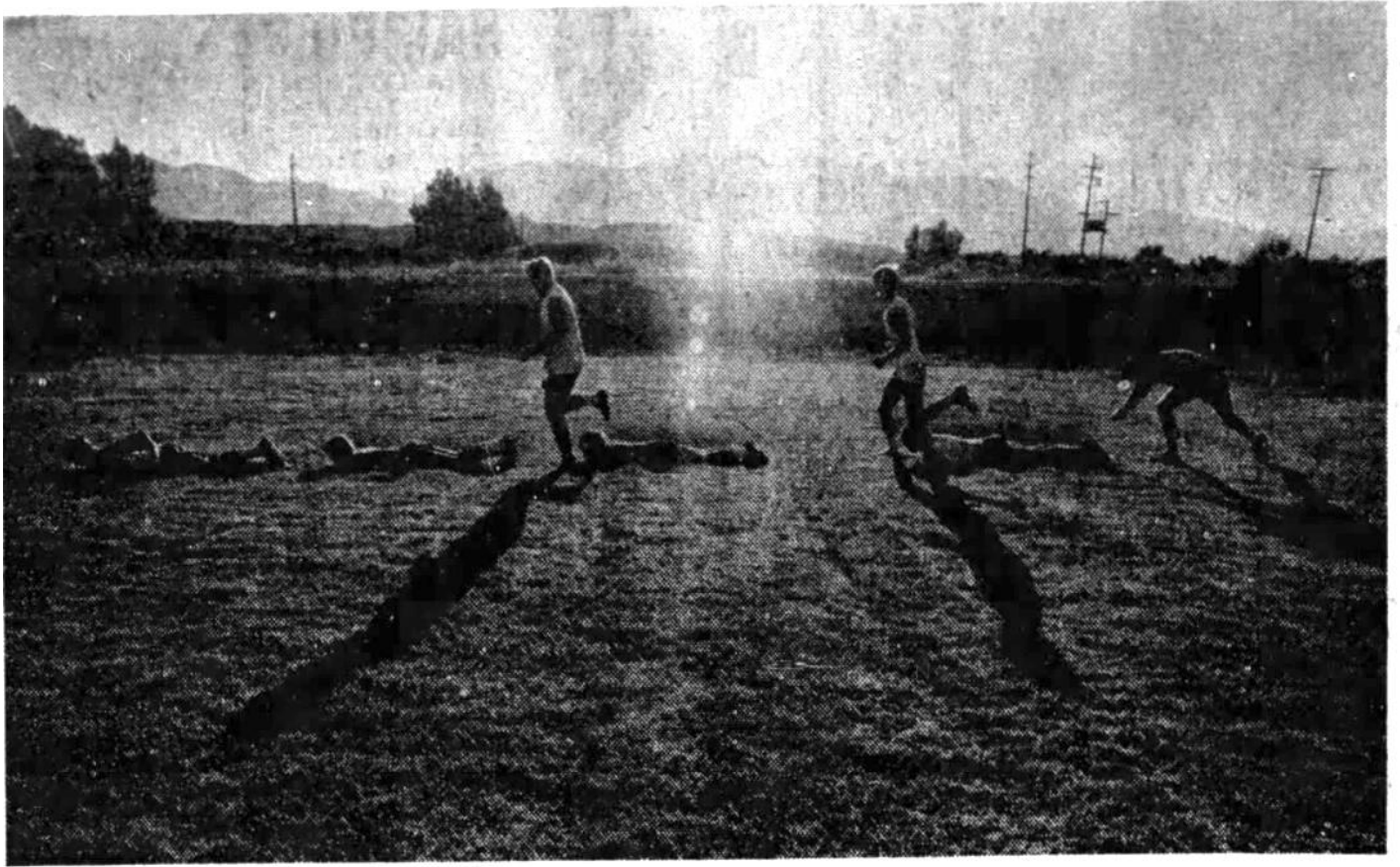
"We'll have about 22 boys on the team, as near as I can figure," he said. "But most of them can't make the preseason workouts. The ones under 16, for example, can't drive here from someplace like Death Valley Junction (26

Most of Tulk's players are sons of miners, merchants and Park Service rangers.

Last season the Scorpions were 5-2-1, Tulk's best year at Death Valley. This season's prospects, however, are poor.

"They just opened a high school in Pahrump (Nev., 27 miles away)," Tulk said. "We had 110 students from there last year, so enrollment has dropped from about 160 to 56. We'll be hurting this year."





BY THE DAWN'S EARLY LIGHT—That's not sunset over the hills of Shoshone, Calif., but sunrise. It's the football team at Death Valley High

School working out in the early hours to escape the sweltering mid-day temperatures. Here, it's just past 7 o'clock, and already it's 85 degrees.

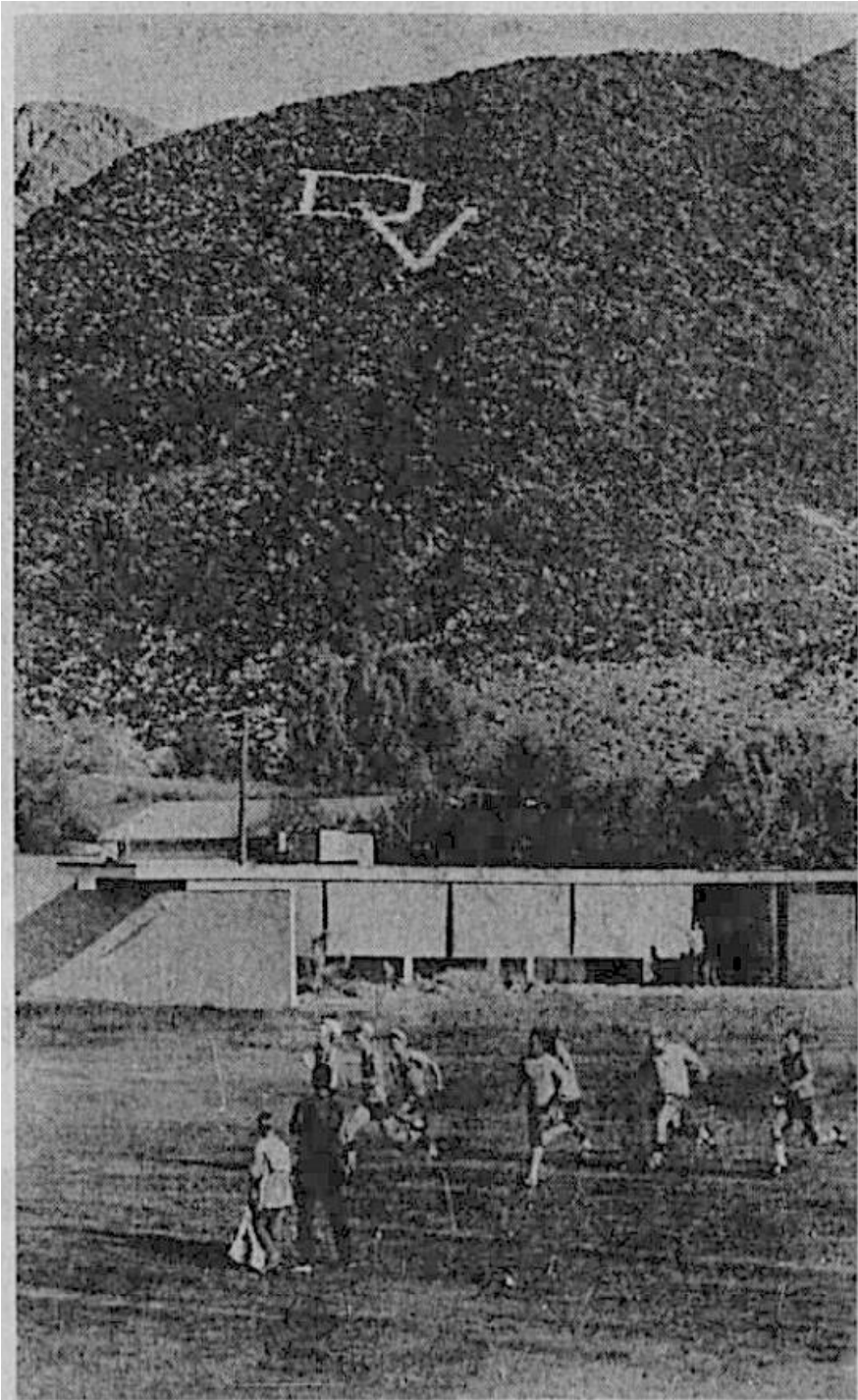
Times photo by Larry Anderson



Bernice Sorrells, right, with daughter Susan Mativo, is "the whole ball of wax" in the remote California desert hamlet of Shoshone.

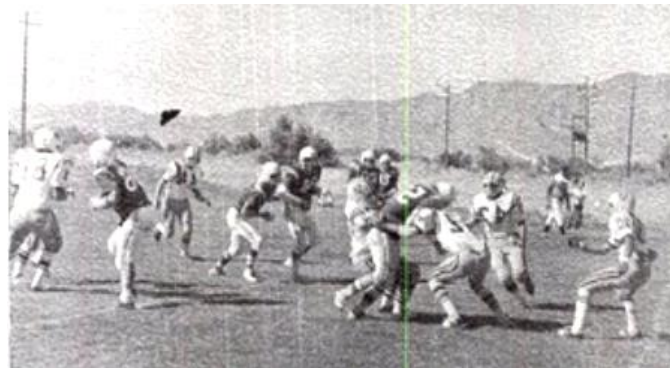
Best Seat in Town

Mrs. Sorrells has the best seat in town for the local high school football games—her house. It sits between the high school and the football field facing the 50-yard line.



YARDBIRDS—Athletes from Death Valley High School run some wind sprints on the school's football field, which also happens to be the spacious front yard of Mrs. **Bernice Sorrells**.

Times photo by Larry Anderson





Sorrells's residence in Shoshone



Looking out front window towards playing field



Looking from playing field into the home

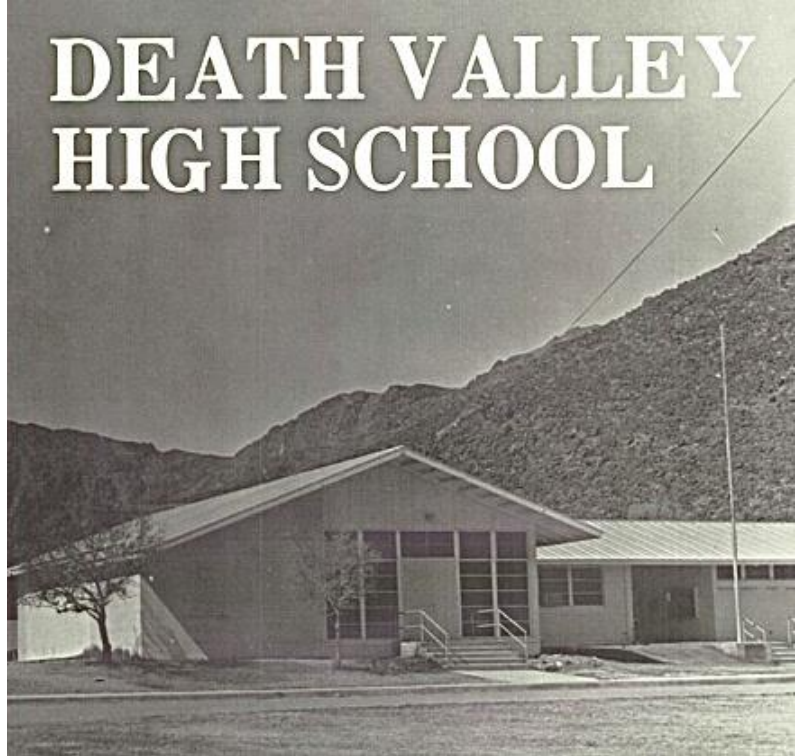




Lonely Highway 127 leads to the towns of Shoshone and Tecopa.

“This is the way to experience America. It clears your mind, gives you a sense of peacefulness. I’ve traveled these roads a lot, and even now I feel it’s still a source of inspiration.”

Susan Sorrells,
whose family founded the tiny town of Shoshone



DEATH VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL

Dedication



WILLIAM TULK has been at Death Valley High School for nine years. Prior to coming to Death Valley, he taught school in Horton, Kansas. He attended Highland Junior College, Highland, Kansas; Kansas State College, Pittsburg, Kansas; and Peru State College in Peru, Nebraska.

Here at Death Valley High he is better known to us as “Coach” for in addition to his duties of teaching Science classes, he coaches the football, basketball, and track teams.

Coach lives in Shoshone, California with his wife, Nancy, and his two beautiful daughters, Michele and Wendy.

We dedicate this yearbook to you, Coach Tulk.

Special thanks to Ethel Messer Shoshone Museum and Superintendent Jim Copeland, Death Valley Unified School District, for their historical help.