



Hands Across History



A joint newsletter for the White Sands Historical Foundation and the White Sands Pioneer Group.

Volume IX, Letter I

February 2013

New Sign Marks Historic Space Age Site

The White Sands Historical Foundation has created and donated a roadside sign to mark the location of the rapidly disappearing Space Harbor. It joins many other marker signs already on the missile range.

The other signs include: Launch Complex 33 where one sign sits beside the blockhouse and another at the entrance beside Fulwyler's giant boulder - a bronze plaque is affixed to the rock noting LC-33 is a National Historic Land-

mark like Trinity Site; Trinity Site where there are many signs - at the Schmidt House, the 800-yard bunker, Jumbo, Ground Zero and all the photos on the inner fence; the Nike Hercules Missile at Red roadblock used as a rest area at San Augustin Pass; the Miller ranch alongside old N.M. State Route 52, now Range Road 6, in the San Andres Mtns.; and on a ridge in the Hembrillo Basin, overlooking the 1880 Buffalo Soldier/Apache battlefield.



Jim Eckles and Monte Marlin strike a Grant Wood pose after installing the White Sands Historical Foundation's Space Harbor sign out on Range Road 7, directly west of the now defunct shuttle landing site. The Foundation has donated the sign to WSMR. Marlin, WSMR Public Affairs Officer, tracked down the necessary range approvals to install the sign. She sat in the car during the hole digging. Eckles wrote and designed the sign. He talked as David Soules, Historical Foundation vice president, did most of the work digging the hole and taking the photo.

WSMR Hall Of Fame Taking Nominations

White Sands is now accepting nominations from all sources until the end of March for its hall of fame.

The hall of fame was established in 1980 to honor former missile range personnel who made lasting contributions of an outstanding nature. Past honorees include such individuals as Wernher von Braun, the famous German rocket scientist, and Dr. Clyde Tombaugh, the astronomer who discovered Pluto. Recent inductees are Daniel E. Dugan, COL (Ret.) and Eugene Dirk, PhD, both from the Las Cruces area. There are now 48 individuals in the White Sands Hall of Fame.

For information on nominating an individual contact Lisa Blevins at the missile range's Public Affairs Office at (575) 678-1134 or email her at ednamaya.e.blevins.civ@mail.mil and request the recently revised White Sands Hall of Fame Pamphlet. In addition to the nominating forms,

the pamphlet outlines the guidelines and procedures for the hall of fame. The pamphlet also is available by contacting the White Sands Missile Range Public Affairs Office at WSMRPAO@conus.army.mil

To get into the hall of fame a nominee must have been responsible for significant and lasting deeds or achievements in support of the missile range mission. The contributions may be in various areas such as research, cost savings, technological advances, safety, public relations, equal opportunity or heroic deeds.

All former military, civilian and contractor personnel who once served at White Sands are eligible for nomination. No one currently working at the range is eligible.

The White Sands Hall of Fame is located inside the main museum building just inside the Las Cruces gate at the missile range.

Top Managers Left White Sands In 1957 For Other Jobs

This is some real trivia that jumped out at me (*THE EDITOR*) while looking at the White Sands "Diary" kept for 1957, 1958 and 1959. The following men all resigned their positions at White Sands in 1957 to "accept a position with private industry." It looks like people abandoning ship.

1. Ernest D. Zambelli (GS-14), Chief of Scientific Studies Office WSSCA.
2. Dale Goodson (GS-14), Ordnance Mission Air Defense Projects Officer.
3. Lawrence Gardenhire (GS-14), Chief of Instrumentation and Standards Branch, Electro Mechanical Laboratory.
4. Dr. Joachin Muehlner (GS-15), Technical Director of Range Instrumentation Development Division, Integrated Range Mission.

5. Dr. Ernst Steinhoff (GS-16), not exactly a White Sands guy but was Chief Scientific Advisor and Technical Director at Holloman AFB. He is listed with the White Sands personnel leaving..

6. Robert A. Noor, (GS-15), Supervisory General Engineer, Plans and Programs Office.

7. Dr. William Clohesay, (PL313), Chief Scientist at White Sands Proving Ground.

It seems to me that is a lot of top-level people leaving in one year especially since it included the chief scientists at both Holloman and White Sands.

On the other hand, one could look at it and say there were suddenly great opportunities for others to move in or move up.

Pioneer Group Needs Your Dues And A Few Volunteers To Be Officers

Austin Vick, the guardian of the White Sands Pioneer Group, reminds members that dues or donations are greatly appreciated. The Pioneer Group recently bought the lunches for the new hall of fame honorees and all past inductees.

Also, he has pointed out that this newsletter goes mostly to Pioneer Group members - about 80% of the mailing list. Every issue, expenses are split with the Historical Foundation, costing the Pioneer Group close to \$200.

Statement of Purpose and Membership

The "Hands Across History" newsletter is published by the White Sands Missile Range Historical Foundation and the White Sands Pioneer Group (WSPG). Both nonprofit organizations aim to preserve the accomplishments of White Sands Missile Range.

The newsletter is intended to keep members of both groups informed about current events and share information of common interest. The edi-

tor is Jim Eckles. He can be contacted by email at nebraska1950@comcast.net or at either address below.

Membership to either organization is open to anyone who shares their goals. However, details of membership (dues, etc.) differ between the two groups. For more information, please contact the appropriate organization and we will send it via the Post Office or email.

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White Sands Historical Foundation
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'They Really Are Human' In A Pinch

By Jim Prior

I was with the Corporal Project, STD, from February 1956 through March 31, 1958, finishing as Project Engineer. I recall a couple of events mentioned in the most recent excerpts in the November 2012 *Hands Across History*.

Secretary Brucker and a large entourage were guests for a Corporal launch at our Area 3 site. I think that there were two busloads involved, with both military and civilian high-ranking folks from the Army. They filled our green wooden "football" stands next to the only permanent structure at our site, a wooden office building.

We went through the countdown without any major delays and the fire button was pushed on schedule. Corporal had a Starting Delay Valve that allowed pressure to build up in the propellant supply lines before the blade valve was allowed to open, preventing blowback from engine chamber pressure. Our nominal delay was about five seconds before fire from the engine.

Nothing happened. The rarely reliable scribed diaphragm in the SDV did not break. The emergency button was pushed and two colored streams of toxic propellants were blown from the missile fuel tanks to depressurize them. These clouds were headed to the viewing stands and rank had no privileges when all those folks decided to get back on the buses. One of the radar crewmen, commented from the open door of his van "They really are human!"

Tom Brown drew the honor of fault isolation. He recovered the faulty burst diaphragm, bulged, but otherwise intact, and had it mounted on a walnut plaque with an engraved brass plate with the date and so forth. This was sent to Secretary Brucker by Gen. Laidlaw.

The Wide, Wide World program was a major operation for STD. My records of the event have more than five missiles being fired. I recall Nike Hercules, Corporal, LaCrosse, three Honest Johns, Dart and Hawk.

We got permission to modify the Corporals to "internal guidance" so that we didn't have to relocate the radar van, computer van, radar antenna, et al to the Army Blockhouse area. Jack Pickle modified the two missiles we set up. Why two missiles? Please refer to the paragraphs above about the SDV burst diaphragm. I cover the event in "Relentlessly Onward," on file at the WSMR Museum, in more detail.

Nike Hercules, with its solid propellant booster, was fired at three seconds after three o'clock. We were later, with Jack Pickle manning the firing panel for missile 1 and Art Goodall manning the panel for missile 2. Missile 1 had a pole next to it with a downward-looking TV camera. Jack pushed the button and we began our count. It went to six seconds before firing.

In our "after action" discussion in our sand bagged pit next to the Blockhouse, we did a bit of what if thinking. What if Art had also pushed the button and we had two missiles lift off? How would Range Safety deal with an in-flight

malfunction? What if missile 1 failed to launch and the TV audience saw it sitting there while the noise from the missile 2 launch was obvious.

The three Honest Johns had three targets marked on a mountainside, with buried explosive charges. The three missiles went off -- solid rocket motors are reliable. Only two of the explosive charges fired.

The Dart flew past its target tank. The LaCrosse went through the door of its target bunker. (Semper Fi)

After all was done, Col. Jim Hamill sent a DF to STD with congratulations on a job well done. His participation, he noted, was "albeit vicariously," Lt. Col Harry Whitmore, STD, endorsed the DF to the participating projects, noting that he was "somewhat albeit vicariously myself."

The West Point group had Tom Brown and me up all hours preparing briefing charts for Capt. Knipe to use. My recall is dim, but I think that was the night that Tom and I went into Las Cruces about 2 AM in his Packard Caribbean for something to eat, setting a couple records for fastest time over the mountain. I don't recall a Corporal launch during their visit.

Editor's Note: Jim mentions the "fake" ground targets for the Honest John frings for the TV show. You can imagine the primitive equipment NBC had at the time and all the launches they had to broadcast, including a camera in the blockhouse. There was no way for them to put cameras on the targets and no way for it to be done safely even if the cameras were available.

Recently, I talked to Paul Arthur about this because he was in the blockhouse for the broadcast. He said after each Honest John launch, the director would call for the camera focused on the base of Black Mtn. and the explosive charge would be cued and detonated while the missile simply flew to the middle of White Sands.

On the second Honest John, the target explosion cut the wire to the third target so it failed to detonate on camera. Paul said afterward they joked that the missile must not have come down and was probably in orbit.

Some recordings of Wide, Wide World can be seen on YouTube. The show was quite remarkable. Dave Garroway, the host, would start a show with an introduction and explain where they were going during the next 90 minutes. In one, he said they had 74 cameras on location to do the show. The only thing currently that comes close to such an arrangement is when a network covers the Olympics with its many locations.

For the March 3, 1957 program, the White Sands segment was only 20 minutes. During the rest of the show, Garroway interviewed baseball legend Mickey Mantle, Karl and William Menninger of the Menninger psychiatric clinic, actor and dancer Gene Kelley, Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas and two-time Pulitzer Prize winning playwright Tennessee Williams.

First Launch And Driving Up Alamo Peak

By Roger Ratliff

Editor's Note: What follows is a continuation of recollections by Roger from our last newsletter. A current photo of Roger is set below.

Witnessing My First Launch

In 1947 the business of White Sands was rockets, and the only rocket in town was the German V2, that monster machine that rained destruction on England and northern Europe during WWII. Many V2s were captured at the end of the war and most of them found their way to the White Sands Proving Ground in southern New Mexico. There they were put to work carrying experimental payloads to very high altitudes. It was an exciting business, and people with no connection to launch operations would search for an excuse



to get close enough to watch.

Within a week after arriving at Alamogordo as a freshly minted army Signal Corps technician, I received an invitation to accompany an enterprising individual who had found just such an excuse. It meant getting up at three o'clock in the morning and riding in an open jeep the forty miles to White Sands and another ten miles through the desert to the launch site.

My friend dropped me off about a half mile from any patrolled area and told me to stay out of sight until after the launch. There was a Military Police presence, but security had not yet become the all-powerful force we would see in the future. Cameras were not encouraged, but they had not yet become a threat to then-owner's liberty. Mine was tucked inside my field jacket pocket.

As I waited in the darkness, I could see the lighted rocket in the distance and the swarms of people working around the gantry. The area was covered by school bus sized sand dunes, locally known as boondocks. I soon observed that one boondock looked pretty much like its neighbor, and they extended to the perimeter fence that surrounded the launch complex. Not to be deterred by fear or common sense, I set about improving my vantage point. When daylight arrived I was within a few yards of the fence and was hunkered down behind a sand dune, being careful to stay out view of the blockhouse window. I adjusted my camera and waited. And waited.

Gradually the activity around the rocket slowed, and only a few people in white, protective clothing remained. Eventually, they too disappeared, and the rocket stood alone, its liquid oxygen tank venting a wispy cloud of vapor into the early morning sunlight. Finally, a speaker on the blockhouse began announcing a ten-second interval countdown. In my blissful ignorance this was all new and very exciting. I had heard tales of rocket launches, but had made allowances for the usual amount of exaggeration.

At the count of zero I became aware of the reason for a blockhouse and why I had no company to share the view. The eerie silence that filled the spaces between counts was shattered by an explosion that was not heard but rather felt; a disorienting invisible presence that was chaos. Its beginning was instant, it was sustained, and it was violent beyond my wildest imagination. There was time to get a shot of the rocket as it was about half its length above the launch platform. It was several hundred feet above the ground and accelerating before the camera could be reloaded.

Rolling onto my back, I looked directly up into the inferno that was pounding the earth with a noise that came from everywhere.

There was time for a couple more shots before the rocket disappeared in the sky, leaving behind a white vapor trail that was soon distorted by layers of wind in the upper atmosphere. The deathlike silence that descended over the area was broken only by the continuing ten-second interval count coming from the blockhouse speaker.

By now it was abundantly clear, even to me, that my luck had been stretched into the realm of providence, and I wondered at the patience of divine care. Still rattled, I hurried into the boondocks, keeping a low profile on the way to my pickup point, where I would blend into normal traffic and find my way home.

The Terrible, Awesome Alamo Peak Road

The thirty-some mile road that leads from Alamogordo Air Force Base to Alamo Lookout becomes two-lane gravel path five miles beyond Alamogordo. It is a winding, dusty trail that roughly follows the bed of an abandoned railroad. It passes by the tiny community of La Luz, a place of perhaps a half dozen adobe houses and, back then, fenced backyards of goats and chickens. From this altitude of four thousand feet, there will be a one-mile climb over the next fifteen miles.

The first wide spot along this road is High Rolls. It boasts one general store, which includes a post office and the proprietor's home. They are our closest neighbors; we live another ten miles farther up the hill. In good weather, we use Karr Canyon Road. It is the short route. It follows the narrow bottom of the canyon whose steep sides are covered by dense, evergreen forest. Midway to the top a miniature park

see [The Railroad Route](#), page 5

The Railroad Route — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

occupies a natural, wide space between the opposite canyon walls. A spring fed fountain provides an incredibly cool and delicious flow of water.

At the top of Karr Canyon Road we have attained most of our vertical climb, and we rejoin the path of the railroad bed that has taken a much longer, less steep route. For the next few miles, we see the reason for the railroad. Sometime in the past the forest was clear-cut. Ancient stumps dot the landscape, and there is evidence of a long-gone community of log cabins, locally known as Little Russia. I never heard the details, and I never asked. Such things seemed unimportant then. The evergreen trees did not return, and the alpine meadows are dotted with groves of aspen.

The road to Alamo passes through a range of environments that, depending upon the season, may lead from the harsh to the sublime, or the reverse. In the fall season conditions at each end of the road are moderated. In the desert, the noonday sun has lost some of its intensity. At the top of the mountain, nature is about to close shop on its most beautiful season. Since late spring, the mountains have been a paradise of dense, viridian-colored forests and blooming alpine meadows. Now, since the first killing frost, the shimmering, reflecting leaves of quaking aspen have become a landscape of brilliant orange and yellow. The road through these groves is enclosed under a translucent canopy of bright color, creating contrasts with the deep blue, altitude-darkened sky. Life that is not able to move to lower altitudes is preparing for the bitter cold that will soon arrive.

This was the scene that greeted me on my first trip to Alamo Lookout. And indeed, within weeks, winter did arrive, hard and cold with bitter wind-driven fury. What recently was a pleasant drive could now be an all day ordeal. At that altitude snow came early and stayed late. In that season, ours was the only vehicle that traveled the road beyond Karr Canyon and the snow accumulated undisturbed by plow or traffic. Our truck was fitted with a cable winch, providing such power that it could drag itself through drifts high enough to pile over the engine hood and against the windshield.

By using the same path week after week, a fairly reliable track could be maintained. The effect of this was a buildup of packed snow under each track. If this track was followed precisely, there were few problems. Eventually, however, the packed tracks became too high and narrow to follow. At that stage, if our truck slipped in either direction off these ridges we were high centered, resting on a ridge of packed ice and snow. All four chain draped wheels sat flailing in the snow, high and without traction. The only way out was to drag the cable to the next tree. In the two winters I spent on Alamo we were totally defeated by the weather on only one occasion. The snow became too deep, and travel by fifty-foot increments was no longer an option. The Air Force rescued us by sending a tracked vehicle called a Weasel, loaded with barrels of gasoline and food.

Winter life on Alamo had its share of miseries, but there were compensations. Except during snowstorms the winter air at that altitude had a crystalline clarity that was absolute. Forty miles to our north, Sierra Blanca's snow-capped peak stood in stark contrast against an unspoiled sky, at that distance, a miniature of exquisite clarity and beauty. From our backyard we were able to look down upon the tops of lesser mountains and on clear days, see a part of Alamogordo not hidden behind the Sacramento foothills. In the mid distance the brilliant white gypsum dunes of the White Sands National Monument stand in stark contrast with the surrounding desert.

During our twice-daily maintenance routines with the stations below, we would comment on their weather by noting how beautiful were the tops of the storm clouds that covered their area. In times of sub-zero temperatures, moisture-laden air from lower altitudes arrives super cooled and anxious to condense on any available surface. Antennas and their guy ropes became encrusted with hoarfrost, and quarter inch lines take on arm-sized masses of brilliant white ice crystal. The forest trees near the edge of the overlook became masses of brilliant white frost that lay in contrasts against the altitude darkened sky. Any disturbance of these fragile crystalline clusters of ice filled the air with countless numbers of diamond like points of reflected light.

Springtime brings a change in weather fortunes to both desert and mountain. The high altitudes are relieved of the deep snow and miserable temperatures, while the desert below us would begin the season of area wide sandstorms. In southern New Mexico, constantly moving sand is a given, but springtime brings new meaning to the term, "wind driven sand". For days at a time it becomes continuous and pervasive, invading the most carefully guarded spaces. It grinds between teeth, stings exposed skin and becomes a part of the air we breathe. Highway visibility is reduced to a few feet and commuters are encouraged to travel in small, bumper-to-bumper convoys to avoid the free-for-all of cars moving at different speeds.

On Alamo we have days of wind-lashed violence that swept up the westward side of our mountain, bringing with it the gritty dirt from the desert below. It rattles our rooftop, and, through some effect of wind currents and eddies, occasionally blew out the flame in our kerosene fueled heater, leaving us in cold, stinking fumes. At times a spontaneous re-ignition would bring a minor explosion that blew the lid off our stove, showering the place with clumps of black soot.

That season, too, soon would pass, and, while the desert heat becomes more inhospitable, our mountain became a refuge of Eden-like tranquility. Beyond the sound range of our noisy generators, the stillness was at times disturbed by the whisper of air moving through trees. More often, the silence was total and the cool, green scent of pine forest was complete.

First School Teacher Remembers Her Job

By Laura Sandiford
Arcadia, CA

While watching the landing of Curiosity on Mars, I thought again of the V-2 rocket launches at White Sands Proving Ground in 1948-9. I had witnessed those launches as the teacher in the first school there.

After I graduated from New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts in 1948, Bob Sandiford and I were married in my hometown, Hot Springs, NM. Since Bob would not receive his degree until 1949, I applied for a teaching job. Almost immediately, I was offered a position at WSPG.

The new school was in an old barracks building, which had been moved close to the residential area. It contained the first four grades with only fifteen students. Basically it was a one-room school house.

The parents, who didn't want their children to have the long bus ride to Las Cruces, had requested the school. They were always cooperative and pleasant. The children were studious and respectful, and have always remained in my heart.

My transportation from Las Cruces at 6 a.m. was on the army bus, which also stopped to pick up other employees. The bus would grind over San Augustin Pass, which

seemed like an interminable time, and arrive at WSPG at 7 a.m. I walked to the motor pool, and was driven to the schoolhouse in a jeep. It was a chilling ride in the winter. It was almost as cold in the schoolroom, where I would build a wood fire in the cast iron pot-bellied stove. At 5 p.m. the bus left for Las Cruces.

Invariably, on the day of a V-2 launch, the county school supervisor would arrive. When the rumblings of a V-2 rocket at lift-off were heard, the children and I always rushed outside. It was a thrilling sight to see the rocket as it laid a bright white vapor trail against the blue New Mexico sky. I feared that the supervisor's evaluation might include my lack of discipline!

Occasionally, I had lunch at the Officer's Club. The room was not large, and the furnishings were only adequate. There I visited with Clyde Tombaugh, whom I will always remember as being a very fine, kind person. At first, I didn't know that he was the discoverer of Pluto. Afterward, being in awe of him, I let him do the talking! One day a group of men came in, and he pointed to Dr. Wernher von Braun. Von Braun looked straight at me, and might have wondered why I was there among only men.

It amazes me, at 87 years old, to have seen the advancement made in space exploration since then.



Laura Sandiford teaching the first-ever students at White Sands. The school was started by Dona Ana County.

**WITH GREAT APPRECIATION THE
WHITE SANDS MISSILE RANGE HISTORICAL FOUNDATION
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Hands Across History
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The Back Page



According to the photo caption these are the first co-op students at White Sands - June 1952. Only last names were used but they are: back row, L to R – Morris (training instructor), Linard (co-op coordinator), Smallhouse (student), French (student), Mitchell (student), Nothrey (student).
Seated, L to R – Guess (chief of training branch), Pickett (civilian personnel officer).