The Artist Who Painted Huge Mural In Bldg. 1504 Returns

By Jim Eckles
In late 1956 a young, New York City artist named Robert Glaisek was drafted into the Army. He was sent to basic training at Fort Knox, KY where he was tagged for the Armor Branch. However, a different fate awaited Glaisek when he was reclassified as an illustrator and shipped to White Sands Proving Ground in January 1957. There he was to create a mural that is truly a work of art amongst the frugal practicality that marks typical military office space.

Glaisek returned to White Sands, just before Thanksgiving 2017, to see the painting he made 60 years ago after being invited by the missile range’s Cultural Resources staff to discuss repair of water damage from years ago. The mural is in the office of the Director for the Materiel Test Directorate. In an interview in front of the mural, he told how it came to be.

In 1957, when Lieutenant Colonel James Hamill, who was chief of the Army’s Ordnance Mission at White Sands, found out that Glaisek could paint he asked the young private if he would be willing to produce a large mural. Glaisek already had experience working with oil paint and murals so he jumped on the proposal.

Hamill’s organization, which was in charge of Army missile testing at White Sands, had just moved into a new building. He envisioned a tribute to his old boss Holger Toftoy who was then the general in charge of Army missile development at Redstone Arsenal in Alabama.

Hamill and Toftoy had an association dating back to World War II when Toftoy was put in charge of retrieving as much advanced German

See Colonel Hamill’s Tribute, page 4
Hall Of Fame Nominations Being Taken

White Sands Missile Range 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, and the purpose is to give appropriate and perpetual recognition to those members of the WSMR workforce, military and civilian, who have made singularly significant contributions to the mission on the Range and to the surrounding communities. It is the highest award the missile range can bestow on one of its own.

Past honorees include such individuals as Wernher von Braun, the famous German rocket scientist, and Dr. Clyde Tombaugh, the astronomer who discovered Pluto. But you don’t have to be a world-class scientist to be recognized in the hall of fame. If anything, Tombaugh and von Braun are the exceptions.

The hall of fame includes 52 members. It contains both men and women, both civilian and military personnel, both government and contractor employees and a huge mix of professions - everything from chaplain to missile flight safety to public affairs to professional engineer to equal employment opportunity to “mover and shaker.” It is the embodiment of “Team WSMR,” the phrase missile range leaders have thrown around for decades.

The Army Research Lab has had a few inductees to include Joy Arthur, Donald Hoock and Joseph Trammel.

For information on nomination procedures or to request an updated copy of the White Sands Hall of Fame Guide, call the WSMR Public Affairs Office, (575) 678-1134. The guide contains the forms, guidelines and procedures for nomination.

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

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

Suggestions for Submitting a Nomination

Suggestion #1. Get help. Some nominations are submitted by loved ones or friends who don’t have a deep understanding of what the nominee did. You need information about the person’s accomplishments and why they were meaningful. The person’s personnel file will help if you have access to it - asking the nominee for his records is one way to get accurate data. You need to find the nuggets of excellence and put those in the package. It is highly recommended to work closely with the nominee’s colleagues who may be able to strengthen the nominee’s package with technical information and quantifiable statistics and information on the impact of work accomplished.

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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 editor 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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Suggestion #2. Remember the intent of the program—the WSMR Hall of Fame recognizes past WSMR employees who went above and beyond. Thousands of great people have worked at the range in its 70-year history, but this honor is for those who made significant contribution while at WSMR.

Suggestion #3. The nominee should have made accomplishments individually, since the honor is not presented to a group or a couple. If a nominee “collaborated” or “contributed” to a project then they can’t solely take credit for the accomplishment. On the other hand, if the nominee “spearheaded,” “led” or “single-handedly accomplished” a project, they would comply with the intent of the honor.

Suggestion #4. Do not include obscure documents, evaluations, award certificates, etc. In fact, if you look at the latest rules you will find that the board limits the narrative submission to 4 pages.

Suggestion #5. Find the good stuff - grab it and jettison the rest. It is in the mountain of paper you want to submit but won’t. Take the real examples of the nominee’s great work and succinctly write up what he or she did, how it made a difference, and support it with a quote from an evaluation or an award certificate. If John Doe designed a new camera widget or lead an effort to save millions of dollars, explain what it was. The quotes from the evaluation or award are then the proof that he or she did them and that they are, indeed, important.

Suggestion #6. Make sure everything is specific. I’ve seen a lot of packages where nominators sought an endorsement from their congressman thinking it would impress. Those letters don’t help but the key facts from those who worked with them carry much more weight.

Gold Was To Be Mined At White Sands 50 Years Ago


There’s gold in them thar hills! So sayeth the U.S. Army Test and Evaluation Command (TECOM), now conducting a special campaign, “Operation Gold Mines.”

“Operation Gold Mines” is TECOM’s three-month suggestion campaign which is being conducted during the period of Feb. 1 through April 30 this year. During this period both military and civilian personnel are encouraged to participate in this worthwhile and rewarding suggestion program.

And rewarding it can be. Cash awards to White Sands personnel totaled $5,355 for fiscal year 1967 and with only half of fiscal 1968 passed, awards to employees have already rolled out to the tune $4,780, with more to come.

Accounting for a big per cent of the government savings at WSMR thus far in 1968 is the suggestion that came from Sergeant First Class Paul W. Kramer, of the Atmospheric Science Office, U.S. Army Electronics Command. Sergeant Kramer simply introduced the idea of replacing expensive, commercially produced corner reflectors on balloons (used in tracking), with good old household aluminum foil. The saving to the government is $94,167 annually, while earning the sergeant a comfortable $1,125.

The top suggestion of the 1967 fiscal year came from a government employee, Harry F. Bennett of the Communications Directorate, National Range Operations. Mr. Bennett’s suggestion resulted in the procurement of two hydraulic combination construction and earth boring machines for pole line construction. The machines eliminated heavy lifting and manually holding poles during backfilling. His suggestion will save the government $12,205 annually in man hours and repair cost. Mr. Bennett was awarded $560.

These suggestions and others have been rewarding to both the government and the suggestor. In the past year and a half alone, well over 200 ideas have been accepted at WSMR, saving the government more than $200,000 each year, and paying cash awards of more than $10,000.

This is the 25th anniversary of the Army Suggestion Program.
technology and V-2 rocket material as possible before the Soviets took over many of the German development sites. Hamill was responsible for leading units into Germany to capture the parts and pieces. Also, when Dr. Wernher von Braun was being moved to Fort Bliss after the war, he insisted that Hamill be his escort on the cross-country trip.

Glaisek said Hamill wanted the mural to cover the east wall of his office which meant it was to be about 17 feet wide and about six feet tall. Once he had an idea of the mural’s size, he set about acquiring the canvas and paints for the job – the Army didn’t have requirements for its illustrators to be artists. He also worked up a series of sketches to eventually work from when painting the full-scale version.

According to Glaisek, the conquistador on the
left of the mural is a nod to the early exploration and settlement of the Southwest. On the right is Gen. Toftoy representing the present-day scientists and engineers working at White Sands. In the background, but capturing the viewer’s attention, is the spread of the Organ Mountains as seen from the east side. Although the mountains are stylized, it is easy to pick out Rabbit Ears, the Needles and Sugarloaf Peak. Below the mountains is a broad plain of irregularly sized rectangles. Glaisek said he painted them in perspective so they lead your eye to the mountains.

Both of the mural’s men are gazing up at the moon over the Organs. Glaisek said he posed them that way because, in 1957, Space was a hot topic as both the United States and Soviet Union announced they would launch manmade satellites for the International Geophysical Year. Glaisek said he felt the moon would be the logical goal for all of these Space-related activities.

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Also, he said he wanted to have Toftoy holding something so he came up with the idea of an atom with its electrons in orbit around a nucleus of protons and neutrons. He came up with an atom partly because of the atomic bomb test at Trinity Site on the north end of White Sands and partly because he thought nuclear power might be used to power spaceships in the future.

At the bottom of the mural is a legend stating, “The Organ Mountains Witness a Second Conquistador Who Like The First Comes To Conquer A New World.”

Glaisek related that it took him months to complete the mural. He built a large wooden stretcher for the canvas and worked in an empty room on the first floor. Because it was such a large project, he was relieved of most of his soldierly duties and job as an illustrator. His fellow soldiers jokingly dubbed him “PFC Michelangelo” after the Italian artist who painted the Sistine Chapel.

During his interview, Glaisek said officials really cut him a lot of slack when he was working on the project. Also, he found his time in the Army as a draftee eye opening. He said he found the “in-your-face-democracy” refreshing.

By that he meant that the Army had a way of treating most people the same. His example was the guy from Harvard out on the grounds picking up cigarette butts with the guy who barely graduated from high school.

After he completed the mural he went back to his illustrator job but was still used for some big jobs. At Christmas 1957 he painted a nine-foot tall Santa Claus that was mounted on the side of the Troop Command office for the holidays.

In early 1958, Glaisek requested an early-out from the Army which was granted. He left White Sands and entered the master’s program at National University of Mexico in Mexico City.

After his studies, he made his way back to the New York City area where he made illustrations for books and trade magazines and even illustrated some record album covers. Eventually he established his own studio where he painted and produced sculptures. His portfolio can be viewed at http://www.robertglaisek.com/

Glaisek’s visit was made possible by Bill Godby, an archaeologist with the missile range’s environmental directorate. Godby has been focused on documenting the rich Cold War history at the missile range found in the many buildings and structures that remain. The building housing the mural exists within the White Sands Missile Range Army/Navy Cantonment Historic District managed by Godby.

Glaisek was assigned to White Sands as a technical illustrator. When the post newspaper, the Wind and Sand, did a story about the unit, instead of photographs of the various illustrators, Glaisek drew little head and shoulder caricatures of each man. Each drawing then ran beside a few paragraphs of biographical information for each man.

For himself, Glaisek chose not to resort to the typical image and, instead, portrayed himself as an artist in his smock and palette of oils. The article pointed out that, at the time, Glaisek was working on the huge mural.
This is the last page of the 22-page booklet published after the visit of President Kennedy to White Sands Missile Range in 1963. In the middle photograph is Edwin L. Mechem then one of New Mexico’s two U.S. senators. Mechem also served three terms as New Mexico’s governor. Mechem grew up in Las Cruces, attended NMSU, and practiced law in the city. He also served as an FBI agent during World War II. When elected governor the first time, in 1950, he lived in Las Cruces. The whole booklet can be found in the White Sands Missile Range Museum Archives.
The Back Page

LTC Harold Turner In Officers Club

EDITOR’S NOTE: I discovered this photo of Harold Turner on an old hard drive I had gathering dust from years ago. I didn’t know the image was there and don’t think I’ve seen it before.

Having worked for Public Affairs in Building 122 for years before it was demolished, I can tell you that he is standing in front of one of the two fireplaces in the old building. There was one in our office area and one downstairs in the ballroom which was also a reading room. Later the ballroom was used by us as the Visitors Center. Of course, at the time of the photo, the building served as the Officers Club for White Sands.

I’ve never heard from anyone about whether or not the fireplaces were ever used. Too bad its not a full-length photo with a crackling fire burning in the hearth behind him.