



# Hands Across History



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

Volume IV, Letter II

May 2008

## Director Stresses Education For Museum

By Darren Court, Director  
WSMR Museum

I would like to begin my comments in this issue by briefly discussing what I believe to be the most important piece of the museum's mission – education. Everything we do - collecting and exhibiting artifacts, making archival materials available, restoring the Blockhouse – is part of our mission to educate visitors, and there are no more enthusiastic visitors than kids!

The first two weeks of May really reinforced this, as we hosted 40 students from Alma d'arte Charter School in Las Cruces, over 90 students from Jornada Elementary, also in Las Cruces, and almost 70 students from Red Mountain Middle School in Deming. The museum works closely with the Public Affairs Office to ensure that school groups that would like to visit have every opportunity to do so.

However, as we take on a greater role in conducting tours and talking to students, we have had to re-examine just what our educational mission is. Age-appropriate lectures are being developed and we are currently focusing on two things; 1) the V-2 rocket and WSMR as the birthplace of the space program, 2) the Manhattan Project and Trinity Site.

These two histories determined the course of the last half of the twentieth century and we see them as being the most critical for students to understand - other subjects will follow. Eventually, we hope to see many of these lectures

and materials become web-accessible for educators.

We also have a number of "exhibit items," artifacts which are not cataloged as such and can therefore be used in hands-on education. We tried this for the first time with a group of home-schooled kids from Las Cruces in April and it was hit! The kids (and their parents) enjoyed being able to see how heavy a Loki rocket was and had fun with watching a gyroscope move as it was turned.

We are looking at other materials we have in storage to see what we can use. We hope that students will take away an appreciation for not just the rockets, missiles and other artifacts themselves but, more important, the science and engineering behind them and their development.

I also wanted to give everyone an idea of some of the other things that are happening at the museum. We are currently in the process of getting the paperwork through so that we can hire a new registrar and hope to have one on board by early summer.

Our museum volunteers all received awards for their fantastic service to WSMR at the Volunteers Appreciation Luncheon on April 29. We could not function without their hard work, so thank you to everyone who donates their time to keep our doors open!

Rebecca Balizan is also back for the summer, her third, and we are grateful to have her on board.

see **New Additions Coming**, page 2



Some of the museum volunteers who were honored at the missile range's Volunteer Recognition Luncheon on April 29 stopped long enough for this group photo by Doris Glenn. From the left are: Joe Marlin, Glenn Moore, Darren Court, Bill Jones, Jon Gibson, Doyle Piland, Debbie Walters, Fred Walters, Robert Watkins, and Terry Chappell.

# New Additions Coming — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Regarding donations, Doyle Piland donated a neat old butter churn, made in 1900, that will go into the ranching room – thanks Doyle!

Although donations have been slow, the ones that have come in are mainly artifacts, rather than archival materials. We received three missiles from UXB, and we are in the process of taking receipt of an F-4 Phantom fighter-bomber from Holloman Air Force Base. As many of you know, the QF-4 (target version of the aircraft) was used as a target here for many years, so we are excited to be able to add one to Missile Park, with the Air Force making most of the arrangements. They are also working on getting our Rocket Sled, another Holloman gift, into the park.

The Navy is not to be forgotten, however, as they will be placing a Standard Missile 2 into the park as well – should make for a busy summer!

Inside the museum, we will be updating and adding to the Navy room, with the help of volunteer George Helfrich, as well as moving the NASA materials out into the gallery so that we can create an Air Force room next to the Navy room. Doyle has been working with NASA on acquiring a very special artifact, so be on the lookout for news from that front.

As always, we continue to add “bits and pieces” here and there to existing exhibits. We recently added some newspaper accounts of Red Canyon Range Camp to that exhibit, as well as brought out a painting of a Redhead/Roadrunner target drone. The painting has been in our warehouse for years and is finally on display, along with a few photos of the target on a launcher and in flight.

Also, the expansion of the Trinity Site exhibit is moving along, and should be completed this summer, so be looking for that. I recently learned of a Manhattan Project employee who has moved to town and is looking for a place to deposit all of his memorabilia; his daughter is recommending WSMR, so keep your fingers crossed! We might also have on display a traveling exhibit about General Leslie Groves, the military commander of the Manhattan Project, sometime this summer.

One other item of note; the New Mexico Council of

the Navy League of the US, through Mary Beth Rinehart, has made available to the museum a two-foot long model of the new Virginia-class submarine, the USS New Mexico. The model, as well as a storyboard about the sub, are on display in the gift shop area and should be here through the summer. CDR Robert Dain, the submarine’s CO, and some of his crew toured the museum and LC-33 recently and enjoyed their visit, so I urge you all to stop by and take a look at the model. Thanks to all of you who made this possible.

Again, thank you all for making me feel welcome; this May marks my one year anniversary of being back at WSMR and I would not want to be anywhere else! And, as always, if you have WSMR materials that need a home, we can provide them a safe and comfy one!

## Paying Tribute To Others

You may be aware that you can make a donation in someone’s honor and have their name placed on a brick in Signatuaire Plaza - see page 7. There are other ways to honor good folks.

Foundation board member Frances Williams writes she is making two donations to honor the following people.

●●● “In memory of Lonnie Sumpter, who was in many ways a pioneer at WSMR working at was one time known as ARMTE, Army Test & Evaluation Directorate, as senior project engineer on the Patriot Test Program. He later became the Executive Director of the Spaceport Authority for New Mexico, working toward the establishment of a Spaceport which was his dream.”

●●● “A “thank you” to Doyle Piland who continues to do a yeoman’s job for the WSMR Museum and the Historical Foundation. He is the keeper of the historical flame, working diligently with his crew to archive and preserve the accomplishments and history of WSMR and keeping the Foundation informed of membership, maintaining the Web page for the Museum and letting us know how many people come to the museum monthly, and how many hits we get from over 180 countries around the world to our web site. Muchas Gracias and many more. ”

## 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](mailto: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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## My Memories

# Women Weren't Always Welcome

By Frances Williams

A few months ago I took an inadvertent sentimental journey down memory lane at White Sands Missile Range, traveling to a meeting for the WSMR Historical Foundation. I found myself on Watertown Street where some of the buildings are still used as warehouses to receive and store materials. It brought back memories when I worked in this area as the Chief Clerk for the Transportation Division for the receipt, storage and issuing of commercial and tactical automotive spare parts and aircraft spare parts.

I had been an Accounting Clerk in the Fiscal Accounting Branch of the Comptroller's office in 1954. When it became evident that my job was dead ended at a GS-04 Accounting Clerk, I applied for the position of Chief Clerk in the Office of the Accountable Property Officer, Transportation Division, under the Quartermaster Corps, and was selected. I reported for duty to the selecting official, Mr. Oscar Casavantes, a very nice, kind, mild mannered man, who had been enthusiastic about my selection.

I was to work in the warehouse supervising the function of recording receipts and issues of the spare parts, issuing these parts as well as maintaining the inventory and establishing ordering levels. We also maintained the Property Book for the Accountable Property Officer to insure that each piece of equipment issued and turned in when it became unserviceable or was no longer needed was recorded and signed for. At that time the Motor Pool had about 2500 vehicles (both commercial and tactical) and about forty aircraft both fixed wing and rotor wing at Holloman.

When Mr. Casavantes brought me to the warehouse to introduce me to the crew, all men, that I would supervise, there was shock, disdain on some of the faces of the employees, and it was clear that they did not approve. Nevertheless, I had the job, and as I adjusted, I hoped that these employees would adjust to me as their supervisor. It was an uneasy work environment.

For almost a month no one would talk to me unless I spoke first. There was constant whispering which stopped when I entered the room. As I explained to them, I knew about accounting and inventory procedures, and how to read and interpret regulations dealing with the process -- I didn't need a working understanding of engines, carburetors and generators.

We had a sergeant assigned who was an expert at this, and also one of my employees. He also was reluctant to speak to me except when absolutely necessary.

When I was hired, the Transportation Officer, Major Edwin Miltenberger who was a courtly, gentrified, southern gentleman with a distinct southern drawl, from New Orleans, was on leave. When he came back to work, he was horrified to know that a woman had been hired for the Chief Clerk's job in the warehouse. "It was no work for a woman and

certainly no place for a woman to work", as Mr. Casavantes, my supervisor, repeated his words to me. He ordered Mr. Casavantes to get rid of me.

Remembering Oscar's temperament, his mild manner and meekness, this was not a job he relished. However, he did call me into his office, told me that Major Miltenberger did not feel that my job was appropriate for a woman and also that he did not like the fact that I was working in the warehouse. My reaction, of course, was one of anger. I told Mr. Casavantes to tell Major Miltenberger, if he wanted me out of the warehouse, he would have to get the Military Police to carry me out. "I got this job fair and square, and I ain't moving."

He did relay the message to Major Miltenberger, who was so angry that he would not address me, or talk to me, and found every which way he could to avoid me, so that he wouldn't have to deal with me at all. In today's terms it is called "working in a hostile environment."

One day Mr. Casavantes had a heart attack, and would not be returning to work soon. What to do. Someone had to sign for the property on the Property Book that he had hand receipted out to numerous individuals on the range. All the trailers and vehicles in the desert were on this Property Book and someone had to be responsible.

I had been working in Transportation about seven months when this occurred. Major Miltenberger called me into his office one day and told me about Oscar's heart attack. He didn't know when Oscar would return, explained the urgency of having the property that he was responsible for being signed over to another Accountable Property Officer, and asked me if I would be willing to take over the property book, as well as continuing to be responsible for the automotive and aircraft spare parts.

My first question was, "Will I receive a promotion?" Almost grudgingly, Major Miltenberger said yes, but it would be temporary, subject to Mr. Casavantes' return. I asked if I would have his full support and cooperation to do the job that was needed, and he agreed that he would give me whatever support I needed.

I then reminded Major Miltenberger that many of the vans and vehicles spread out all over this vast range would have to be inventoried, and I would not agree to sign for this property until such time as I actually saw the property, and verified that it was on the property book, or I would add it to the Property book if it wasn't recorded and then get a signature from someone who had it in their possession.

This may cause problems, because some of these vans and vehicles had been sitting out on the range for sometime with no one signed for them. The Major agreed that I had his full backing to do whatever needed to be done.

see **Breaking Barriers**, page 5

## Way Back When

# Early Range TV Was Basic At Best

By Doyle Piland

From the WSMR Museum Archives

People living and working at White Sands today have access to the TV cable system and possibly satellite TV that gives them many channels to choose from. In fact there are so many channels they need a complex channel guide to keep it all straight. That is not the way it was Way Back When....

The photo below shows the channel guide in the late 1950s and 1960s. Anytime you drove by the sign, you were reminded of the vast channel selection. But, even that was courtesy of the Signal Missile Support Agency. The White Sands main post is tucked in behind large mountains that still block the TV signals from the El Paso TV stations, which at the time were the only stations around.

The Signal Missile Support Agency set up a station on Elephant Mountain to pick up the El Paso TV stations, convert them to different frequencies, and transmit the signal to the Main Post area. Elephant Mountain is located in the very southeast corner of the missile range. It is just south of the Orogrande Range Camp just outside the eastern range boundary. It has two humps (peaks) and the TV facility was on the southwest hump. The north-east hump had, and still has, a range radar facility on it.

One of the people assigned to the Signal Missile Support Agency from 1958 to 1960 was Specialist 5 Mike Reilly. Mike has donated some photos of his time at White Sands to the Museum Archives and has written about his experiences on the range.

### ***Mike Reilly's Story - in his own words***

Having been raised as an Army brat during WWII and being of prior service, WSMR at that time in history was a unique time in my life. Most of the Germans had already been sent elsewhere, and WSMR was going through a growth period with the Nike Zeus and many other missile systems. I arrived at the range in mid '58 and because of prior civilian and military experience I was assigned to the television group of the Signal Missile Support Agency.

I spent a few months setting up different types of video chains for various missile shots and working on the first video recorder that was housed in a huge tractor-trailer. It was filled from floor to ceiling with about 100 push pull type circuit vacuum tubes and other miscellaneous equipment. Because of the filament heat buildup, that trailer would get real hot on a warm day. After we set everything up, the rep from Ampex would arrive to insert the recording head and

then wind the 2" tape through the sprockets. After the shot, he would remove the head and take it back to Ampex. That \$100,000+ piece of equipment can now be had for less than \$70, and sits next to your TV. Things do change in 50 years.

I was later reassigned to the UHF television station atop Elephant Mountain, where I picked up the VHS signal from NBC and CBS out of El Paso, and converted it to UHF and transmitted it towards the post. I usually had the night tour, and because of my late hours, I was exempt from normal military duties. Four of us ran the station, one man to a tour. As I remember, we worked 3 days one week and 4 the next. It was hard job, but somebody had to watch the television sets. The married men usually took the morning shift to be home with their family at night. My desk sat right under the two parabolic antennas, and I often wondered what the microwave effects would be over time. It's been 50 years, and I'm still here, so someone knew what they were doing at the time. Fort Collins radio would come out every year to certify the station and make whatever updates needed.

My boss was a GS-12 civilian named Harold A. Lambeth, and he would drive out every so often for a routine walk through inspection. We also had a M/Sgt. Lumpson, Discher and McDonald, but they worked in a different group than I did, and I rarely saw them where I was stationed. Out of sight and out of mind, has its own benefits in the military.

We used a Mrs. Gardner and her two daughters (wife of the post radiologist) who lived in the center of the post to tell us when the UHF signal had any problems, and I would then adjust the signal output accordingly. It was not exactly state of the art, but practical for the times, in lieu of field strength meters. I still remember all the metal coat hangers hanging out of the barracks windows, each trying to get a decent signal. I remember one night during a bad sandstorm the signal degraded so bad I had to crank the output beyond normal and then received a nasty call from the FCC an hour later saying I was interfering with ghost reception in Phoenix, Ariz. Every broadcast station on air sends out a location identification bar atop the visible signal to show where it is coming from. I cranked it back and never heard of any repercussions. So much for line of sight.

Most of my time spent at the station was routine, running logs, watching television and keeping an eye on the gas generator. If one was about to fail, you had to quickly run out and change generators. If it quit at night, you had to stumble down the dark rocky path and pray the flashlight stayed on till you got the other generator back up and running. My only companion was an old skinny coyote who would stop by at times to lie next to the screen door on cold nights to stay warm, but as soon as I stood up, he would disappear. I had the occasional mouse or baby snake sneak in, but they were easy to get rid of. The only real problem was the mass of tarantulas that would come out of their holes after a rainstorm.



## Bats In The Outhouse — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

They were everywhere. If a major sporting event was on, some of the guys from the radar station on the next mountain peak would come over to watch it. Other than that, it was fairly lonely being way out in the boon docks.

Our only bathroom was an old wooden outhouse next to the generators that looked out over the desert towards the lights of El Paso. You quickly learned to pound hard on the side before entering, so if any bats were in there, they would fly out before you sat down. I learned this fact the hard way. The only real excitement I had was when the station got hit one night by a type of lightening that flashed on through and left a three second 6" corona around everything, including myself. I guess it was all voltage and no current, because it did not cause any damage and the station kept right on working. I found out later it is called ball lightning.

My other bit of excitement was when a reserve anti-aircraft detachment set up a base at the foot of the mountain. Every time they would key their radio mike, I could hear



SP5 Mike Reilly levels a TV camera at the 1960 Armed Forces Day display.

## Breaking Barriers — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

It took me over a year to fly over the range and inventory most of the vans and vehicles out there. I don't know that I got them all, but I gave it a pretty good go. I did sign for what I saw with my own eyes and then had it hand receipted as prescribed by Army Supply regulations.

Eventually I won Major Miltenberger's respect, and he mine. The men started talking to me, and we became good friends. Initially this was a hard pill to swallow for all of them. Breaking new frontiers, pulling down the stereotypes wasn't easy for them, or for me.

As luck or some other divine intervention would have it, I did get my temporary promotion to a GS-7. When Mr. Casavantes passed away it became permanent, and eventually I worked my way up the career ladder in Logistics. I had to take the risk of being a woman in a non-traditional job, having to prove myself at every turn. The men who became

them on my receiver. They were firing huge long cannons at small red target drones and by accident they set one of them on fire. It crashed landed into a long row of empty pup tents and set them all on fire. They all packed up their gear and left shortly afterwards. I often wondered who got stuck for the statement of charges for the many damaged tents.

My daily routine was to stop by the mess hall in the afternoon and pick up a box lunch for dinner, and then drive over to the motor pool to pick up whatever vehicle was available at the time. If nothing good was available, I would use my own car. Gas was cheap in those days. The drive out to the station was fairly routine. Driving back was a little more cautious, because of the 100's of rabbits that would sometimes gather on the warm road at night in large groups, usually in the springtime, and it became a real effort to try to miss them. My biggest advantage was the 1 to 2 a.m. breakfast in the mess hall. The night cook was usually bored, and would fix you almost anything you wanted within reason. I really miss that place.

On my days off, I traveled all over New Mexico, Texas and Juarez, seeing the sights. My favorite dinning place was in a large restaurant in Juarez, where for a little over a dollar, you could eat like a king, and the waiters would pour wine from a sheep-skin directly into your mouth. I met many girls there from Texas Western University, and we all became great friends. The place was usually filled with officers from Fort Bliss in civilian clothing. Their shoes and military demeanor gave them away.

NOTE: The TV station building now stands abandoned on Elephant Mountain. Today, it has no significance to the residents and employees at WSMR. But that is not the way it was Way Back When.....

my mentors and helped me up the ladder of success took a chance on me.

And after all we just want a chance to prove that we can be all that we can be. without regard to our race, sex, ethnicity, age or disability. "It ain't easy being green" as Kermit the frog has noted, and in those "good ole days" it wasn't easy being a woman in a man's world.

Since then a lot of barriers have been broken, especially for women at White Sands Missile Range. I still had a hard time being accepted by the Aircraft Maintenance Officers at Army Air at Holloman, but then that's another story and there are many more. That's how it was..... once upon a time at WSMR.

*Editor's Note: Frances went on to become the Equal Employment Opportunity Officer for White Sands. She was inducted into the missile range Hall of Fame in 1995.*

## Book Review

# “What If” Tale About The Fountain Mystery

By Jim Eckles

So what really happened to Albert Fountain and his eight-year-old son Henry at Chalk Hill on Feb. 1, 1896? Were they murdered and buried in the San Andres Mountains or nearby Parker Lakes? Or did something else happen that most of us really have not imagined possible?

W. Michael Farmer has taken the Fountain murder mystery and turned it into a fairly entertaining novel about what might have happened. He calls it “Hombrecito’s War.”

Farmer summarizes his intent nicely in the book’s prefatory note: “Who was responsible and what actually happened to Albert and Henry Fountain have been fiercely debated for over a hundred years. Those who knew the true facts went to their graves without telling their story, or if they did, historians have not believed them. Logic dictates that eight-year-old Henry Fountain died with his father. However, life, filled with unexpected events and inconsistencies, is not logical. What if Henry survived...This story of Henry’s survival is constructed from actual events and fictional ones to create a myth for what might have been, and, for what devotees of western legends wish had been.”

If you know a lot about the Fountain story and the basic geography of southern New Mexico, you will find the book very familiar. Farmer lived and worked in the area for 15 years as a physicist. During his time here he was apparently intrigued by the local history and spent time exploring the mountains and deserts.

If you don’t know much of the story, the book will read like a western novel with a mix of action, description and philosophizing.

I probably fit into the first category so I was continually trying to separate the fact and the fiction. This made it harder to simply get lost in the story. On the other hand, recognizing all those places and people adds to the satisfaction. Reading Eugene Manlove Rhodes is always a pleasure because it is easy to relate to the local geography.

Be certain this is no work by Rhodes or even Louis L’Amour. It could use some tight editing to trim the fat as it bogs down in places. He also pushes a lot of those Western cliches about cowboys and Indians that we’ve all seen on television over and over again.

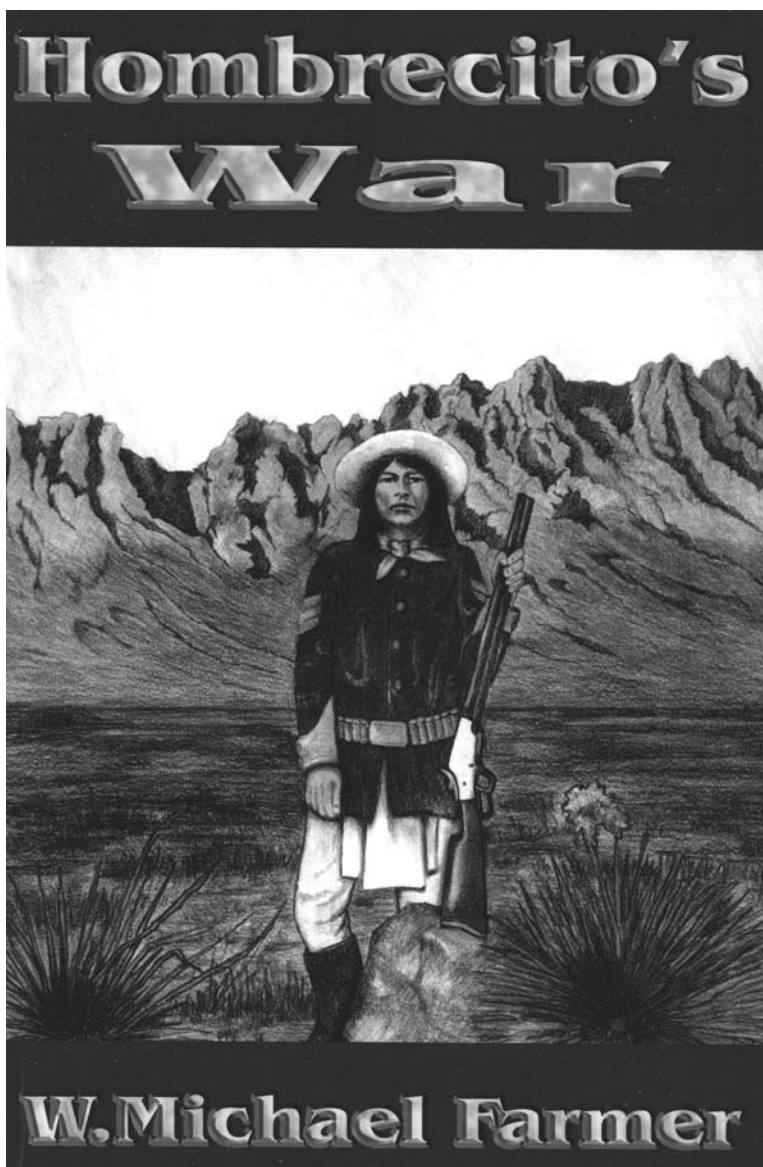
And, of course, like most cowboy tales there is unbelievable shooting. For instance, at age 12, Henry says he can break whiskey bottles with his rifle nine out of 10 times at 600 yards. In real life however, professionals reported in the March 1887

issue of “The Rifle” that they hit a 22-inch bullseye nine out of 10 times at 600 yards, using the same kind of rifle as Henry. That bullseye had a surface area about eight times larger than a whiskey bottle. In fact, seeing a whiskey bottle at 600 yards is a bit of a stretch.

But that kind of exaggeration comes with the genre and most people don’t give it a second thought. Believing astounding and unsupported claims seems to part of our culture today.

I think if you are at all interested in Western fiction and are intrigued by the Fountain mystery, you will enjoy this read. You can speed read through the tedious sections.

“Hombrecito’s War” came out in 2005 and was a finalist for the 2006 Spur Award in the “best first novel” category. It is published by Llumina Press and lists at \$21.95 in paperback.



# Are You In Signature Plaza Yet?

At this time, the WSMR Historical Foundation has emplaced approximately 400 donor bricks in Signature Plaza at the entrance to the missile park at the WSMR museum. Most bear the donor's name but many were placed to honor other individuals or groups. It is a great gift idea for the person who has everything.

A simple donation of \$65 is all it takes to be honored with a three-line, 14 characters-per-line brick, lettered to your specification. Also, larger bricks are available.

Please use the order form below. Your brick will be delivered and placed in 45 to 60 days.

## ORDER FORM FOR STANDARD PERSONALIZED BRICKS

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 City, State, ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please enter your personalization text requirements in the form for your brick size provided below – one character per square and blanks count as characters. Contact Brick Committee personnel below for larger sizes and logo bricks.

### *Standard 4" x 8" Text Brick – A \$65 Donation is required*


### *Standard 8" x 8" Text Brick – A \$110 Donation is required*


\_\_\_ Enclosed is my tax-deductible donation check made payable to **White Sands Missile Range Historical Foundation**.

\_\_\_ Please charge the amount of my tax-deductible gift to: \_\_\_ VISA \_\_\_ Master Card

Card Number \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Total Amount: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**Return form to:** WSMR Historical Foundation, PO Box 171, White Sands Missile Range, NM 88002-0171. If you have questions contact the Foundation Brick Committee: Bob Lipinski (505) 678-1644 or Pam Vick (505) 522-4179.

**Hands Across History**  
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## **The Back Page**



**MOON OVER DUNES:** For decades this beautiful image of the national monument dunes and a full moon over the San Andres Mountains was in much demand from WSMR Audio-Visual. The image is actually a darkroom creation and was made by sandwiching two negatives together - one of the dunes and one of the moon - to make the final print.