



# Hands Across History

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



Volume VIII, Letter II

May 2012

## The Roswell Incident Anniversary Looms & You'll Never Guess Who Started The Myth

By Jim Eckles, Editor

This summer marks the 65th anniversary of the infamous Roswell incident. You think you know the basic story about how a rancher stumbled onto a crashed UFO with aliens onboard and then the Air Force rushed in to steal away the vehicle and bodies. But is that what really happened?

In my job in the White Sands Public Affairs Office, I was sometimes asked about Roswell, aliens being stored on the missile range and reverse engineering alien technology. Usually, no matter what I said, I was accused of not only covering up the facts of the case but of hiding the "true" facts as well – whatever "true" facts are. That always made me smile since no one associated with the U.S. Government has ever talked to me about these subjects.

I find this story of a crashed UFO at Roswell fascinating for two very different reasons. The first reason, and the one you are probably most interested in from a White Sands history point-of-view, is that most of the accounts, sightings, and testimonials are based on testing done by the military at the White Sands/Holloman complex from 1947 to 1959.

The second reason is the wonderful insight into human behavior the legend provides. We are more sophisticated now than we were in the 50s and better understand how unreliable humans are as witnesses and how easy it is for investigators to ask leading questions to get almost any response they want. Studies are showing that eyewitnesses are about as reliable as casting bones to read the future.

An excellent example of this came to light a few years ago when we had a rash of news stories across the country about children being tortured and sacrificed to Satan at several daycare centers. What an uproar.

Of course law enforcement found no children missing, no children molested, no bodies and no Satan worshippers running amok. It turned out that one or two individuals believed these stories and asked kids and their parents some leading questions about some suggestive "true" facts they might have been witness to in the past. Bingo, all of sudden people were swearing they had seen suspicious activities.

The Roswell story begins in June and July of 1947, less than two years after the end of World War II. It was a time when everyone was trying get on with their lives after the war, to start anew with families, homes, schools and jobs.

But life still had an edge to it. The Soviets were threatening and some people actually feared an invasion or, at least, waves of Russian bombers taking out northern cities.

In June 1947, a pilot near Mt. Rainer in Washington spotted a formation of "saucer-like" vehicles flying near his airplane. He reported his sighting and it made national news. There was much speculation as to what he saw. Some of the leading theories were clouds, secret Soviet aircraft spying on us, and secret U.S. airplanes being tested. The idea he saw alien spacecraft was not a leading theory.

Meanwhile in southern New Mexico, rancher W.W. Brazel found some bright materials scattered across one of the pastures of the J.B. Foster ranch that he managed. He didn't think much of it but gathered up much of the material he described in a July 9, 1947 article in the Roswell Daily Record, as "rubber strips, tinfoil, a rather tough paper and sticks."

In the article he described finding the material on June 14 and then bundled it together on July 4. The next day, he heard about the "flying disks" being talked about while he was in Corona, N.M.

He dutifully went to the county sheriff in Roswell and reported he might have found one of the disks. The sheriff

see [Project Mogul Balloons](#), page 3

### Foundation Sponsors Golf Tournament On June 15th

The White Sands Missile Range Historical Foundation will host a 4-man scramble golf tournament on June 15 at the missile range's golf course. Proceeds will go to support the White Sands Museum.

A shotgun start at 9 a.m. will be followed by lunch and an awards presentation - you'll have the afternoon free to play another round if you want. The cost is \$55 per person and covers green fee, cart and lunch. Also hole sponsorships are available.

Contact Doug Messer for information and registration at 575-430-1825 or [dmesser99@aol.com](mailto:dmesser99@aol.com). Registrations need to be in by June 4.

# Letters From Readers About The Old Days

## A Privileged Journey For Roger

Sirs,

Recently while wandering around the internet I came across your website and wondered if I might be eligible to be included in your mailing list. (EDITOR: he is) There is much time and distance between me and WSPG, but I have memories of being there.

I showed up at Alamogordo Air Force Base in mid 1947 as a freshly minted eighteen-year-old Army Signal Corps Communications Technician from the Signal Corps Engineering Laboratory, Ft. Monmouth, New Jersey. SCEL was there to provide telephone service between the Air Base, WSPG and Ft. Bliss, Texas. By the time I arrived the relay station at Alamo Lookout was up and running, so I missed the grunt work of hauling it to the mountain top. I did get to spend a year and a half, including two winters, on the mountain as one of a two-man team. We has a magnificent view of the entire Tularosa Basin - unfortunately the action was fifty miles away. We did set up a theodolite in an attempt to provide clues as to where the V-2s came down.

After my G.I. days I went to the college at Las Cruces and came back to WSPG for work during summer break, between semesters. Memory is a little hazy here, but I worked in a branch of BRL under Mike Kravantich. The highlight of that time was going up range to D7 to collect Corporal impact data.

Graduation took me to the Physical Science Laboratory of NMSU where I spent time in their playback station reducing flight data from WSPG launches. At the beginning of the International Geophysical Year a group from the NMSU PSL followed the Viking rocket to Cape Canaveral and became part of the Vanguard Project. After Vanguard came thirty odd years at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center.

So, what is the cosmic impact of all this? Not much actually, but I do sometimes get a bit carried away when considering the unlikely path of this lifetime and its brush with the making of twentieth century history. From a one-room country school house in a subsistence farming community,

I have stumbled, fallen or have been invited into one adult playpen after another. It has been a privileged journey and I treasure the memories of its beginning in your southern New Mexico community.

Sincerely,

Roger Ratliff

## Hank Witnessed Rockets Away

Dear Jim Eckles,

I enjoyed the article "Early Rockets & Missiles...by Kennedy" since I was there at the time and participated in many of the rocket launches manning the powerful MK-II telescopic tracker at "C" station for Werner Von Braun.

In response to your request of submitting something of interest "rattling around in my memory" the early flight tests of the MX-774 comes to my mind. On the first try the rocket remained on the launch pad with its rockets going full blast and never had one inch of lift off. At X-0 the announcer decided to use the alphabetic letters and when he got to Z said launch scrubbed.

On the second try the blockhouse was full of visiting "top brass." This time the MX-774 left the pad and immediately all the top brass ran out the single steel protective blockhouse door to witness the rocket in flight. When half the observers got out they got terrified as they saw the MX-774 coming right down in vertical orientation with its rocket motors still in full blast upon them. Needless to say there was pandemonium at this time as half the visitors wanted out and half wanted in - in the worst way. In this incident no one was injured as the rocket settled right back down and violently exploded on the launch pad. The consolidated Vultee engineers considered this a successful flight for at least the rocket took flight and remained in perfect vertical orientation.

Sincerely,

Hank Young

## 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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# Project Mogul Balloons — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

promptly contacted the Roswell Army Air Field and got Maj. Jesse Marcel involved. (From now on I'll attribute all Army Air Force activity to the "Air Force" since they broke away from the Army and became independent in 1947.)

Together, Brazel, Marcel and the sheriff went to the ranch to see the debris. The Roswell paper further described the debris, "When the debris was gathered up the tinfoil, paper, tape and sticks made a bundle about three feet long and 7 or 8 inches thick, while the rubber made a bundle about 18 or 20 inches long and about 8 inches thick. In all, he (Brazel) estimated, the entire lot would have weighed maybe five pounds." They put it in the backseat of one of the cars to drive it back to town. By the way, my bicycle weighs much more than five pounds and I have to carry my own life-support system.

Not exactly the Starship Enterprise. In fact, the article said they took the material and tried to reconstruct the "vehicle" as a kite but had no success.

The Roswell Air Force officials put the material on a plane and flew it to the Eighth Air Force headquarters in Fort Worth, Tex. There, according to another article in the July 9 issue of the Roswell Daily Record, Brig. Gen. Roger Romey, commander, explained the debris material was from a "harmless high-altitude weather balloon."

This is where the story gets interesting and where the UFO believers like to jump up and down, get red in the face and point out that the government lied. Yes, it did. It was just a little white lie – the kind we tell all the time to cover some sensitive activity that is exposed to the public.

In this case the material was not from a weather balloon but similar balloon material and associated debris from Project Mogul. The similarity in the kinds of materials and the amount was considered close enough that a weather balloon story would provide the necessary cover for the sensitive project. Not even government bureaucrats would be so dumb as to use such a cover story for finding an actual spacecraft with aliens onboard.

White Sands did the same thing just weeks before when a highly modified V-2, built up by the German scientists at Fort Bliss to test ramjet technology, went astray and crashed outside Juarez. The vehicle was called a Hermes II and was a sensitive project.

When it crashed it looked like a V-2 because it basically was one, just like a Mogul balloon train looked like a weather balloon with just more stuff. In the case of the V-2, we know from other impacts, they can hit the ground with the force of a 2,000-pound bomb so not much is left but little pieces. So the natural cover story released from White Sands was that a V-2 crashed in Mexico. It was simple and straightforward without getting deep into some X-Files-like lie.

Two years before that, the military did the same thing for the Trinity Site atomic bomb test on July 16, 1945. For this cover story, the news release stated a "remotely located ammunition magazine containing a considerable amount of

high explosives and pyrotechnics exploded." No extravagant claims, just a fairly reasonable explanation for a bright light and a big boom.

So what was Project Mogul? This is probably more interesting than the UFO story. It was an attempt by scientists to detect the test of the first Soviet atomic bomb whenever that might be. Everyone knew the Soviets were working on the bomb and U.S. officials were anxious to know when they would actually accomplish it. It would make a big difference in how America dealt with the Eastern Bloc, politically and militarily. In other words, the stakes were high.

Scientists looked around for all kinds of ways to detect the big explosion from the outside since it was unlikely any Western observers would get an invitation to the test. One idea seemed like it had some possibilities and is still being pursued by scientists today.

During the war, scientists learned they could "hear" loud noises like explosions through hundreds if not thousands of miles of water. Somebody said, "why not listen in a less dense fluid like the upper atmosphere and see if we can 'hear' that bomb test." Today the research is called infrasound and experts find they can detect the non-audible, low frequency sound waves created by volcanoes and nuclear explosions half a world away.

So the Air Force set about making it happen. Unfortunately they greatly lacked the technology we have today to really accomplish it. But they marshaled on.

They devised ways to string a batch of weather balloons together and from them dangle radar reflectors (foil) for tracking and a sensitive microphone to gather sound. The foil reflectors were used on the early balloon launches in June 1947 because they didn't want to use radiosondes yet. They were going to depend on White Sands Proving Ground radars to track the balloons.

The idea was to get the balloon train up into a level of the atmosphere where it could stay suspended for days if not a week or two at a time. And, of course, not blow to Sweden on some river of fast moving air.

These things, like the many research balloon launches later, when seen shining in the later afternoon or early morning sun generated UFO reports all by themselves. The Mogul balloons were sometimes reported as UFOs in formation because there were several balloons uniformly spaced out on one line.

Later, other military groups took the balloon idea further hoping to put up balloons with spy cameras to provide look down photographs. This, of course, was years before U-2 planes and satellites, so intelligence folks were scratching for any advantage they could find.

Mogul balloon trains were launched in June 1947 from Holloman and proved not very unsuccessful. They blew all over the place and strong winds and storms brought them down prematurely.

**see Credit John Stapp, page 4**

# Credit John Stapp — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

From published interviews with some of the personnel associated with Project Mogul, we know all the material found by Brazel northwest of Roswell matches up perfectly with what went into their research balloons. In fact, the balloon train launched on June 4, 1947 from Holloman was never accounted for and used the foil reflectors. Plus, it fits the timeframe for Brazel's discovery.

After the Air Force announced that Brazel had found a weather balloon, the whole thing pretty much died away - died away for decades! I mean it was out of sight. No one said anything about aliens and Roswell until the late 1970s and beyond - 30 years after the fact. So, you might ask, "where did the story about a big spacecraft, aliens and a military recovery come from?"

This is where another interesting military project associated with the Holloman/White Sands complex comes dramatically into play. It is safe to say this part of the legend comes mostly from the work of Air Force Colonel John Stapp, A plane crash and a few other events probably contributed but Stapp's work in the 1950s takes center stage.

Some people living in the Alamogordo area know a little about Stapp because they remember he rode one of the rocket-propelled sleds at Holloman to a speed of 632 miles per hour on Dec. 10, 1954. It put him on the cover of Time Magazine as he was declared the "fastest man on earth." But today most people have no idea what this hero did.

In 1946 Dr. John Stapp, with the Army's Air Forces Medical Corps, was assigned to the aeromedical laboratory at Wright Field in Ohio. In addition to medicine, Stapp became an expert in biophysics. His interest took him to Muroc Field in California.



**Colonel John Stapp**

crash, the human body flies all over the place and hits all kinds of hard objects. This bashing and gashing of soft tissues was often fatal.

This led to looking at ways to perfect aircraft crewmembers' safety harnesses so the occupants stayed in one

Stapp was initially interested in why some pilots died in plane crashes and some didn't. In scientific terms it meant finding out what happens to humans at high rates of acceleration and deceleration.

One obvious observation was that if not properly restrained in a

place during a "rapid deceleration." For some of his early testing of restraint systems, Stapp himself rode sleds on a track at Muroc. On this track he was once accelerated to 150 miles per hour and then stopped in just 19 feet. He experienced forces 35 times greater than gravity or 35 Gs.

At the time he remarked the leading experts thought humans couldn't survive 18 Gs and yet he was walking proof that if properly restrained they could easily survive twice that.

At the same time, the Air Force was moving to jet aircraft and then to supersonic aircraft. The survival game was elevated many steps as the speeds and altitudes were suddenly breathtaking.

Stapp moved to Holloman after more than four years in California. He and his fellow researchers had new questions to answer. Can a pilot survive an explosive ejection seat exit? What happens when the ejected pilot hits the airstream outside the cockpit? What should said pilot be wearing? Does it need to be pressurized? What kind of breathing system should be on board these high flying airplanes? What kind of parachutes will work at both low and high altitudes? And on and on.

To find answers to these and many other questions Stapp led an extensive set of investigative tests during the 1950s. This is why he rode the sled at Holloman to a supersonic speed followed by an abrupt stop. He wanted to show that pilots just might be able to eject from planes travelling faster than the speed of sound.

***AND THIS TOO -- Being the bright person he was, Stapp immediately saw that restraining the human body in a car crash would prevent the same kind of injuries suffered in a plane wreck. Heads bashing against metal dashboards and windows while chests were crushed on steering wheels could be minimized with seatbelts. So Stapp set about, in the 1950s, to demonstrate to police and safety officials what kind of forces were at work in car crashes. He offered rides on a simple little seat that slid down a short ramp and was stopped abruptly. A seat belt kept the rider from flying off the end. It was a simple and effective demonstration of how much energy is involved in a very, very low-speed crash. At one point the Air Force objected to his promotion of restraints in cars saying it was outside their scope of work. Stapp won continued support for the program when he pointed out more Air Force pilots were killed in car wrecks than in plane crashes. In 1966, after overcoming the objections of the car companies and many other powerful lobbies, Stapp got to see the Federal law signed mandating seatbelts in automobiles.***

Most of the time Stapp didn't use humans as guinea pigs for his tests. For the dangerous stuff he used animals and dummies. In fact, Stapp revolutionized the science of using dummies in this kind of research.

**see Kittinger's Record, page 5**

# Kittinger's Record —

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

Early dummies used to test parachutes weren't much more than sandbags tied together to have the general shape of a human. Stapp demanded much more realistic subjects and came up with the requirements for anthropomorphic dummies. These dummies were much more realistic, resembling men in weight and articulation. They had heads, faces, hands, the whole package because Stapp wanted them to wear helmets, oxygen masks, goggles, flight suits complete with gloves, etc. etc.

He then went about flinging these dummies from the rocket sleds to test ejection seats and the parachute mechanism. To get high altitude data, he launched dozens of big balloons carrying dummies to be ejected or dropped from various heights.

The dummies were carried to altitudes from 30,000 feet to 98,000 feet under balloons. Sometimes they were housed in gondolas and some times they were simply hung from racks hanging from the balloon. Instruments such as accelerometers, pressure gauges and cameras were used to collect data.

Most of the balloon launches took place from Holloman but other New Mexico launch locations included White Sands Proving Ground, Hatch, Truth or Consequences, Nutt, Lake Valley and Ft. Craig. The idea was to have them land on White Sands for fast and easy recovery but that was rare. Instead Stapp's crews chased balloon payloads all over southern New Mexico.

The caravan of vehicles used to chase down the balloons was fairly extensive. To handle the dummies, and several times there were many, an old military ambulance was used. It was convenient to go out into the desert, put the dummies into body bags to keep the arms and legs from dangling all over the place, put each one on a stretcher and then load the stretchers onto racks in the ambulance.

Accompanying the group would be trucks for personnel, recovery equipment like a wrecker or some sort of crane to lift the payload onto a big truck, and a truck to collect all the balloon material. The polyethylene balloons Stapp used could carry hundreds and thousands of pounds of payload and could be inflated to millions of cubic feet. They were huge. Clean-up a major part of the mission.

The point here is the Air Force was able to track their balloons and sent a convoy of vehicles out quickly to run down each one, recover the equipment and valuable data, and smooth relations with any rancher or farmer who was distressed at having his property trampled. To maintain positive relationships with ranchers, Air Force personnel usually sought the cooperation of the families involved and tried to clean up after themselves so little trace was left.

Some UFO believers claim that when the alien spacecraft crashed, local civilians always found the Air Force already on the spot, cleaning up before they could get to it. If you have worked for the military as long as I have in southern N.M., you know a military unit couldn't have been

mustered, the object found and recovery started in just a few hours unless the event had a pre-planned impact area with everyone assembled and waiting to go. Could "witnesses" be remembering Stapp's operations?

According to the Air Force, in their report "The Roswell Report: Case Closed," Stapp's team launched 43 high-altitude balloons carrying 67 of Stapp's dummies between June 1954 and February 1959.

At the end of the decade Stapp upped the stakes by putting some of the new fangled clothing and innovations to more realistic tests. He decked out humans in the stuff and had them ride in gondolas suspended below balloons.

The first three tests were dubbed "Project Man High" and consisted of "pilots" riding balloons to altitudes from 96,000 feet to 101,500 feet. They then descended with the balloons. The pilots were: Capt. Joe Kittinger, Lt. Col. David Simons and 1st. Lt. Clifton McClure.

Next Stapp went all in with a series of three flights where Kittinger actually jumped from his gondola to test the new parachute systems. These were the legendary Project



**Captain Joe Kittinger**

Excelsior tests.

Or maybe they are not so legendary. It could be that all the publicity surrounding UFOs has buried Kittinger's accomplishments.

On November 16, 1959 Kittinger jumped from an altitude

of 76,400 feet.

Unfortunately his stabilizer parachute deployed early, wrapped around his neck and rendered him unconscious. He missed the show as his main chute had to deploy automatically to deliver him safety to terra firma.

The next jump was on Dec. 11, 1959 with Kittinger jumping from 74,700 feet. He free-fell for 55,000 feet (that's just over 10 miles) before opening his parachute for a safe landing on White Sands.

His final flight was on Aug. 16, 1960 when the balloon reached an altitude of 102,800 feet – 19.4 miles above White Sands Missile Range. After he jumped he dropped like a rock for 4 minutes and 36 seconds before triggering his parachute.

The altitude Kittinger reached in the balloon, the altitude for his jump and the length of his free-fall are all still

**see Crash Victims Burned, page 6**

# Crash Victims Burned — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

world records. Oh, by the way, he reached a speed during free-fall of just over 600 miles per hour.

I once heard Kittinger say he did not experience that “faster than a speeding bullet” speed. There was no air rushing past and he was so far up, the cloud cover below did not rush up at him as he approached. It was quite leisurely until he got much closer to the ground.

Kittinger is still justifiably famous because of that jump. Over the years news and documentary people have interviewed him about his exploits. Some have brought Kittinger back to New Mexico so he could be interviewed at Holloman and on the spot he touched down on the White Sands.

Debbie Bingham, from Public Affairs, coordinated these visits and helped Kittinger find the spot. Basically it was an impossible task with no landmarks out in the desert plus Kittinger was in no condition to notice at the time. So, the two of them drove out and found a likely spot in the middle of nowhere but very close to a good road, easy to get to, and called it “the spot.” From then on, they always took crews to the same area for interviews.

by the impact and incinerated in the resulting fuel fire. The bodies were moved back to Walker for autopsy.

Beginning in the late 1970s and through the 80s, UFO researchers looked at the Roswell incident trying to prove aliens actually crashed there. There were no records of alien spacecraft so they called for help. They advertised in the local papers asking for people to come forward who might have seen the Air Force working at the spacecraft crash site, who might have seen them extracting the alien bodies, who might have seen them hauling the debris away, etc.

A few people did come forward with rather vague stories about seeing something along the lines of what was suggested by the investigators. Most of them were unsure or vague about the actual dates because this was decades after the event.

It turns out these witnesses usually gave very nice descriptions of Stapp’s crews and vehicles out in the countryside recovering their equipment. When they described the alien bodies they saw, they were almost perfect matches with Stapp’s dummies down to the grey color and webbed fingers.

The dummy designers knew the dummies couldn’t

have individual fingers because they would be too fragile and would just break on most impacts. So they stuck the fingers together to provide needed strength.

In another case a civilian witness described the alien bodies arriving at a morgue in a burned condition and that base officials performed autopsies on them. He complained about the smell. Also, he said an officer told him to mind his own business.

Most folks assume the witness saw the aircrew from the KC-97 crash being

brought in – many of the victims were charred beyond recognition and everything was soaked in jet fuel. The smell must have been horrible.

As for the Air Force officer telling the civilian to go away, it seems a reasonable reaction when he had just lost 11 of his mates in a terrible crash. He might have been a tad upset. That he and the other military personnel would close ranks against the outside world is perfectly normal.

see Reality, page 7



**Two of Stapp’s anthropomorphic dummies (left) are ready to go as the balloon is inflated.**

So, what does all this great work done in the 50s around White Sands have to do with the Roswell incident? Well, just about everything.

But first I have to mention an incident that probably adds fodder to the Roswell story. On June 26, 1956 a fully fueled KC-97G aircraft took off from Walker AFB (Roswell) on a refueling training mission. Just four minutes after take-off there was a propeller failure with the blade slicing into one of the fuel tanks. The plane burst into flame and crashed about nine miles from the base. All 11 personnel were killed

## Reality — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

This is a big myth that keeps getting bigger. At this point it seems rather pointless to go chasing down all the variables and try to explain every niggling little detail. Many believers want to argue far-flung details or accounts that are way down the line from the originating event. It is a case of asking the wrong question.

If the original event can't be proven as real, then all the rest is nothing but smoke and mirrors, rumors and myth, urban legend and outright lies. There is no evidence that an alien spacecraft crashed at Roswell or aliens ever existed.

In the end you are left with a choice. One, you can believe a series of fantastic stories: aliens traveled across the galaxy and managed to crash at Roswell; the military somehow detected it and rushed to the site to retrieve the bodies before anyone else got there; the government has managed to keep it all secret and even reverse-engineered this super-duper technology to create stealth bombers, anti-gravity machines etc.

Some even claim the transistor is the result of alien technology. There is a problem with such a claim. The men who received the Nobel Prize in Physics for the first transistor concluded their work in 1947.

Two, you can believe the story that some really neat and quite real (with "true facts") military research was being done at Holloman/White Sands and was misremembered years later as some devious UFO cover-up activity as suggested by investigators trying to prime the pump. Out of the dozens of people who witnessed Air Force recovery activities for Stapp's projects, it only took one or two to jumble the details in their memories.

As you read this, do you remember exactly what you were doing 25 years ago this month? Not 23 years ago and not July or January, but 25 years ago today? I certainly can't remember – I do know it's not my birthday and I'm pretty sure it's not my wedding anniversary. At least I hope not.

## Museum Helps Film Maker

Darren Court, White Sands Museum Director, announced at a recent Foundation board of directors meeting, he was assisting a documentary film crew on a project called "Letter from Cloudcroft." They have already filmed out at Launch Complex 33.

In 1946, a young Jewish engineer from New York named Sanford Hess was assigned to work at Fort Bliss and White Sands after completing his Army basic training. While he served in the Army, young Hess sent letters home about his experiences that included working with the German scientists on the V-2 rocket.

In one letter Hess described watching a V-2 launch at White Sands. In another he wrote, "I am working with a Dr. Schilling, from Berlin. He is about 35 and a very likable fellow with a good command of English. He has a bachelor's degree, masters and his doctorate from the University of Berlin. In 1940 he went to Peenemünde, the heart of the

German research. By the end of the war he was in charge of all testing."

After his death in 1989, his film maker daughter, Melinda Hess, discovered the letters and found one that had never been opened. It was postmarked from Cloudcroft.

The daughter has said she knew very little about her father's time in the Army. The letters opened up a whole new picture of him especially the idea of a Jew working with the Germans.

She has decided to make a documentary film about her father's experiences using the letters as a baseline. According to her website, the history of the times will be incorporated to provide context for the letters.

## Pioneer Group Notice

Austin Vick would like to remind all White Sands Pioneer Group members that their dues are due. Funding is required to split the cost of publishing this newsletter with the White Sands Historical Foundation.

Also, Austin is looking for just one or two people willing to step in and run the Pioneer Group. The duties are not extensive and can easily be done from most anywhere in the country.

## New Record This Summer?

On March 15 this year, "Fearless Felix" Baumgartner jumped from a balloon at an altitude of 71,581 feet above the New Mexico desert near Roswell. The jump took just over 8 minutes during which he free fell for close to 4 minutes and reached a speed of 364 miles per hour.

This jump was preparatory for his attempt later this summer to break Joe Kittinger's record jump from 102,000 feet back in 1960. For the record-breaking jump, Baumgartner hopes to reach an altitude of 120,000 feet using a helium-filled balloon to get him to altitude.

According to the team's website, Baumgartner has another jump from 90,000 feet planned before he tries for Kittinger's record.

Baumgartner can probably be described as a daredevil as he has over 2,500 jumps from planes and helicopters as well as landmarks and buildings. He has jumped from the huge Christ the Redeemer statue in Rio de Janeiro and has even jumped into a 620-foot-deep cave opening.

His attempt has attracted NASA's attention and support as his team has designed a lighter and more flexible "space-suit" to protect him during his ups and downs.

The project is called Red Bull Stratos. It is sponsored by the Red Bull energy drink maker and "stratos" is a reference to the stratosphere.

## Foundation To Cosponsor

Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce Business After Hours for July 26 will be co-hosted by the Encanto Hotel and the WSMR Historical Foundation. The festivities will be 5:30-7:30 p.m. to include hors d'oeuvres and a drink.

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



**This is a quasi-famous photo of Major Jesse Marcel from the Roswell Air Base holding some of the debris discovered by W.W. Brazel near Roswell in 1947. The photo is poor quality because I had to steal it from one of the dozens and dozens of websites that have used it. He is holding part of one of the foil reflectors that hung down and provided the reflective surface needed for White Sands radar to track the Mogul balloon train.**