Next WSMR Hall of Famer Stolen From Holloman In 1947

By Jim Eckles, HOF 2013

In August 1947, 23-year-old Placido Trujillo drove down to southern New Mexico from his hometown of Belen, NM, on his way to a new job as a skilled machinist at the Alamogordo Air Field, now called Holloman Air Force Base. Never having been to the area, Trujillo was unsure where to go so he pulled into White Sands Proving Ground, just over the Organ Mountains east of Las Cruces.

According to Trujillo’s son John, officials at White Sands didn’t tell him of his mistake until they had looked at his papers, interviewed him and offered him a position in the new proving ground’s machine shop. He accepted and the Army effectively stole a Hall of Famer from the Air Force.

On Sept. 28, at 10 a.m., Trujillo will be the 54th former WSMRite inducted into the White Sands Missile Range Hall of Fame. The ceremony will take place at the missile range’s Museum.

Interestingly, this is not the only Hall of Fame member to come to White Sands under rather seren-

See Early Employees Were Pioneers, page 3
White Sands Museum Update w/Darren Court, Director

It’s been busy lately here at the WSMR Museum. Our numbers for the year are on track to be approximately 34,000 visitors. Again, this is almost all civilian visitors who might have their only contact with the Army be their visit to the installation for the museum.

We will be attending the kick-off meeting for the 2019 Las Cruces Space Festival this week. This is the second year for this new annual event and allows the museum to interact with many thousands of visitors in downtown Las Cruces. We are also preparing for the second annual Border Regional Archives Group Bazaar in October. This event will be held in El Paso, this year and encompass New Mexico, Texas, and Chihuahua, Mexico as archives from throughout the area hold a one-day show and symposium highlighting our local history and what we offer the public. This is a well-attended event and we expect several thousand visitors.

We have almost completed our exhibit for the installation headquarters building giving a brief overview of the installation’s history. This was a project requested by the post CSM and follows the approved museum storyline. We are currently trying to tell at least a bit of the installation’s history wherever we can, and what better place than Building 100!

Missile Park has undergone numerous upgrades and changes this year. We have added/replaced signage for the Lacrosse, Rocket Test Sled, F-4, QH-50 drone, BQM-34 target drone, Cardinal target drone, “Tactical” Redstone rocket, and have received – but not yet installed – signage for the Redhead/Roadrunner target drone, MLRS, and Little John rocket.

New macro artifacts in the park include a Hermes 1A rocket and a Lacrosse missile on its transporter/launcher. We are currently awaiting a final cost estimate from USACE and the local contractor and will construct pads, move, and provide conservation and new paint for an Aerobee 170 research rocket, Aerobee 350 research rocket, Little John missile and launcher, Redhead/Roadrunner target drone and BQM-34 target drone with a stainless steel body used in laser targeting testing.

In July, Mr. Court accompanied the Public Affairs Office as the Subject Matter Expert (SME) as they conducted a visit for WSMR employees to Trinity Site and the Schmidt/McDonald ranch house – site of the first atomic bomb test in 1945. This was a popular event and will become a partnership as it allows the museum to interact to a greater degree with PAO and the curator to better explain the importance and role of the Army in the development of this technology. We anticipate doing this at least quarterly.

Late summer is typically a slow time for tours and outreach but as we look toward the fall, a number of things are scheduled for September. On the 8th, museum volunteer Gerry Veara will take a group from the Las Cruces Lions Club up for a tour of the Hembrillo Battlefield. This was recently publicized in local media and we have received numerous requests for civilian and veterans groups for the tour/staff ride.

We also have three tours scheduled for groups on coach tours traveling through the area, as well as providing the SME at Trinity Site for visits from students from the Defense Nuclear Weapons School in Albuquerque and the School of Advanced Nuclear Deterrence Studies at Maxwell AFB, AL. We also received national coverage when C-SPAN aired a 17 minute special about the museum as part of their “American History” TV series:

https://www.c-span.org/video/?448721-1/white-sands-missile-range

We continue to prepare for both the transition to

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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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Early Employees Were Pioneers —— CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Dipitous conditions. Austin Vick was a 1950 NMSU graduate and was getting gas in Las Cruces for the drive up north for his first job when fate changed his path.

The gas station owner asked Vick where he was going and Vick explained moving north. The owner told Vick that White Sands Proving Ground was hiring and he might want to check with the base before he left. It was a Saturday so the owner sent Vick to his neighbor’s house. The neighbor worked in the White Sands personnel office.

Vick knocked on the door, showed his degree and work experience, was interviewed and then hired on the spot. Vick went on to a Hall of Fame career at White Sands and was inducted in 2001. In fact, he helped Maj. Gen. Duard Ball establish the Hall of Fame in 1980.

The Hall of Fame they created was designed to recognize civilians and military personnel who make lasting contributions to White Sands Missile Range. Ball himself was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1989.

Arriving in 1947, Trujillo was one of the true White Sands pioneers as he started work when there were very few permanent buildings yet and the German V-2 rockets were being launched in front of reporters and photographers from the national news media. His career ran until he retired in 1978.

He started when the workforce was inventing the very idea of a missile test facility. None existed before White Sands. Employees needed to be able to create products and systems without much guidance. They had to work together and pool their expertise to bring together the many pieces that make up the largest test range in the United States.

Trujillo was a machinist who could mechanically visualize the needed part for a missile or a tracking system, then design it and finish it by creating the precision parts — all with minimal plans or detailed specifications.

Eventually, he proved himself an excellent manager. At the end of his career he was in charge of all buildings and grounds with more than 200 employees. On a test range covering 3,200 square miles he had a lot of ground to cover.

Trujillo was born on July 16, 1924 in Belen, NM and graduated from high school there. In 1943 he went to the Puget Sound Navy yard to train as a “shipfitter.” Afterward he returned to New Mexico expecting to be assigned to a Navy unit during World War II. The local

See Trujillo Helped Improve V-2s, page 4
This photo ran in the April 14, 1961 issue of the
Wind and Sand newspaper. Optical Engineer William Russell, on the right, is demonstrating the precision fit between a lens and a cinetheodolite. Trujillo, on the left, and his team fabricated the interface that made the instrument possible.

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and go off saying things in German. Unbeknownst to von Braun, one of the men spoke German and later translated the famous scientist’s remarks. Apparently von Braun didn’t care for the American way of doing things and was often hurling insults at the men.

In addition to making parts and pieces for the 60-plus V-2s fired at White Sands, the shop was crucial to making photographic tracking telescopes work. Askania cinetheodolites arrived at White Sands along with the V-2 rocket parts. These tracking instruments were essential in collecting data to be used in evaluating the performance of not only the V-2s but all the other missile systems eventually tested at White Sands. The machine shop made one-of-a-kind parts for them but also built whole telescopes designed by the White Sands engineers.

In an article in the April 14, 1961 issue of the White Sands newspaper – the Wind and Sand – Bill Mimmack, the Development Section Chief of the Range Instrumentation Development Division, said, “White Sands’ position as the best instrumented missile range in the Free World owes much to the ability of these machinists to turn our thoughts into the real thing.”

The article goes on to explain how diverse the shop was. It stated, “Imagine a jeweler repairing a tiny wristwatch, the next rebuilding a Diesel engine … shop activity runs the gamut of delicate instrument repair and modification to construction of a mobile missile launcher.”

The same article singles out Trujillo for fashioning “an instrument-rigged nosecone for one of the early experiments with captured V-2 missiles.” Also, he recommended changes to V-2 fuel valves that improved the motor’s performance.

Trujillo must have been pretty good because he was sent to Florida to assist at Cape Canaveral on a couple of V-2 launches.

And in those days it was difficult to stand out in his huge organization. He was part of the Installation Engineering Office which had 600+ civilian and military personnel. His section was part of the Construction and Maintenance Division which accounted for half of that overall organization.

The post newspaper said “these workers range from clerks and typists to engineers, and from laborers and helpers to journeymen electricians, carpenters, welders, machinists, sheet metal fabricators, plumbers and mechanics. There are power plant operators, paint-
He Even Helped Build The Float —— CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

...ers, cabinet makers, insect and rodent exterminators, garbage collectors, road maintenance crews, machine and instrument technicians, landscape artists, engravers, punch press operators, designers, draftsmen and metal workers.”

So, in 1956, Trujillo was foreman of the Precision Machine Shop, part of the Mechanical Branch. He was “responsible for most of the post’s prototype work such as machined modifications and/or repair on such things as cameras, recording devices and smaller portable instruments.”

Trujillo’s nomination package includes a long list of projects he was involved in for which he received personal commendations. It includes construction of the T-153 and T-154 telescopes, mechanization of camera mounts, work needed for the live broadcast of missile shots from White Sands for the “Wide, Wide World” television show in March 1957, modification of the 500K Static Test Stand, and the Contraves Cinetheodolite Mount Project.

Letters of commendation for Trujillo often cited his attitude which many said reflected on his character. The Atmospheric Sciences Lab, after placing their laser research domes on two mountaintops (see Hands Across History newsletter, May 2018 for story), said Trujillo’s “attitude, enthusiasm and attention to detail” contributed to successfully constructing the two sites.

New Gallery Construction Soon? —— CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Being innovative, he excelled at some odd jobs as well. He received a commendation for preparing the range’s float for the Sun Carnival Parade in 1974. The float was then used extensively in other communities - Las Cruces, TorC, Deming and Alamogordo. He was praised for his volunteer work in constructing a jungle gym for the children’s center. Also, he was cited for designing and building a bump gate for an uprange location.

Eventually he was promoted to machinist foreman supervising 12 employees. His responsibilities grew as the years passed because of his common sense approach to work and his ability to bring people together to accomplish each task. His final position was as Division Chief of Building and Grounds where he was responsible for over 200 people. Somehow the last position got him involved in the introduction of oryx on the missile range. As an avid hunter and hiker, Trujillo enjoyed having the African antelope roaming the range.

Trujillo was married to Sally Sanchez Trujillo for 65 years. Both are now deceased. They had six children and there are many grandchildren and great grandchildren. Some family members are expected to be on hand to accept the award at the ceremony. There is no luncheon.

CMH and the construction of a new gallery. Some of you may be unaware, but the museum is transitioning away from local and IMCOM control to the US Army Center of Military History at Ft. McNair, Washington, DC. This will basically make us a tenant organization of WSMR, with basic support from the installation but everything else from CMH. It’s a big step and we have great hope for better, more timely, support of our mission and programs moving into the future.

The museum proffer addendum for construction of our new exhibit gallery is expected to be approved soon. Once we receive notification, the historical foundation will provide the additional funding and we will then schedule a groundbreaking ceremony and move forward from there.

As always, this is YOUR museum, support it!
Museum Archive Receives NM Recognition

By Adriana Salas de Santiago
WSMR Public Affairs Office

The State of New Mexico Cultural Properties Review Committee awarded White Sands Missile Range with the Heritage Organization Award during the 2018 Heritage Preservation Award ceremony in Santa Fe in May. The prestigious award is presented annually and recognizes organizations for their significant contributions to historic preservation in New Mexico.

The Cultural Resource Program at WSMR was recognized for their historic context development, describing the chronological development of sites such as the Small Missile Range, multiple launch complexes and instrumentation sites within the installation.

“Out of all of the Department of Defense, Department of Education and the Parks Services, these WSMR reports are by far the best historic contexts I’ve seen,” said State Historic Preservation Officer Jeff Pappas. “This is the biggest commitment to research we’ve seen in quite a few years.”

Behind a lot of this research at White Sands has been the Museum Archives where much of the needed documentation is now stored.

The SHPO award recognizes archaeologist Bill Godby, two contracting firms and the WSMR Museum Archives, for their multi-year effort of creating historic contexts to support National Register evaluations throughout WSMR. Historical Architects and archaeologists from Epsilon System Solutions, Inc. and Ama Terra Environmental Inc. are responsible for writing the report. Godby said this was a team effort on all fronts, and he is very proud of the quality of work produced by both companies.

Godby also noted the role of the WSMR Museum Archives volunteer staff who are former WSMR employees. They are led by volunteer Debbie Walters. “It’s a complicated process, a story that can’t be told unless you have the information,” Godby said.

The team has written contexts for Green River Test Site, their first complex historic context report, the Small Missile Range and multiple launch complexes. The team is currently finishing the first comprehensive context for the LC-33, home of the V-2 and Nike rockets. “We give a broad history of what happened, to include the initial development of an area, to documenting all the missions and projects it supported,” Godby said. “Generally we try to write up to the present, making the context a very comprehensive history.”

This is the 36th award ceremony for SHPO. Pappas said his staff chooses the award recipients, with only seven awards presented per year, in eight different categories. “Basically we just recognize great work in historical preservation and the development of historical resources,” Pappas said. “To get the award is really quite a big deal.”

WSMR Environmental Division Chief Brian Knight said the nomination for the award was unique in that the SHPO National Register Coordinator Steven Moffson, was the one who nominated Godby and his team for the award.

Godby said historical context development for archaeology at WSMR is great and has been going on for over 30 years, but not the same for the built environment. “It’s never been done to this extent,” Godby said. “We’re really putting our efforts toward something that will support the future development of WSMR.”

See Rare Award For Military, page 6
The historic context reports not only provide a window to the history of the built environment, but it also directly supports the Facilities Reduction Program by allowing WSMR missions to more readily move forward with necessary changes to their facilities, while meeting requirements of the National Historic Preservation Act. For example, the historical context provided for Launch Complex 35 allowed the Navy to make modifications to support the arrival of a new system.

The idea to focus intensely on developing historic contexts for the built environment came about from a visit Pappas made to the installation shortly after his governor appointed position as State Historic Preservation Officer. During the visit Godby said he and Pappas agreed on a direction for the built environment, noting “At that point we both agreed that historic context development was the most important thing we needed to be doing.”

This is not the first prestigious award Godby and his team received. In 2015 they were awarded the Secretary of the Army Award for Cultural Resources and in 2016 they were awarded the Secretary of Defense Award for Cultural Resources.

“Our goal is to try to balance and support testing while preserving cultural resources,” Knight said. “That’s the most challenging thing for a military organization, we want to preserve our historic resources and we also want to maximize mission assets.”

Normally the award recipients are tribal governments, university organizations or non-profit groups. It is rare for a military installation to win the award. In 2008 Knight and his team at Fort Bliss, Texas, at the time, received the award for an excavation of a prehistoric pueblo.

“Bill has been really instrumental.” Knight said. “One of the hardest things there is to do, especially at WSMR, with such a complicated history, is to capture and research data. They’ve been able to do that and really tell the story of WSMR.” Godby said he intends to have the reports available online at WSMRHISTORIC.COM and will make them available for viewing at the WSMR Museum Archives on base.
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Here is a photo you don’t see much. This is Maj. Gen. Leslie Groves, head of the Manhattan Project, in the crater at Trinity Site during the Sept. 1945 news media visit. What makes it great is that all four stumps to the 100-foot steel tower on which the bomb was placed for explosion are visible. Also, there is a clear view across the low part of the crater to the eastern lip. One of the stumps is still partially exposed today. Next Trinity Site open house is Oct. 6.