



Hands Across History



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

Volume V, Letter IV

November 2009

McDonald's Stand Opened Rancher Debate

By Col. Dan Duggan, USA (ret)

It was Wednesday, October 13, 1982 and a typical, beautiful fall day at White Sands Missile Range. The commanding general, Maj. Gen. Fulwyler, was on a speaking engagement in Idaho and the acting commander, Col. Dan Duggan, was looking forward to a typically quiet day with the boss out of town. Maybe there would be an opportunity later for some quail scouting time.

Jump forward to the Oct. 14 headlines in the local newspapers and you would discover that my Wednesday didn't turn out to be a "typical quiet day." The headlines read: "RANCHER RETAKES HOME ON THE RANGE: Armed Rancher Retakes, Fortifies Home On The Range."

The Albuquerque Journal went on to say, "Armed with two rifles and an old pistol, an 81-year old rancher and his niece slipped across the boundary into White Sands Missile Range at dawn Wednesday, setting up occupancy in the isolated house from which he was evicted 40 years ago."

This was the basic situation that was reported by Dale Green, Up Range Coordinator, to the command group at about 1145 hours - just in time to ruin the lunch hour.

White Sands range rider Tom Dayberry, who was on location, reported that initial contact indicated that Mr. Dave McDonald (81), his niece Ms. Mary McDonald (32), and two Albuquerque Journal reporters were at the ranch site. Mary McDonald, armed with a .30-30 rifle, appeared to be the initial spokesperson for the group.

In addition they had posted the area with homemade signs stating "Road Closed to the U.S. Army -- Deeded Land, No Trespassing."

I asked Dale to have everyone back off an appropriate distance (out of rifle range) and set up surveillance until we could assess the situation. I immediately advised General Fulwyler in Idaho. I distinctly remembering his saying "I don't want any kind of confrontation with any of the 'visitors'" and then he immediately flew back to assume command of the range.

Meanwhile, as still acting commander, I went to Station by helicopter, accompanied by Maj. Dave Olmstead and Jim Eckles from Public Affairs, the command sergeant major, and a representative from the Staff Judge Advocate's office.



Rancher Dave McDonald escorted by Debbie Bingham from Public Affairs during a Trinity Site open house. Dave sometimes showed up at the open houses and asked for permission to visit his old place.

Historical Foundation Annual Members Meeting 9:30 a.m. / November 18 In The WSMR Museum

Please attend the annual meeting so you can vote on the candidates for the current empty board seats. We'll even provide cookies. Also, it will be a great time to look around the Museum to see the new exhibits and see if you can envision how the new layout will work.

see McDonald Not Impressed page 6

Museum Director Says Museum Layout To Be Redesigned

By Darren Court, Director
WSMR Museum

Things are moving along quite well here at the WSMR museum, and thank you all for your continued support. We are beginning a two-year project to redesign the museum gallery and re-write the exhibits.



As many of you are aware, there is very little actual interpretation in the exhibits so we hope to correct this. Over the next few years we plan on installing temporary walls as a means of guiding visitors through a more chronological exhibit of WSMR's unique history. At the same time we will be expanding the storyline to include a bit more of the pre-Army history of the range.

The main gallery will contain this chronology, beginning with the establishment of the range and the Tiny Tim booster and traveling all the way to the arrival and deployment of the 2nd Engineers. The rooms off the gallery will remain largely the same, with expanded exhibits on the Navy, Air Force, and NASA at WSMR. In addition, we hope to do more social history, and show what daily life has been like for those thousands who have made this place home.

One room will be strictly temporary exhibits, which we hope to develop one or two of each year. Our hope is that a guest can visit every year and see something new each time.

There are a few recent collection items of note. We finally have the Manhattan Project uniform and items donated by Jonah Blankenship, of Indianapolis, on permanent exhibit in the Trinity Site room and have been rewriting all of the signage and labels for that room.

We also are busy researching and writing for Bataan. The exhibit of Ben Steele paintings has been a remarkable success and we are hoping to do more than just our one small case for a Bataan exhibit. To that end – we need your stuff! If you have any documents, photos, journals, (copies would suffice!) or even artifacts relating to Bataan, please consider donating them. One item we will soon receive is a WW2

Japanese rifle with bayonet, which will certainly make a huge impact upon visitors when it goes on display.

Another donation which we are trying to get consists of items from one of the German Rocket Team members. A number of personal items, as well as books and other materials, might be coming to the museum and will be used to more fully tell the story of at least this one German rocket scientist. If we successfully acquire these items, we will tell you more about them in a future issue.

Our educational programs continue to grow and expand, and Callean Holly has done a fantastic job in her role as the de facto Education Curator. She has created many activities used by groups of kids when they visit the museum, and we are beginning work on a small children's activity and coloring book which we can give away – a little 8 page booklet kids can take home with them. Over the next 6 weeks the museum will host over 600 local schoolchildren and the requests for visits continue.

This past year we have hosted military reunions, members from the militaries of Germany, Canada, and Great Britain, various VIP's and many dozens of school groups. We expect to be close to 90,000 visitors this year!

Again, thanks for the support you give the museum and as always, please don't throw that stuff out – DONATE IT! Nothing is too inconsequential for us to consider.

*Happy Holidays
from
Your Museum
Staff!*



Statement of Purpose and Membership

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

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

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

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

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Yvonne Remembers WSPG - Part 2

Editor's Note: In the last newsletter I ran the first part of a biographical article by Yvonne Ganske Adams. Here is part two about growing up at White Sands in the 1950s.

By Yvonne Ganske Adams

During the early grade school years, my mother did not work. She was an excellent seamstress however and she took in sewing and made many party gowns for the officers wives for various functions. She did almost any kind of sewing and in fact made the gymnasium curtains for the school. They were heavy black out type so we could watch films in the school. When I was there 10 years ago, the curtains were gone but the rods remained. My father hung the drapes.

The school was essentially unchanged even down to the bench outside the principal's office. I sat on that bench more than once as I had been sent to his office.

Eventually my mother took a position on the base. She was an administrative assistant in the geodetic survey area and through that I had the opportunity of meeting a lot of rocket scientists of the time. Among them was Clyde Tombaugh.

Rocket engine testing was done at WSMR and the testing sites were built into the sides of the mountain. They were large concrete bunkers and the engine would be mounted and tested. They were incredibly loud and the ground shook. It was almost like an earthquake. Tuesdays were testing days.

There were also the rocket launches that created noise and from anywhere on the base one could see the rocket go into the clear blue skies over the desert.

Ten years ago I went to a kids reunion on the base and one of the places we toured was the 'block house' where people worked and observed the launches. My mother was one of those people so it was very meaningful to me. At the time she helped with the data on rocket studies and impacts. I don't really know what all that means, but I did know it was important work at the time and top secret.

By the time I was in the 10th grade the local science types had started a 'moon watch' program at NMSU. A family friend would take me each month and I was able to observe the moon and stars through really nice telescopes. It was great in the summers as the evenings were warm and there were no bugs to speak of. It was perfect. The skies were clear and black except for the stars.

Starting in the 9th grade we rode a bus to Las Cruces for school. The military had outfitted our buses with a radio so we could listen to our 'tunes' on the trip which was 30 miles each way. Time wise it was about a hour and a half due to all the stops we made to pick up kids. Eventually there were three buses, but at the beginning there was only one and our bus driver was a man by the name of Bob Lucas. He was a retired minister. The first day of school after we left the base he pulled over and stopped the bus and said he had 3 rules – no rubber bands, no spit wads and no water guns.

Anything else was fair game. The radio blasted all the way. God bless him – he was a saint.

One time a bunch of us tore up paper and threw it out the windows when we reached the top of the mountain pass. Well, when he saw it, he stopped the bus and everyone had to get out and police the area till it was all picked up. Didn't matter whether or not you were involved, you still picked up the paper. And it didn't matter that we were all going to get home late and have to answer to our parents, which was rarely fun. Justice was swift and sure for most of us.

If we had a boy/girl friend we would search the 'Daily Bulletin' for the listings of vacant houses. We could pull into the carport stall and 'neck' all evening. The MP's were pretty strict about parking on the streets. They would send us home. I think they were envious as the MP's were not much older than us. They were just hassling kids, BUT who knows they may have prevented a pregnancy or two.

I went to Las Cruces for all the football games and proms in town. For the football games, the school buses were provided. Nearly all the way through high school, I had a boyfriend that lived in Las Cruces so he was at the base a lot.

Early in my teen years, I had a boyfriend with a Cushman Eagle motorcycle and we rode everywhere on the base. My parents were very accepting of the motorcycle as my father had a big BMW motorcycle and only gave up riding when he was 85.

On the base there was a 'dump' with wood, cement blocks and metal scraps from WSMR projects. From the time I was about 10 to 13, every time my dad would go down there to scrounge stuff for whatever project he was doing, a girlfriend and I would go along to also dig through the junk. There was an old tank that had been thoroughly stripped, so it was only the shell. We had a great time climbing around on and in it. Probably not much of an experience, yet how many 10 yrs old kids out there have ever been inside a tank.

During high school, 'Slam Books' were all the rage. We used a spiral notebook and on the first pages were numbers and signature spaces. In the rest of the book, kids logged in by number and wrote comments and answers to questions at the top of the page. Questions were: what is your favorite color, what grade are you in, who is your boy/girl friend, whose is your English teacher, do you wear glasses, where did you go on vacation... Just info like that.

I don't recall it being ever disparaging but there probably was some hurtful questions and comments as we certainly were not perfect kids to one another. There was definitely the in and out group. We had the 'geeks' too. There were the girls that were really pretty or had exceptionally nice clothes and boys with cars. There was still the strata of acceptance. That was especially true as the base got bigger.

see **Yvonne Remembers**, page 5

Way Back When

500K Static Test Stand Now A Curiosity

By Doyle Piland

From the WSMR Museum Archives

Note: The information below is from a tour guide document in the Museum Archives

Located some 2.8 miles from the administrative area, near the El Paso gate, is the 500K static test stand jutting out from the base slope of Soledad Peak like some majestic, medieval, European castle (see photo below). There is no longer any activity there. But, that's not the way it was Way Back When.....



Aerial view of the 500K static test stand west of the El Paso gate. Most people mistake it for some sort of mining structure. The pump house on the left was burned out during a wildfire that burned down the mountain from above.

The 500,000 pound static test stand at one time was the largest such facility in the world and was capable of testing motors for any known or planned missile or rocket. It is situated in solid rock; un-faulted granite strata on the east face of a spur of the Organ Mountains, 4,400 feet above sea level and 200 feet above the floor of the Tularosa Basin.

The design of the 500K static test stand was completed in 1947 and construction began that same year. It was completed in 1950. German V-2 motors were tested there in 1950 and 51, Redstone motors from 53 to 55, Nike motors during 1956 and Corporal propulsion systems in 1957 and 1958.

The Army Ballistic Missile Agency decision to perform static testing at Huntsville in the future, caused the facility to be idled in 1959 and essentially mothballed in 1961.

The 500K stand consisted of two propellant tanks, two pump houses, the universal motor mount and the underground fire control and observation room. The motor mount was a circular steel framework with an inside diameter of 9 feet and a length of 22 feet mounted 30 degrees to the vertical and designed to handle a sustained thrust of 500,000 pounds with a safety factor of two.

The two pump houses were located above and on each side of the motor mount for the housing of propellant pumps. The pumps themselves were usually furnished by the agency testing.

In each of the tank barricades located above the pump houses were 15,000 gallon pure aluminum tanks. Each tank barricade consisted of two separate structures, one located within the other and the annular space filled with sand. These structures were light weight concrete and marked so as to control fragmentation in the event of an explosion. Provisions were available for rapidly dumping the fuel in the event of emergencies.

see Static Test Stand, page 5

Static Test Stand ——— CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

The tower was originally built to fire motors with Up to 500,000 pounds of thrust at a 60 degree angle but was rebuilt to handle 525,000 pounds in a vertical plane with a maximum motor package size of eight feet by eight feet.

Four thrust cells to measure firing loads were used during test firings for measuring rocket thrust. The thrust mount was designed so that modifications could be added to test various size missiles and power plants.

The interior of the facility contained the instrumentation to record a hundred different items of information on a rocket motor's behavior during the static test firing. The control room housing the elaborate instrumentation was built into the solid rock mountain. Four observation windows in the east wall faced angular mirrors which allowed indirect viewing of the motor under test.

The 936 square foot control room was reached through a 250 foot access tunnel. The room was built in a T-configuration, with the observation area and control console contained in a forward section. Behind the control area was a huge instrumentation room containing row after row of instrument panels. Measurements included data such as pressure, temperature, thrust, turbine RPM, vibration and acceleration.

There were also five remote camera circuits to provide recorded visual information of the motor under test from various angles.

The facility could handle motors or the complete missile. Hoists were installed on the tower. An elevator rising 45 feet above the flame pit had a 2500 pound capacity. Rails could be utilized to haul heavy assemblies from the end of the gravel access road to the bottom of the thrust mount structure.

A typical test during the days the 500K static test stand was in full operation might involve evaluating motor performance in sub-freezing temperatures. The missile was locked into place in the thrust mount above a concrete flame pit extending 60 feet straight down

the side of the mountain. The missile would be loaded with low temperature propellants to produce specified temperatures. The missile motor was then ignited and as the roar and searing flame shot into the flame pit, 3,000 gallons of water per minute were sprayed into the flame pit to quench the exhaust, creating a mushroom of steam. Several hundred yards in front of the flame pit sat the "pillbox" that was employed for observation and photographic recording of the test.

Note: You can see in Yvonne's article in this issue that these tests during the 1950s made the ground shake on main post.



A Redstone engine test at 500K on Nov. 8, 1951

Yvonne Remembers ——— CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

We drove fast cars down the Rocket Road. Often over 100 mph. The road was about six miles or more, straight as an arrow and unpatrolled – so what do kids with their parents high-powered Pontiac's and Chevy's – race down the road. No seat belts and no concerns except to see who could go the fastest. What a rush! Still love fast cars.

I officially left the base in 1961 but often came to visit my parents. When the Kennedy assassination occurred, security got really tight for a while. I lived in EL Paso and just happened to be going to the base the day after and was turned away at the gate. They were not allowing anyone without base ID on the post. That lasted about a month.

About 1965-66 it was decided that civilian personnel could no longer live on the base, so my parents moved to

Las Cruces to live. Eventually they retired and built a home in Cloudcroft.

I was vaguely aware that my growing up had something special about it. However, only after I became an adult did I come to fully realize what a truly unique experience I had living on the base. Not only from the standpoint of growing up there, but the scientific things that were occurring around me everyday.

White Sands truly is the birthplace of American missile and space activities. Some kids have traveled the world but I got to live at WSMR and I don't think that compares with anything else. There are really so few of us that had that opportunity, although at the time, most of us likely didn't know what an opportunity it was.

McDonald Not Impressed ——— CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

We picked up Dale Green and proceeded to the ranch site where we were greeted by a blockade and Dave McDonald, his niece Mary, and the two reporters. Mary was armed with a rifle, and one reporter was armed with a camera that he used extensively during our visit.

Mr. McDonald was informed of his unauthorized trespass on government property and given the regular bureaucratic “trespass form letter” that we served on all trespassers.

I could tell he was about as impressed with that as if someone had squashed a mosquito.

I immediately found myself liking this old man. Perhaps it was because he reminded me so much of my grandfather who had come to Oklahoma, made the land rush and staked out his 160 acres while running a few old cows all his life. Dave, like my grandfather and so many other early settlers to the West, was lucky to have a formal eighth-grade education. But, at 81 years old, he had gained so much “on the job education” that he could hold his own with the best. Without exception everything he said had merit and reflected a clear thought-out assessment of the problem. I could tell immediately he was there on a mission with no BS attached.

The problem, as he relayed it to me, rested on the fact that the “Army” took his land in 1942 for a bombing range and later development of the atomic bomb. For years they paid him a lease on the grassland but in 1980 the government cut off the payments, started eminent domain hearings, condemned the land and was ready to pay off McDonald.

He said he had not withdrawn the \$35,000 placed in escrow and the bottom line was he wanted \$960,000 for the 640 acres. In short he said, “the army never intended to give his land back, that his house, the windmill and water well were all wrecked and his requests to graze cattle there were denied.” He stated, “they keep trying to fool people by calling it a desert while last summer the grass was knee high.”

Trying to understand Dave I asked him to show me around and tell me what he remembered about living there. This started about a two-hour walk around of the old house, cellar, out buildings, corrals, watering areas etc.

His memory was crystal clear and he told me about his family and how his wife canned food, tended a garden, and basically ran the household while he handled the cattle, horses, fences, out buildings and the ranch in general. Practically everything he pointed out brought a story to the surface about something that happened some 40 years before. It didn’t take long to see that he took pride in his efforts and meager life as a rancher there in no mans land.

During our “tour,” which was constantly under the close observation of Mary with her .30-30 rifle at the ready, I noticed a pistol partially covered in the bed of his pick up. “What’s this?” I asked.

Without hesitation Dave picked up the pistol, handed it to me butt first and stated, “It’s my old thumb buster .45 I have carried for years. It’s not loaded - I can’t find bullets for it anymore.”

That got Mary’s attention. “Watch that rifle, Mary” I said. Dave admonished her. “Be calm Mary, he is just looking at it.” I knew right then Dave was not a violent person and we would solve this trespass problem. I handed his old gun back, butt first of course.

It was apparent that my initial visit was not going to convince Dave and his niece to leave WSMR immediately. Dave and Mary had a master plan and they didn’t intend to give up so easily.

Not so with the Albuquerque Journal reporters. They had no communications (this was BC - before cells) with their paper and they were anxious to get going and file their report. After advising them of the prohibition on cameras and taking photos on the range they immediately apologized, handed me several rolls of exposed film indicating this was all they had.

This was my first mistake in dealing with reporters. Instead of taking my time and sending the film for development 60 miles away at range headquarters and taking “our time” to process while holding the reporters under “house arrest” for trespassing, I agreed to let them leave the range.

You guessed it. I saw my photo on the front page of the Albuquerque Journal the next morning. I knew then and know now to never trust a reporter. They live by a double standard where they can lie but nobody else can.

Upon his return the general signed a “bar” letter which was an order forbidding the reporters from the Journal from ever entering the missile range again.

Dave McDonald’s stay at WSMR lasted four days.

First, he knew he had the backing of about 120 local ranchers who were raising money for a media assault on Washington.

Second, he demanded and got a personal visit to “his ranch at WSMR” from Congressman Joe Skeen (a rancher himself), Senator Harrison Schmitt, State Representative James Martin, Bob Jones, the President of the NM Cattle Growers Association, and Maj. Gen. Fulwyler.

Jim Eckles, a Public Affairs spokesman, stated in summarizing the visit, “I think we understand Mr. McDonald a little better now and what he is trying to do, and he’s a little better aware of our situation.” Also, he described the meeting as “very peaceful and very reasonable!”

From the meeting Fulwyler agreed to forward McDonald’s concerns through channels to Washington. Senator Pete Domenici made this missile range issue his “top A-1 priority.” Meanwhile Skeen and Schmitt pledged their support as did newly elected Sen. Jeff Bingaman who was taking Schmitt’s seat.

Dave and Mary were escorted off the missile range on October 16, accompanied by Skeen. It was only four days after “retaking his ranch” but it sure seemed longer to some of us.

see Peaceful End, page 7

Austin Vick Reports On Pioneer Group Activities

Austin Vick, White Sands Pioneer Group, reports the recent WSMR Hall of Fame induction was a great success. Around 150 attended to see Mary Beth Reinhart and Dale Green become the 40th and 41st members of the hall of fame.

The Pioneer Group helped at the event by paying for the lunches of all past inductees who attended as well as Dale and Mary Beth's lunches along with a guest for each. Because of that expenditure and the continuation of splitting the cost of this publication, Austin wants to remind all Pioneer Group members it is time to pay your dues again. He adds, that the newsletter is expensive to provide the old fashioned way, **on paper**, and any contribution would be appreciated to

make sure we can continue to mail it.

Austin says another "Then and Now" luncheon is in the planning. Stay tuned for more info.

Also, he says he is hearing some rumbling that NASA may test a new spacesuit at WSMR. The test would involve dropping a mannequin wearing the spacesuit from a high altitude balloon.

Finally, Austin wants to thank everyone who has donated historical documents to the Museum. They are quite valuable and Austin says, "Keep them coming."

Quiz



Do you know where this Mogollon pictograph is located on WSMR? The mask is done in mostly red pigment with yellow in the eyes. HINT: Its in a canyon halfway up the range. See the "Back Page" for the answer.

Peaceful End — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

While it took some time and several high level meetings to complete this World War II WSMR rancher evacuation problem, old Dave McDonald would always be known as the catalyst who reopened the ranch compensation issue for a very public debate. After taking a sip of champagne at the Stallion Gate as he departed his last words were, "if I didn't accomplish anything, I'll just go back again."

In the end McDonald never got that big pot of money. Although Skeen introduced a bill to provide WSMR ranchers with more money and the issue was argued all across the country, Congress never passed it. In fact, it never made it out of committee.

That process took years to wind down and, by the time it was over, Dave was too spent to try it again. He died in 1993.

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Austin and Pamela Vick

Hands Across History
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The Back Page



These two photos show the DICE THROW explosion that took place in October 1976 at the north end of White Sands, just west of Trinity Site. The test was conducted by the old Defense Nuclear Agency, now the Defense Threat Reduction Agency. They were experimenting to see if ANFO (ammonium nitrate and fuel oil) could be used to simulate the shock and vibration of a nuclear explosion without any radiation. For DICE THROW they stacked 600 tons of ANFO in bags and then surrounded the ground zero area with a variety of military hardware and shelters to see what would happen. The pile of ANFO was equal to a one kiloton nuclear burst.

(ANSWER: The pictograph on page 7 is found in Rhodes Canyon.)