



Hands Across History



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

Volume XIII, Letter IV

November 2017



SECRETARY OF THE ARMY
WASHINGTON

SEP 28 2017

Mr. Edward Kennedy
President
White Sands Missile Range Historical Foundation
Post Office Box 171
White Sands Missile Range, New Mexico 88002-0171

Dear Mr. Kennedy:

On behalf of the United States Army, I am pleased to accept the Historical Foundation's donation to the White Sands Missile Range Museum and Learning Center.

The new structure will allow the facility to be energy efficient and use current sustainable technology that will better tell the Army's story and thus improve the quality of the visitor experience.

Please accept my appreciation for this generous gift.

*Mr. Kennedy,
Thank you for the most
generous donation!*

*Army Strong!
R.M.*

Sincerely,

Ryan D. McCarthy
Ryan D. McCarthy
Acting

**See page 2 for an explanation
of this letter which has been
decades in the making.**

A Giant Step Has Been Taken With Many More To Go & So Many To Thank

By Eddie Kennedy, President
WSMR Historical Foundation

Plans for using WSMR Historical Foundation funding to help pay for the expansion of the WSMR museum took a big step closer to reality on September 28th when the acting Secretary of the Army, Ryan D. McCarthy, informed the Foundation he would accept the Foundation's donation for expansion of the facility.

The Foundation offered a conditional donation of up to \$800,000 to fund this effort subject to applicable regulations and final approval by the Foundation's Board of Directors (WSMR Historical Foundation By-Laws require a two-thirds majority vote of the Board of Directors to obligate more than ten percent of the Foundation's cash assets). This qualifies.

Approval from the acting Secretary of the Army is indeed a crucial step but definitely not the last hurdle on the way to groundbreaking. Final design and costs have yet to be reviewed and the particulars for transferring Foundation funds from the Foundation to the Army must still be settled.

A unique accounting code will be established for the Foundation's donation that will restrict withdrawal of funds to only expansion activities. This will protect donor contributions from being used for purposes not associated with the museum. It is still too early to identify a start date for con-

struction activities but early 2018 is being targeted.

Expansion of the museum is made possible by the financial contributions from members of the Foundation and the generosity of corporate donors who recognize that promoting our past goes a long way to promote our future.

The WSMR Historical Foundation will soon be redoubling its efforts to broaden its membership and seek additional corporate contributions for future endeavors. Two goals are to strengthen our support of STEM-related initiatives (Science-Technology-Engineering-Math) and increase the museum's connectivity with the local community.

We hope to see you soon at the anticipated gala groundbreaking ceremony for the new museum structure.

And a special thanks to all of you who have worked so hard on this project, have donated to it and continue to work on it.

Editor's Note

Don't miss the short story on the back page about Captain Gary Rose. He served at White Sands for almost two years working in ARMTE with the Copperhead Project from 1978 to 1980.

If you remember Gary, please shoot me your memories or call or send me a phone number and I'll call you. I'd like to know more about his time at WSMR.

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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P.O. Box 171
White Sands, N.M. 88002

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A Not Very Good White Sands Football Team Overcame Social Injustice & Set An Example

Editor's Note: With football season a long way to go, here is a story about the White Sands team from 1950. This snippet is from Pocketful of Rockets: History and Stories Behind White Sands Missile Range by Jim Eckles.

At one time, when V-2 rockets were still being tested, real football was played at White Sands. This wasn't the flag or touch football now played by the post team. These were full-grown men in real pads and uniforms going up against other teams.

In 1949, the team was winless. In 1950, the team played other military and school teams. They even played in a game billed as the "Silver Bowl."

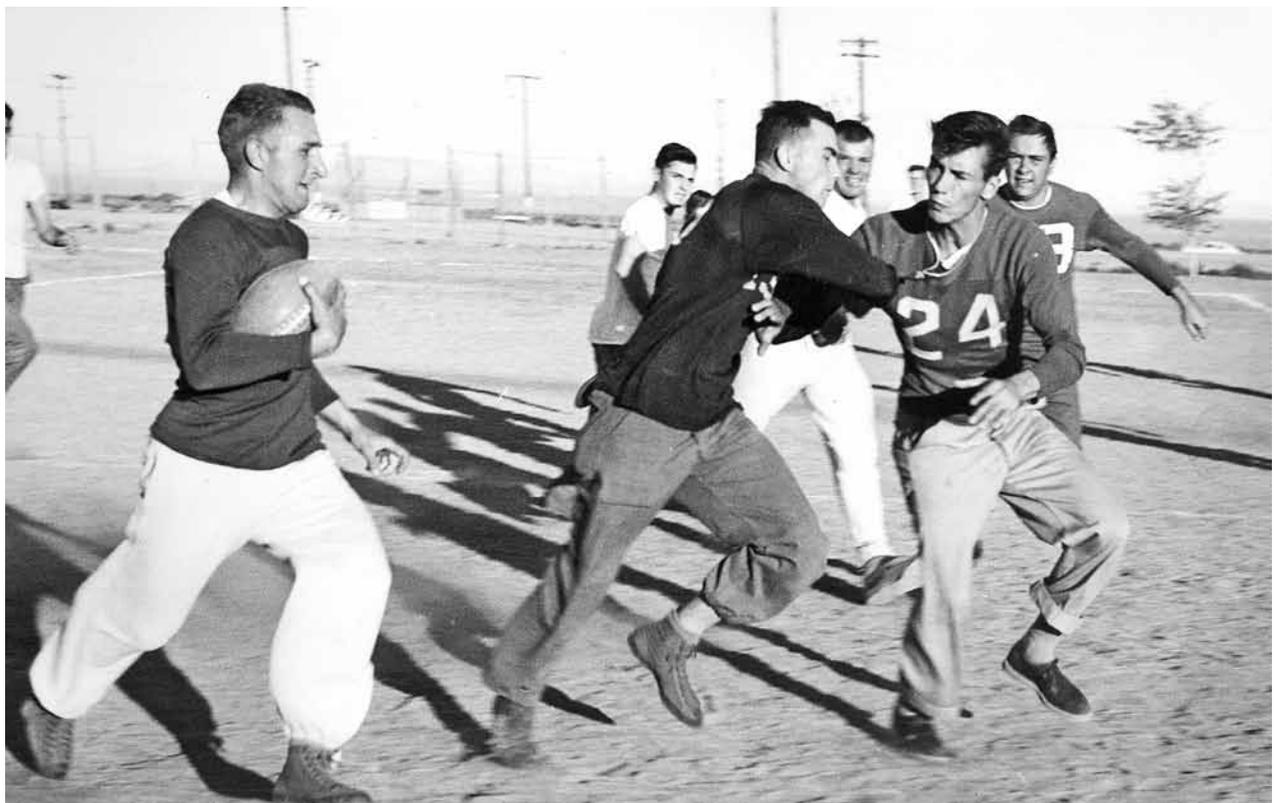
It is hard to grasp how good or bad the team was because there are no White Sands records and only one post newspaper still around to reference. By searching through newspapers from Las Cruces and other military bases, I found the results of three games in 1950. According to Don Lloyd, who was a guard on the offensive line, there were only three

games - so I may have found them all.

Unfortunately, the evidence doesn't point to a "rocket-powered" team. Instead, the clippings indicate it was not a very competitive team and the "bowl game" was a local attraction that promoters tagged as a bowl game. The White Sands team lost all three games and scored only 22 points while the opponents scored a total of 113 points.

The team may not have been a powerhouse, but it did enjoy some novelty as one of the few and maybe only true all-service football organization. The starting offensive lineup included an Army backfield with the linemen coming from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps. Included on the roster were some of the Broomstick Scientists, enlisted men with technical educations in science and engineering who were drafted and assigned to White Sands to assist on several missile projects. For instance, the starting quarterback, Dom Toscani, was a broomsticker.

See New Mexico A&M Game, page 4



Typical intramural football at White Sands in 1953 - much easier than the full tackle game.

New Mexico A&M Game — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

One game, probably the season opener, was on Sept. 28 against the freshman team at New Mexico A and M, now New Mexico State in Las Cruces. Although the final score was A&M 13, White Sands 7, the game wasn't all that close. According to the university's newspaper, the school scored all of its points in the first half while the White Sands offense didn't cross the 50-yard line until the second half.



Walter Patton played tackle for the White Sands Red Devils. He was a double captain. By day he was a Marine Corps captain working as a missile project officer. In the evenings and on weekends, he was the captain of the post's football team in 1950.

In the second half, White Sands crossed the 50 twice and only managed a score in the closing seconds when Bill Poteat caught a pass and got himself into the end zone. The paper said Poteat had been an All-4th Army performer in 1949 and was an obvious bright spot for the proving ground team.

On Nov. 4, the team traveled to El Paso to play the Fort Bliss Rockets. In its lead sentence the following day, the *El Paso Times* reported, "After a scoreless first quarter Fort Bliss poured on the coals and trampled White Sands, 47-7, on Armstrong Field at Fort Bliss Saturday afternoon."

White Sands scored its only touchdown thanks to Bill Poteat, again. In the first half he burst through the Rockets line for a 12-yard run to pay dirt. Basically, the White Sands team was again outmanned — except for Bill Poteat.

According to team captain Walter Patton, it was a difficult situation because of the lack of players and command support. He said there were about 2,000 troops on post, which is not a large number to draw from. In addition, the commanding general didn't really like football and didn't back the team. Without that support, the team members had to participate strictly on their own time. With all the players working in so many jobs and programs, getting them together at one time and place for practice was just about impossible without some command emphasis.

Then, to top it off, they had to practice on a dirt field littered with large stones and goat heads, a nasty ground-cover plant with seed pods covered in thorns.

Patton came to White Sands in the summer of 1950 as a young Marine Corps captain working as a missile project officer. He played high school football and had worked for the athletic department at Auburn University when going to college. He volunteered to be the line coach for the team.

According to Patton they only had 27 players on the team, so the coaches decided to check out uniforms as well, just in case they were needed. In the first game, two of the tackles were injured and

see Las Vegas And The Silver Bowl, page 5

Las Vegas And The Silver Bowl — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

Patton had to step in and play. “I played about 56 minutes in the first game and couldn’t get out of bed the next day,” he said.

At the time, Patton weighed about 200 pounds and stood six feet tall. He ended up as the starting tackle for the rest of the season.

So the question is, how did this team make it to a “bowl game?” Details are sketchy, but Nellis Air Force Base, outside of Las Vegas, Nevada, did invite White Sands to play in the Silver Bowl on Dec. 3. Nellis always hosted this bowl game and played in it.

Patton said, “somebody got our record fouled up and thought we were better than we were.” Patton’s point is certainly true because the *Las Vegas Review Journal*, in an article printed before the game, said, “The White Sands aggregation has yet to taste defeat this season but has two deadlocks.” Well, we know that’s not true.

We’ll probably never know if the error was an honest mistake or a deliberate attempt to make the game look more attractive to fans. The Las Vegas paper did hype the game, saying the White Sands team was a bevy of “behemoths who will crash heads with the Nellis Air Force Base Mustangs” and “A pair of huge, rugged pigskin organizations...run full tilt up against one another this afternoon at 1:30 in the annual Silver Bowl football game before an estimated 3,500 fans in the Last Frontier Sportsdome.” The Nellis coach also was quoted as saying his team would need at least four touchdowns to win.

What may have added to the confusion about the proving ground’s record was the team name. On the program for the Fort Bliss game, the White

Sands team was called the “Buzz Bombs,” presumably because of V-1 testing at the range. The local paper referred to the team as the “Tigers” before they traveled to Nevada and the Las Vegas papers called them the “Red Devils.” It’s no wonder there were errors concerning the team’s wins and losses.

Whatever the name, the team received permission to go to the game, but with a general who did not support them, the question was how to get there and back. Nellis solved that problem by flying one of their planes to White Sands and picking up the team and coaches on Dec. 2. The Air Force then flew them home on Dec. 4.

Besides being a bowl game, the battle was a fundraiser with proceeds going to the Nellis chaplain’s fund for their annual children’s Christmas program. To defray costs, Las Vegas businesses stepped in to help. For instance, a local casino paid for printing the game programs.

So this may have been the force behind the game and the phony hype. The base and the community were working together to raise money for a very good cause. It really didn’t matter who Nel-

lis played as long as spectators showed up and paid their admission fee.

The White Sands team probably should have gone to the casino instead of the stadium because the Nellis team scored more than the four touchdowns their coach predicted they would need. The *Las Vegas Review Journal* said, “In what

turned out to be a game of one-sided keep-away, the Nellis Air Force Base Mustangs obliterated the White Sands, New Mexico, Red Devils ... by an astronomical 53-6 count before 1,000 subdued fans.”



The offensive unit for the not so rocket-powered White Sands post football team - preparing to go to Las Vegas.

see, A True Team Leaves Vegas, page 6

A True Team Leaves Vegas — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

White Sands scored in the second quarter after a drive that started on its own 30-yard line. The touchdown came on a 15-yard pass from quarterback Bob Plenert to end Art Guglielama. They missed the extra point.

The Las Vegas paper described the game in terms of “carnage.” Patton said they were completely “outclassed.” He said Nellis carried a huge roster of around 55 players with 18 of them being former college players. It was an understandable loss but still a disappointing day for White Sands.

The *Wind and Sand* newspaper, was a bit more positive with a headline, “Hard-pressed Tigers lose to rampaging Nellis.” In the story’s first line the writer said, “White Sands football team finally went down under the overwhelming power of a slamming Nellis Air Force eleven to the tune of 53-8.”

Note that score. The Las Vegas reporter must have left early because the *Wind and Sand* reported the Tigers scored a safety in the closing seconds to get to eight.

Instead of “carnage” the post paper favored a more favorable description. Their reporter said, “It was a contest of a determined, hard-fighting group bucking up against the granite-walled drives of a highly trained team.”

The article singled out a few players for their outstanding play: Corporal Bob Pienert, Sergeant

Poteat, Torpedoman’s Mate 3 Johnston, Gunners Mate 1 Lafata, and Sergeant Parker.

What happened next wasn’t reported in any of the newspapers but was more important than a football game. It showed the true nature of this White Sands team.

After the game, Patton took the team into town to buy them a drink. He said they played hard and they deserved to relax and have a beer. Getting that simple glass of beer turned into a small battle for the multi-service unit.

Patton said he had trouble getting a drink because the first half dozen bars they entered would not serve the black soldiers on the team. Apparently, Jim Crow laws and barefaced segregation were alive and well in Las Vegas in 1950.

Patton said he led the men into a bar, was told the black players wouldn’t be served, and led the team right back out. Finally, they found a place that would serve all of the team members and they had their drink.

The team may have been outclassed on the field, but that was a minor detail when facing the realities of everyday life. Confronting adversity both on and off the field turned these diverse human beings into a cohesive unit. They had every reason to return to White Sands with their heads held high. No man left behind!



In this rare photo from the Silver Bowl, number 50 is White Sands running back Army Corporal Robert Pienert who has broken through the defensive line. It was too little, too late, as the scoreboard in the background shows Nellis up 47 to 6.

Time To Order That Special Christmas Gift



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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:

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Return form to: WSMR Historical Foundation, PO Box 171, White Sands Missile Range, NM 88002-0171. If you have questions contact Bob Lipinski, (575) 678-1644 or Jon Gibson (575) 382-8292. The WSMR Historical Foundation is not part of the Department of Defense.

White Sands Missile Range Historial Foundation
Hands Across History
P.O. Box 171
White Sands, NM 88002

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The Back Page



WSMRite Awarded Medal Of Honor

In case you missed it, Capt. Gary Rose was awarded the Medal of Honor on Oct. 23, 2017. As an artillery officer, Rose served at White Sands Missile Range from 1978 to 1980 with the Copperhead Project, shooting rounds from SMR.

Rose was honored for his actions as an enlisted medic during Operation Tailwind in Southeastern Laos during the Vietnam War, Sept. 11-14, 1970. Then-Sergeant Rose was assigned to the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) at the time of the action. Rose treated more than 60 wounded men and saved many lives.