The Vitality Of The Missile Range Museum Highlights The Annual Membership Meeting

Your White Sands Historical Foundation held its annual membership meeting on November 8 at the missile range’s Frontier Club.

One interesting topic of discussion was that White Sands is going to move the Las Cruces gate further to the north (toward U.S. Highway 70) along Owen Road. At this point there are no plans to move the museum and missile park out to the new location. Range officials have stated the move will not affect visitors trying to get to the museum.

Speaking of visitors, Museum Director Terrie Cornell reported that during 2006 the White Sands museum recorded about 66,000 visitors. Terrie said the number put White Sands in the top 10 for Army museum visitors. She added that the WSMR number was especially significant because most of the visitors were true tourists who wander in from Highway 70. Most other Army museums draw a large portion of their visitors from the on-post population of soldiers and their families.

Terrie also reported there are now 12 volunteers who help at the museum mostly working in the archives which, she added, now has over 10,000 items. You can view the catalog and search it on line at: http://www.wsmr-history.org/Archives.htm. If you would like to help as a volunteer, call the museum at 678-2250.

Jon Gibson, the foundation’s treasurer, reported the organization has about $350,000 in the treasury. See Jon’s chart below for a display of the Top Ten donors.

Because of expired terms, three board members were renominated and elected to their positions by the attendees. They are Bob Lipinski, Austin Vick and Pamela Hoscheit. During a board meeting following the members meeting, Pam Ray (President), Jon Gibson (Treasurer) and Pamela Hoscheit (Secretary) were re-elected to their executive positions. The election of a vice president was deferred.

Top 10 Supporters for the WSMR Museum and Learning Center - 1992 to 2007

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“Thanks For Your Help. It’s Been A Blast.”

By Terrie Cornell, Director
White Sands Missile Range Museum

Your Museum has been busy since my last column in Hands Across History in August. We have taken in several huge donations of papers and photographs, truly an abundance of riches for the Archives. Darren Court, Registrar, and Rebecca Balizan, summer hire, have sorted and cataloged them, entering hundreds of items into the archival database. Check it out at www.wsmr-history.org and search the archives for anything of interest to you.

Speaking of Rebecca, at the end of the summer we were able to get her hired part-time for the entire year. She now works at the museum every Saturday and Sunday, plus school holidays. Rebecca is a sophomore at NMSU, majoring in Electrical Engineering.

In October, the Air Force celebrated its 60th birthday. Here at WSMR, the Air Force gave the museum a rocket sled used for an Improved Hawk test and a model of a JASM (Joint air to surface stand-off missile).

With end-of-year funds from the Army’s Center of Military History, we contracted to have 14 more missiles in Missile Park repainted. They are: Lacrosse, MLRS, Corporal, SS-11, 2 Pogos, Aerobee Hi, Aerobee 170, Missile “A”, XQ-4 drone, Talos, Crossbow, Honest John and Pershing I.

How many people visit the Museum? Visitation statistics are astounding. In 2006 we had 66,770 visitors. I am constantly amazed at the number of visitors in the museum and park all day long, in spite of difficulties created by increased security at the gate.

Many of you know that I am retiring on December 31st, so this is my final column. Working at the WSMR Museum has been the capstone of my 26 years in museums, in El Paso and in the Army.

Ron Burkett, my predecessor, put the WSMR Museum back on a professional footing, in accordance with Army regs. I fine-tuned it, attracted additional volunteers, repainted missiles in Missile Park as funds became available, and wrote new text for signage in Missile Park. I leave the Museum in the capable hands of Darren Court, knowing he will carry on professionally and with enthusiasm.

Based on visitation, website hits and queries, the world now knows about the WSMR Museum – the most important museum in the Army! I have enjoyed my seven years here immensely.

I urge all of you to contribute your papers and memorabilia to the Museum and assist in preserving the history of this amazing place.

Happy Holidays!

From the Foundation & Pioneer Group Boards

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.

White Sands Pioneer Group
P.O. Box 318
White Sands, N.M. 88002

White Sands Historical Foundation
P.O. Box 171
White Sands, N.M. 88002
Christmas At WSPG In 1953 Was Spiritual And Material

As White Sands Proving Ground marched into Christmas 1953 it was a very magical time for the children living on post. The new school had just opened and a large Christmas tree was put up in the auditorium.

In the photo at right, first-graders gaze up at a shiny angel atop the tree. Students opened the pre-holiday festivities with programs presented by each home room.

In the photo below a small boy is probably wondering if he should punch the “Joe Palooka” balloon or run.

He is standing in Toyland, a special store operated on post by the White Sands Post Exchange just for Christmas. Since personnel on post were 28 miles from the nearest shopping center, officials opened the shop to help out busy parents.

There wasn’t room in the PX so it was housed in a Navy quonset hut and was open Monday through Friday.

The trick is to see how many of those toys you recognize. Most don’t require batteries.
Way Back When

Cox Dude Ranch Was Once Soldier’s Haven

By Doyle Piland
From the WSMR Museum Archives

Author’s Note: Portions of the information for this article came from the “Broomstick,” a journal/newsletter by Mr. Arnie Crouch, for the Broomstick Scientists group. The photos from the 1950s are courtesy of Arnie Crouch.

Depart the Missile Range through the Las Cruces gate, drive out Owen Road, pass under the underpass and turn right just after the underpass, go through the security gate and drive up the road leading to EMRE and HTA about 1¼ miles, you will see several old, rundown buildings off to the left. Well that is not the way it was Way Back When.....

Everyone knows that there were, many ranches scattered around the area that was taken over by the government and became White Sands Proving Ground, and later renamed White Sands Missile Range. Many of these ranches had people living there before they were forced to move. Some were allowed to remain for some time even after the Proving Ground was established. But, all were eventually required to leave, although some kept cattle on the properties for several years.

The old buildings on the way to EMRE and HTA was the Hal Cox ranch, or as it was called the HAL Ranch. Apparently at the time the range was established, it was a guest ranch, commonly called a “dude ranch.” Along Highway 70, there was a sign at the turnoff to the ranch very close to where the HTA road is today.

After the property was vacated, it sat vacant for quite some time. However, since a few miles away there were large numbers of young military guys without much to do during their off time, they would occasionally find their way to the HAL Ranch location for parties and general hell rais- ing. It eventually became a significant problem for the White Sands Military Police.

After some time, in the early 1950s, they came up with a plan to reduce the problem. The plan was for a military family to move into the ranch headquarters, rent-free, with the requirement that they act as caretakers of the property.

As it turns out, one of the Broomstick Scientists (see the August 2007 issue of Hands Across History about the Broomsticks), Max Talley and his wife Johnetta were selected to be the caretakers of the Hal Cox ranch. Since the ranch was already set up as a “guest ranch” another couple, Danny and Arline Banks, also moved in to share some of the space and responsibilities.

According to Johnetta Talley, the Talleys and Banks’ had their bedrooms in the guest house, and their dinning room and kitchen was in the old ranch house. She said there was also a big room attached to the ranch house where they had lots of cots for weekend visitors.

see Dude Ranch, page 5
Dude Ranch Caretakers — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

And, there were visitors aplenty. Below is a photo of a gathering by several of the Broomstick Scientists at the ranch.

Max Talley, left, and Arnie Crouch sit on the rock wall by the water tank / swimming pool.

The water tank as it sits today. The Bataan Death March route goes right by the Hal Cox ranch.

The Lena Cox ranch as it is today. It sits on the west side of Mineral Hill just around the corner, so to speak, from the old Pat Garrett ranch.

Max Talley says about the HAL ranch, “we’ve got lots of stories about that place. By living there as our first home away from home, we got thoroughly indoctrinated into cowboying so that when we got out of the Army in 1953, we weren’t gone but a few months until we were back at White Sands, we lived on the post for seven years but on weekends. We took our five children, went up into Cloudcroft and worked and played on the VIV Ranch. Ultimately I bought a ranch in Tularosa, NM commuting to work at Climatic Conditioning. We remained at WSPG, until 1963, when that whole operation of 40 men, were RIFed.”

A little over a mile west of the Hal Cox ranch is Mineral Hill. As you are going up the hill on Highway 70, Mineral Hill is the first small mountain on the right. On the west side of Mineral Hill was the Lena Cox ranch. It was not as elaborate as the Hal Cox ranch, having one main building and possibly a couple smaller outbuildings. According to Johnetta Talley, there was also a military couple selected to live at the Lena Cox ranch as caretakers. They were Francis (Red) and Mary Crehan, from the Bronx, New York. According to Max, they had never driven a car before coming to White Sands. Can you imagine the culture shock? But, they apparently loved this new life.

Both ranches were equipped with 32 volt electrical systems. These systems consisted of a windmill driven generator to charge a bank of batteries located in a building by the windmill. There were also windmills for water at both ranches. The one at the Lena Cox ranch is still operational and provides water for the wildlife in the area.

And, that’s the way it was, Way Back When......
Editor’s Note: Several months ago I gave a talk in Alamogordo about the Victorio Peak treasure legends. During the question period, Mr. Lou Blundell got up and said he had seen the peak in 1960 but had fallen into one of the shafts. I explained to the crowd that I had always heard about a “soldier” falling at the peak and because of his injuries, the commanding general had to place Victorio Peak off limits to all personnel. It turns out it probably wasn’t a soldier but Lou, a civilian employee at Holloman. He was seriously injured but survived unimpaired. In 1975 he wrote a letter to the editor of Gold!, a publication from True West, detailing his accident on the peak. He has given us permission to run excerpts from his letter.

Dear Mr. Small:

You recently published in GOLD! an article entitled “The Curse of the San Andreas,” a story about the lost gold mine of Padre La Rue. This mine is located almost directly east of the town of Rincon, New Mexico, across the desert valley which the Spanish long ago named “The Valley of Death,” or “The Journey of Death.”

Hal Gregory and I spent several weekends in 1960 looking for the location of the mine as described in the book. On still another try to locate this mine on May 20, 1960, we entered the “Valley of Death” from Highway 70 north of Las Cruces, and drove northward along desert roads. We were determined to defy the curse of San Andreas, and this time we had a detailed map indicating the location of Hembrillo Pass and Soledad Peak where the mine was supposed to be.

Entering the Hembrillo Pass just before nightfall, we found ourselves at a deserted shack next to what looked like a dried-up creek bed just to the south a few yards away. (This is probably the Henderson ranch - Editor) Out buildings? I don’t really recall. I remember looking to the north and seeing a mine entrance on the side of a hill. And I do believe that there was an airplane cowling on the ground near the creek bed. Even though I haven’t read the book in 15 years, I think the book mentions an airplane that tried to land in Hembrillo Basin.

We slept in our bed rolls that night and after cooking breakfast in the morning, we proceeded to climb the hill which was just on the other side of the creek bed. Not really knowing at the time if we were at the right place, our primary aim was to look around from the top of the hill.

Our first discovery near the top of the hill was a fault which went straight down about 40 feet, leveled off and then down again about another 20 feet. Climbing down a wooden ladder and looking upward from inside the fault, we could see light coming through a crack far above. At the apex of the hill, there was another entrance to the fault. Entering from this point, Hal and I had to use a rope.

Further exploring the hill, on the east side someone had begun to dig into the side not very far from the top. This digging only penetrated a few feet.

About ten feet or so from the fault entrance near the top of the hill, a man-made vertical shaft was made apparently to parallel the fault.

Near the entrance of the shaft there was a scaffold on all four sides which consisted of boards nailed together and suspended from points just inside the shaft. Hal said that he would go get the rope that we had left in the fault so we could explore this shaft. Impatient as I was, I decided not to wait for his return and I climbed out on the scaffold – and down, down, down I plunged – scaffold and me!

The San Andreas was adding another victim to its curse! I fell 75 feet but Lady Luck was with me. The instant I began to fall I blanked out, thus apparently relaxing my body for the impact that followed. When I regained consciousness a few minutes later, I was crouched against the wall with my knees near my chin. I had landed on a false bottom which further contributed to saving my life.

The dust was still settling when I heard Hal call my name. I answered back and told him that I was unable to move my body except for my arms and head. To come down to where I was, he went back and removed the wooden ladder from the fault and tying the rope to it, lowered it down the shaft. Being very careful not to jar the remaining scaffold, he then lowered himself down.

After examining my wounds, Hal arranged my body to a more comfortable position and said that he had to go for help. He then placed the ladder over me so that if any more boards fell, they would strike the ladder instead of me.

Climbing back up the ladder, and then monkey-fashion up the rope, he made his way to the top trying not to touch
NASA Revving Up For Testing At WSMR

NASA held a ceremony to break ground on Nov. 14 for a new test launch pad at the White Sands Missile Range’s Launch Complex 32.

The pad will be the site of a series of tests, beginning next year, of a launch abort system that will ensure the safety of astronauts aboard the Orion spacecraft.

Orion is being developed by NASA to carry astronauts to the International Space Station, the moon and, eventually, Mars. Right now the goal for reaching Mars is set at 2030.

According to NASA officials, the Orion program is being developed with no black holes - at no time will the astronauts be prisoners in their vehicle without some sort of escape system. Testing at White Sands will be used to help design a launch abort system for Orion.

The first of five planned tests, designated Pad Abort 1, is already scheduled for Sept. 23, 2008, from the new pad. Four more tests will evaluate the abort system’s performance at different altitudes.

Officials also pointed out that the current schedule means there will be a gap between when the Space Shuttle stops flying in 2010 and Orion begins flying live missions. In the gap, the United States will have to rely on Russian launch vehicles to make the supply runs and personnel change overs for the Space Station.

Many people have commented on the similarity to Little Joe testing at White Sands in the early 60s for the NASA Apollo program. NASA officials told news media at the ground breaking that while the ideas may look similar, the technology is worlds apart.

The first two tests at WSMR will probably not be visible to the surrounding communities as the abort motors will only fire for two seconds. It won’t carry the boilerplate capsule very high. The other three tests will use former Peacekeeper rocket motors to boost the capsule to extreme conditions. Those should visible for miles.

Visitor Defies Curse

the remaining scaffold. But the inevitable happened. The shaft entrance was too narrow and a board was loosened enough to give way and come tumbling down.

My reaction to the noise of boards breaking loose caused me to raise my body to duck under the ladder to protect myself. The board landed about two inches from where my head had been.

After Hal left to get help, I tried to raise my body again but couldn’t. I was paralyzed from the waist down.

My watch had stopped at 9:50 in the morning, thus placing the time of my fall at that moment. Lying there unable to move until help arrived about 7 that evening made this the longest day of my life!

Boyce Lane of Lane Bros. Garage in Las Cruces, Claude Brown, Mr. and Mrs. Al Stovall, Lieutenant Wimberly of the New Mexico Highway Patrol, and my friend Hal brought me out. I then spent 110 days in the hospital recuperating from a broken back, fractured skull, broken left ankle, and, oh yes, paralyzed legs which required three months to regain the use of again.

Just as it was turning dark and while I was lying in that “chicken wire” stretcher on the back of a jeep being moved away from what had almost been my death, I struggled to turn my head in a backward glance. The silhouette of that hill was just like the sketch in the book, “The Curse of the San Andreas.”

Editor’s Note: While in the hospital Lou received a citation from the White Sands Missile Range military police for trespassing. How did they know he was in there? His friend Hal, once out to the highway, called Holloman and requested a helicopter evacuation. They refused and word got back to the missile range. Care to guess what the hospital bill was for 110 days plus surgery and doctor’s bills? According to a newspaper article Lou gave me, it was $4,279.
G.E. Wilson, Secretary of Defense and looking somewhat like a Hollywood caricature of a 50s politician, keeps step with Brig. Gen. G.G. Eddy, White Sands Commanding General during a tour of the facility in 1953. The two officers flanking the pair are unnamed in the photo’s caption. Wilson was part of a large group of VIPs visiting.