



Hands Across History



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

Volume XV, Letter II

May 2019

Volunteers Needed For Museum's Next Steps

By Frances F. Williams
WSMR Historical Foundation President

After more than 15 years of fundraising, selling tee shirts, fajita pitas, caps, and donations from members and community businesses, the addition to the WSMR museum is taking shape. The concrete has been poured, the roof will be going on and the expectation to finish is by the end of May.

Paul and Joy Arthur, former WSMR employees, donated \$357,000 to the Foundation for the Museum. Their generosity put us over the top and is making the present construction of a new building possible.

For this new structure, the Foundation donated most of a million dollars to the Department of Army. To those of you, and the many officers who have served on the Foundation board of directors, and those who serve now, it has been a labor of love and dedication to get us to where we are now. WSMR is one of the most historical places in the world, ushering in the start of the Atomic, Missile and Space Ages.

After the building is finished, the Army Center for Military History, which has taken ownership of our museum as well as others in Department of Army, will build the exhibits to populate it. Darren Court, our Museum Director furnished the story line, and is monitoring the construction as it goes along.

Many of you may not be aware that Darren's assistant, George House, passed away recently, and he is

awaiting a much needed replacement.

Now that our mission has been completed to build a permanent structure for the Museum, the board of directors is working on a strategic plan to take the next step into the future. It will focus on learning and education, working with those institutions and organizations who provide these services, and doing outreach to them and the communities we serve and beyond.

To make this a reality, we need everyone's assistance. We need YOUR help in this new endeavor in such areas as membership, fundraising, communications, conducting tours, and just plain old step-in-and-help where you can.

We are also looking for individuals who would like to serve on the WSMR Historical Foundation Board of Directors. If you want to get involved with the board or just help out on one of the committees, the easiest thing to do is email me at: ffw@lascruces.com

We still appreciate doing things the old fashioned way as well, so if you want, just fill out the form below and mail through the U.S. Postal System to: Frances Williams, P.O. Box 171, White Sands Missile Range, NM 88002.

The preservation of this historical site and its history depends on all of us. It depends on those who were here at the beginning of this journey and those who are enjoying WSMR's heritage today.

Please join us.



The foundation for the new building is done.

I Want To Volunteer:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Address: _____

WSMR Museum And Alamogordo Lose A Friend

On March 17, the White Sands Missile Range Museum lost its museum specialist when George House died. He was only 63.



George came to work at White Sands after a long career at the International Space Hall of Fame in Alamogordo - now known at the New Mexico Museum of Space History. He started work at the museum in December 1985 after earning his Masters degree in history.

He was the museum's curator for 29 years - its longest serving curator. With such a long career in one spot, he

was key in building the museum's artifact collection.

In his job he got to meet and interview some pretty interesting people, to include Frank Borman, Deke Slayton, Gene Kranz and Clyde Tombaugh.

He was the instigator of New Mexico's Space Trail. One day he passed a highway historical marker and the thought struck him that there should be space related markers in New Mexico. He then developed maps outlining the trail, while the museum's savvy research and marketing team expanded on the educational efforts of the trail's legacy.

Less than a year after retiring from the Alamogordo museum, he hired on at White Sands. George was always enthusiastic about WSMR and the switch from Space history to Military history didn't phase him a bit. His positive outlook and cheerful greeting to all visitors will be missed.

Honor Donations To The White Sands Historical Foundation In Honor of George House from Frances Williams Jon Gibson

New Mexico Space Trail Includes Some WSMR Sites

The New Mexico Space Trail that George House started has grown with some interesting and some head scratching sites. For instance, WSMR in its entirety is included. But then it singles out the High Energy Laser Systems Test Facility, the Space Harbor, NASA's Johnson Space Center and Trinity Site. They even include McGregor Range on nearby Fort Bliss.

The selection of McGregor seems like a bit of a stretch. But the trail also includes the UFO crash site near Roswell and the "International UFO Museum and Research Center" in Roswell. In all, the state has listed 52 places. If you'd like to see the map and a listing, go to this site for a printable version: http://www.nmspace-museum.org/documents/SpaceTrails_map.pdf

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.

White Sands Pioneer Group
P.O. Box 171
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White Sands Historical Foundation
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Las Cruces Lawman Photographed Early White Sands

By Jim Eckles, Editor *HAH*

Who was James M. Flanagan and how did he get access to White Sands Proving Ground to take photos during those first few years?

These questions came up last year when Dennis Daily, department head for New Mexico State University's Archives and Special Collections, showed me about 60 large format negatives stored in the Flanagan collection. Dennis knew of my background at White Sands Missile Range and was looking for some help in identifying and dating what was in the photos.

I went to campus expecting to see the same photos we've all seen of the first V-2 shots and some of the associated equipment. I was floored with what I found. Here were pristine images of the V-2 and WAC Corporal preparations on May 9, 1945 and their launch the next day. There are photos of the 500K Static Test Stand just after the completion of the concrete work and long before any testing. There are nice shots of the Skyscreen System created in 1947, of some of the equipment used to track and record missile flights and even that pesky German railroad car used to transport and launch V-2s in Europe – some claimed it never existed at WSMR.



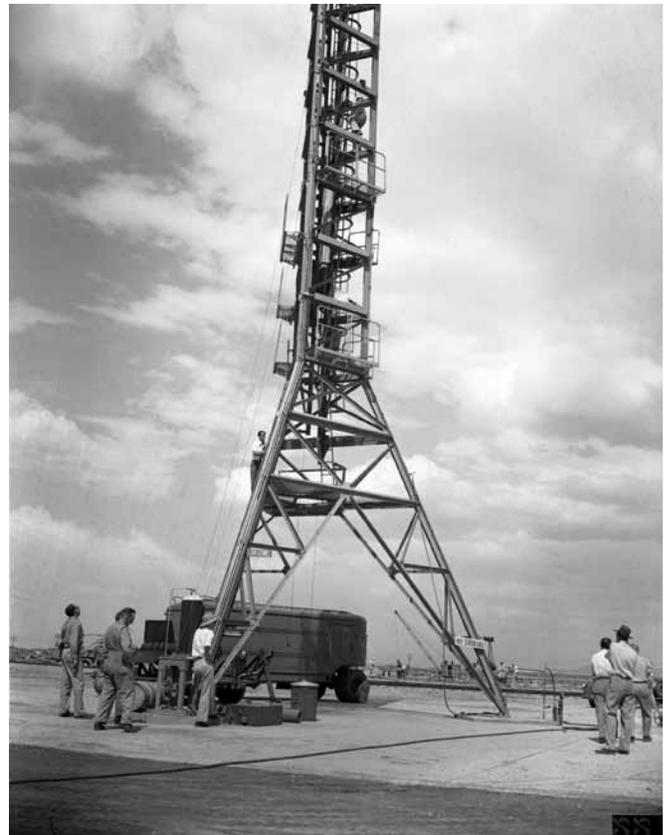
Jim Flanagan's portrait while he was a deputy sheriff in Dona Ana County.

Some of the negatives look just like images we used to have in Public Affairs to illustrate the early history of WSMR. Many are new to me – have never seen them printed anywhere. And what is great is that these are original negatives and not generations old copies of prints that have lost any crispness they might have had decades ago.

It turns out that Jim Flanagan is a pretty interesting guy who lived in Las Cruces most of his life. He is originally from Kansas, born in Junction City on August 20, 1912. He worked as a Geary County deputy sheriff until 1937 when he moved to Las Cruces, NM. He worked for the New Mexico National Guard just before World War II. In 1938 he married Amelia Moya. They had four sons.

During the war, Flanagan served with the 45th Infantry Division as a warrant officer and saw combat in Sicily, Italy, Southern France and Germany. Near

See Seriously Wounded In Combat, page 4



Jet Propulsion Laboratory personnel are finishing up loading a WAC Corporal rocket into its launch tower at what is now Launch Complex 33 for a Friday, May 10, 1946 demonstration flight. The WAC Corporal was fired about 4:15 p.m., a couple of hours after the first successful V-2 flight from the same launch area.

Seriously Wounded In Combat — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Lauf, Germany, he was severely wounded when the tank he was riding in struck a mine and killed everyone else aboard. Lauf is south of Baden-Baden.

While in a medical station there he was further wounded. I found an article in the Las Cruces Sun-News from July 13, 1945 that described how Flanagan was injured. The article is mostly about his rescuer who turns out to be Major Ben Billups from Las Cruces who turns out to be the same White Sands pioneer who was one of the missile range's first Hall of Fame inductees.

German aircraft attacked the American camp. The initial wave left Flanagan more seriously injured and helpless while tents burned around him. Billups and Capt. Aubrey Stewers rushed to Flanagan and carted him off to a safe place while the attack continued. Flanagan was then evacuated to a regular medical station and, at the time of the Sun-News article, he was in a Paris, France hospital recovering.

Flanagan ended up being awarded the Bronze Star and several Purple Hearts plus two commendations. His injuries must have been extensive because he wasn't mustered out of the Army for another year when he was discharged from William Beaumont hospital in

El Paso in June 1946. At least he was close to home.

After the war he operated the Magnolia Oil Company in Las Cruces. If you bought your gasoline at a Magnolia station you'd have seen a large magnolia blossom on the sign. Through various mergers, Magnolia became part of Socony-Vacuum and used a red Pegasus logo as well as the Mobil name. The "Magnolia" name disappeared in 1959.

On August 29, 1949, Flanagan was hired as a Dona Ana County deputy sheriff. He was made chief deputy at the start of 1955, a position he held until he resigned in September 1959 when he was hired as the Las Cruces chief of police. He resigned as police chief on Feb. 23, 1961 in a dispute over pay for his department.

During all this time, Flanagan was a competitive shooter winning many state championships and distinguished himself as a marksman at the national level as well. For several years Flanagan was rated the best all-around marksman in the state. One Las Cruces Sun-News article in May 1949 noted that Flanagan was the

See Photography In Police Work, page 5



Flanagan nicely framed the V-2 being prepped on its launch stool with the WAC Corporal launch tower and the blockhouse at LC-33. The news media were at White Sands on July 9 to be briefed on the launches and to visit the launch site before the actual shots on July 10. You can see that the basic blockhouse is finished but they have added rebar to the wall above the door and to a new concrete pad - they are getting ready to build the communications addition on the south side.



Dating this photo is more difficult than the one to the left. However, the same pile of cable reels is in both photos - just off the northwest corner of the blockhouse. On the left side of this image, down the railroad tracks and barely visible is the German V-2 railway launcher. The launcher and tracks were quickly removed and rarely show up in later images. However, there is a 1947 Army film, FB 219, with aerial footage of complex and the railcar is there.

Photography In Police Work — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

national small bore champion and he was the only man to ever win the honor twice. Based on this information, it is no surprise that he taught marksmanship to National Guard personnel.

In addition to his shooting rifles and pistols, Flanagan was pretty good with a camera. He was president of the Las Cruces Camera Club at one time and won some of their photo contests.

In the Flanagan archive is a handwritten article he composed that argues for all law enforcement offices to have a photographer or access to a photographer to take pictures at crime scenes. He explains that it is really helpful if the police department trains one of its investigators to take photographs since those individuals are familiar with evidence gathering and know what is important.

He gives examples of how useful the photos can be. He explains that they once went to trial where a defendant was pleading he was innocent. The police department produced photos of the defendant in a compromising position. Once the defense attorney saw them, they immediately sought a plea bargain.



It is hard to say for certain that this is the V-2 launch at 2:14 p.m. on May 10, 1946. It stands to reason that Flanagan caught this on that day but we don't know if he was allowed to photograph other V-2 flights. The V-2 for the May 10 shot was painted black and yellow and is very distinctive in the color photographs. It is possible to identify that rocket, even in black and white photos, if it is a nice close shot. The yellow is clearly not white in those pictures. According to the Albuquerque Journal report of the May 10 launch, witnesses were on sandy knolls a thousand feet from the V-2 and they were ready "to fall to ground in event of a mishap."

The NMSU archive has numerous Flanagan photos of crime scenes and victims. Occasionally his photos of criminal activity showed up in the Las Cruces Sun-News. Also, he took pictures of sporting events his children were involved in and some of those show up in the newspaper as well.

Looking at all this information and then seeing his photographs, it is apparent Flanagan knew what he was doing with a camera. The photos he took at White Sands are quite nice. But it doesn't explain how a guy running a gas station in Las Cruces in 1946 and 47 was given access and an escort to take pictures – even if he was a World War II hero.

See Flanagan And Billups Connection, page 6



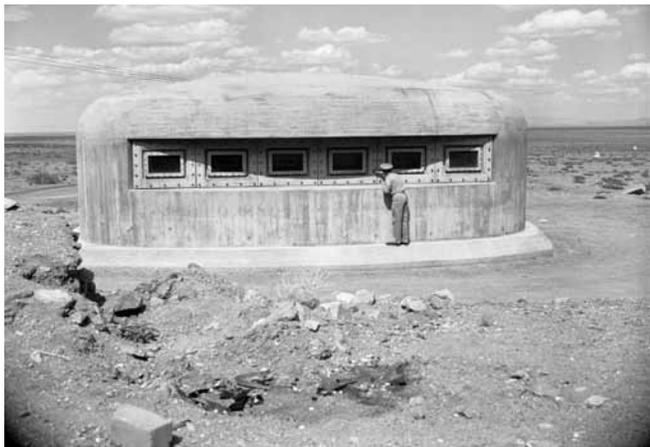
The skyscreen system was developed after the two V-2 mishaps in May 1947 - one crashing just northeast of Alamogordo and, two weeks later, one crashing just outside of Juarez. The system used several sites perpendicular to each other. A viewer would watch the missile/rocket launch and flight through a fixed scope and he could tell if it was veering left or right. If there was an anomaly, he could radio controllers to cut the vehicle's propulsion system.

Flanagan And Billups Connection — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

I have toyed with the idea that Flanagan and Billups somehow linked up after the war and that maybe Billups made something happen. But, after the war, Billups returned to college where he received his engineering degree in 1947. It seems unlikely that he had the connections to get Flanagan onto White Sands.

There is a handwritten note in the Flanagan archive that says, “Jim Flanagan was retained by White Sands Missile Range, circa 1953, to photograph some of their facilities and launch operations. Some of his photos were deemed to be classified, so they were kept by WSMR – some of which were later returned to Jim when they were declassified.” I’m guessing this was written by the family member who donated the archive materials after Flanagan died in 1983 at the age of 71. The author was guessing at the date and was off by several years. It is exactly what happens in families when someone tries to recreate what happened decades before and there are no written records.

So it looks like Flanagan was asked by the military to take the pictures. Of course that raises other questions that I was not able to answer – Was he paid? Did he use his own equipment and film? If some of the photos were considered sensitive, maybe White Sands developed the film. How did he end up with the original negatives? Or, did he shoot everything twice so he could retain one negative? If any of you have any in-



The three images on this page are of the 500K Static Test Stand. It is clear that the concrete work is done but the facility is not operational yet. There is a photo in a WSMR history showing construction that is labeled February 1948. In Lt. Col. Hamill’s report from 1957, he states construction took place between 1948 and 1950. Given that, these photos were probably taken in late 1948 or in 1949. This photo is the pillbox out in front of the test stand and was used in photographing rocket engine tests.

formation, please contact the author at: nebraska1950@comcast.net or 575-521-8771.

After his stint in Dona Ana County law enforcement, Flanagan ran a gun store in Las Cruces. He also served as a consultant to an ammunition manufacturer. In 1974, at the age of 62, Flanagan ran for sheriff of Dona Ana County. He finished fourth out of four candidates.

The photos in this article are from the James M. Flanagan Papers, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library. The ones of White Sands activities were taken by him.

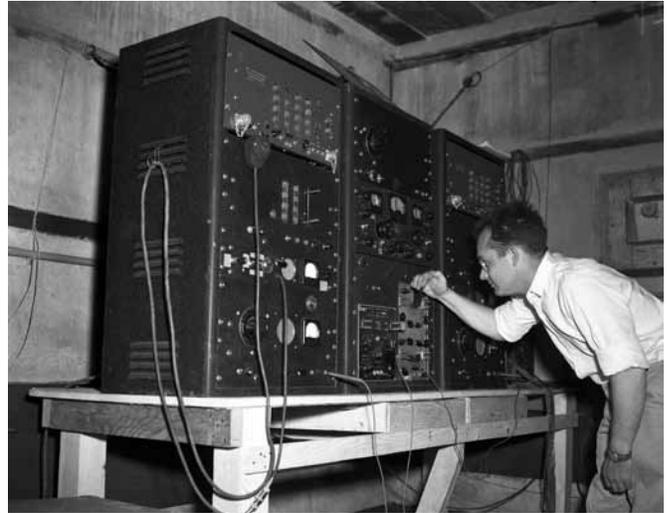


The top photo is the spillway to drain liquid propellant away from the personnel and equipment in the event of an accident. This photo is the emergency escape bunker from the control room which is 60 feet below inside the mountain. A metal ladder inside a small shaft connects to the bunker.

More Jim Flanagan Photos



Equipment inside the Army Blockhouse. The same clock and panel appear in Army film FB-219.



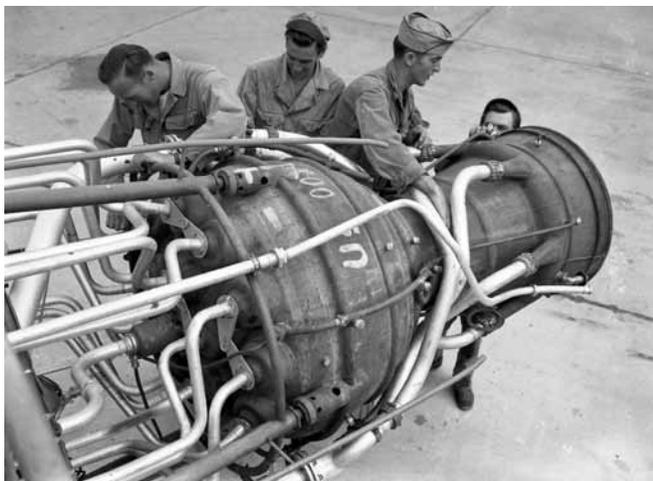
This is also believed to be equipment inside the Army Blockhouse.



A plotting board used to track the location of a missile in real time - inside a van or trailer.



The carbon steering vanes being attached to a V-2.



Adjusting the propellant piping on a V-2 motor.

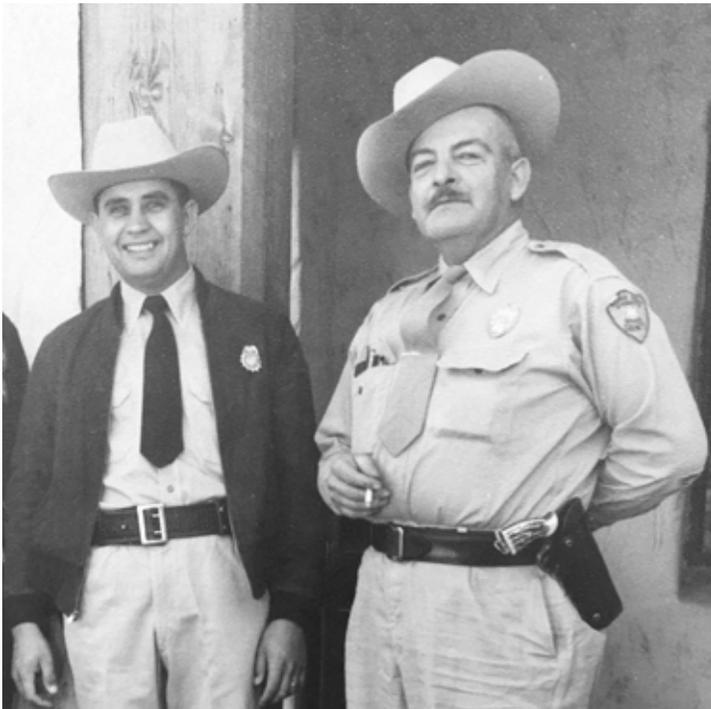


Flanagan's escort provides scale in his photo of V-2 rocket tail assemblies.

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The Back Page



I wanted to include this photo of Jim Flanagan, on the right, with his sheriff boss because it probably tells us a little about him as a person. Note Flanagan's cocked hat and how he wears his weapon which appears to be something the other officers probably didn't carry - at least the grips are different. He looks like a man confident in his role and who wants to do it his way. Of course, being in combat through much of World War II, getting almost blown up, and being one of the best marksmen in the country might do that for you. From the James M. Flanagan Papers, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library