



Hands Across History

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



Volume XVI, Letter I

February 2020

Very Positive News For WSMR Museum

By Darren Court
Museum Director

It's been a very interesting couple of months here at the museum so I would like to take some time and let you all know what we have been doing, where we currently are, and what you could possibly expect going into the future – which is quite exciting for this little museum!



Reorganization

First of all, the museum is no longer “part” of the installation. Initially under the Directorate of Family, Morale, Welfare and Recreation (DFMWR), the museum moved just over 5 years ago to the Directorate of Planning, Training, Mobilization, and Security (DPTMS). These were all part of the WSMR Garrison and the museum fell under that Installation Management Command (IMCOM).

Throughout 2018 and 2019 we gradually came under the direct control of the US Army Center of Military History (CMH), Ft. McNair, Virginia. CMH, at the time part of the Office of the Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of the Army, moved under the US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) in October 2019, placing the museum under the direct control of the TRADOC four-star commander and removing us from any local WSMR control.

All Army museums made this move and it places us all within the larger construct of Army training – which is where we should be. As part of

this move, we lost one permanent position, as the army was going through a 10% across-the-board reduction, and we were placed under the Ft. Bliss museum for administrative purposes.

What this has done is consolidate all museum personnel and resources to a Ft. Bliss “nexus” which allows us to all support each other. In addition, we are now part of the Western Regional Museum group, with higher level administration and supervision at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma.

Because of the loss of this permanent position, we are in the process of hiring a term employee for a period of two years. This person will help with developing programming, exhibit content, and the deaccession and turn in of excess materials and artifacts the museum currently holds.

CMH Visitation and Results

In late November, Dr. James Kelly and Ms. Roxann Snow from CMH visited the museum. The new museum gallery requires a new exhibit plan – we will not just move everything from the old gallery to the new – and we turned in the first draft of the new exhibit plan in June 2019. A collaborative effort in rewriting and rearranging the scripting for the new exhibits then took place over the next couple of months between curator Darren Court and Dr. Kelly.

In November, Dr. Kelly and Ms. Snow – the exhibit designer – spent two days at the museum reworking the exhibit plan, measuring and photographing the space and artifacts, and finalizing what the content of the new museum will be. This process is on-going, though almost complete and was a very good visit - we feel confident that CMH

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👁 Please Read This Announcement 👁

You Need To Respond To Continue Receiving *Hands Across History*

The White Sands Missile Range Pioneer Group mailing list for this newsletter and those before, has not been purged in decades. We mail it to hundreds of addresses and have no idea how many people receive it or still want it. It costs hundreds of dollars each quarter to print and mail the newsletter. If a couple of hundred copies are being thrown away, it is a fairly large waste of resources. By the way, the Historical Foundation now pays all of these expenses.

Since it is mailed bulk rate, undeliverable newsletters are not returned to us. The editor feels the most reliable way to purge the list is to simply start over with a new database. It will require that everyone, except the Foundation members who pay an annual membership, submit their desire to continue. In doing so, you need to supply your name and address to make sure we have the correct information. An email address would be appreciated but is not necessary. Your request can be submitted via the U.S. Postal System or by email.

Send emails to nebraska1950@comcast.net and snail mail to: White Sands Historical Foundation, P.O. Box 171, White Sands, NM 88002.

You have until summer to get on the list.



You might want to take this opportunity to join the WSMR Historical Foundation. Annual membership is offered at different donation levels. They are:

Trailblazer - \$25 to \$99

Rocketeer - \$100 to \$299

Explorer - \$300 to \$999

Patriot - \$1,000 or more

Your donation is considered a tax deductible gift.

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

White Sands Historical Foundation
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Virgil Lucky Served At White Sands From 1953 To 1958

By Janet Santacroce

This is a story about a young man named Virgil Monroe Lucky.

Out on the road in 1923, Virgil's mother was pregnant and getting close to having the child. It turns out she could not wait to get back to Kansas City to a hospital. They had to stop along the way so she could have the baby. This was done with the help of a midwife in a local farm house. Virgil Lucky was born near Bedford, Iowa on Sept. 28, 1923.

Virgil grew up in Kansas City, Missouri. He had two brothers. One was older and one was younger. At age 18, he was drafted into the army as a private. He wasn't planning to make the military his career. The war started and things changed. Virgil ended up being on active duty for the next couple of decades - the whole time he was in the Army.

When the war started, he was right in the mix of things. He fought at Omaha beach on June 6, 1944 during the allied invasion of France. Virgil said by this time he was a staff sergeant and a combat engineer.

He was wounded several times. He was shot in the elbow, had a skull fracture, and had shrapnel in his right side and back. Medics were busy patching people up and taking bullets out. Virgil later received a Presidential Citation and a Purple Heart for his bravery on Omaha beach.

While fighting at Omaha, Virgil lost his dog tags on the beach. They were found 15 years later by a French college student. This student got in touch with Virgil's grandson who lives in Albuquerque and is also named Virgil Lucky. Unfortunately the student said he couldn't get the dog tags returned to the family because they were being kept with war memorabilia in the local museum.

Later, after he was healed, Virgil was assigned to help build bridges over rivers across Europe. He said they worked on hundreds of river bridges in Belgium, Germany, and elsewhere in Europe.

Virgil finally returned to the states in 1945. In 1946, he married Maxine Maynard in Columbia,

South Carolina.

She was his friend from Kansas City. Later, his one and only son Richard, was born in Kansas City on July 16, 1947.

Virgil had a second tour to Germany where they disassembled V-2 rocket missiles that were crated up and sent to Aberdeen

Proving Ground in Maryland. He worked in the motor pool and took classes at night.

When he got back to the states, Virgil volunteered to go to a language school in Monterey, California where he learned to speak Spanish. He then went to Panama to teach. He taught automotive engineering in both Spanish and English. He was head of the Automotive Division in Panama and was there for three years. By this time he had been promoted to the rank of second lieutenant.

After Panama, he was sent to White Sands Proving Ground, New Mexico. He was at WSPG from 1953 to December 1958. He was assigned to the Special Weapons Missile System at SWAF. Virgil was the Nuclear Weapons Officer at SWAF 4. He said they did research and development of nuclear weapons. They built adaption kits for all missiles. He saw a lot of firings where they had to block the highway just like they do now.

Virgil and his wife lived on post with their son in a two bedroom duplex. During the summer of 1954, Virgil and his family made a trip back to Kansas. His wife had been married before and had five children from the previous marriage back in Kansas. Two of those children, the two older brothers (Frank & Leroy) went to Panama with Virgil and Maxine when he was stationed there.

When they came to visit in 1954, I begged to go back to New Mexico with them when they



Virgil Lucky's official portrait as a captain. Photo courtesy of the author

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CMH Director Visits In Jan. — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

will provide the installation with a first class facility, containing all that a modern museum visitor expects to see while telling the story of White Sands much better than we currently are.

During their visit, we also hosted the new Director of Army Museums, Colonel Roger Keen, and the Director of the Western Museum Region, Mr. Frank Siltman. Mr. Siltman was familiar with the installation, as his father had been stationed here, however for Colonel Keen it was his first visit and it allowed us to give him a better understanding of the installation and its diverse history.

On January 9, the museum hosted the Executive Director of CMH, Mr. Charles Bowery, and Mr. Mike DeYoung, program manager for the career field for army archivists, museum professions, and historians. This was Mr. Bowery's second visit to the museum and he was able to see some of the changes we made in the ensuing three years, as well as the new exhibit gallery. Mr. Bowery had meetings with the installation leadership and the White Sands Missile Range Historical Foundation, as well as spending a few hours in discussions with the museum curator. They were able to explain the changes in the Army Museum Branch and how this will affect the WSMR Museum. They were able to allay fears that the museum would be downgraded or affected negatively. In contrast, the news was very good. CMH has decided that this will become a STEM education center for the Army and to that end a number of things will occur.

Museum Education

The museum gallery will be a modern facility with everything visitors expect to see in a modern museum. The exhibits will contain up to date, modern interpretation and graphics, with video and technology that will allow for a fuller experience. CMH is interested in having the technology available to build a "back end" database and web presence that reinforces the story seen in the museum and informs the visitor to a greater extent than can be done in a limited exhibit space.

Also, the museum archives, now across the

installation in a warehouse, will be moved to the old gallery space, which will also contain space for education, classes, and meetings. CMH understands that the ideal museum for this type of education to occur is here, and is interested in making this happen! This has been a museum effort for several years and we're excited to see if finally paying off. To this end, we intend to build stronger partnerships with NMSU, UTEP and local school districts, as well as other organizations involved in education in order to build the curricula and programs required for success.

In addition to the on-site work in educating students that we will pivot more toward, under TRADOC, the museum has a mission to train soldiers. This TRADOC mission is one that is certainly challenging for us, since we do not have a large population of soldiers such as found in larger FORSCOM and training installations, however, we have not let that stop us! Approximately 5

years ago museum staff participated in a Staff Ride conducted by the US Army Sergeant's Major Academy historian to the "Pancho Villa" battle site in Columbus, New Mexico. Upon our return, we thought the development of something similar – and being able to offer it to Ft. Bliss – would greatly benefit the museum and make us a larger part of the army museum educational organization. The decision was to develop something for the Hembrillo battlefield – a site within the boundary of the installation where, in 1880, Buffalo Soldiers of the 9th Cavalry fought an engagement against Chief Victorio's Warm Springs Apache.

Research and writing of the product was conducted by the museum curator and Mr. Gerry Veara, and Gerry has taken the lead in updating the materials and conducting most of the staff rides, which can also be done as a curated tour of the site. The location is a protected site, under the purview of the Environmental Branch of the department of Public Works (DPW), and the museum works closely with that organization to protect



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Too Many Artifacts — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

the archeological and historical integrity of the battlefield. We have conducted this trip dozens of times for local and state historical and archeological groups, civic organizations, ROTC, and senior enlisted leadership of the 10th Mountain Division, currently at Ft. Bliss. Mr. Bowery was interested in this so we provided the briefing materials for his review and this is now being pushed out to 1st Armored Division at Ft. Bliss - he called it a "...superb staff ride..."

We are quite excited to see this product we developed be adopted in the manner we had always hoped for. As well, we are interested in developing virtual staff rides of other battles and engagements in the state, such as the Battle of Brazito, Battle of Valverde, and the Battle of Glorieta Pass. With the development of these staff rides, as well as other formal tours to historical ranches, LC-33, WSMR Cold War sites, etc., we can become a more important member of the Army Museum Enterprise (AME).

The Artifact Collection

One more, very significant, change that will occur with the reorganization of the AME is the reduction of collections. The AME is currently downsizing the army artifact collection for a number of reasons, mainly due to an abundance of material with no provenance as well as a significant amount of duplication – how many of the same rifle, insignia, vehicle, or uniform is really needed? We are a bit different due to the mission of the museum and our collections management policies; most museums do not collect the same type of material we do here.

We have identified the artifacts to be used in the new exhibit gallery, which is only about 10 percent of the artifacts held by the museum. Items in Missile Park make up about another 15 percent, so that leaves us with a large amount of material in storage. Much of this material in storage is important WSMR and Army material culture and will be moved to a climate controlled curatorial facility at Ft. Bliss, with the other Ft. Bliss collections.

Material for which there is no provenance, or which is "off the shelf" material not unique to

WSMR, will be deaccessioned and turned in. All army museums are currently going through this process and there procedures and policies in place to ensure that important artifacts are not overlooked and turned in by accident. This will allow us to concentrate on education – rather than collections curation and inventory – and also give us the opportunity to clear out our warehouse storage facility. With the artifacts and archives both emptied from that building, we can then turn it back to the installation and concentrate all of our efforts and activities in a smaller museum footprint.

So what does this all mean?

So what does this all mean for the WSMR Museum? It means that we will become the museum and learning center as envisioned by those who took the first steps to put this organization in place all of those years ago, and who have worked since that time to make it a possibility. It means that greater opportunities now exist for the historical foundation for a greater partnership with the museum in supporting these new endeavors.

It also means that the WSMR Museum is becoming a much more important piece in the education puzzle for local communities, the state of New Mexico and the US Army. This greater importance and visibility can truly launch us to greatness in the next decade!

WSMR Hall Of Fame Nominations Are Being Taken Until March 31

Uncertainty about the Hall of Fame has been eliminated. The White Sands Historical Foundation has taken over the Hall of Fame functions of the White Sands Pioneer Group and assumed the financial concerns of missile range officials. In turn, the WSMR Command Group has pledged to continue supporting the Hall of Fame and providing a space for it.

Nominations for 2020 are due by the end of March. For a copy of the revised Hall of Fame guidance pamphlet, contact Miriam Rodriguez at the White Sands Public Affairs Office. Her email address is: miriam.u.rodriguez.civ@mail.mil. Her phone number is 575-678-1134.

Moving To Las Cruces —

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returned. I was only supposed to go for one year, but then they decided to keep me longer. Since both Virgil and Maxine worked on WSPG, I could help take care of my younger brother, Richard (Virgil's son). Maxine worked at C station.

I went to school on base for 8th grade. For high school I would have had to ride the school bus back and forth from WSPG to Las Cruces every day, if they stayed on post. That was when Virgil and Maxine decided to move into town. That way I could still watch my little brother when he got out of school.

They bought a house in Las Cruces where they lived from 1955 to Dec.1958. Richard's elementary school was just a block from the house.

Virgil always seemed to be busy. He bought some land and two horses, one for himself and one for me. We loved to ride in the desert.

In his spare time, Virgil loved to work on cars, fixing engines and keeping them running. He bought an old Crosley which he fixed up and painted pink and gray. It had a stick shift on the floor. He said he bought it and fixed it up for me so I could drive back and forth from home to Las Cruces High School. During this time, I got closer

to my step-father.

In the summer of 1958, Virgil was sent to Taipei, Taiwan. There he worked on Nike Hercules, equipped with nuclear warheads, and ground-to-air missiles. He was soon promoted to captain.

The family moved to Taiwan in December 1958. I went to the American school where I graduated from high school. The family lived in Taiwan for two and a half years.

Upon returning to the states, Virgil was sent to Ft. Irwin, California where he was promoted to major. After the promotion, Virgil decided to retire from the military after 25 years on active duty. In that time, he went from a private to a major.

Maxine and Virgil ended up getting a divorce and he moved to San Antonio for work. Later they both got married again. His new wife had a son whom Virgil adopted when he was a child. His name is Sonny and he still takes good care of Virgil. He goes to visit him every day at the hospital.

Virgil is now 96 years old and living in a hospital in San Antonio. I try to call him several times a week just to keep in touch. He still has a good sense of humor. He laughs and says, "I just might make it to 100 years old."



Maxine, Virgil and Janet at Lucky's promotion to major. Photo courtesy of the author

**WITH GREAT APPRECIATION THE
WHITE SANDS MISSILE RANGE HISTORICAL FOUNDATION
ACKNOWLEDGES THE GENEROSITY AND SUPPORT FROM THE MANY BENEFACTORS
TO ITS CAPITAL FUND FOR THE
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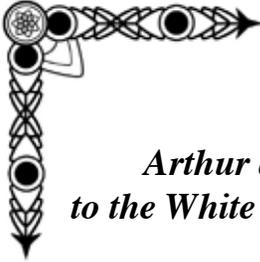
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The Back Page



Jon Gibson Honored



Arthur and Rebecca Berkson recently made a \$350 donation to the White Sands Missile Range Historical Foundation in honor of Jon Gibson.

It is most appropriate that Jon be honored in this way because, more than anyone else, he has been the glue holding the Foundation board of directors together. His constancy and attention to detail as the Foundation's treasurer has been invaluable. Then there is that wealth of wisdom that comes with experience which he shares with the group. No one else comes close to serving the Foundation as long and as generously as Jon has.

Jon, we salute you.

