



Hands Across History



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

Volume XVI, Letter II

May 2020

Important! Last Chance!

👁️ Please Read This Announcement 👁️

You Need To Respond To Continue Receiving This Newsletter

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 actually 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.

This is your last warning. This summer we will create a new mailing list.



You might want to take this opportunity to join the WSMR Historical Foundation. Annual membership is offered at different donation levels. See the form on page 2. 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.

White Sands Missile Range Historical Foundation Membership and/or Donation Form



Please join the Foundation as a member or consider making a tax-deductible donation to help us tell the missile range's unique story.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Email Address: _____

Phone: _____

Annual Membership Categories

- Trailblazer.....\$25 - \$99
- Rocketeer.....\$100 - \$299
- Explorer.....\$300 - \$999
- Patriot.....\$1,000 or more

Business and Corporate Categories are also available.

Checks should be made out to: **WSMR Historical Foundation**

Donation Amount enclosed \$ _____

My donation is on behalf of: _____

Please send this form to: **WSMR Historical Foundation,
P.O. Box 171, White Sands Missile Range, NM 88002.**
Contact Jon Gibson at 575-382-8292 if you have questions.

Members receive a quarterly newsletter entitled *Hands Across History*. It is sent out via the postal service or by email. Email has the advantage of being in color and arriving 3 weeks before the other. If you are joining, which do you prefer? _____



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.

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.

The newsletter is intended to keep _____

Membership to either organization is open to anyone who shares their goals.

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

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

An Update From The WSMR Foundation President

By Frances Williams
Foundation President

We hope that all of you are staying safe and are well as we continue working to conquer this virus that has encompassed all corners of our planet and has taken so many lives. In the United States and in our surrounding communities we have been grateful that we have not suffered the same losses as so many other states and in particular some of our New Mexico counties. We encourage all of our citizens to follow the guidelines that Governor Grisham has issued for New Mexico. We have weathered many bad times which threatened our nation with resiliency, strength, courage and determination. We will meet this crisis as we have in the past and will move on to the next chapter meeting the challenges with the same determination we have demonstrated in the past.

The White Sands Missile Range museum is entering a new and exciting era as we start the new year. After the reversal of the decision from the Center of Military History (CMH) to pare down the operation of our museum, reduce the museum hours of operation and essentially make us a second class museum, we have succeeded in having that decision reversed. As reported in our last news letter by our curator Darren Court, the Executive Director of CMH visited the museum and spent several hours with the WSMR Historical Foundation Board advising us that he had reversed this decision.

We will be operating full time, full steam ahead, with new exhibits and artifacts, as well as the use of sophisticated technology depicting the historical events which happened at WSMR, and changed the world forever with the introduction of the Atomic, Missile and Space ages. It will also include exhibits of technologies now being tested at the range. A professional museum designer has been assigned and is working closely with our museum Curator Darren Court.

The Executive Director of CMH has stated that in addition to operating the museum, we will be an education and training center. This will encompass working closely with universities, as well as

our public schools. It will include having speakers, seminars and tours acquainting students with the historical mission that WSMR has always played in the defense our this nation. The push will be to get young people interested in the STEM subjects that White Sands needs to populate its workforce. The WSMR Historical Foundation gave the Army funds (\$982,00.00) to build the 4,000-square foot addition to extend the museum, providing badly needed space to upgrade the exhibits and artifacts. The Foundation wants to continue its support for the museum so that the new and exciting era in which we are now entering will continue.

WSMR will be involved in new areas of testing and support not only to the new organizations created as a result of the Army reorganization but to our allies who continue to test on the range. This will all be documented and artifacts included in our museum .

To continue the work of the Foundation we need more members, donations, and volunteers to serve on our Foundation Board. We want to insure that we have the resources to face and support the new era and challenges it brings.

You will find a membership and contribution form on page 2 of this newsletter. Please provide your support to our very important mission and join us in making this new era a success.

We fought so hard to keep this museum operating in full force and we want to keep it that way. It will depend on how many of you provide us with the necessary support and funding to do the job that needs to be done. Please become a part of this new and exciting journey.

Send your membership and donations to White Sands Missile Range Foundation P. O. Box 171, WSMR, New Mexico 88002.

If you are interested in becoming a member of the WSMR Foundation Board of Directors contact Frances F. Williams at 575 526 9769.

75 years ago on May 7, Los Alamos scientists and engineers exploded 100 tons of TNT at Trinity Site to rehearse the atomic bomb test in July and calibrate instruments.

Hey, I Know Who That Is. He Was A WSMR Pioneer.

By Jim Eckles
Newsletter Editor

Recently my wife and I were watching the documentary film about the Apollo 11 mission that was released in 2019. Imagine my surprise when, toward the very end of the film, there is footage of Ozro Covington, White Sands Missile Range pioneer and Hall of Fame member, on the screen for a few seconds. By the way, the film is simply called “Apollo 11.”

First of all, the film is remarkable because it tells the story of Buzz Aldrin, Neil Armstrong and Michael Collins going to the moon and back using nothing but NASA archival footage. Also, there is no outside narration. The story is told using mission control recordings and news broadcasts from the time – Walker Cronkite’s voice comes through many times. There is some 70mm film used in the movie that has never been seen by the public before.

The nice thing about some of this beautiful footage is that it isn’t just a second or two like you’d see on a TV news program. There are ex-



Ozro Covington’s WSMR Hall of Fame portrait.

tended clips letting the viewer really absorb what is happening. This is a good reason to watch the film at a theater on the big screen or on a large, high-definition set at home. We still get DVDs from Netflix so we were watching it from a disk.

For instance, on the moon, there is quite a bit of footage of Aldrin and Armstrong deploying instruments on the surface – stuff that never gets included in the historical clips on cable.

The movie runs about 90 minutes and at the end there are lots of clips of joyous personnel from the various NASA facilities celebrating the safe return of the astronauts. Watching it on a disk, I could stop it and get an accurate time on where Covington appeared. At 1:27:12, for five seconds, there is Ozro Covington, in a very nice brown-plaid suit and striped tie, being congratulated by his employees. He has a huge smile on his face and people are thumping him on the back.

Covington came to White Sands Proving Ground in May 1946, just when the first successful V-2 rocket was fired. He eventually served as the senior civilian for the Signal Corps Organization, a detachment of the Signal Corps Laboratories. His title was technical director of the U.S. Army Missile Support Agency.

This was when a group of civilian and military personnel invented what a missile range should be – they invented White Sands. Covington’s White Sands Hall of Fame write up mentions his contributions in establishing radar as the primary source of data for flight safety, building the chain radar system as an acquisition aid and the control of drone targets using range instrumentation radar.

If that wasn’t enough, the article says, “Covington was instrumental in enabling the first U.S. guided missile to receive guidance commands from the ground. He played a role in the development of specifications for range instrumentation radar, the first range communications system and creation of the frequency coordination function and office. Covington established photographic

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A Valuable NASA Asset — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

capabilities for public relations and historical coverage on the missile range. He was instrumental in the establishment of upper atmospheric and ionosphere research, electronic countermeasures and electronic warfare facilities.”

The relatively new NASA appreciated what Covington did at White Sands. In a NASA history, I found this, “It was at White Sands during this time that a young engineer named Ozro M. Covington began developing the concept of centralized networks for tracking and communications, honing skills which would later be used to lead NASA’s human spaceflight network.”

In 1961, NASA hired Covington away from WSMR. In a NASA oral history with William Easter, who worked at WSMR for eight years, Easter says, “NASA reached out and hired him, because they had to have somebody with his talents. They just kind of took him. So there went my boss, and I was coming back to the Sands, and like I said, I didn’t know what I was going to do. Well, fortunately, he called me and offered me a job at God-

dard [Space Flight Center, Greenbelt, Maryland]. He was at Goddard. I had no idea what Goddard did. I didn’t even hesitate. I said, “Of course,” and I went there.”

At the end of Project Gemini in 1967, Covington was named Goddard’s Director for Manned Flight Support, overseeing all network activities in preparation for the Apollo Moon program. And that is why Ozro Covington was being congratulated in the film. His people put together the complex network to communicate between all the NASA ground facilities and the Apollo spacecraft. It was a huge success.

For his work, Covington was given the NASA Distinguished Service Medal later in 1969. The medal is the highest award NASA can bestow and is awarded “to those who display distinguished service, ability, or courage, and have personally made a contribution representing substantial progress to the NASA mission.”

Covington retired from NASA to Longview, Texas in 1973. He died in 2006 at the age of 91.

It’s A Payload Shroud That Flew From Green River, Utah

By Jim Eckles
Newsletter Editor

My neighbor in Las Cruces, Marion Carter, had several of these items along her driveway. She simply called them Athena nose cones. Her husband was Air Force Colonel James Carter, who served at WSMR as the Athena project manager in the 1960s.

When Marion died, the property went to her daughter Anne McGinnis. Anne lived there for a few years and then sold it. Before she left she gave me one of the nose cones.

I was always skeptical about Marion’s claim that these objects survived the flight from Utah to WSMR. I’ve seen enough twisted and smashed items that have flown over White Sands to question these fiber-



glass items could remain intact. Then I ran into Jim Forman via email. He served as a young Lt. and Capt. in the Athena Program Office from 1968 to 1972.

Jim explained the objects were payload shrouds and covered the Athena’s experimental re-entry vehicle. After the burnout of the second stage, the shrouds were ejected and left to fall on their own to the ground on WSMR from over 100 miles up. They obviously didn’t fall like arrows, but tumbled and slowed in the atmosphere so they survived impact.

Jim remembered gathering shrouds from the WSMR boneyard and delivering them to the colonel when he retired. A nice farewell gift. I painted mine so people know what it is.

Kriss Kennedy Once Worked For WSMR's Navy

By Bruce Kennedy

An old proverb states that the journey of 1000 miles begins with a single step. In modern times, to paraphrase, the path to a promising career starts with the first job.

Our oldest son, Kriss Michael Kennedy began his lifelong service to this country at White Sands Missile Range.

He graduated from the United States Naval Academy with an engineering degree in 1981. While in his senior year he was summoned to appear before Admiral Hyman Rickover, the man in charge of the Navy's nuclear program. He entered the office and stood at attention. The admiral studied the young man's history at the academy and asked two questions.

The first: "What extracurricular activities did you participate in?" Kriss replied, "Tennis and sailing." The admiral told him that those were a waste of time. The second question: "Have you ever overhauled an automobile engine?" Kriss replied, "no sir." To which the admiral told him that he couldn't be an engineer unless he had.

The interview was over in less than a minute. A short time later Kriss was notified that Admiral Rickover had selected him to enter the nuclear Navy submarine program.

Ensign Kennedy graduated and returned home to El Paso where he immediately married his longtime girlfriend Ellen Marie Davis. She had just graduated from Texas Tech University with a degree in biology.

Kriss was scheduled to start his nuclear training in the fall of 1981, so in the meantime he was assigned to the Navy Ordnance Missile Test Facility at WSMR. While there he participated in missile firings at LLS-1 Desert Ship.



LT JG Kriss Kennedy (right) aboard the nuclear ballistic missile submarine James K. Polk.

After leaving White Sands he attended nuclear training at Orlando, Florida, and Saratoga Springs, New York, and submarine training at Groton, Connecticut. After completing this training, he was assigned as a nuclear officer on the James K. Polk, a ballistic missile submarine out of Charleston, South Carolina. It would appear that his experience at White Sands would be helpful in his new career. Kriss served 6 years in the navy, and after he left active duty he stayed in the navy reserve where he advanced to the rank of Captain.

After leaving active duty he applied for a job at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. For the next 30 years he was assigned as the assistant and resident inspector at nuclear power plants in Texas and Arkansas. He and



Ensign Kriss Kennedy (seated left) at LLS-1 (Navy Desert Ship) launch control in 1981. Courtesy photo.

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NRC Regional Director — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

his wife and growing family relocated many times as his assignments changed. His final assignment was as Regional Director of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in Arlington, Texas.

In a news release announcing his new job as a regional director, the NRC stated, “Over the course of his career, Kriss Kennedy has repeatedly demonstrated an exemplary commitment to technical and managerial excellence,” said Victor McCree, the NRC’s Executive Director for Operations. “The experience he has gained in a wide variety of NRC assignments will serve the agency well.”

The office he took over is NRC’s Region IV office and is responsible for the inspection and safety assessment of 13 nuclear power plant sites (19 reactors). Region IV covers 22 states, including Alaska and Hawaii, overseeing the inspection and licensing of medical, academic and industrial



Kriss Kennedy’s NRC portrait. Courtesy NRC.

users of radioactive materials. Sixteen of those states are Agreement States, which implement the NRC’s materials inspection and licensing programs.

Kriss retired in 2017. His long journey that started at White Sands Missile Range in 1981 had ended.

Kriss Michael Kennedy passed away in September, 2019. He was 60 Years old and left a lasting legacy for his children and grandchildren. He dedicated his life to protecting and defending the United States of America.

About the author: Bruce Kennedy began his engineering career at WSMR in 1958 and was assigned to the Attitude and Events Section of Measurements Division. In 1965 he transferred to the Army Atmospheric Sciences Laboratory where he worked for the next 23 years. He has been a frequent contributor to *Hands Across History*.

July Marks Two Local, Very Significant 75th Anniversaries

By Jim Eckles
Newsletter Editor

Not only does this year mark the end of World War II 75 years ago, in July we will observe the establishment of White Sands and one week later the test of the world’s first atomic bomb at Trinity Site. With the Covid-19 battle currently underway, those anniversary dates will probably pass without much fanfare.

July 9 is observed as the official birth of the missile range because that is when the paperwork was published. In reality, Corps of Engineers personnel and Lt. Col. Harold Turner were on the ground already working on July 9. In fact, records show a contractor on site drilling water wells weeks before this.

Exactly one week later, on the 16th, the first atomic bomb was exploded at 5:30 a.m. at Trinity Site - at the north end of the missile range. At the time, Turner was living in Las Cruces and had

no idea what was going on at the north end of his “proving ground.” The Trinity test was highly classified and Turner had no real need to know what was going on 75 miles north of the main post. In fact, he was in the process of telling the Corps of Engineers where to even put the main post so they could start erecting the many temporary buildings that would make up the early facility.

Before the pandemic, missile range officials were holding planning meetings to discuss possible open houses or special events to commemorate these two dates. No firm plans had been established when society started shutting down to help curb the virus’s spread. Given the short time between now and July and no miracle events on the horizon, it looks like there won’t be anything special happening at WSMR for this anniversary year.

If you have a message about these 75th anniversary events, send it in to the editor.

White Sands Missile Range Historial Foundation
Hands Across History
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White Sands, NM 88002

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The Back Page



Get Your Rockets Off

At The
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