



Hands Across History

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



Volume XVI, Letter III

August 2020

Jon Gibson Honored @Volunteer Recognition Lunch

Jon Gibson, White Sands Historical Foundation treasurer, has been chosen as the “June Bisbey Volunteer Angel of the Year” by the missile range. The award was given during the Range’s annual Volunteer Recognition luncheon on July 7. Jon couldn’t make it so the Foundation’s president, Frances Williams, accepted for him.

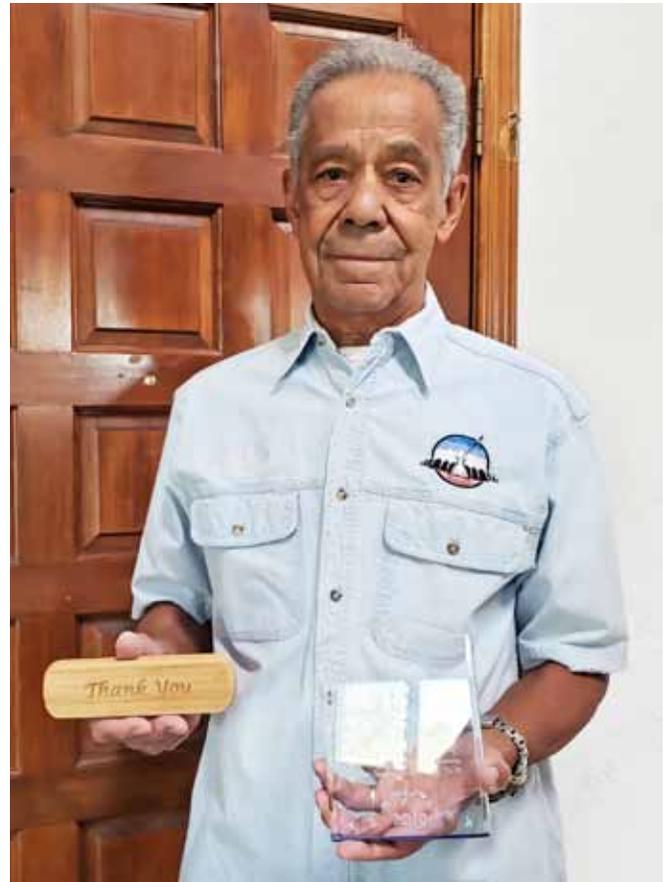
Williams pointed out to the attendees that Jon has been the glue that has been holding the Foundation together for years. As the treasurer, he did an outstanding job handling the hundreds of thousands of dollars that came into the Foundation over the years. On top of that, he has been the interface with the missile range and its many requirements for organizations operating on the post.

The award was started in 2014 and is meant to honor someone who “epitomizes the spirit of volunteerism.” It is named after June Bisbey who was the missile range’s first official Baby Strong Volunteer and who died earlier this year.

Two other recipients of the award have connections to the Museum and our Foundation. Mary Beth Reinhart received it in 2015 and Joe Marlin was honored in 2018.

Jon has to be one of the longest running volunteers with any organization at White Sands Missile Range. He started with the fledgling Foundation and then took on the treasurer’s job in 2001. That is decades of service.

Jon was born in Danville, VA in 1936. Growing up he attended Danville Public Schools. After testing for the Ford Foundation Early College Admission Program he qualified for a full college scholarship and selected Morehouse College in Atlanta. He started his college freshman year after completion of the 11th grade in high school. He graduated with honors and earned a BS degree



Jon Gibson with the plaque and a token of appreciation from the Army Community Service volunteer program. Photo by Elvia Gibson.

with a major in mathematics and physics minor.

Jon started at White Sands in June 1957 as a GS-5 mathematician in the DOVAP Data Reduction Unit. He retired in 1999 as a GS-15, Director of the Information Operations Directorate. In those 42 years he held a lot of different positions, mostly with National Range. He did put in one three-month stint in Army Basic Training but his job was considered a “critical skill” position by the military and he returned to White Sands.

Newsletter Readers Recall Trains And Cowboys

I enjoyed the article on “Ozzie” in the May issue. One minor “nit-pic”, at White Sands his organization was known as “The Signal Missile Support Agency” (SMSA). I was assigned there as a Co-Op in 1956 -57 as a SOTIM operator. The article reminded me of one of the incidents/events in my life/career when I would really have liked to have a “do-over.”

Another Co-op and I were sent TDY to northern New Mexico with our SOTIM set in an experiment to determine if it was possible to detect mid-range trajectory of a Green River firing. We found a good location, laid out our array, dug our shallow pits for the microphones, strung the “field wire” to the recorder location then went to rest awhile. (Those firings were always in the wee hours of the morning).

We went back to the site, calibrated the equipment and waited for the firing. At precisely the wrong moment a train went by on the tracks about a mile away from our site. Of course it saturated our equipment and made any useful recordings impossible. On our return to White Sands we explained to our supervisor what had happened and he carefully explained to us that SOTIM was an acronym for “Sonic Observation of Trajectory and Impact of Missiles” not “Sonic Observation of Trains In Motion”. It took us a while to live that down.

Scotty (Jim Scott)

Hi Jim,

Wanted to let you know I am still around and enjoying your newsletter.

The article about Ozro Covington that mentioned his building the chain radar system for flight safety, reminded me of when I was an RCA Service Company engineer, working with the WSMR radar engineering group headed by Max Blackmon. We designed and built an upgrade to improve the accuracy of that system.

The article about the Athena nose cone reminded me of a funny story.

The RCA Service Company Manager and I contacted the Moab, Utah Chamber of Commerce to let them know we would be bringing a group of employees to work in Green River and probably live in Moab. When we arrived, we were met by the Chamber staff, the Mayor of Moab and several city fathers. They were disappointed when they realized we were not from the *Rodeo Cowboys Association*.

Thanks for a Great Newsletter.

Will Diener

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Just in case you missed it, this is the redesigned WSMR logo for the 75th anniversary. It was done by Adrian in Visual Information.



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

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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.

White Sands Historical Foundation
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More Money For Museum And A New Employee

By Darren Court, Museum Curator

I was recently notified that the US Army Center of Military History has increased the budget for the new WSMR exhibit gallery from \$1 million to just over \$1.22 million - an increase of just under 25%. Though unexpected, it demonstrates the commitment CMH has to the museum and its future.

Recently, the executive director of CMH held a series of discussions regarding racism, diversity and inclusivity within the Army Museum Enterprise, through the Army as an organization, and within society at large. Part of this discussion focused on how Army museums can - within the framework of their storylines and exhibits - better reflect society and those who have served.

During this discussion, the WSMR Museum was singled out for its success in highlighting the diversity of the peoples whom the Army has engaged with - both during war and peace - in New Mexico and the lands upon which the range now sits, as well as the diversity of the military and civilian workforce at White Sands. Through the earliest inhabitants of the Tularosa Basin, the wars with Native American tribes, Buffalo Soldiers, ranching, mining, the World War II history of Bataan and the Manhattan Project, and into the Cold War, the museum has striven to include all voices in what we do and how we educate both our military members and the public at large. It was nice to get recognized for this.

New Museum Employee

We are very happy to have on board our new Museum Specialist - Ms. Jenn Jett. I'll let her introduce herself:

"Jenn K.M. Jett earned her Bachelor of Arts degrees in History and International Studies from Ohio State University and is currently a Master of Arts student in the Museum Studies and Digital Curation program at Johns Hopkins University. She is also pursuing certification in archival sciences through the Society of American Archivists.

"Jenn is a former US Army Air Defense Artillery officer commissioned out of the Ohio State University Army ROTC program and has had the

privilege to have served worldwide from Tirana, Albania to Okinawa, Japan. Prior to moving to White Sands Missile Range, she was a full-time graduate intern, serving as an archival lead, curatorial assistant, museum technician, and docent at the Lewis Army Museum on Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA from 2017-2020. From 2019-2020, she interned for the Washington Secretary of State at the State Archives in Olympia.

"When Jenn is not tending to her work at the WSMR museum, she enjoys tending to her virtual museum on Animal Crossing. Other interests include reading and researching about Western Medieval cartography and the Crusades.

"Her physical hobbies include cross-country hiking and rock scrambling. Here at WSMR, she is looking forward to getting acclimated to the heat and aridity not found in the Pacific Northwest."

Jenn brings a wealth of knowledge on archival practices and procedures to the museum - much needed as we move into the future. In addition, she has already made an impact by taking the lead on rewriting many of the museum operations documents and SOP's and has already - after one short month - proven to be a valuable addition to the WSMR Museum.

Former WSMR Commander To Take Over PSL Top Job

Notice from Dan E. Arvizu, NMSU Chancellor

Brigadier General (ret) Eric L. Sanchez, currently serving as the Physical Sciences Laboratory at New Mexico State University as Deputy Director, will be appointed to the director position soon. He will take over from Jim Chavez.

Eric is an outstanding leader who already heads many of the efforts at PSL, understands the mission and programs, has been prepared and is postured for a seamless transition. He is a 1987 graduate of NMSU and retired in 2018, after 32 years of active duty service to our nation.

In his last assignment, Eric served as the Commanding General, White Sands Missile Range. He has the background, experience, and vision to keep PSL moving in the right direction.

Tom Shaw Remembers Playing Baseball For WSPG

By Tom Shaw

Editor's Note: Tom wrote me looking for help in finding information about the White Sands baseball team after he left. I couldn't help him but when I found out he worked in the Public Information Office, I asked him to write an article about his baseball and other experiences at White Sands. This is his account.

Nostalgia beckons as I remain a prisoner in my own home in The Villages in Florida due to the Covid-19 lock down. Nineteen has been a bellwether number in my life: It's Johnny Unitas' Baltimore Colts uniform number, my daughter's near fatal auto accident June 19, 1964, and my military discharge from WSPG on Nov. 19, 1953.

I arrived at WSMR, then referred to as WSPG for White Sands Proving Grounds, from an eight-week summer stint at Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama. While learning which terminal of a battery was positive, I found the time to play semi-pro baseball with the Huntsville Parkers, a town team. At this time, 1952, there was no post baseball team at Redstone.

Previously, I was stationed at the signal corps school at Ft. Monmouth, New Jersey where it was my good fortune to be housed near Yankee luminary Whitey Ford who'd also been drafted. He showed me all about junk pitching.

At White Sands, 20 of us from Redstone were housed in Detachments 1 and 2, forming the 9393 TSU then segregated for "work" at various missile training sites. I was first assigned to the Terrier project. This was a land-to-air missile the Navy had been developing earlier. At this

point, they were firing a simulated missile made of cement attached to a real live booster. I rode at the rear of the gurney to the once-a-week launching on Fridays waving two red danger flags.

Sensing I was overqualified for this work, I was transferred to the Corporal missile project. This was a big mother. I don't remember specifically what my duties were since I spent every afternoon trying out for the post baseball team.

At this point, spring '53, a vacancy occurred right in my Detachment 2 barracks - that of Day Room Orderly. Upon advice from a few of the RA's, I did well here and was soon promoted to Latrine Orderly. Fridays were the big inspection days. I knew I had to do well under the eye of my very capable 1st Sergeant, Russell Gearou - I later came to respect him with great admiration. He knew who the good guys and bad guys were. He was also the post baseball team manager.

Cartooning became my epiphany. It was the sudden intuitive perception into the satirical reality

of military life in the form of literary work. My literary work were cartoons I drew and placed secretly on the company bulletin board.

But Russell knew who did them. He had me reassigned to the Public Information Office with the task of producing one cartoon per week for the post newspaper, "Wind and Sand." In addition I became Sports Editor covering every post sport except baseball. Pfc Ted Majzer did the baseball write ups and handled team statistics. Why not? He was the team bus driver.

For a relatively small post, we did quite well on the diamond. One glorious



Tom Shaw on the mound as a pitcher for the White Sands Proving Ground Rockets.

See Beating Powerful Ft. Bliss, page 5

Beating Powerful Ft. Bliss

evening saw us defeat Ft. Bliss, ending their 27-game winning streak. I was the pitcher of record junk balling them for five-plus innings with fireballing Ted Szezpaniak allowing but one run as the closer.

Overall the Rockets won 30 and lost 15. Our home field was a skin diamond (no grass anywhere) located right across the street from Detachment 2. Not even any grandstands, just wooden bleachers!

Opposing clubs in the six-team Armed Forces League included Ft. Bliss, Biggs Air Base, Holloman Air Base, WSPG Navy, Beaumont Hospital and WSPG. Most of our season had us playing against Kirtland Air Base, Santa Rita, Truth or Consequences, New Mexico A&M, Silver City and Bayard teams, El Paso teams, Desert Inn, Stahman Farms, Alamo Vets plus a trip to the 4th Army tournament in San Antonio meeting up with draftees Don Newcomb (Dodgers) and Marv Rotblatt (White Sox).

— CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

Sadly all good things come to an end and while I debated re-enlisting, one turn of the mimeograph machine could send me to an obscure post with no baseball.

Discharged on November 19, 1953 with letters of commendation in hand from William Haggard and Gabriel Brillante, civilian Public Information Officers, and Major General S.R. Mickelson, Ft. Bliss, I entered the world of advertising as a copywriter for clients bent on a little humor in their sales messages.

Career wise, I spent final 30+ years with the Avalon Hill Game Company as jack of all trades. This included the design of "Football Strategy" and "Baseball Strategy" circa 1960's. In 1961, "Football Strategy" was called by *Sports Illustrated* "the best football game ever invented."

But baseball was always my first love, playing on the sandlots until I was 40 years old. Now at 90 I'm content to stream all my beloved Balti-

See Land Only \$10 An Acre, page 6



The 1953 White Sands Rockets. Shaw is seated fifth from the left with Sgt. Russell Gearou on his right. The young boy is the son of Gearou and was batboy. Standing second from the left is pitcher Frank Metully who became Shaw's lifelong friend. Courtesy photo

Land Only \$10 An Acre

more Orioles baseball games inning by inning on TV at Disneyworld for Adults - my home is in The Villages, Florida.

I can be reached at 1257 Camero Drive, The Villages, FL 32159 or by phone at 352-446-2415 or by email at mandotom88@gmail.com.

Editor's Note: Tom and I communicated some more after he sent the initial article. I had asked him about the PIO office and the ball team. He added the following:

As to the make up of the Public Information Office, located in a modest rectangular building just 100 feet from the rear of Detachment 2, there were approximately seven GI's and three civilians working there. Some GI's I recall were simply part time as news gatherers. I don't recall how it was organized.

I was the only one with a staff car - with a dashboard sign that read "Take care, this vehicle cost taxpayers \$1,038." It was a Chevy 4-door sedan I picked up every morning from the Motor Pool. My job was to chauffeur dignitaries around the base. And to deliver copy to the printer in Las Cruces. On the journey, I saw signs offering acreage for sale for \$10/acre.

As to my double duty on the team, I was "signed" as a pitcher. Shortly into the season, a wonderful thing happened: the center fielder broke his hand allowing me to take over permanently as center fielder so I got to play in every game from that point on. I did continue to pitch as the season progressed.

As Seen by Shaw

By Pfc. Tom Shaw



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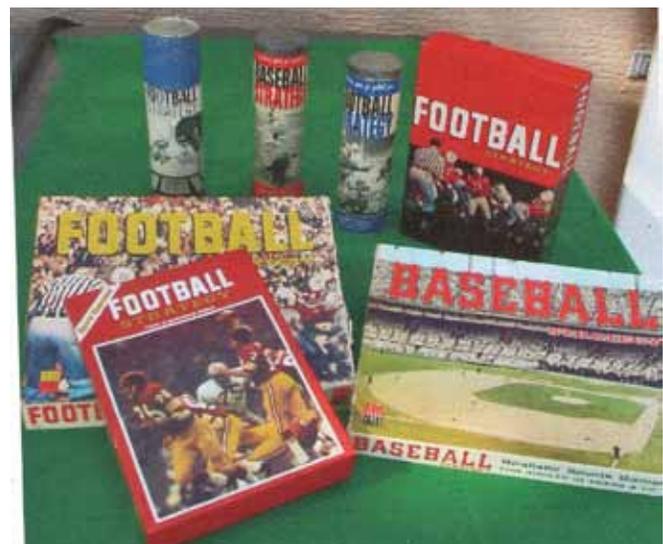
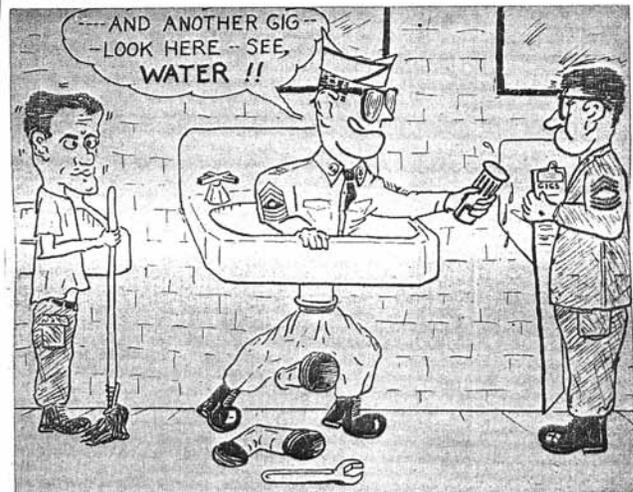
As an aside, I was part of a three man hillbilly band called "The Latrine Trio" which was the only place we could play safely (chuckle). For the last 15 years up until the lock down I have been entertaining the old folks as a mandolin player in a five-man band "Last Tyme Out," so titled because it might be.



The Latrine Trio practicing in the barracks latrine. Tom is in front with banjo. Courtesy photo

As Seen by Shaw

By Pfc. Tom Shaw



Various box configurations for the two sports games that Tom invented in 1959/60. Some are still available on ebay. Courtesy photo

McFall Made A Working Trip To Trinity Site In 1964

By Fred Lawrence McFall, Jr.
Sp5 in August 1964

In late summer 1964, I was a Specialist Fifth Class assigned to the WSMR Nike Systems Test Branch facility at Launch Area #5 and working for Captain Howard B. Dyer as his briefing assistant. Our task of conducting briefings for high-level government officials and Congressional members on the proposed Sprint Missile System began a dormant phase at that time. So, to keep the small number of personnel then assigned to the project busy, Staff Sergeant Medaris and I were given a



Lawrence saved one of the boxes from his day at Trinity. Courtesy photo

large ring of keys and a box of new locks with changeable combinations and told to proceed to Trinity Site. We were told to change all the key-type locks on the gates as well the small monitoring buildings and huts that dotted the enclosure.

Fortunately, aware of the dusty 80-mile drive and the probability of having an insufficient number of keys, we equipped our Dodge pickup with a crowbar and hacksaw along with a substantial amount of drinking

water. We arrived just before noon and found no key for the main gate facing the road. Removing the lock with the hacksaw, we then went about replacing the locks. Sergeant Medaris changed the combinations on each lock and logged them per our orders as I removed the old locks, luckily having keys for each of those.

Our task was complete by mid-afternoon. Realizing that we brought an ample water supply but no food only intensified our hunger. Driving north to US380 we turned west to San Antonio. There we found a small country store. Being from Virginia, I had been reared consuming the staple, pork n' beans. On the other hand, Sergeant Medaris, from Hawaii, had never heard of them. In the shade of the store's small porch, with a sleeve of saltine crackers, each of us downed a can of the beans with a small wooden spoon later used for the cold Dixie cups of ice cream we enjoyed for dessert.

Our return to the WSMR motor pool that hot afternoon was silent except for the occasional comment I would make concerning the historical significance of our assignment that day. To actually walk upon the ground that just 19 years before had brought our country into the Atomic Age simply overwhelmed me with awe. Medaris, on the other hand, would only comment on the satisfying taste of those wonderful beans.



The missile range commemorated the 75th anniversary of the Trinity Site atomic bomb test on July 16 with a small ceremony at the site. It began at 5:30 a.m., the time the bomb was detonated. At the podium is BG David Trybula, WSMR commander. Photo by Jim Eckles

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The Back Page



On the morning of July 9, White Sands had a small ceremony to mark the 75th anniversary of the founding of the missile range. Because of social distancing requirements, only a few personnel were present. Here BG David Trybula, left, and CSM Christopher Prosser cut the range's birthday cake. Courtesy photo