



Hands Across History



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

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November 2022

Museum Grand Re-Opening Tentatively Set For December

Editor's Note: Your board of directors got an inside look at the new museum exhibit hall on White Sands after our meeting on Oct. 18. Contractors were feverishly working on the details. "Wow," pretty well describes everyone's reaction, with a lot of "This is going to be special" thrown in. And it is going to be something special, maybe even "unique" in the Department of Army's museum system. The photos in this article were taken in various spots on the 18th. Of course there are ladders and equipment scattered all over, the lighting has yet to be setup and I used my phone so don't judge it by my images. My advice is to start planning a visit soon.

By Darren Court, Museum Director

The WSMR Museum has a history now going back 28 years and in that time has seen many changes – the V-2 Building, Administrative and Gift Shop addition, new gallery addition... We have also seen the closure of the Gift Shop and MVD office, which has allowed us to do something a bit different.

When those closed several years ago the museum was just entering a period of transition. During that time we were exploring options to ensure the US Army Center of Military History had a full understanding of what the museum "was" and how and why it was an important part of what is today the Army Museum Enterprise. As one of the more unique museums in the system we had to go a bit further than other museums in which tanks, artillery, uniforms, and small arms are exhibited to tell the stories of divisions, regiments, and battles. No other Army museum explains the development of the atomic bomb, the history of rockets and the beginnings of the race for space, or artifacts such

as cinetheodolites, target drones, or – especially – the Navy and NASA.

To do this, we created a new Museum Storyline – a comprehensive document which explains in detail the exhibits – the "stories" – which would be told in the museum, why they are important, and what we wanted the visitor to gain from the experience. That 100-plus page document replaced the original "storyline" which was simply a short outline of possible exhibit ideas and set in motion the museum visitors will see when we reopen in December.

The museum had always had very small "pieces" of pre-WSMR history – the earliest

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The new museum is not just about the history of White Sands Missile Range. Because it is the only Army museum in the state, it is also going to tell the story of the Army in New Mexico. That will include Bataan because so many of the captives were from New Mexico's 200th Coastal Artillery Regiment. Supporting the story are some of Bataan survivor Ben Steele's art work.

Pat Quinlan Remembers Scavenging Droned B-17s

Dear Jim:

As a Co-Op with Cinetheodolite (German Askaniyas) Electronics, Range Operations, during the mid 50's, we had close contact with the Cine tracking operators in our section. They were able to track the drones and watch the progress of each B-17 mission. They saw the aftermath and told us naive Co-Ops many stories, some true and some probably not.

One story involved a B-17 drone mission wherein the Ajax missiles damaged one wing, part of the fuselage and must have taken out the drone control radio system. B-17s are hard to kill. Either the drone had no destruct system or its radio was damaged also. The 17 being in level flight for the mission, dipped the damaged wing and entered a wide orbit with a very slight decent.

Range plotting boards driven by radar tracking data showed a drift which might take it off-range before fuel ran out. After sorting through many actions, the range requested that Holloman scramble a fighter (many were used in testing weapons) and shoot down the drone. The fighter made a number of passes with guns and that old warrior just kept flying. Finally, the fighter tore one wing to shreds removing large pieces, disabled one engine, and the drone pitched over in its last dive crashing safely not far from one of the impact areas.

We Co-Ops would go out after an Ajax mission, often before Recovery, and scavenge what vacuum tube electronics we could from the B-17s

with the dream of making our own stereos. Another Co-Op filled us in on where flight safety destruct equipment was likely to be so we stayed clear of those areas.

We were very familiar with those B-17s particularly the goodies inside. Often the vacuum tubes and circuit boards were roughed up but intact because the bomber pancaked or was crash-landed on Northrup strip.

We never got caught as our jeep was faster than recovery vehicles which were 2 ½'s and Dodge Power Wagons. We put mud on the vehicle numbers and our license plate, and since we knew the tangle of range roads and where to stash stuff before going through a range gate, we escaped. No investigations were started. There were 100s of us on the range and I suppose everyone knew it was "just those Co-Ops."

I found this pawing around on Google driven by your article and my so many memories.

Patrick

P.S. I also have a shorter memory of using film cans packed with Honest John fuel as flying saucers on campus at NMSU. Some day.

Editor's Note: As noted, Patrick included a story about the last B-17 to fly as a target out of Holloman in 1959. The story is on the Aerovintage.com website. Just Google search "drone-mission-august-6-1959" and you'll get there.

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.

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So Many Contributors To This Sweet Success

By Frances Williams

The White Sands Missile Range Museum is nearing completion and what a museum it is. It is not only a credit to our history but to this nation as well. It captures the beginning of the atomic age and space exploration at White Sands but also looks back at those who came before and how the missile range has evolved since.

The Museum captures the diversity of those who not only inhabited the land but who fought for it as well - Native Americans, African Americans, and the Caucasian Americans who traveled to an unknown world hoping for a better place to settle and raise a family, farm and raise cattle and the conflicts that this transition caused.

As you go through the museum all of these stories are depicted with incredible murals and descriptions of the events. You can be mesmerized, caught in the moment of that story. These are all good history lessons for the young and old, and reveal so much about a part of American history that may not have been known or is now forgotten.

The development and test of the atomic bomb was led by visionary Dr. Robert Oppenheimer, a scientist of note. In 1994 another visionary, Major General Richard Wharton, commander of the missile range, saw the need to capture the history of this area and established our museum. The museum has gone through many iterations since but time has nurtured and improved it. It is now the *crème de la crème*. I found it an exhilarating experience to go through the exhibits even though they are only partially complete.

This would not have all been possible without an unusual team of organizations, individuals and supporters. The White Sands Missile Range command group has been supportive for decades. More than 20 years of Museum Curators/Directors have worked diligently to improve the facility. The Center for Military History has taken ownership of the museum and they are spending millions and providing first class assistance to make this a state-of-the-art museum.

And, of course, there is the White Sands Historical Foundation, an organization near and dear

to my heart. We have provided financial support to the museum for years in large and small ways. And that would not have been possible without all the individual and business contributions to our treasury which made it possible for us to build the new exhibit hall that is now being polished off. We could easily fill this newsletter with lists of people who have contributed.

For now, I'd like to highlight our Museum Director Darren Court. I think Darren has done an extraordinary job in creating the timeline for this new exhibit hall and then gathering the artifacts, photos and stories for Roxann Showers, CMH Exhibit Designer and the COR for the project. They have teamed with contractors Tehama, Inc. and MuseumArts, Inc to produce a fabulous product. The center, under Dr. Charles Bowery, has spent over two million dollars creating this new hall.

By the way, in another example of how the Foundation has supported the museum in small ways, we just voted to buy additional lights for the exhibit hall. These lights are needed to fully light all the exhibits but were not included in the original contract. We will buy them so they can be installed in the next month - before the re-opening.

Finally, I think the museum will have an economic and educational impact locally and nationally. Local schools will be invited to bring their students for a visit. Tourism groups will have the museum on their "places to visit." That will certainly be good for local hotels, restaurants, plus shopping will be on their agenda.

The Foundation has procured computers and a special room has been set aside for visiting students. The Foundation's Strategic Plan calls for assistance to local schools to help fund transportation to bring students to the museum. We also are planning for speakers and to continue to fund the Museum for any needs that have not been funded by the Army. We will continue to reach out to the WSMR workforce and the local communities to become members or make donations to the Foundation that will help us to continue our work.

"Yo' all come on down." See what we have accomplished together. Thank you.

From Pike To Bataan — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

inhabitants, the 9th Cavalry-Apache battlefield at Hembrillo, a bit on ranching history. As we began to explore exactly which stories we would be responsible for telling we realized the need for the comprehensive website we have built.

The idea of an exhibit about the Army and its history in New Mexico came into focus – as the only “official” Army museum in the state we felt we had a responsibility to tell the WSMR story as part of a continuum of the Army experience in the state, going back to Lt. Zebulon Pike’s arrest by the Spanish in 1806. In addition, we have a public trust to remember the history of the lands upon which the range now stands. Hembrillo was a great starting point and fit in well with this since it would allow us to present it in a more comprehensive way while providing an opportunity to develop a formal Staff Ride – an Army education tool which brings senior NCO’s and junior officers to the battlefield to discuss and learn from the experiences of their predecessors. We are currently working on other Staff Rides, as well.

The former gift shop area will contain small exhibits on the most important early pre-Columbian culture - the Jornada Mogollon - wildlife on the range, and ranching and mining, but the bulk of that space traces the history of the US Army in New Mexico from its “formal” entrance after 1821 through the US war with Mexico and the Civil War in the state. We were surprised by how few visitors were aware of the three Civil War battles that happened in New Mexico and the importance of the Confederate defeat at Glorieta Pass. In addition, the interaction and conflict between the Apache and Army troops – in particular the “Buffalo Soldiers” of the 9th Cavalry Regiment - is highlighted. The 9th Cavalry had a distinguished history in the state – protecting the Apache from marauding settlers while also striving to ensure they remained on their lands. They also played a role on the Ute conflict in Colorado, the Colfax County War in northern New Mexico and even the Lincoln County War.

The museum also educates visitors on the disastrous Bosque Redondo reservation near Ft.

Sumner and its impact upon the Mescalero Apache and Navajo peoples. These are all important stories which allow the visitor to gain an understanding of the Army’s long history in New Mexico prior to its entrance in the last days of the second world war.

The hallway housing the Hall of Fame will be updated but the Hall of Fame itself remains where it has been for many years.

The new hallway between the old space and new large open gallery is dedicated to telling the story of the 200th Coast Artillery and Bataan, with an emphasis on using the men’s own words to show what they thought and went through from surrender, on the Bataan Death March, packed into hell ships, and their use as slave labor in Japanese mines, ports, and factories.

Upon entering the new gallery, one first encounters a large curved wall – 9 feet tall and 20 feet across – laying out the history of the Manhattan Project, with a brief explanation of nuclear fission. Previously the museum had focused almost exclusively on the Trinity test but we now have the space to provide greater interpretation and be able to explain the project more fully, to include all of its locations and key players, and place the test within the context of the development of the bomb.

The V-2 rocket exhibit comes after a brief history of rocketry and follows the same plan – plac-

See Variety Will Be The Name Of The Game, page 5



Mannequins for the Hembrillo Battlefield display were still wrapped in plastic waiting to be placed in the display case.

Variety Will Be The Name Of The Game — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

ing the arrival and testing of the V-2 rocket here at WSMR as both the culmination of its development and use as a weapon in Germany and the beginnings of a test vehicle which would lead to the development of rockets and missiles for all of the military services, as a research vehicle, and as the beginning of the US pursuit of space.

Early WSMR and the Cold War follow, with that section of the new gallery broken down by types of missiles beginning with missiles for nuclear use. Early air defense (ADA) weaponry is highlighted by the first missile intercept of an aircraft (a droned B-17) in 1952, the development of Red Canyon Range Camp as a Nike Ajax range, and subsequent ADA weapons. Short Range Air Defense (SHORAD) and Man-Portable Air Defense (MANPAD) systems are highlighted, as well, as are smaller anti-armor weapons.

The Navy is finally getting their due, as well, with large graphics and images used in discussing its history at White Sands and a large floor case which allows us to mount Navy missiles in a vertical position.



NASA, having been here since its earliest days, gets better attention as well. The exhibit gives more detail to not only the landing of the Space Shuttle Columbia, but to WSMR's role in tracking John Glenn's historic first orbital flight. The testing of the Apollo Launch Escape System on Little Joe and Little Joe II and the Restone rocket and it's use in putting Alan Shepard and Gus Grisson into space can be found in this area,

Also. President John F. Kennedy makes an appearance, with the rostrum behind which he spoke when he visited the range now on exhibit.

Tracking cameras, still cameras, cinetheodolites, a ballistic camera, drones, control consoles, plotting boards and more range support artifacts are featured to show the visitor how much actually goes into the preparation and testing of a rocket at the range – an aspect of testing largely unknown to the average person. We even have the range control slats used for the missions on the last day in which that method of scheduling was used.

Finally, the Large Blast Thermal Simulator model and images and artifacts related to large scale conventional explosions used to simulate nuclear detonations are highlighted.

The museum has continued to grow and evolve over the last decade and a half and we anticipate this will continue. The lack of space in the gallery means that many of our stories can, at this time, only be told on the museum website. In addition to these “other stories,” each section of the new gallery will also have associated articles available online – we have written and published quite a few already and are currently working on more.

The website and social media allows us to reach a very large audience which might have an interest in our history but not the ability to visit in person. Our goal is to provide a quality educational experience to everyone who visits - in person or online - and ensure the museum remains an important recreational and educational asset for the WSMR military and civilian community, local schools and universities, and the general public.

As always, we appreciate your continued support and welcome your visit in 2023.

Jean Was The Missile Range's Expert On Real Estate

Editor's Note: A few months ago I received an email from Jean Simpkins inquiring about the newsletter. In my time at White Sands in the Public Affairs Office, I interacted with Jean many times because she could answer almost any question dealing with the range's real estate. That included what ranchers and miners were there first, how many acres they had and how much the government was paying them in lease money. She also had the records for the final acquisition of those properties by the government. In addition to her encyclopedic knowledge about the lands, I remember the wonderful six-foot map of the missile range she created that showed all of the land plots. It was color coded so, at a glance, you could find a ranch, see who owned it, what parts were originally private, federal and state owned and use its filing number to go and pull the folder containing all the paperwork. It was precise and comprehensive. I started an email conversation with Jean asking about the map and these responses are the result.

You bet I remember the Range map I made. I don't think I could ever forget how frustrated I found it to be when I needed to pin point a location and had to go to another building to find a USGS map on a scale large enough to plot the location.

No, I was not assigned the task, I just thought it would be beneficial to have immediate access to a full scale map identifying each section of land.

Public Land Order 833, dated in the early 1940's withdrew the land from public use. The privately owned land was used under lease agreements with the owners. I expect that the ranchers felt very patriotic during WWII and were happy to cooperate since they had been told that their land would be returned when the war ended. The area was used by the Air Force to practice bombing runs (side note--My brother was a radio operator on a B-17 and I've wondered if his plane practiced in the area where you and I have spent a big part of our lives, meaning White Sands Missile Range).

From the original leases I plotted each land description on all the USGS map segments cover-

ing the withdrawal. You know the color code and I am sure I drove our supply guy nuts asking for more yellow pencils to show the federal land. I would say that I spent a month to six weeks working on the map. (I used the same color code to prepare ownership maps for the off-range areas)

Editor's Note: Yellow was used for federal land, green for state land and a pinky red for patented land. Also, as private lands were bought by the government, she put a little black border around the pink blocks.

As it turned out, preparation of the map resulted in it being used for many briefings and was a big convenience at various times. Do you remember when a young female soldier was murdered in the barracks? I had a visit from several FBI guys wanting to verify that it took place on federal land. Yes, it did of course since the entire Post Area was on federal land.

When the leases expired, the land was placed under exclusive use and in 1970 when the leases were up for renewal the Corps of Engineers, through the Justice Department, filed condemnation actions to secure continued exclusive use. Attorneys for the land owners filed a petition with the Federal Court in Albuquerque to establish lease values based on the increase in the market value of the real estate, including restoration. As the hearings were held and the Federal Courts ruled in favor of the land owners, Deficiency Judgements were filed. I received the judgements and computed the payments as directed by the Court. About the time this was finally completed the Government decided to purchase the privately owned land and mining interests and then exchange the State land for federal land outside the Range.

I prepared Outgrants (leases, licenses, permits, easements and rights-of-way). Requests were received for "use privileges" on the Range proper by utility companies, installation of communication facilities, pipelines, representatives of city, county and state, the state highway department for roadblocks and other Federal agencies. As you know we had a Memorandum of Under-

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Goofy Requests To Use The Range — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

standing with the Monument(then White Sands National Monument). It was updated as required. We did exchange two to three sections of land with them when the sands drifted.

Some of the requests to use the Range were goofy. One day a guy called to ask if he could fly over the Range to locate oil deposits. He said he could see if there was oil just by looking.

Another party wanted to bring in a herd of bison. Can you imagine what those animals would have done to the instrumentation located on the Range? Anyway, it was interesting to staff the requests and see some of the answers I received from other organizations.

I also administered and managed the off-range lease agreements and was the authorizing officer for all payments due land owners for land use, damage claims and evacuations made during missile firings. I initiated and justified real estate acquisition actions for congressional approval, assisted in the negotiations of leases with property owners for use of their land in support of the WSMR mission. I negotiated directly with the Rancher's Committee and land owners in support of the off-range missile programs and served as the Contracting Officer's Representative for deputy sheriffs appointed by New Mexico County Commissioners, and monitored their performance in conducting area surveillance during evacuations in the call-up areas.

Planned acquisition programs for launch and impact areas and complexes to support research and development program requirements. Analyzed the areas involved for environmental, social and economic problems. Surveyed proposed locations to ascertain the best site for the purpose involved (missile launch and impact areas, instrumentation sites, etc). Interpreted legal descriptions, plats and land status images. Determined acreage necessary for support of the missile program. Prepared documentation to justify the real estate acquisition.

Explained the government's programs and interest to individuals such as ranchers, farmers, attorneys, Indian Tribal Councils, land owners, etc. I'm reminded here of being the only squaw sitting at the council table with the Native Americans while I explained evacuation procedures. Not one of them ever looked me in the face, but kept their eyes on the maps I had prepared.

I know you asked me once how the basic payments originally got started. Payments were determined by the Office of the Corps of Engineers at the Washington DC level to pay an annual rental of 2.5% of the fair market value which was compensation for disruption of ranching operations during evacuations.

I then had to budget for on- and off-range payments under lease agreement, condemnations, restoration, permits and evacuation agreements.

I would like to say that I was always pleased to be a part of the mission of WSMR. I knew and worked with so many special people. My job as the Realty Specialist for the Range was the most enjoyable and satisfying job one can imagine.

I was born in Galveston, TX. I attended grade school and junior high in Lubbock, high school in Denison and college at Texas Women's University in Denton.

I started to work at WSMR in December 1952 shortly after my dad, a federal employee, began working there as Chief of Internal Review. I was first assigned to Military Personnel before moving to the Range Control Office, NR and worked there for several years until transferring to the Real Estate Division, FE. That was a start to the most challenging, satisfying and enjoyable job I ever held. In September 1978 I received a TECOM Professional Award presented by Maj. Gen. Patrick Powers, commander Test&Evaluation Command..

My total Federal service was 32 years and I retired in June 1984 as a GS-11 Realty Specialist.

See Jean's map on the BACK PAGE.



Jean Simpkins in her office many years ago. U.S. Army photo.

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This is a reproduction of Jean Simpkins' range map which is now on display at the entrance to the "Ranches to Rocket" exhibit in the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Museum in Las Cruces. One half of the hall is dedicated to ranch life before World War II and the other half is about the early days of White Sands. Unfortunately the original map is gone but I luckily had photos taken of it and was able to provide them to the museum. (Photo by Jim Eckles)