

Hands Across History

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

Volume XXI, Letter I March 2025

There Is Confusion And Uncertainty For Us Now

By Frances Williams, President

The Historical Foundation did not hold its elections in January 2025 as prescribed in the by-laws because of the announcements by President Trump and Elon Musk and handed down through the chains of command that actions for United States government employees were to be eliminated and changes made to Federal government organizations. Quickly many of those reductions were made, and policies had to be changed for federal organizations, which included the WSMR Historical Foundation.

This was suspended along with other programs in progress or planned. I am still the president of the Historical Foundation although my term was up in December 2024. The same is true for some of our board members. At this moment we have only 5 board members, there should be nine. One of the Board members will leave because of obtaining a job. There are two appointees members, who will be asked to become board members. That still leaves a shortage of board members.

Jim Eckles who has produced our Newsletter for more than twenty years will no longer perform this duty, so we will try to find someone who may be willing to serve in this position. If there is someone you know please tell them to get in touch with me.

We will still be involved with the Hall of Fame, which Dolores Archuleta and Jim Eckles will continue to do, if we have nominees. We need more memberships for the Museum and will be offering free memberships for those who are interested. We will certainly need more Board members and appointees.

Until the dust settles I do not think we can take any action to do what we think is urgent to get to where we need to go. If you have any thoughts please let me know. Just an added note, some of our federal civilian workers who are in very important sensitive jobs involved in weapons modification, improvement and development have opted to take the buy out or their jobs have been deleted and they have been fired. These positions will not be filled and are putting the defense of our nation and our allies in jeopardy. I have been getting the news out through newspapers, radio programs and soon TV. Thank you all for your support and we will hang in there and keep you posted on any changes as they occur. G-d Bless. Frances

Thank You Jim Eckles For Your Work On Behalf Of The WSHF

By Frances Williams, President

Jim Eckles was raised in Lincoln, Nebraska. He met his future wife Debbie between his freshman and sophomore years at the University of Nebraska. They have celebrated 53 years of marriage, and my personal observation is that this was a marriage made in heaven.

He then went for his Masters Degree at the University of Washington in Seattle, Washington. He entered civil service in 1975 as an Army intern at the Aviation Command in St. Louis. In 1977, they arrived at White Sands Missile Range, New Mexico - Jim assigned to the Public Affairs Office and Deb in the Contracting Office. Jim retired in 2007, 32 years of outstanding service. During that period he received numerous awards for the many programs he introduced. To name a few, he did a radio program every morning on KOBE radio directed at WSMR employees coming to work which

See This And That, Page 2

This And That — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ran for several years; he escorted tours for visitors and dignitaries all over the range; he escorted former ranchers to their homes that became part of WSMR's testing range. Turns out elder family members wanted to show the grandchildren where they grew up; some of these turned into family reunions on the old ranches complete with picnics and live music; he wrote and designed many commemorative signs for the national historic sites at WSMR and other historic sites off range - there are about two dozen signs at Trinity site; he has held many positions for the Dona Ana County Historical Society; served as Secretary for the WSMR Historical Foundation; wrote and published newsletters for the DACHS and the WSMR Museum and Foundation. He has written three books -Camp Cody, Pocketful of Rockets and Trinity, in

addition to articles for various publications. He is sought after by many organizations as a speaker and loves to share his knowledge with whoever is willing to listen. There was an interview in 2017 with the Atomic Heritage Foundation (now online at their website) where Jim talked in detail about the first atomic bomb test site and the many eyewitnesses he got to talk to. Jim's journalism and story-telling abilities were amazing because he captured not only the essence of the technology, but also very personal insights into personal lives and how their work impacted our history.

While he will still involved with both the WSMR Historical Foundation and the DACHS, we will be forever in his debt for the legacy he left behind. G-d Bless and be safe in wherever you go or whatever you do.

Thanks To All Of You Readers - But This Is My Last Newsletter

By Jim Eckles, Editor

If you look at the cover you will see that this is Issue #1 of Volume 21 for the *Hands Across History* Newsletter. Before that I did seven issues of *The Catalyst* which was the newsletter for just the historical foundation - before we merged it with the White Sands Pioneer Group newsletter. I called it *Hands Across History* because it served two different organizations which had similar interests in the history of White Sands Missile Range.

I want to thank the many people who have contributed their stories to this newsletter. They have made my job a little easier as there is nothing worse than facing a deadline with nothing to publish. Also, your stories were usually more interesting than anything I came up with to fill the void.

I'm not doing this anymore because, at 75, I'm tired of deadlines. I've also stopped doing the monthly newsletter for the Dona Ana County Historical Society. I don't remember a life without recurring and constant deadlines. There were the ones all through school, then decades of them while working for the government then years more in retirement. That's enough.

Having said that, digging into history and learning new stuff is still a GREAT pleasure. You'll see that as I run the Brandenburg story which was submitted by Paul's family.

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 editor is Jim Eckles. His email is nebraska1950@comcast.net or use the ad-

dress below for snail mail.

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 us and we will send it via the Post Office or email.

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

The Remarkable Life And Career Of Paul F. Brandenburg

EDITOR'S NOTE: This wonderful story came about when I asked Jenn Jett, the WSMR Museum archivist, to look for material for this newsletter. She said they'd just received a donation of photos and documents from the Paul Brandenburg family. On looking at some of the photos, I was hooked. I contacted Paula, Paul's daughter, to see if she could provide some background so I could write something to go along with some of the photos. She did way better. She and her brother gave me a "readyto-go" article. Several things attracted me to this archive. One, Paul took color slides of many activities at White Sands and they are pretty good. Two, there are several photos taken in the first officer's club which turned into Bldg. 122, my home in Public Affairs. I'm including a photo of Navy Captain Goring's retirement dinner taken in what we called the pine box (ball room) which we turned into the first WSMR Museum.

By his children, Paula Faye Cardoza-Jones and Paul Robert Brandenburg, "Rob"

Family Background

Our dad's father, Frank Ludwig Brandenburg, was born in 1866 in Treblin, Germany, the area of Pomerania on the Baltic Sea, which is now in Poland. His mother, Emma Marie Schluessler, was born1874 in Eisenburg Germany near the Thuringin forest. They were married in Indiana in 1902 I believe, and they had nine children, four boys and five girls, born from 1903 to 1921. The family

Tive girts, both from 1905

Paul's confirmation 1921

operated a truck farm with nine greenhouses at 1514 Main Street in Vincennes, Indiana. The family spoke German at home, and German was also spoken at their Lutheran church and school. The kids learned English as a second language in school in the only class conducted in English.

Our father, Paul

Frank, their fourth child, was born on July 3, 1907. He did not finish high school, working on the family farm instead. He was always interested in science and technology. Paul attended Coyne Electric School in Chicago, working on the docks in the morning before going to class.

Early Marine Service

With jobs short during the depression, Paul joined the Marine Corps on May 18, 1931, going through basic training at Parris Island. He consid-



Paul on the way to Parris Island

ered the Army, but some of his friends had joined and had gotten sent to Kentucky. Paul decided he wanted to see a little bit more of the world, and he sure did!

Paul was trained in communications. When Paul's first term was ending, the Marines promised him a tour in China if he re-enlisted. He was in Shanghai from February 1933 to De-

cember 15, 1935. He said the duty was light, and he took up body-building at Stembera Institute of Physical Culture, being featured on an ad for the institute.



Paul building his body in China.

In the next few years, he was stationed at Quantico, San Diego, and New York, sometimes serving as an instructor.

See At War In The Pacific, Page 4

At War In The Pacific

World War II

Paul was at home in Vincennes on leave when Pearl Harbor was bombed, and just waited for the phone call to return to duty, which he knew would come. He received a temporary promotion to officer status during the war and was stationed on Guadalcanal as a communications officer. For his outstanding ingenuity and performance of his duties there under heavy fire and bombing, he received a letter of commendation from Admiral William H. Halsey. He also served on New Georgia Island.

After the war, Paul graduated from a Marine Corps communications school in 1945. Paula's son, Joseph Cardoza (Paul's grandson), graduated from that same school 70 years later in 2015 as a Marine reserve officer. Joseph found a picture of Paul with his class on the wall of the school.

Service at White Sands Proving Ground

Paul was then stationed at White Sands Proving Ground (now White Sands Missile Range) in New Mexico—probably the highlight of his career. Paul worked on rockets, including the Viking, the Aerobee, and the V-2, with Werner von Braun.



Paul, lower left, poses with fellow Marines in front of "Betsy" the exhibit V-2 rocket used in surrounding communities for "show and tell."

Paul was in charge of the rockets' communications/telemetry systems.

Some rockets were not entirely successful.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Some never made it off the pad. One went off course but the powers that be waited too long to order it destroyed and it landed in Mexico. After some negotiations, the rocket was returned, but the farmer whose land it crashed on put up a fence and charged people to see the crater. Paul joking called it the last shot in the Mexican-American war.



One of Paul's photos. V-2 assembly in the Mill Building.

One of Paul's favorite stories was the time that a V2 came down within a mile or so of the radio and telemetry station where his team of Marines maintained contact with the rocket. Standing

orders were that only the recovery team could approach the landing site. Well, Marines being Marines decide not to pass up the opportunity to see the landing crater first. Off they went in a couple of Jeeps and upon arriving decided to climb down into the impact crater and place a sign "Kilroy was Here" at the bottom; quicky returning to their station. As you might imagine this caused the recovery team to quickly visit the Marines to identify the responsible individuals. All Marines

were seriously engaged in the end of flight activities; giving a response, "What sign?"

See Paul And Virginia, Page 5

Paul And Virginia — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4



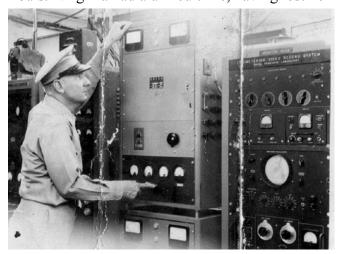
What is now Launch Complex 33 showing the blockhouse, WAC Corporal tower and V-2 gantry with a V-2 rocket in place being prepared. The red smoke warns of an imminent launch.

Paul also commented that he worked with Clyde Tombaugh, who On Feb. 18, 1930 discovered Pluto.

Paul was very interested in photography while at White Sands and took lots of 8 mm movies of the rockets. He had a 16 mm movie camera, a 35 mm still camera, a movie projector for each size movie, and darkroom equipment, some of which he built himself. Paul had one large picture that was a composite of several smaller pictures taken from a V-2 showing the curvature of the earth, which was quite an accomplishment back then.

Paul and Virginia

It was while Paul was stationed at White Sands that he met Virginia Rose Mall, who was from St. Louis. Virginia had a difficult life, having lost her



Paul sent this photo to Virginia before they were married. The folds were necessary to get it into a wallet. He explained the button he is pushing turns on the telemetry equipment in the rocket before launch.

mother when she was 14 and her father when she was 18. She was living in an aunt's tiny three-room house (plus bath) with her brother and working as a secretary at an organ company.

Paul had a number of relatives in St. Louis, including a sister, Frieda. Frieda's husband, Ralph Wilson, was a union organizer trying to unionize the place where Virginia worked. He introduced Paul and Virginia, and they began dating and eventually became engaged.

During their courtship, Paul sent Virginia a photo of him at this duty station. He wrote a note on the back describing the equipment in the photo and what it did. He concluded, "Come on out and I'll give you a ride in a rocket. It's a one-way trip, want it?" This photo was still in her wallet when she died in 2004.

Paul and Virginia were married in St. Louis on October 15, 1949, when he was 42 and she was 24.

When Virginia moved down to White Sands, she received a chilly reception. She later learned that several times when Paul took leave to visits St. Louis, he told people he was going to get married, and when he came back, he would report that he had been stood up. This was just a joke, but Paul didn't tell anyone, and when he did marry Virginia and they moved to While Sands, everyone thought that this was the terrible woman that kept standing up Paul. I think he finally straightened out the misunderstanding after Virginia read him the riot act.

They lived at 3732 Ct 1 on White Sands Proving Ground, NM. The house was very hard to keep clean because fine dirt and sand kept blow-



ing in. Virginia led a Brownie troop there.

Not long after moving to White Sands, Virginia attended her first Marine Corps ball, dressed in a beautiful gown she had made, next to Paul in his Marine Corps dress whites. She would make several

See Life After White Sands, Page 6

Life After White Sands — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

more gowns for subsequent balls.

Paul and Virginia went on leave and vacationed at Chihuahua City, Mexico. While there they had their photo taken in a local restaurant. This photo sits on the desks of Paula and Rob as a reminder of their Mom and Dad at perhaps one of the happiest times in their lives. From a brief news posting in the *Wind and Sand* of Thursday, June 22, 1950: "Captain Brandenburg says that he had a most enjoyable trip, but he still believes the best slogan is 'See America First."



Virginia and Paul in Mexico in 1950.

Service after While Sands

After White Sands, Paul was stationed in Maryland for training (Naval Ordnance Development Unit, Applied Physics Lab, Johns Hopkins University). They lived in Silver Spring, Maryland. Paula was born on September 3, 1951, on Labor Day, at the Naval Hospital in Bethesda. Three months later, Paul was sent to South Bend, Indiana for six months of training in guided missiles at the Bendix Aviation Corporation.

Paul was then transferred to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. No sooner had Paul gotten to Camp Lejeune when he was shipped off to Cuba for some training exercises. Virginia wrote dutifully every day, but the letters were diverted to Paul's desk on base, maybe for security reasons. Paul had no idea this was happening, and would write letters asking Virginia to write, even though he said he knew she must be busy with the baby and getting settled. Virginia had no idea what was going on. When they discovered what had hap-

pened after Paul returned, they were both angry at whoever allowed it to happen.

The family first lived in a small house off-base in Jacksonville, NC, later moving to a house at Paradise Point, which was a huge white two-story house with a big yard.

Virginia made a delightful "Little Corporal" uniform for Paula based on a uniform worn by women Marines, which has been donated to a museum near Camp Lejeune.

In December 1954, the family moved near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where Paul worked with electronics inventory at a depot. We lived in a new brick row house in Glenolden. Shortly after moving in, Paul and Virginia's son, Paul Robert (called Rob) was born on January 18, 1955.

Paul was transferred to Point Mugu Naval Base, near Oxnard, California, in 1957. The family lived first in a small house in Oxnard. When new housing was built on base, we moved to 1018 Oriole Drive. Virginia again led a Brownie troop, this time with Paula as one of the Brownies. Not to be outdone by his Little Corporal sister, Rob proudly wore a Little Master Sergeant uniform.

Paul was the second highest ranking officer of the Marine Aviation Detachment ("MAD"). Paul was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel on July 1, 1959, and retired in 1961, after 30 years of service.

Life after Retirement

After Paul's retirement, the family moved to La Mesa, California, and Paul attended college at San Diego State for a year. The next year the family moved to Vincennes, Indiana, to be near Paul's relatives. After a year in town, the family moved to a 100-acre farm near Wheatland, Indiana. One of the first things Paul did was to build a darkroom in the basement. For years the family had a large strawberry patch, which helped put us kids through college. Both Paul and Virginia were active in St. John Lutheran Church in Vincennes, the church of Paul's childhood.

Paula joined the Air Force in 1974, and after getting out in 1978, she used her VA benefits to attend the Indiana University Mauer School of Law in Bloomington, Indiana. She graduated in 1982

See Generations of Service, Page 7

Generations Of Service

and retired in 2016 after a career spent mostly assisting federal courts and the Indiana Supreme Court.

Rob was in Army ROTC at Rose Hulman University near Terre Haute Indiana, graduating in 1977, where he majored in electrical engineering and computer technology. He retired from Eli Lilly & Company in 2010.

When Paula was home on leave in 1975, Virginia suggested we all pose for photos in our uniforms. With the silver oak leaves on Paul's shoulders and a chest full of medals, it was clear



Paula, Paul and Rob in their uniforms.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

who out-ranked who!

Paul and Virginia lived on the farm until Paul died on February 19, 1991. Paul was buried in his Marine Corps dress uniform with military honors. He lived long enough to see his first grandson, Joseph Cardoza, who was born on January 20, 1988. Paul was never happier in his later years than he was with Joseph. His second grandson, Nathan Cardoza, was born on February 18, 1993.

After Paul died, Virginia sold the farm and moved to a condo in Vincennes, Indiana, where she was active in many volunteer activities. She died on January 15, 2004.

Paul and Virginia would be so proud of their two grandsons, who have grown to be fine young men. Joseph graduated from Purdue University in 2011, served as a Marine reserve officer, and is now a high school science teacher, married to a middle school science teacher. (He has a You Tube channel on science called Cardoza Queries.) Nathan completed an associates degree in machine tool technology and is a machinist.

Paul's family is proud of the legacy he left to his family, his community, his country, and the Corps!



This image from the collection was taken by a Navy photographer and shows the ballroom of the first officer's club. This is a formal dinner for the retirement of Navy Captain William A. Goring, just to the left of the arrow. To the right of the arrow is Colonel George Eddy, deputy commander of White Sands and soon to become the commander in January 1950. He'll be promoted to the rank of brigadier general in July 1951. By the way, the fireplace behind them is made from native granite and is slightly radioactive. Public Affairs used the space to set up the first museum displays for WSMR.

White Sands Missile Range Historial Foundation Hands Across History P.O. Box 171 White Sands, NM 88002

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IMPORTANT NOTICE

Dues are due for the White Sands Missile Range Historical Foundation. However, because of the uncertainty in Washington about the value of museums, the Foundation board feels it cannot in good conscience ask you to pay dues. So, the board has declared 2025 a dues-free year. You can renew your membership AT NO COST and new members can JOIN AT NO COST. You won't find a better deal anywhere in America.

The board feels this is necessary to keep the Foundation viable when no one knows what the future holds. The Foundation needs to keep a membership and a board so that decisions can be made about funding in the near term and where to go in the future. One large example is what to do if the Foundation needs to dissolve. In that case, the membership (not the board) will vote on what to do with any money in the bank. That can't happen without some members and a few board members.

PLEASE email me a note that you want to continue as a member or that you are joining for the first time (nebraska1950@comcast.net) or mail us via the post office at the PO Box above. Provide your full mailing address as well as your email address so we can send out updates and news.

THANKS.