



Hands Across History

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



Volume X, Letter II

May 2014

The Rest Of The Story About Miss Nike 1956

By Jim Eckles, Editor

In doing my research for *Pocketful Of Rockets*, I ran across the story of Clara Melendres in an old issue of the *Wind and Sand* newspaper from White Sands Proving Ground. The article was from 1956 and what struck me was how Tab Hunter crossed paths with Clara at the annual Truth or Consequences Fiesta.

Little did I know there was much more to the story of Clara.

In the book I relate how Clara Melendres represented the White Sands Signal Corps Agency(WSCCA) when she won the proving ground's Miss Nike competition in 1956. Immediately after winning the White Sands title she went to Truth or Consequences as the White Sands entrant in the fiesta's beauty pageant. However, instead of her Miss Nike banner, she wore one for all of New Mexico. The young contestants each represented a state, not a town, region or organization.

The fiesta and the town's name can be attributed to Ralph Edwards, the creator and host of the popular radio and TV show *Truth or Consequences*. To celebrate the show's 10th anniversary on the air, Edwards offered to stage that birthday broadcast in any town that changed its name to Truth or Consequences. Hot Springs, N. M. jumped at the chance to receive the national advertising.

The community's main industry was health tourism based on the soothing properties of the hot mineral water found there. According to a town brochure, they were constantly getting confused with towns like Hot Springs, Ark. and were always getting the short end of the stick. The brochure said California alone had something like 32 towns using "hot springs." By changing the name, the community suddenly was blessed with a unique brand – one that no rustler could steal.

Like most long names and titles in America, locals have shortened Truth or Consequences to T or C.

Although Edwards only promised to do the one show in 1950, Edwards returned to T or C each year to participate in the town's fiesta. For years White Sands sent military hardware and floats to appear in the fiesta's annual parade. In 1956, the White Sands parade entry was a Nike missile on a trailer, matching Clara's Miss Nike title.

Each year, Edwards brought acts and personalities with him from Hollywood to entertain folks. In the first decade,

often called the golden years, there were a number of recognizable names who showed up. In 1956, his group included quasi-star Tab Hunter. Hunter was approaching the height of his career and was very popular. He appeared in many films, was considered a heart-throb by teenage girls, and even had a hit record in 1957 called *Young Love*.

In 1955 he appeared in a Climax television show called *Fear Strikes Out*. It was the story of major league baseball player Jimmy Piersall and his battles with mental illness. Hunter played Piersall. Also in 1955, he appeared with Claudette Colbert in a Ford Television Theatre production.

The Burning Hills was a Warner Brothers film that Hunter starred in with Natalie Wood in 1956. It was based on a Louis L'Amour novel but apparently the book was much better entertainment than the movie.

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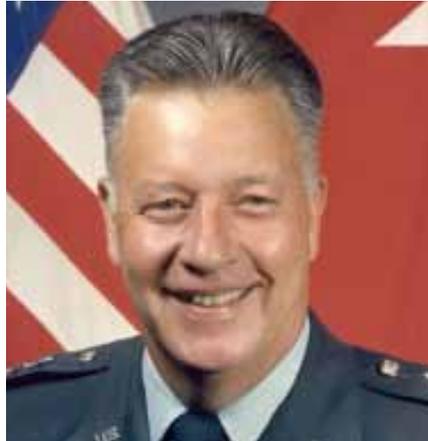


Movie star Tab Hunter gives Clara Melendres a kiss during the Miss Fiesta beauty pageant in T or C in 1956. Clara finished second to Beverly Sikes on the left.

Fulwyler Dedication Ceremony On June 5

On June 5 White Sands Missile Range will hold a memorial dedication ceremony where the headquarters building will be named in honor of Maj. Gen. Niles J. Fulwyler. The ceremony will start at 9 a.m. in front of Building 100.

As part of the ceremony, a free-standing sign will be unveiled with Fulwyler's photo and some of his background information. One fact on the sign not commonly known is the general's middle name. The initial "J" was always in his signature block but few knew it stood for Jennings.



Fulwyler commanded WSMR from September 1982 until his retirement in June 1986. He began his service in the Army in 1952.

While WSMR's commander, Fulwyler did a tremendous amount of public speaking. He was a dynamic and skilled presenter. During his White Sands tenure, the Valley Forge Freedom Foundation awarded him with the George Washington Medal for Patriotic Speech.

Bowling Green University, where Fulwyler went to school as an undergrad, offers a scholarship in his honor.

Museum Contributions Made To Pay Tribute To Individuals

Per the suggestion in a previous issue of the *Hands Across History* newsletter, here is a listing of recent contributions made in someone's honor.

In Honor Of MG Niles Fulwyler

Piland, Doyle & Lutisha
Dye, Carolyn
TRAX International
Gibson, Jon & Elvia
Revie, Charles & Gwendolyn
Fletcher, James
Wellman, Gloria
Williams, Frances
Eckles, James
Shepard, Earl
Vick, Austin & Pam
Trefry, LTG & Mrs. Richard
Reinhart, MaryBeth
Archuleta, Dolores
Einstein, Linda Lovelady

In Honor Of RADM Paul Arthur

Williams, Frances
Gibson, Jon & Elvia
Shepard, Earl
Brady, Ed & Rosemary
Kelley, Gib & Retha
Reinhart, MaryBeth
Vick, Austin & Pam

In Honor Of Dr. Richard Duncan

Williams, Frances
Gibson, Jon & Elvia
Shepard, Earl

In Honor Of Jim Eckles

McFall, Lawrence

In Honor Of Jon Gibson

Berkson, Arthur & Rebecca

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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White Sands, N.M. 88002

White Sands Historical Foundation
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WSMR's DIRT 1 Tests Looked Into Battlefield Obsuration In 1978

By Bruce Kennedy

The first man-guided missile firing I ever saw was when, in the late 1950's, I was assigned to the Attitude and Events Section (A&E), Measurements Division, at White Sands Missile Range. A&E was responsible for tracking and photographing missiles in flight. The missile being tested was the Lacrosse artillery weapon fired from a truck and guided to its target by a forward observer (FO). The missile trajectory was controlled by radio signals sent to the missile by the FO, much the way a model airplane is controlled in flight by a kid or adult flying his latest Christmas present around the neighborhood.

The weapon saw limited deployment and was withdrawn from service in 1964. Its primary weakness, besides many technical problems, was the need for the human controller to clearly see both the missile and the target so he could guide one to the other. Those conditions worked very nicely at White Sands, where clear skies and unlimited visibility were the norm. However, it certainly wasn't the norm in Europe or Korea where low clouds and poor visibility were common. Also, it could not be fired at night, and was not capable of hitting moving targets.

Now jump forward just a few years to a time when self-guided and laser-guided smart weapons were reaching maturity and night-vision optics and displays were in com-

mon use. Suddenly there wasn't much difference between day and night and the computer replaced the human.

The Forward Looking Infrared (FLIR) systems on tanks gave crews the ability to see at night and allowed them to fight as effectively at night as in daylight. Infrared optics on missiles easily picked up the heat emissions or signatures of targets and allowed the missiles to track and attack on their own. Laser rangefinders accurately measured the distance to a target and permitted artillery to destroy that target. And, finally, laser designators guided missiles directly to the target.

They sure sound great in the news releases but these wonderful devices had the same limitation as the Lacrosse - they had to have a clear line of sight to acquire the target. As they say, "you can't hit what you can't see."

In 1978, the Army Atmospheric Sciences Laboratory (ASL) conducted a series of field tests to measure the operational effectiveness of these new Army electro-optical systems when looking through dust and other types of battlefield obscuration. Battlefields are messy places with smoke, dust and other materials often billowing into the air.

The tests were designed by principal investigator James Lindberg and co-investigator Radon Loveland. The tests were performed at White Sands in October 1978. A lo-

see **Can You See It Now?**, page 6



Blinding dust boils up at the DIRT 1 test site during ASL's 1978 tests conducted north of the Orogrande Gate.

Tab Hunter's Appeal — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Because of his appeal, Hunter was an obvious choice to be one of the fiesta's beauty pageant judges. According to the *Wind and Sand* newspaper, Clara Melendres was "the center of attention" wherever the beauty contestants appeared. She also caught Hunter's eye.

When Beverly Sikes from Crane, Texas was announced as the winner, the paper reported that Hunter rushed the stage, gave Melendres a hug and kiss and said, "This is my choice for queen." Apparently Hunter also publicly begged for a delay to allow the other judges to reconsider their decision.

Hunter lost his loud appeal and the rest of the places were announced. Clara finished second.

At that point in my book, I ran out of information and assumed that was the end of Clara's story. I moved on to other topics needing attention.

After the book came out last October, I received an email from Karl Laumbach telling me that he was sure Clara Melendres went on to marry Jerry Apodaca – the Jerry Apodaca who was elected governor of New Mexico in 1974. He also thought she was still alive and living in northern N.M.

Holy cow, the story suddenly had new life. Just maybe, I thought, I would be able to find and talk to her.



Clara Melendres posing at the proving ground's Navy pool after being named Miss Nike. WSPG photo

It was easy to verify that Clara had married Jerry Apodaca. In fact, Laumbach helped in this by sending me a clipping from the July 22, 1956 women's page of the *Las Cruces Sun-News* with their engagement announcement. They were married on August 18, 1956 in St. Genevieve's Church in Las Cruces.

The more difficult task was finding her and getting in touch. People who have been in the limelight are often hidden and difficult to contact. I eventually found her in Albuquerque and was able to get an old-fashioned mailing address. I wrote her a letter asking if I could interview her by phone and she graciously said yes. In addition, she sent me pages from her scrapbook with many photos and clippings.

So, as Paul Harvey, a White Sands Proving Ground visitor in 1963, used to say, "Now for the rest of the story."

Clara grew up in Las Cruces attending Las Cruces High School (Union High in those days). In high school she was a cheerleader, homecoming queen, Bulldog Sweetheart, and played in the band. Then at New Mexico A&M, now NMSU, she was head cheerleader, a princess to the homecoming queen, voted most popular girl and finished in the top three of the Vanity Fair Beauty Contest. She was exactly the kind of girl most young men would dream about dating but never actually ask out.

In running through these things, Clara was quick to point out she was also a decent student. She said she couldn't match her sister Esther who was a straight A student in high school and college. Esther graduated from high school at age 15 and college at 19.

When you see the photos of Clara from this time, the striking feature is her mega-watt smile. She just beams. In talking to her, it became evident that the smile is just an outward reflection of Clara's friendly and outgoing personality. She told me she has always been a people person and simply enjoys being with others. The smile and personality are a potent combination still benefiting her in her 80th year.

At the end of her junior year at New Mexico A&M, she dropped out "to make some money." Early in 1956 she was hired at the Signal Corps Agency on White Sands as a stenographer in the organization's supply division. She said she was majoring in elementary education in college and, like everyone else, she took lots of typing and shorthand. So, when she applied for a job at White Sands, she was an accomplished typist and note taker.

She said she doesn't remember a lot about the job except that people were very nice to her. Also, I got the impression she attracted the young soldiers like bees to honey. However, she said she never dated any of them.

When Clara agreed to compete for the Miss Nike title at White Sands, her mother was not happy. The contestants were required to "pass in review" before the judges and the audience in swimsuits. Clara explained that her mother was very conservative and wouldn't even let her have movie

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Mini Miss America — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

magazines in the house. Clara said she had to hide them in her room. But Clara was an adult and she did what she wanted.

There were a total of 13 contestants for Miss Nike in 1956. Interestingly, four of them were married. In the end, the field was narrowed to just three. Along with Clara were Joyce Roberts and Mary Benn. When the votes were all tallied, SueAnn Holman, the proving ground's 1955 queen, gave Clara her crown and a big bouquet of flowers.

Then it was on to the T or C Fiesta in early April. Clara remembers being there for a couple of days but the big day for her was Saturday, April 7. At 10 a.m. she and the other beauty queen contestants rode in the annual parade. She said she was in a convertible and got to wave at the crowds lining the street. Being from Las Cruces, she was almost a hometown favorite and the crowds cheered.

Then at 11:30 the beauty queen contest was held in the high school auditorium. Clara said it was a kind of mini Miss America event which probably explains why she wore a New Mexico sash instead of her Miss Nike one. The women appeared in formal gowns and swim wear and had to answer a question posed to each of them by Ralph Edwards.

According to *Complete TV* magazine which ran an article about the event in February 1957, the four judges were Edwards, Hunter, Warner Brother's publicity man Hugh Benson, and production manager Ed Bailey. The article was



Clara Melendres Apodaca today. Courtesy photo

titled "Ralph and Tab Paint the Town." While there was a page of photos from the beauty pageant, there were more from the visit to the Carrie Tingley Children's Hospital by Edwards and Hunter. The story said they devoted an afternoon visiting with and entertaining the kids.

That bit of information seems indicative of what kind of man Edwards was. He made a commitment to be there and seemed genuinely concerned about the children. His commitment to T or C was the same. He continued to return to the fiesta for 50 years, long after the shine had worn off.

As the beauty pageant wrapped up, Clara, with that laser-beam smile, was again a finalist. She confirmed that Tab Hunter ran out to hug and kiss her on the cheek when it was announced that Beverly Sikes had won. It turns out there are a few photos of the event. Lost in this brouhaha is the fact that Pat McCombs from Wilcox, Ariz. placed third.

One can imagine the reaction Ms. Sikes might have had with the Hollywood star protesting the fact that she was chosen the winner. In the book, I comment that she and her family probably never purchased a Tab Hunter record after that.

I asked Clara if she was flattered or embarrassed by Hunter's antics. She said she was flattered to receive so much attention from the star.

That evening in the same auditorium Edwards broadcast the 10th anniversary *Truth or Consequences* show. The three beauty queen finalists appeared on the radio broadcast.

Of course, there was much more to the fiesta. It had a bit of a county fair atmosphere with a rodeo, a dance, fiddlers contest, dress revue, and a beard-growing contest. By the way, second-place prize in each of the beard-growing categories was an electric shaver. First-place prize in the girl's barrel race was a round-trip ticket on Continental Bus Lines to Albuquerque.

Now, this is where the story really gets interesting. In high school, Clara dated Jerry Apodaca. When he went off to the University of New Mexico to play football, she stayed in Las Cruces. They drifted apart and weren't dating anymore by 1956.

Somehow Apodaca heard about Clara being in the fiesta and he went to watch. You guessed it, they started dating again. Things went pretty fast and within a few months the engagement announcement appeared in the *Sun-News*. After they married, she moved to Albuquerque to be with Apodaca as he finished college.

After the fiesta, Clara returned to her job at White Sands until the wedding. She said one thing that was a bit startling at White Sands during the last few months was seeing her framed photo on office walls as Miss Nike.

The two started a family and eventually had five children. Clara is very proud of her children and that she now has 10 grandchildren.

In 1961, they moved down to Las Cruces where Jerry

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Can You See It Now? — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

cation was selected about two miles north of the Orogrande gate and was designated as the Dusty Infrared Test site, DIRT site for short. The test strip was 2 kilometers long with the dust clouds produced in the middle.

DIRT I looked at obscuration caused by battlefield dust but also included burning tires and fuel – dust and smoke. There are other types of battlefield-induced obscurants that affect electro-optical (E-O) systems such as burning vehicles and intentionally produced tactical smoke from generators and munitions (fog oil, HC, white phosphorous). Day-to-day weather can also play a major role in the performance of E-O systems: rain, snow, sleet, fog, dust, clouds are obscurants as well.

The effects of these obscurants depend on the wave-

simultaneous. Needless to say the dust cloud was huge.

Other tests included static and the live firing of 155mm high-explosive artillery shells. The firings were provided by the Third Armored Cavalry Regiment from Fort Bliss. Four self-propelled M109 howitzers were positioned about three miles from the impact zone. Various firing rates of the 155mm high-explosive rounds with super-quick, point-detonation fuzes were used to produce different size dust clouds. The favorite scenario for the troops was to fire as many rounds as possible in a one-minute period.

During the planning for DIRT I, I was designated as the test conductor which entailed interaction with all participants and range organizations. The site for the artillery emplacement was an empty, unimproved desert area east of



A typically spectacular White Sands photo of static artillery rounds being exploded in the test area to generate the dust needed for the DIRT 1 testing. Photo courtesy of Bruce Kennedy

length of the light used in each weapon system. For example, systems operating at visible and near infrared wavelengths cannot see through smoke composed of fog oil. At the same time, sensors operating in the far infrared wavelengths can penetrate fog oil as if it wasn't there.

Regular old dust presents a different problem. Dust particles are much larger than oil smoke. Depending on the particle size, volume density, and path length, even the FLIR can have difficulty seeing through dust.

At DIRT I we ran a series of tests where multiple TNT charges were exploded on the ground. The different configurations were designed to produce dust clouds of varying size and density. The largest array of TNT included 140 charges, each weighing 15 pounds. The array was approximately 85x285 meters (about 6 acres), and the detonations were

Launch Complex 38.

The range environmental representative wanted to look at the artillery position, so we walked to the area about a kilometer north of Nike Avenue. He insisted that any approach to the site must go in and around the mesquite sand dunes in order to minimize environmental impact on the desert. So when I took the captain from the 3rd Cav to the site, I emphasized that his equipment, which included the four howitzers, must go around the boondocks.

The 3rd Cav moved into position a day or two before the tests began, and I went out to look at their deployment. What did I find? Their bulldozer had cut a pioneer trail in an absolute straight line, through sandhills, mesquite, grease-

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Why Laser Weapons Are Dickey — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

wood, and anything else in its way. As I recall I didn't bring that to the attention of the environmental guy.

ASL's commanding officer at the time was Col. William Rawlinson, an artillery guy. So, on the day of the artillery tests he came to the DIRT site and parked himself in my control van — one of the privileges of being in charge. The artillery captain was also there to relay my test instructions and countdown by radio to his crew.

Before the tests began, I made it very clear that when I said "cease fire," his crew would do just that. So we began. The first barrage came whistling into the test area and exploded with a thundering roar. "Cease fire."

Things were going fine with a few tests under our belt, when we got to the rapid-fire scenario: four howitzers firing their projectiles as fast as possible. Countdown... "three, two, one, fire". Twenty seconds later four explosions ripped into the test area, just one kilometer from our location. A few seconds later, four more, then more, then more. Shells were whistling and dust was boiling up from the test area. Also, a shell fragment came down about 100 feet in front of us. Rawlinson was standing outside my command post and the captain was on the roof.

After one minute, I commanded "cease fire." About twenty seconds later the last barrage impacted. THEN, about 20 seconds after that, a lone round whistled in and exploded. I leaped out of my chair, went outside the van, and yelled at the captain, "I told you CEASE FIRE!" The captain muttered something less than apologetic and the colonel looked at him and chastised him for not following instructions. Other than that, the artillery tests were great fun and very successful.

Different types of instrumentation were used to characterize the dust clouds. Perhaps the most spectacular and

dangerous used a CH-54 Skycrane helicopter to fly an instrumentation package through the dust cloud without entering the cloud itself. The particle-size measuring instruments were suspended on a long cable from the chopper. After the dust cloud was produced, the Skycrane would fly over the cloud with the instrumentation package (mounted in a wingless Beaver fuselage) dangling down into the cloud. The trick was to fly the suspended payload as close to the ground as possible.

Ground instrumentation included Fourier Transmission Spectrometer, Lidar, FLIR, millimeter wave transmission, multispectral digital imagery, particle size distribution, particulate samples, soil and crater measurements, gas sampling, and general photography.

DIRT I was the first of many obscuration field tests conducted by ASL. Other Army agencies ultimately joined in over a period of several years to address the problem of using E-O systems in natural and battlefield obscured environments. Ultimately the Program Manager for Smoke and Obscurants funded a series of smoke-week tests in order to evaluate various types of tactical smoke materials and their ability to defeat the most sophisticated E-O sensors.

The PM for Smoke and Obscurants has conducted many field tests to determine the best materials that will defeat E-O sensors at visual, near IR, far-IR, and millimeter wavelengths. Testing has been done at WSMR, at Eglin Air Force Base and various military installations. With good reason, smoke generators with capabilities to deliver these multispectral particulates have been installed in several tactical vehicles. For example, the testing showed that lasers don't do well penetrating heavy fog, heavy dust, heavy precipitation and a variety of manmade visible and infrared obscurants. Sometimes a smokescreen is all it takes.

Miss Nike Continues To Serve — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

went into real estate and insurance. But he eventually turned to politics and Clara quickly rose to the occasion with her personality, smile and people smarts. She told me that you hear how people hate political campaigning. She loved it.

Clara said they would be canvassing a neighborhood with Jerry taking one side of the street and her the other side. She related that Jerry would quickly run out of gas and say, "that's enough." Clara, on the other hand, was just getting started. She'd say, "let's do another street."

It doesn't take much imagination to see how Clara was a major ally in getting Jerry into office. He was elected to the state senate in 1966 and then to the governor's office in 1974.

As first lady of New Mexico, Clara participated in many volunteer activities and worked to promote the arts. She said when they got settled in Santa Fe she immediately saw an opportunity in the governor's reception area on the fourth floor of the capitol building. She said the space was a sitting area and was mostly used by reporters hanging out.

She pushed and quickly turned the space into the Governor's Gallery. The grand opening featured paintings by

Georgia O'Keeffe who was the guest of honor for the event.

Being New Mexico's first lady didn't quench Clara's interest in politics and getting involved with people and issues. She quickly struck out on her own and in the 1980s she served as cabinet secretary for the Department of Cultural Affairs under both Governors Anya and Carruthers.

Later she served as the President and CEO of the National Hispanic Cultural Center Foundation. While in Washington, D.C., she served as a commissioner on the DC Commission of the Arts and Humanities and was appointed to the White House Millennium Commission by former first lady Hillary Clinton. Also, she was general assistant to Chairman Ron Brown at the Democratic National Committee.

You might think, at her age, that Clara is ready for retired life. When I talked with her she needed to consult a loaded calendar to find a time when I could conduct the interview. Even today she serves on several boards and still has her finger in what is happening on the political scene — she mentioned she had just dined with Hillary Clinton. But most of all she said, she has 10 grandchildren to keep her busy.

Hands Across History
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During demolition.....



Building 300, the missile range's second Range Control Center, was recently demolished to make way for possible new structures elsewhere on WSMR. The building stood empty since 2000 when the new J.W. Cox Range Control Center was dedicated, just across the street.

Nothing left but desert and crumbling parking lots.