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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

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SUBJECT OF DOCUMENT: [use relevant bold-face introductory terms]

Oral history interview with (Sandy) Nestor G. Sandoval, Jr.
[full name of interviewee]

about White Sands Missile Range and
[main focus of interview]

Propulsion Systems Development Facility

Title: 1963 - NASA, White Sands
[interviewee's current and/or former title and affiliation]

1968 - Equal Opportunity Officer, Air Force Systems Command

Interview conducted by Robert B. Merrifield - Staff
[interviewer's name/position]

Historian at WSTF ?
[location of interview]

Transcript and tape(s). [for inventory only: # pages 10; # tapes 2]

(partially from notes)
master 1

CONTENTS:

Biographical - [date/place of birth; family background] _____

Education - _____

Career Path - U.S. Army at White Sands Missile Range;
1963 transfer to NASA at White Sands;

Topics - Little Bel Test Complex (Launch Complex 36);
Army Redstone gantry refurbishment; large North
American Aviation employee force; lack of
housing on post; offices in old barracks;
Propulsion Systems Development Facility (PSDF)
20 miles from ^{White Sands} Missile Range; problem keeping
Indian artifact seekers out of toxic material areas;
Attending Missile Range boundaries;
Ollie Isaacs, irate rancher; govt-rancher
agreements; local youth turn holding tank into
swimming pool; contracting for construction
site food wagon + facility food concessionaire;
Army-NASA tension over security; wild animal
population control; visitor management;
livestock driving hazards; New Mexico open
grazing land laws; historic interest of area.

local
resentment
toward
govt.

1383

March 15, 1968

Dear Bob,

I have received both - "New Contract Bridge" and the transcript of our interview. I am now one of the better card shufflers for it. Proficiency in the game I hope will follow.

As you know, I am now with the Air Force Systems Command as the Equal Opportunity Officer. The elimination of all discriminatory practices and the promotion of equality of opportunity without regard to irrelevant considerations is certainly a challenge and a large order.

After a review of the information I've inserted some very minor changes. The only additional information which I see may lend substance to your material would concern the various geographical or historical associations; such as our facility being a part of the "Jornada del Muerto" - Valley of Death, etc. Should you not have this in the source type material furnished WSTF should have.

Best wishes and please advise if I can be of any assistance.

Sincerely,

Sandy Sanderson

✓ 264 (all pages)
213 (P. 4)
244 (P. 6)
221-1 (P. 3, 4, 5, 6)
260 (P. 5, 6)
399 (P. 9)

March 11, 1968

Dear Sandy,

I hear you are plowing in another agency's south 40 these days. I'm sorry that you decided against making a move to Houston, but can understand why you and your family would not want to tear up roots. I hope your new position offers you both a professional challenge and an opportunity for advancement.

Attached is a transcript of our interview. I edited it lightly to remove extraneous material. You will notice, however, that near the end of the interview I had an equipment failure and was obliged to rely on my notes for what was said. I hope I did a satisfactory job of "reading you." If you will, please read the statement and mark those sentences with brackets [] that you would not want alluded to in a Center history for reasons of embarrassment to an individual or the Center. As I mentioned during our recording session, this interview is to part of the source material for the history, and it is doubtful that I will quote from it verbatim. Therefore, please don't worry about a sentence here or there which might not be as polished as you would like were it to receive public scrutiny.

If you want to add information feel free to do so. Just tack it on at the end of the statement, unless you prefer to insert it into the text. After you return the transcript to me, I'll send you a copy for your personal file. I'm enclosing a franked envelope for your use.

Please give Gloria and the children my regards and best wishes.

Sincerely,

Br. Remfield

Interview with Nestor G. Sandoval, Jr.
12/14/67

Originally, I came to work for the Army at White Sands Missile Range. While working in the intelligence office at the range, I became acquainted with the NASA programs. I also became acquainted with some of the individuals who were representing the Agency during this period because of working relationships. I had helped Mr. Messing obtain office space and housing from the Army and in hiring personnel. I transferred over to NASA in the middle of 1963 just prior to the first test conducted by NASA on the Range.

At the time I was hired, Gene ^AKnoff^A was considering transferring from MSC Houston to the MSC White Sands Operations as successor to several individuals who had come out on a temporary basis as head of the administrative organization. MSC's ^{Twight} operations at this time were on the range on the launch complex 36, or the Little Joe Test Complex, as it was referred to. Staffing for a propulsion systems development facility was just beginning. There weren't enough MSC people to do the work required, and as a result people were working extremely long hours--occasionally working completely around the clock. People were wearing 2 or 3 hats. Frank Clark was in charge of all services--he had transportation, communications, personnel orientation, and supply.

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The launch complex facilities were then undergoing considerable change. The gantry, which originally was the old Army Redstone gantry, had just been refurbished. Considerable work and effort had gone into modifying it to make it suitable for the Little Joe launchings.

264 There were many problems in this operation; I remember one particular incident after the Little Joe vehicle was already in place. The gantry, of course was a part of the launch pad facility. This gantry had been moved inadvertently although it was supposed to be locked on the rails. It had been moved at least a foot causing some of the electric motors on it to burn. Luckily, there was no damage to the flight vehicle itself, which would have resulted in a tremendous loss of time and effort for NASA and its contractors, General Dynamics-Convair, responsible for the Little Joe test vehicle, and North American Aviation, prime contractor for the Apollo spacecraft boilerplate models. NAA had quite a few employees at White Sands as did General Dynamics, but NASA was just getting a cadre together.

When I was first hired the opinion was prevalent in the Las Cruces area that NASA was one of the subcontractors to NAA. It took some doing to correct this impression.

264 There was no housing on post for either NASA or contractors. However, the manager, Mr. Messing finally was given housing on the post. Getting Mr. Messing a house was something of an accomplishment, as it had been quite a few years since any civilian had been able to obtain housing on the post. Old army barracks were given us for offices. They were dilapidated one story structures or the 2-story World War II vintage wooden barracks. Considerable work had to be done to turn them into office space, and as hiring stepped up, desk space was at a

premium. What would probably be normal space for 1 desk and 1 individual was probably occupied by one desk all right, but about 3 were using it.

My first contact with operations of the Propulsion Systems Development Facility on the west side of the San Andres Mountains and north of Organ was around September 1963. I came to look over our operations to check the protection and safety of our construction. To get to the PSDF, it was necessary to take a dirt road from Highway 70 at Organ to the Propulsions System Development Facility. This road had been carved out of the desert and the first 6" of its surface was a soft, fine, caliche ^{resid-} ~~due~~ that would get into any supposedly airtight vehicle. The Propulsion Systems Development Facility at that time, had only a single building, (Bldg 114), which was metal pre-fab construction and occupied by the U. S. District Corps of Engineers. The Corp was responsible for supervising that phase of construction for the facility. There was also a trailer house occupied by three employees of NAA who were the watchmen for the facility. Only the excavation for the buildings had been completed. NASA personnel had their offices at the White Sands Missile Range proper, 20 miles from the facility, six of which were over this very dusty road. It was not a hard surface road with many gullies, and at least a 20 minute ride from Highway 70. Some of the NASA people were concerned with both the flight test program on the east side of the San Andres Mountains and the operations at PTDF. They maintained an office at White Sands, but travelled to and from the work site here.

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213 We didn't have many government vehicles; it seems there were 1 or 2, and all other vehicles were government-leased. Most of them were sedans which made traveling to the site quite difficult.

264 The site area was earlier quite a rock hound paradise and also produced quite a few Indian artifacts. For this reason, people were always trying to get in the area. With all the toxic materials we had and our isolated location, our housekeeping personnel were taxed in trying to diplomatically keep these people out.

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211 We had several other problems which arose during this time. The government was coming in and extending boundaries of the White Sands Missile Range into an area that had been ranch country for decades. This action caused resentment. One of the local ranchers Ollie Isaccs, was challenged by one of our guards and requested to state the nature of his business. He asked the guard if he knew whose land he was on. He had been a rancher there for over 50 years, and was a little put out that the question would be raised as to what right he had being there. He ran cattle on this land, and what kind of identification did the guard want? My telephone number was given to the rancher and he called me. His first question was - on which part of the horse would I desire to have an identification placed since he intended to look for approximately 18 head of cattle that he had lost. I assured him that we had no intent of keeping him out or from keeping an eye on his cattle, and as a matter of fact we would be happy to help him find them. He inferred that he would never see those 18 cows

again (and as a matter of fact we never did find them). I made an appointment to go out to his ranch to work out some arrangement that would be mutually satisfactory and he could come and go when he needed.

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When I went over to his ranch, sometime later, he was at home -- a man in his late 70's, lean ^{rugged} and bowlegged. He was not too pleasantly disposed toward any representative of the government, and unfortunately I was not familiar with any of the previous arrangements when the government acquired leases on this land on which he ran his cattle. It took considerable time and discussion before Mr. Isaccs apparently determined that maybe we weren't all bad guys, and were honestly trying to see his problem and cooperate with him in any way we could. He received the first visitor identification of any type issued at the White Sands Test Facility. I had to extent the same privilege to another ranching pioneer, a Mr. S. A. Walter, who was also running cattle on some of the land that had been acquired by the government.

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We had a few other problems. About 300 yards from Highway 70, the Corps of Engineers erected a water holding tank, to have water available for the construction of the road. The problem came from the fact that when youngsters from Organ who had never seen that much water in one place in their whole lives found out about it, it was quite a chore to prevent them from using it as a swimming pool

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Again we were 20 miles from town, 6 miles from the nearest establishment that served food, so we had to try to interest somebody in furnishing a mobile food concession for the construction people. We were finally able to obtain the services from Jerry Wolff Enterprises of Las Cruces who furnished a sandwich wagon that came out on a daily basis and offered

sandwiches, cold drinks, and other snack items. It was a real problem keeping the dust out of the food though in those 6 miles of dirt road to the site.

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After facilities at the installation were completed, a non-appropriated fund activity committee was created. It had the responsibility for hiring a concessionaire to take care of the cafeteria operations and related vending. These two functions were tied up into a single package by this exchange council committee of which I was the supervisor. We were very fortunate in getting a competent and experienced concessionaire. It is quite difficult to furnish a food service for a facility that has few people and is so isolated. This meant there would be a requirement for quite a few lunch customers but very few for breakfast. It was quite awhile before the concessionaire was able to break even on the cafeteria operations. However, by having a joint vending and cafeteria service, he was able to keep in operation and furnish this vital service.

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The initial agreements for the establishment of the NASA propulsion development facility at White Sands, called for NASA to have full responsibility for security, law enforcement, and safety of operations. At the White Sands Missile Range, where flight operations were conducted, the Department of Army furnished all support services. This included post engineer-type functions, photographic support, security guard, and traffic regulations. We were considered tenants on the installation and could not utilize the NASA identification, although we did have our own assigned launch complex, Number 36. The Army jealously guarded its prerogatives and at times a lot of

271-1
coordination was necessary. For example, when we had a test scheduled, NASA always tried to allow the public to view the operation from a safe distance. The Army, for its operations, limited access to those people who were concerned with the operations. On one occasion when the public was invited to a NASA launch, we discovered that the Army had established about 4 Military Police checkpoints for the visitors. It would have given an impression of a very closely guarded or classified operation. We fortunately discovered this arrangement before too many visitors had come and were finally able to reduce the number of checks that the Army required in order to protect NASA's image and yet comply with range requirements.

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At times we had difficulty getting the required support at the right time. One time we had a problem obtaining the necessary security guard coverage we required. I jestingly suggested to the Department of Army Provost Marshal that we might replace MP's with our own personnel. This was never meant to happen, however. Since we had started staffing for the Propulsion Systems Development Facility, the security guard services contractor who had been awarded the contract for protection services at the test facility was in process of hiring personnel, and had hired a very attractive young lady as a visitor control clerk. She came out to White Sands for an orientation, and of course was in her uniform of the Security Guard force. I had some material to send to this Provost Marshal so I asked her if she would deliver it for me. She did, and when the Provost Marshal saw the security guard insignia on her coat, he suspected the worst, hit the roof and immediately contacted me. When he discovered that I was merely putting him on, he calmed down.

From that point on, we had less trouble in getting the security support we required from the Army.

Portion of interview resurrected from notes

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It is necessary to maintain a wide range of liaison activities at MSC PSDF. The Department of Agriculture, the County Sheriff, the Las Cruces City Police, the State Police and miscellaneous other law enforcement agencies all have jurisdictional interest in the Range. Use agreements for the range involve the Interior Department, the State of New Mexico, and private individuals as well as the Army and Department of Agriculture. Occasionally it is necessary to permit hunters on the Range in order to harvest the deer herd. Overgrazing is a real problem in the area and a constant threat to the Bighorn sheep. In early December 1967, a 2-day deer hunt was organized. It required Department of Army approval (it was their range the hunt would be conducted on) and coordination with the Wild Life Refuge, the State of New Mexico Fish and Game Commission, etc. Over 1300 hunting permits were issued.

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Jurisdictionally NASA is responsible for PSDF traffic regulation, law enforcement, investigation of accidents, and law violations. Usually, depending on the type of case, county, state or federal investigators are also involved in an investigation. During the construction phase, a warrant was to be served on a construction worker. A deputy sheriff who was to serve the warrant was accompanied by a deputy U. S. Marshal, an FBI agent, and Sandoval--the latter three strictly because of the type of facility involved. When they drove up to the site of the construction the worker was up in the rigging of a high

bay building under construction. He waved when he saw them drive up, yelled that he would come right down, and did so without having to be asked. *This was a case of being overwhelmed by sheer numbers.*

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The number of visitors to the PSDF both official and casual amounts to some 400 to 600 a month. Because of the small number of personnel at the site, accommodating such a large number of visitors presents a problem. In order to protect NASA's image and yet prevent visitors from using the facility on an "open post" arrangement, the gate guard has been instructed to make certain that a visitor has at least a semblance of official business involving a person on the facility. The guard then directs the visitor to that person. No one is allowed to wander around the facility or interfere with operations. So far the policy has worked well-at least there have been no complaints.

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Until the access road from Highway 70 was fenced, livestock was a driving hazard. Fortunately no serious injuries to individuals has occurred, although property damage has been considerable and at least 10 head of cattle has been killed by vehicles. It is not unusual for Sandoval to be called in the early hours of the morning to be advised that an animal was struck and killed by a vehicle. It is imperative that immediate action be taken to determine ownership and receive instructions on how the carcass is to be disposed of. Usually the only means of ownership identification is through the brand borne by the animal. Sandoval thus would immediately call the New Mexico cattle inspector, L. B. Johnson, and would meet him at the

scene of the accident. After identification, the owner is immediately contacted for instructions as to salvage or disposition. The process is complicated by New Mexico open-grazing land laws and certain steps or procedures have to be followed in order to conform to the law.

264 Sandoval noted that the PSDF is located on ground of considerable historic interest. Early stage lines ran through the edge of the facility, and at one time a large number of mines were operated nearby for gold, silver, copper and magnesium. While excavation of the mines was in progress an old bell and chalice ^{of considerable historical significance} was uncovered. It was turned over to state authorities. Billy the Kid frequented the area during his hey-day, and the law official who finally cut short his criminal career, Sheriff Pat Garrett, had a ranch house located up Bear Canyon, a short distance from ^{and within the boundaries of} the PSDF.

Speaking of historic interest, there was probably more business conducted at the "Oregon Mountain Lodge" than anywhere else during those early days.