

Milton Windler Article in the March 3rd, 2011 WSMR Missile Ranger

By Adriana Salas - Staff Writer

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Milton Windler, looks on at Darren Court, not in picture, during his private tour of the V-2 rocket Feb. 24.

Windler was the lead flight director for several Apollo missions and Skylab mission during the 50's and 60s and was in town to speak at the 40th anniversary of the Apollo 14 Launch commemoration in Las Cruces, N.M

A man who played an integral role in America's space exploration in the 50s and 60s visited White Sands Missile Range Feb. 24, during his stay in Las Cruces, N.M.

Milton Windler, flight director for the Skylab mission and several Apollo missions, including Apollo 13 and 14, received a private tour of the museum and Launch Complex 33, two days before speaking at an event celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Apollo 14 launch in town.

"I don't do this very often but it was an honor to be asked," Windler said.

In 1971 Windler was awarded the Exceptional Service Medal, an honor, according to the NASA website, only awarded to those who created an improvement in aeronautics,

engineering, administration or spaceflight. Windler also received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1970 for space exploration, a medal that only a handful of people have been awarded by the president himself.

Windler, originally from Hampton, Va. said that though Apollo 13 was the most dramatic mission he was a part of, Skylab was probably the most important because of the nine months of data they received from the mission. The Skylab mission was intended to prove humans can live in space for long periods of time. Looking back at his 35 years with NASA, Windler said he learned was the importance of working as a team. "I learned the things that people can do when you utilize a variety of intelligence as a team," Windler said.

Windler who rarely speaks at major events, said he decided to speak at this event to honor the life of his friend, Pete Frank, head flight director for Apollo 14. Frank was killed in a car accident in 2005. Windler said Frank would participate in several community services after his time in NASA, particularly to help build houses for low income families with Habitat for Humanity.

"He's the guy that should be coming to these events," Windler said of Frank. Through his friends' charitable work, Windler and his wife have also lived a life of giving by volunteering with Meals on Wheels to help deliver food to the elderly. He said he also works with a small program in his church to help the elderly do small chores around the house that they are not physically able to do, like change a light bulb.

Windler, who now lives in a small town near Houston, Texas, said he was happy to be able to visit this area having only learned about it through text. Windler said his favorite part of the tour was learning about the native's way of life and artifact found prior to the area becoming a government facility.

"I think it's all very interesting. I'm just glad to be here and getting to see this part of the country," Windler said.

"I spent a pleasant lunch here around this area a while ago and I'm glad to be back."

Windler said he may be visiting WSMR more often, now having known the great history of the area.