

interview w/ FREDERICK I. ORDWAY, III -- 11-12-98 (at HCC)
re: v. Braun

Fred -- One story from when we used to use lantern slides, and we'd go to Wash. I went on one trip, w/ Wernher von Braun, and Hermann Koelle, who was th head of the (MSFC) Future Projects Office. We were going to Wash. to make one of th presentations we made to ~~ARPA~~ Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), which you may remem funded th early days of th Saturn program. It was funded by ARPA. That went on from '58, and then it eventually, the funding was turned over to NASA bec ARPA didnt hav any real mission for it. ~~But~~ But ARPA got th Saturn ~~xx~~ program started. I think it was Dick Canroyd ? (Hanroyd?) was th main figure over it at ARPA.

Anyway, we carried lantern slides, which were I guess 4 by 5, heavy glass, that's what we used for slides in those days. We wd carry them up in these great big wooden boxes. And I was on this, one of these trips I made with ~~him~~ ^{you B.} when I was working for him. I guess we were Army Ballistic Missile Agency then, not NASA, before NASA, ~~doing~~ th presentation. And Herman Koelle was on this side of the table & I was on th other side of th table, and we had th projector here, and von Braun was wherever he was. But Roy Johnson was th main recipient (of th presenta'n). Roy J. was th first dir. of ARPA. Koelle was putting in th ~~slide~~ lantern slide where it goes. I would pull it out & put it over here. ... Wernher was talking and we got thru maybe 10 or 15 lantern slides. And Wernher said, "And now we have another project, Mr. Johnson, tht we wd like to review w/ you." ^{of} So Koelle puts (the slide) in. Well, it was a gas. It was a totally naked woman standing there w/ her arms out. Roy Johnson was puzzled at first, bec he looked at th face of Koelle, who was very proper guy. "Huh!? Vass iss dis?!" And Roy Johnson started to howl & laugh bec he knew it was a trick, we had played a trick on Koelle. Von Braun was puzzled at first, but then we all went into laughter. But I dont think Hermann ever could laugh. (Apparently someone ~~was~~ on Koelle's staff or in another office -- perhaps another v.B German team member -- had done it.)

Fred -- On one occasion I was asked to do a radio interview. Toward th end of the radio interview, there was a call-in (period). There was a voice called in from somewhere in metro. Boston w/ a thick accent, very critical (of v.B & associates). (Was also on w/ Larry King on radio & on Dick Cavett, & all comments on v.B were positive.) I didnt run into, in those days much antagonism toward v.Braun. After he retired, after th team had retired, and then partic after he had died, the attacks began. I dont know whether they had been latent &

?
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naked-woman-slide show

Some autograph heads

Two autograph

nobody dared to do it when he was a hero & taking our astronauts to th moon and so forth, or whether it's th kind of things you'd expect from younger generations of scholars. This is happening in Germany, I understand ~~w/ young German~~ from young German friends of mine. (is attitude toward anybody who worked for Hitler)

(today's political correctness) And ~~naivete~~ naivete. They (young Germans) dont understand what it was like working in a dictatorship. And that is something von Braun used to address, partic after Sputnik, in his speeches. "I want you all to ~~understand~~ discount that you can't do specific projects if you put all your mind to it, under the confining situation of a dictatorship. It's ~~not~~ not the way to do science; in the long run it's counter-productive. But look what happened in Germany, for example. There were just incredible scientific developments if you put your entire attention to it and your highest priority. So dont underestimate the Russians" was his message. He said, "I've lived thru a dictatorship & we were able to do some things -- not that we liked it that way or we wanted it that way, but you can do those things." He didnt hide that he'd ...

Fred -- Do you remem th old autograph stories that von B used to like to tell? This came up with Hugh Downs, We got to talking abt autographs. We were in th restaurant. We were at the Magnum Tree (?) Restaurant at the Cape (?). We had organized a dinner thru th Nat'l Space Society. My wife & I went in first to make sure ~~it~~ it was okay, the tables were all right & everything. The secy of th Society said we want a room for ourselves that we wd hav some distinguished people... Buzz ~~is~~ Aldrin, th president of this company, & Hugh Downs. Hugh Downs attracted more attn than Buzz bec Buzz (was around so much). The lady who owned th restaur asked if she could get an autograph from Hugh for her 2 dau's. "They just love Hugh Downs." I asked Hugh & he said he wouldn't mind at all. So they brough over a menu & he signed it. We got to talking abt autographs, and Aldrin had some stories. And I told one v.B story -- I'll tell you that one, then I'll tell you one of Hugh's. One on occasion -- and v.B used to like to tell this story -- ~~and I dont remem if we had this one in th book --~~ a group of teen-age girls came up to him after a lecture, because he was a hero in those days, and 1 girl said, "Dr. von Braun, could I have two autographs?" And Dr. von Braun said, "Well, yes," and he signed two cards. "But why do you want two?" And she said, "For two of yours I can trade for one of Elvis Presley's."

And Hugh Downs said, "Well, I'll tell you what hap to me.

same center of attr: jealousy of others

same autographs to country music biz!!

*same/autograph hounds **

And Hugh Downs said, "Well, I'll tell you what happened to me." After a program, a lot of young ~~gixxxxxxamxxxx~~ people came up. And finally he had to put an end to it. But then a little boy came up and said, "Excuse me, sir. Could I have an autograph?" (a little pint-sized kid) So Downs says yeah, for the little kid, & signs his name. The little kid looked at him & said, "Huge Downs. Who is that?"

Fred -- We flew up to Wash in probably '59 to ~~xxxx~~ present to the Nat'l Air & Space Museum (then th Nat'l Air Museum) a mockup of th Explorer 1 satellite, which is still there. We were on bleachers outdoors. Von Braun gave a talk. Medaris gave a talk. Secy of th Army Brucker gave a talk. Von Braun was on th podium, th last guy to speak. When von Braun stopped speaking, there was pandemonium. They all rushed down to get his autograph. Brucker looked at me (and said): "Nobody gives a goddam abt th Secy of th Army!" (Ordway was on stand, next to Brucker) He was totally serious, and of course he was also a former Governor of Michigan.

*fame:
center
of attn:
jealousy
of others*

Another little story: Wernher & I did some educational filmstrips projects, involving Frank Rose (U. of Ala. President). Educa filmstrips for schools. Wernher's job was to narrate it in that rich von Braun voice. My job was to put th whole thing together, get th illustrations & do most of th text. All of this w/ von Braun's input, obviously. That was under contract w/ Doubleday in N.Y. We were doing five of every-thing: hist of astronautics, the story of Apollo to th moon, dividends from space, stations in space. And th day came when it was time to record them, & Doubleday made arrangements to go to studios in Nashville. We went up on a Friday, von Braun, we went into these studios where ~~the~~ the country singers are normally recording. Again, he was a hero there, and all th country singers are gaping at him. He was there & we were doing th recording in th studio. And he came out, and again there were all these people, ~~xx~~ some of them scantily clad young things, in long black stockings, that sort of thing, coming up to him & asking for autographs. Then at th end of th day we went back to th motel & had dinner and he made the comment, "Fred, it was a great day, wasn't it? But I think you & I really entered th wrong business," meaning we should be in that business.

*fame,
autographs
&
★
country
music
biz!!*

I remem th 1st time I got to know him well. I was a young guy. I worked for Reaction Motors ~~xxxxxx~~ Inc., & then I'd been given the job w/ th Guided Missile Div. of Republic (Aviation) on Long Island. ~~ixxxx~~ And I got very active in those days -- the early '50s -- w/ th brand-new, just-created American Astro-nautical Society. And I was also very active w/ the New York Section of the American Rocket Society. So, in those, we were

able to get von Braun & others on th Boards -- we had Fred Durant on th Board, Kraftt Ehricke (sp?), Fred Singer -- we were able to get some big names on our Board of this small struggling society. Of course, von Braun was also active in the American Rocket Society, which is HQd in NY in those days. So here I am, a young guy -- but I got to know him, which was somewhat unusual. And one day he said, "I'm going to be coming up to (1 of these cos.) on Long Island. Where should I stay?" So here, I was this young guy, and we had a big house there -- that's a totally different story, but we had a big estate there. So I said, "Well, come, you could stay w/ us! We have a big house there." So, he said, "Okay." So, here I am, this young guy, going to have Wernher von Braun in my house! This was before he was that famous. It was before Explorer. It was probably 1953 or '54. But those of us who were interested knew him.

Q--So this was before the Disney TV programs?

FRED -- Probably he had not done those, but he had done Collier's (mag series) & he'd been at the Hayden Planetarium in NY -- and he was known for that, & his name was getting out. So, he came up & stayed there with us. I was driving into NY & so I carried him into NY the next day, a Sat. Then he called abt 3 wks later and said, "Would you mind, I'll be making another trip there & I would like to bring my wife up?" So, here I'm going to have Wernher von Braun & Mrs. von Braun ~~xxxxxx~~ in our house. I'm ~~just~~ a young guy, just starting out. They came up, I organized tickets to Carnegie Hall for them, we gave a big dinner party for them -- w/ mixed people, some from where I worked, at REpublic, some friends from Sperry & Grumman in those days, but also friends ~~from~~ in business, ~~top business xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~, I was a cotton broker who knew Milton Cummings well, but (had nothing to do w/ Hsv), we had some bankers -- just a mixture of people. Maria was w/ him, & we were having this coctail party before dinner. I remem during th recep'n, von Braun was right in th center, everybody was crowded around him. He was talking abt, he'd talk about any & every subject. And ~~Maximilian~~ Maruja (Fred's wife) said, "You better go over & talk to Mrs. von Braun." And she was, as you remem, very retiring. I'll always remem, there he was, this guy, very handsome, & all these people were just drooling over him, these sophisticated Long Island people, out of Oyster Bay, NY, and there was von Braun. I remem we took him & his wife into Carnegie Hall, we did a no. of things for them.

*6 years early fame in NY **
Intellectual Side

And then on 1 of his trips up -- maybe th 3rd ~~th~~ trip-- he was staying w/ us & we were going to have a Board mtng of th Amer Astronautical Soc. -- in those days we had our meetings at th (Harvard House? w/ Harvard Club??) -- we had a room

(more)

(I had talked w/ Fred O. 11-11-98 re: sched. lunch/interview on von B. He talking abt th untenable position v.B was in regarding possibly resisting Himmler's overtures re: Nazi politics & ideology:

"Von Braun had to sign his letters, 'Heil Hitler.' He had to become a Nazi party member because of his position. He had to accept the SS officer's commission that Himmler offered."

(We had been talking in context of author M. Neufeld's forthcoming visit & lecture at UAH on v.B & "The Rocket and the Reich.")

Dr. Werner von
Deputy Associate
National Aeronautics
Washington, D.C. 20546
Dear Werner

As I realized the 50th anniversary of the launching of the first satellite, I could not help but recall a countdown that took place a good many years ago at Cape Canaveral. According to my diary, it was on the 10th of September 1957 that preparations were being

(Fred called me 11-13-98 w/ what he said was a "favorite v.B joke that he'd tell" w/ delight:

Two American astronauts were launched to Mars. When they reach the surface (Martian) they see a beautiful, redskinned woman. They talked w/ her & explained they were from Earth. They saw she was stirring a big pot, and every now & then she pulls a newborn baby from the big pot. Using their language-translation machine (v.B would explain), they ask her, "What are you doing?" She says, "Making babies." How strange," the ~~xxxx~~ astronaut commander says. "Well," the beautiful woman asks, "how do you make ~~xxx~~ babies on Earth?" So the astronaut commander says, "Let me show you," and they go behind the Martian rocks & bushes for awhile. When they come back out, she ~~xxxx~~ asks, "Well, where's the baby?" And he says, "Oh, back on Earth it takes 9 mos. to have the baby." And ~~xxxxx~~ she asks, "Then, why did you stop stirring?"

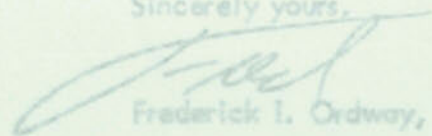
a favorite
v.B
space
joke
(sexy)

items were reported completed, and under a full moon takeoff occurred. With a burst of flame, Redstone-Jupiter A No. 38 wa-30-for a 100-mile altitude, close-range flight. This flight was aimed at 75 n. mi. (range), but only went to 30 due to some guidance difficulties. The aimed short range was to show that the nominal 200-mile missile was capable of high accuracy at 75 n. mi. We watched a powered flight, and then at apogee a flare was burst following the downward leg of trajectory. We heard sonic boom and impact."

(see over)

After the flight we left for the central control room where Azusa data were being analyzed. We then spent several hours in the telemetry room with the individuals who were working out the system errors. At some point during the late hours we called it a night and returned to our motel. Another launch had passed into history.

Sincerely yours,


Frederick I. Ordway, III

Bob Ward, Huntsville Times, fax: [redacted] from Fred Ordway, [redacted], 29 June 99

Good morning, Bob, here are my final inputs as we discussed when I was in Huntsville a week or so ago. They have to do with von Braun's final days. I'll cover the period January 1976 to January 1977 when he was ill with cancer but for a while still putting in part time at Fairchild Industries before leaving for rest first at home and then at the Alexandria hospital.

19 January 1976: I had arranged for WvB and several Fairchild colleagues to visit the new Energy Research and Development Administration in downtown Washington, D.C. At the time I was special assistant to the administrator, Dr Robert C Seamans, Jr., Apollo-era deputy administrator of NASA. After meeting with Seamans, I took the group for a number of program-office technical briefings, ending with Dr Robert Cohen's explanation of the ocean thermal energy conversation technology program that particularly fascinated WvB. We were running late, and the other Fairchild people had left when he turned to me and said, "Fred, remember, we've got to drop by the Statler Hilton for the NSI [National Space Institute] reception. And then let's the two of us have a quiet dinner together. So please call Maria, and tell her I'll be late." I'd been through that routine before; he was afraid she'd put her foot down, scold him, and tell him to get right home. Anyway, when she answered the phone and I said, "Hi, Maria, this is Fred Ordway..." but before I could say anything more, she interrupted, "Yes, I know, Wernher's going to be late. And he made you call me." That was that, and he and I did have a quiet dinner talking about, of all things, geographical locations around the world—he was very keen on geography and we tested each other's knowledge that evening.

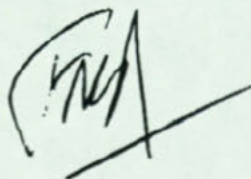
23 March 1976: With our mutual friend from Germany, Werner Buedeler, we celebrated WvB's 64th birthday during luncheon at the Rotunda restaurant here in Washington. He was quite subdued that day, clearly suffering from his battle with cancer. It was sad to watch him walk hesitantly in and out of the restaurant with the aid of a cane. Since our January dinner, he had clearly gone down hill.

28 July 1976: WvB rang from his Alexandria hospital room to discuss progress with our joint book on Solar System discoveries that was published after his death by Doubleday as *New Worlds: Discoveries from our Solar System*. He insisted on reviewing draft chapters and adding material from his hospital bed. I wrote in my daily log, "His voice sounded extremely weak," adding that he was somehow making progress with the chapter on Jupiter. We talked for at least 20 minutes. As he had told me in the past, he reminded me once again that if he suddenly hung up it meant that either the nurse or Maria had arrived. He wasn't supposed to be working and didn't want to get scolded!

20 September 1976: After this phone conversation from the hospital, I wrote that "He sounded more discouraged than a couple of weeks ago when I last talked to him." But he was happy to announce that he had finished work on the "Distant Giants" chapter in our book. What a man!

15 January 1977: Today, he said he was feeling better, "that he felt he was making progress! Incredibly good news," I wrote in my log, adding that "He is concerned that he hasn't done as much as he should on our book."

Bob, this completes the year I wanted to talk about, January 1976-January 1977. I hope you find this useful. Please let me know that this reached you safely and if you need any further comments. Best wishes, and good luck on your project.



Family??
"Too Soon Dying" chapter??
↑