

PETER

~~XXXX~~ PETROFF -- interview (most taped) 6-4-99 in his offices

(see notes for early parts)

Northrop hired him -- (Ret. Maj. Gen. John) Barclay hired him -- in Melbourne then w/ Radiation Inc. (later Harris) or Orlando area -- Barclay offered him \$150,000 in R&D money if he'd join Northrop & move to Hsv. -- in abt 1963 -- which he did.

"That's th way I got to know Dr. v. Braun."

Petroff had his big catamaran in "Go-Day Acres" (sp.?) on Lake Gunterville, & v. Braun had small houseboat, for socializing & drinking & so on." "So v. Braun came to see th boat. He was very curious. And he was this ~~stiff~~ stiff German. There was no 'Peter' or ~~Bob~~ 'Bob' or anything like that. This was 'Mister.'

(?)
"out of the shop"

'Well, Mr. Petroff, what do you do?' My wife talked from behind me: 'He is (unintelligible) sharecropper.' Von Braun said, 'Well, how about \$63 million R&D?' I said, 'Sure, where do I sign?' 'I always want to know how much I can expect (can spend?).' But this was for real. He tried to get me Gs-16. But I didn't have citizen ship, so this was almost impos to do. So he gave me (GS) -15. With NASA.

Couple days later, man named Bob _____, who worked for Hermann Weidner, called & said why don't ~~tx~~ you come (out), I'll make an ~~off~~ offer. Went to work for Dr. Bill Johnson, in a staff position, in area that sort of controlled th R&D at MSFC -- working w/Johnson directly for v. Braun. Involved in overseeing R&D projects

"But v. Braun was mainly int. in space travel. And he knew tht I had been doing instrumentation controls for (AF & NASA??) satellites. I worked for orbital observatory laboratory for ... Nimbus, for Titan 1, 2, 3, Apollo 1.

interplanetary

"The way he (v.B) put it, he said, "When we go in space travel, we hav 2 problems: how to keep people occupied, for months at a time w/ nothing to do. I don't want just th logarithmic tables, so the pilots can figure out where they are & ~~xxxxxx~~ how they are doing. I want them to hav all the symphonies of Beethoven, & I want also "I Love Lucy" & "Perry Mason."!

Mozart, Bach,
Haydn &

No. 2:

all the great composers,

"He also wanted memory (computer). He said 'If you have enough memory, you can do anything.' (Petroff used plural "memories") "I said, "Sure, I can do that." "But I'm going to need about 15 cubic meters of space." He said, 'You're not going to get it. How abt one cubic foot?'

"Music"
(used)

When v.B came to look at Petroff's 65-ft boat, discovered they both knew civil engineering professor (Kirkel??) at Darmstadt (?)....

"Von Braun's problems ... he was like (unintelligible) in Greek drama abt the gods. (had him repeat) Von Braun reminds me of a Greek drama describing the fights betw th gods. What th Greek gods did ... Zeus, the bigshot, has given selected people just enormous capabilities. Von Braun, for instance. He was not only a top-notch engineer & physicist, but he was a visionary. On top of that, he could convince anybody of anything. The problem was with his people, the Germans (he brought over to be his deputies & lab chiefs). What happened, all th Germans here, in th U.S., were by definition Nazis. You couldn't work (in Germany) if you were not. For self-defense (from Justice Dept.'s OSI investigators), what they did, they did not want to hire competent Americans. So by definition, they were hiring dummies. All the deputies to all the lab chiefs were ~~XXXXXXXX~~ all dummies. The reason was, if they had competent deputies working for them, they were afraid the Jews (in OSI) are going to check them out thru th Americans, the way they did w/ Arthur Rudolph. ... (ete, etc.)

(said above was confidential)

"This was a tragedy. Zeus created a guy, von Braun -- way, way above everybody else. But little guys, from jealousies, or for fun, messed up what the bigshot was doing. A typical Greek drama. This was tragic. But v.Braun had a very strong feeling of protecting those guys that he came ~~wxxx~~ with. But he just couldn't force them to ~~st~~ thinking differently (were sticking to much w/ the old, tried, true, conventional technologies, & resisting trying the new, the innovative, the future technologies...).

"When v.Braun went to Wash. to fight for the money for Space Shuttle, as soon as he got th money he left NASA...he left for Fairchild..." (????)

BW--v.Braun's own life had elements of Greek tragedy. He ~~waxxxxx~~ ~~xx~~ accomplished one of his lifelong goals in an almost mythic way -- accomplished in not much more than just 10 years after little Explorer 1 satellite went up with this godawful huge Saturn V, and we go to th Moon and return safely, time & time again. And then his life turns downward...great disappointments in Wash., ill treatment, then joined Fairchild & soon became deathly ill.

PP--The midgets did it (to him). The American (deputies) midgets, which the German midgets ~~th~~ hired (at MSFC).

"The gods gave him too much talent. The lesser ~~guy~~ gods threw up all these hindrances. But he was getting old and didn't want to fight them anymore." (in Hsv.? in Wash.?) So he left for Fairchild.

(cont'd)

Peter Petroff

6-4-99

(taped; in person)

in '60s - was in Melbourne -
knew Gen. Barclay -

• war fin '45 - was @ U. of
Darmstadt - had lost all
prof.'s - he comes to HSV. &
"find all my professors" -

- the real brains stayed in Germany
- were set up well there -
+ anti-U.S. feeling -

- team that came not strong
in mgmt. abil. -

he

^ in '51 to Canada - then '54 to
US w/ co. - bldg USAF base in
Labrador - hired in elec. dept.

@ \$115./wk.

there 3 wks, then

they fired his boss, promoted him.

- then added mechanical -

15,000 constn. workers, in season

- in GOOSE BAY -

• then to S. Vietnam - Saigon - '57
w/ \$600 mil. bldg. project
- infrastructure -

• built catamaran in '59
(made \$60k) in Saigon - 65 ft.
in Melbourne w/ Radiation

- Oct '59 - came to U.S. -
N.Y. - sailed his boat to Fla.
Radiation, Inc. (?) - now
Harris - doing instrumentation
for Titan, Nimbus, etc
- first, can't get hired - no
citizenship, no security
clearance

in '63 (?), Northrop hired him -
Barclay promised him
\$150K in R&D grant -

in '60s, had his catamaran
@ Go-Day Acres, Gville -
- V.B had house boat
noticed catamaran, int. came to
"How abt. see it, talked."
V.B offered "\$63 mil R&D?"
got GS-15 job w/ NASA - '65
- working for Dr. ^{Bill} Johnson,
in a staff position -
overseeing R&D projects -
Apollo, etc.

- v. B very int. in space travel -
knew of Pet.'s work in
Satellite ~~and~~ programs -
- interplanetary - VB:
• how do you keep space
travelers occupied for
mos., yrs. @ a time?
• All the symphonies of
(composers) + "I Love
Luck" + "Perry Mason"
• VB wanted computer memories
capacity to hold all that
storage -

VB gave him 1 cu. ft.

~~Helmut~~
• H. Hoelzer was 1 of brightest
of team - built (invented)
1st digital computer in '42-43 -

(German Jews stopped him
from displaying a special
accurate recreation of his early
computer (in more recent yrs.),
bec. of his connection to
3rd Reich & V-2 team &
forced labor.)

• V.B. reminds him of
Greek dramas describ.
the fights betw. the gods

• Zeus gave selected peop
enormous capabil's

— V.B. had such a
wide range of abil's. —

• left NASA in '67,
formed med. company —
Care Electronics —
Dr. Michael DeBakey —
was on Pet.'s bd. —

“MAYA” rule
heart monitoring @
bedside
using telemetry — no
wires, just transmitter —
— remote monitoring —

“The gods gave him too
much talent. The little”

the "little" or ^{the} ~~group~~ ^{of} ~~guys~~ ^{gave} ~~all~~ ^{these}
handraces... not on tape?

"But he was getting old
& tired & didn't want
to fight ^{them} anymore." So
he left for Fairchild

• H. Weidner cut Pet.
off from V.B. ^{some ill} ^{feelings toward} ^{other} ^{German}
team mem's.

w/ Radiation, he built
telemetry for Apol.
lunar lander -

Dip. Ing.

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