

WERNER DAHM interview 12-6-98 (at his home)

[see written (untranscribed) passages in notes also.]
(not important)

At Peen., he was in same bldg w/ v.B., "but I was a little Indian."
At Ft Bliss, "I was a little bigger Indian."

[gave me 1 very usable anecdote from Ft Bliss days.]

v.B's parents gave him the "ancient spelling" of "Wernher," w/ the "h" and the "her" stemming from "Herr." "Werner" is much more common. Were four (4) "Werners"/"Wernhers" in the team (also Rosinski, et al.)

Q. Dahm's feelings when learned v.B was leaving Hsv for Wash.??

A--I was sad to see him leave. He was the one boss that I (trust?) [E. Rees' remaining in command "still gave some continuity."]

Q--Get any feedback on how v.B was doing in Wash. those 2 yrs.?

A--Well, I heard that it had become a step back, that he got no support. And I also heard that this whole thing had been a political arrangement. As Center director, he was unassailable. In Washington, he took a step back. There were people who were tired of being in his shadow, and they had arranged this."

Q--Tom Paine issued th invitation to v.B to come to Wash., or it was a command.

A--It was an invitation. He couldn't command him.

Q--And there was mutual respect betw Paine & v.B--it is said.

A--Yes. I don't know. ... The story I heard was that an Amer. colleague here (Hsv) was talking to a colleague from Houston who explained, "It was arranged for him, in order to get rid of him, ~~and it was arranged~~ an 'agreement.'"

Q--In some cases perhaps to settle old scores from WW2, if you will?

A--From there, to simply ambitions. 'We want to be the guy that people (lead the Parade? ...raise the flag? inaudible)'"

Q--And there are many who suggest that there were many who were so envious of him, jealous of him. That when NASA needed a witness to go before Congress to get th money, who'd they have to call on? v.B.

A-- Yes. He always knew the technical side so well. He was not a glory hound. He didn't seek that. He wanted to advance space exploration. The glory hounds are th most dangerous guys. And they (inaudible) von Braun. And for the (NASA) administrator, one of the greatest tasks is to stay ~~clear~~ clear of the glory hounds, because they advance to their glory & not to what is best.

more

"Wash. years" & "Leaving Hsv."

Q--Were you surprised to hear v.B wd be leaving NASA to join Fairchild?
A--Not really.

Q--Were you present when v.B came back to Ft Bliss from his first visit to Hsv. & gave a report to the team? That he found it so green, with the hills or mtns?

A--Yes. He said if you dont look so close, it looks like home (the old country).

Q--How difficult was your adjustment to, first, life in th US, and then in Ala.?

A--I see no big difference between El Paso & ~~here~~ here. We had some concerns here, not so much about segregation, and we were quite relieved when we found it wasn't that bad here -- at least the signs we could see. At Redstone Arsenal, going to work in the early 1950s, near the bldgs at Squirrel Hill, I saw this pickup truck and in the back were a white worker & a black worker in a lively discussion. And so we found that it ~~wasn't that bad~~ wasn't that bad. (no open racial strife, etc.)

Ft. Bliss to Hsv.

6) What was your earliest impression of Professor Oberth?

I saw Professor Oberth very rarely, from the distance, at the cafeteria. He seemed to be like a professor, with little involvement in engineering. He was reported to carry a boiled potato in his pocket (these were hungry times !!)

7) What is your fondest memory of Werner von Braun:

In my ~~earliest~~ days in Fort Bliss, a phone caller invited me to dinner. I thought it was ~~my boss~~ my boss, who had done this before, but it turned out later that it was ~~not~~ not him. Embarrassing! My older colleague Fritz Kraemer gave me some advice, which I have never forgotten: "Get some nice flowers, and apologize to Mrs. v.B.". A later 2nd invitation lead to a nice dinner with convivial conversation. I still have a picture that Werner gave me on that occasion, a Dutch village scene by the sea. It is properly marked for my family to know its background.

(Werner uses the ancient spelling of our name; the "her" is the root of the modern word "near". My parents used the modern form of the name.)

(Also see notes from taped interview 12-6-98 -- but no anecdotes.)