

JOE JONES -- ret. NASA/MSFC chief of PAO -- folo interview ~~Sept~~ ^{Sept. or early Oct.} '98

abt. 10-7-98

JJ-- (didn't mean to leave impression in 1st interview that v.B was "cheapskate." was just that he didn't carry change w/ him, for tipping, etc--as many don't)

JJ-- Let me tell you a little story that ~~will~~ indicate to you tht he was not a cheapskate. Lots of peop called on him in those years to do bylined pieces, & he readily responded -- except, as you might ^{expect}, he hardly ever wrote them. He just passed the requests down to Public Information (Office), later ^{called} known as Public Affairs. And, man, we'd just take them as an assignment, and we'd write them.

Q-- And he was paid for them, or some of them?

JJ-- Yeah, sometimes. We weren't always privy to th arrangements made. But sometimes, ^{maybe} in accordance w/ th deal, or ^{maybe} unexpectedly, they would send him a check. He'd take that check & he'd split it w/ th writer. And I would get on occasion a few dollars from v.Braun, & he'd put the other part in his pocket. But he'd split it w/ whoever wrote it. There's no question that it happened, and it happened repeatedly.

I would hasten to say here that when he finished w/ th draft that somebody provided him, it was his. Because, ~~you can't imagine~~ he was an expert at th English language, as well as German. You cant imagine how he would mark up th manuscript, to th point that only Bonnie (Holmes) in some cases could follow his markings. He had arrows drawn everywhere. The page was almost indecipherable. It was truly his work, but somebody else did th framework. But I guess if it was a really important assignment from, say This Week -- and he had several from This Week -- he probably wrote them himself, as far as I know. But on these two-bit trade publications -- and they were always after him -- he or Bonnie wd just buck them downstairs. I was head of the News Branch, and some of them I did, & some of them I'd give to other writers there, and they'd work up whatever was req'd. And sometimes v.Braun would send a check back down. (Jim Funkhauser once got a \$50 ck from v.B -- 1/2 of th \$100 he got from a mag for a piece Jim had done. Jim got upset over th ethics of it, wasnt going to take it, wasnt his money. His solution: to throw a party, so whole branch went out & had steaks on him.) I'm telling you this to counter th impression I might have given you tht v.B was a cheapskate, bec, had he ben, he'd hav put tht \$100 in his pocket & never sd anything. (Most PAO writers didnt hav prob w/ accepting th money) But he was the supreme boss, whom everybody idolized & admired so, if he did it, then it must be all right. That's kinda th way we looked at it. It was not an everyday occasion, but it did happen.

Joe sug. I definitely interview Bill Lucas. "You see, he was th first

Sidabar on Joe Jones

American to break what I call the "Kraut line." Von Braun tapped him very early to be a star. And he was in position to succeed Eberhard Rees. That was th plan. But th hierarchy in Wash. threw a monkeywrench into that and brought in Rocco Petrone to put th ax to the decks under these Germans. And I'll always believe tht was th principal reason that Rocco was brought in. See, Lucas was deputy to Rees then, and he wd hav ben th natural successor ~~xxxRees~~ -- except tht when Rees retired, th Wash. folks brought Rocco in, who earlier had served as a major in the organization (Army days at RSA) (capt. or and later was assigned to Debus at th Cape.

... was thrust whatever shot of fear that comes with having a bullet in your back and take a subtle relations job at a place called Redstone Arsenal -- not realizing that he was about to break the biggest story of his career.

Recalls Jones, "The Army Ballistic Missile Agency had just been formed -- that was the von Braun group. Then when they formed NASA a little later, I was asked to head up the news branch of the public affairs office at Marshall Space Flight Center. I was the first employee of the Marshall public affairs office.

"I don't mean to brag, but I did the press kit on America's first satellite.

For three decades, from Explorer I to the first shuttle launches, Jones enjoyed a front-row seat with the nation's space program.

His desk sat in Dr. Gerhard von Braun's outer office. He called assistants by their first names. His job brought him into contact with movie stars and presidents.

Along the way, he also viewed more Saturn launches than probably any man alive.

"There were 12 Saturn launches," Jones says. "I worked at the base for every one of them. I don't know of anyone else who can say that, including von Braun himself."

Jones describes von Braun as a born leader and a dynamic spokesman for the nation's space program. "He was a great man who was selected precisely he went. The smart people were just the toast of society," he says.

It wasn't all glory, though. Much of his new job came disguised as old-fashioned hard work.

As the space program grew, so did Jones' responsibilities. The press kit for the Explorer I satellite, for example, consisted of a context three or four pages. In contrast, the press kit for Apollo