

Shaner

(v.B. personal or special asst. in 1969-70)

• Tom Shaner 3/4/99

Q And we can all speak at normal speed and all that. Sixty-nine to --

A Sixty-nine and seventy, right.

Q And that was special assistant --

A No, just assistant to the director.

Q I understand you didn't have any management responsibilities per se, but you had --

A I had management responsibilities and that was to manage him. ← *

I was going to give you a little bit of background of how I got that job. I was twenty-nine years old, and that was one of the requirements. Dr. von Braun was not always the most focused person, and he created a lot of problems when he traveled and he traveled a lot. Now, when he was at home, he had a lot of people to take care of him and make sure he did what he had to do, when he had to do it. When he would go on the road, he really didn't have anybody to do that, and he would rely on people who traveled with him sometimes, and it became a real hassle for them. They said, hey, we need somebody to take care of Wehrner.

> (Unintelligible). He would ask anybody to go get anything at any time. They really didn't have time to do that, because they had a meeting or this or that. So, they said, we need to get him an assistant, somebody who can travel with him continuously and take care of all these matters, keep all the coordination going. He was famous for cutting deals everywhere he went, and he would not pass that on to anyone. So, somebody had to keep up with him and be a communication link. I was always on the phone back at home, and then when I would come back and I would debrief the other top managers on who we met and what he said and what commitments he made. He was not good at following up with his staff on doing that. He would have these things in his mind, but he didn't necessarily pass a lot of these very significant things along back to the key managers at Marshall. So, that was another thing that made them nervous, because a lot of times he traveled alone or with somebody that was off on something else and they didn't really know what he was doing or what he had told Tom Paine or the administrator and all that.

Wehrner needs an assistant to handle all these things.

Q Was that before or after Apollo 11?

A It was right after Apollo 11. So, anyway, von Braun -- it was not his idea; it was the idea of his inner circle that he needed an assistant to travel with him at all times. They talked to Wehrner about it, and he said, okay, you do the selection process and you pick out who you think would be the right type, and then he would interview the top three. They had about 12 or 15 people and each of them said, "Here's my nominee," and then we had a round-robin interview with all these top managers. Then they narrowed it down to three people. Then von Braun was going

Why job created

How got job

How got job

to interview the three people. Call it a stroke of luck or misfortune, however you want to look at it, but I was the first one to interview with him and he hired me on the spot. He said he didn't need to interview anybody else, he wanted me. Here I was a young man, 29 years old, had come right out of a technical job in the test laboratory where I was a test conductor on the S1-16. That was one of the requirements. This person had to have a technical background. He wanted it to be a young person who could get some advantage out of it. He didn't just want somebody to be a service to him, he wanted it to be an experience and an opportunity where this person would get to meet people and make a lot of contacts and further his career. It was to be a one- to two-year assignment, no longer than that. So, that's how I got the job. You might say that I was on the road all the time with him.

Q And your background is? You are a degreed engineer?
A Yes. Right. I am a degreed engineer from the University of Evansville back in 1963. Right out of school, I came to work at NASA. I had been in the Test Laboratory for about six years; I worked for Carl Heinberg, who was the Test Lab director. Carl Heinberg is the one that put my name in the pot.

(Unintelligible) I started off as a propulsion systems engineer and worked on the F-1 engine, which basically was the propulsion system for the S-1 stage which had the [#]F-1 engine. From that test stand where I got all the F-1 engine experience, then I moved in to become test conductor on the S1-C stand.

Q Did they call for volunteers?
A No.

Q A selection by the lab chiefs?
A Right. There was no voluntary-type of factor. The fact is I did this because I thought it was my duty and because of my great respect for my leader, Carl Heinberg. He wanted me to do this, so I did not feel like I could say no; because when Mr. Heinberg explained all of it to me, I told him I really didn't want to do it. He said, "Tom, you must do this. You absolutely must do this. This is an opportunity."

~~(Unintelligible)~~ "You can come back, and you will always have a job with me." That was a pretty good endorsement. I said, "Well, Mr. Heinberg, you are my boss, and if you tell me to do this, I will do it." I think I told that to von Braun. He asked me why I wanted that job, and I said, "I really didn't want this job, but Carl Heinberg is my boss and he told me I should take it." Of course, I was in total awe of him, when I went up there to have the interview. ~~he (Unintelligible)~~

and so nervous

intro in & how got job

Q What did he say he was looking for?
A Well, he told me it was not his idea, that it was the idea of these other people because they got tired of putting up with

But he put me at ease. He always did w/ people.

(cont'd.)

(see version of same quote on p. 3)

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him and all the trouble he caused. So, he said that we would kind of learn together, here.

Q ~~(Unintelligible)~~

A He put me at ease the first time I met him. I was totally scared to death when I went up to his office for the interview, and I held him in such awe because I had always heard about him and read about him when I was in school. Dr. von Braun and the German rocket team are going to go to the moon and land on the moon and all that.

Q I guess you had been around --

A Well, I had been around him from being the static fire test director. He had been to all of our static fires. He was not allowed in the control room, though; he was behind a glassed area. So, we were kind of like monkeys in a cage. He could look through the glass and he could see the test conductor and all of the people sitting at the consoles and all that, and he would wear a headset and he could hear the countdown and what was happening, but he did not come in the control room and mingle with the static fire test people. After we would have a successful static firing, there would always be a post-firing party somewhere, and Dr. von Braun always came to the party. He would come around and congratulate people and so. He did that type of thing. He would shake our hands and this and that. It was very small talk. I had never interfaced with him in terms of conducting business or whatever, but I had seen him and I had spoken to him, but never interfaced with him on any business matters. I was too low in the organization and too young to do that.

Q I imagine that right there after Apollo 11, for that period you were with him, those were really busy years with a tremendous demand, publicly, I mean, but also as the landing missions went on.

A I think on one of my very first trips or very early, I went to work for him just right about the time or just within a week after the first lunar landing took place. I met Neil Armstrong up in NASA headquarters, and, of course, I was in awe of him too, the first man that walked on the moon. The occasion was Dr. von Braun had a meeting with Tom Paine, who was the administrator at the time, and he was in Tom Paine's office. I had been off to another office to arrange transportation or picking up something or scheduling something or whatever; so, I was to meet Dr. von Braun at a certain time after Dr. Paine's office. I came up there in the waiting area outside of his office and there is this gentleman sitting there all by himself. There wasn't another sole there, and I sat down and picked up a magazine and looked around, and, my gosh, if it wasn't Neil Armstrong. He had just landed, and he was there to have a

(cont'd.)

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↑ (Tom's early hint that the job of this traveling w/ V.B. wd. be interesting)

first met

V.B. & static tests

1st trip

Neil Armstrong!

meeting with Tom Paine and _____ Albright. He was all by himself. I was so nervous that I didn't know what to say to him, like, how was it on the moon or anything.

Q When you say "landed," you mean landed on earth?

A Yes, he returned. He had just returned. Like I say, it was very shortly after the landing on the moon. He had just come back, and I think this was his first meeting with Tom Paine since he returned from the moon.

Q So, you didn't really strike up a conversation?

A I am afraid it was small talk with him. You know, how's he feeling, how's he doing, and things like that. I was concerned about his health. It was just small talk about how big the agency was and how that mission was really going to lay the ground work for the next one. Here we had another one coming up in three or four weeks or whatever. They were only about six weeks apart, so the agency was really, really busy.

Q What a way to start out. Paine and von Braun had a pretty good relationship, didn't they?

A They had a very good relationship. They were kindred spirits. They were on a level by themselves and nobody else was at that level with them. I don't need to tell you this, but Dr. von Braun was truly a genius. I have never known anyone that had his mental factors and his intelligence. Some things that people might not know is that the man had brilliance, and with all his mental capacity, he was also a great human being. He was a warm, friendly, gregarious, outgoing-type of person, not the type of person you would expect at his responsibility and accomplishing the great things that he did. The movies that I have seen about von Braun have never captured the essence of the man. He always comes across as the gruff, dictatorial, pure German-type, you know, and he wasn't that way at all. A lot of them were, but he wasn't.

Q I have a fair amount of material that goes to that point of what a true, warm, caring human being he was despite his wonderful stature.

A His treatment of me was exceptional, and he included me in everything, and he was concerned about me. He worried about me. I told him to forget about me and don't even be concerned about me, but every time we would go anywhere -- and I would try to fade into the wallpaper like a wallflower and slip off and do what I had to do and try to make a phone call or try to check on some status because we were running behind and try to get somebody's heads up that we were running late and would be there at this time or that -- he would always stick his head up in a crowd and be looking around for me. He would spot me and say, "Tom, Tom, come here. Come here." He would say, "Let me introduce you to my good friend," and this and that. With

(cont'd.)

* Armstrong

"Wash. Post" (Paine)

Good Summary of V.B.

While

"As Boss"

(cont'd.)

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"Boss"
Richard Nixon, one time, he did that, and he calls me up there out of a crowd and introduces me to Richard Nixon, the President at the time. He would do those sort of things, always. Wherever we went -- we would go to Houston. He would make sure that I met all the astronauts. We would go down in the training facilities, and he would make sure that I got to fly in the simulator with the astronauts. He wanted me to participate in everything that he could do in this program. He would bring me into very, very private meetings that nobody else was allowed to come into. I would be the only other person from Marshall Space Flight Center, because he could only bring one person and he would bring me.

Q Absolute trust and --

A Right. Eberhart Reis, who was his deputy, would be there with him, but he wouldn't get to go in the meetings because von Braun could only bring one person. He would always choose me to go into the meetings with him. Like I say, he made sure I participated in everything.

Q He did see this as grooming you for the future, too --

A Yes, absolutely. That's why he wanted --

Q -- for your value to the agency later.

A He wanted me to make contacts. He wanted me to meet people. He wanted me to experience all the aspects of the agency and what it was all about.

Q That's remarkable. Do you remember any other specific examples of his making sure you --

** "Boss" (concern for Tom)*
A Oh, yes. Now, if you want to talk about some humorous things, the funny things, he would always be concerned -- like, if he had an entourage, there would be a lot of people -- if we were going somewhere, like down to the Cape, they would pick us up at the air strip and take us to the headquarters building, there would be a van there or a little bus for 10 or 12 or us or whatever. He would just be like a shepherd with his flock and would be looking for everybody and he doesn't see me and everybody else is on the bus; he would get off the bus and comes back in and comes into the men's room and knocking on the stalls saying, "Tom, Tom, are you in here?" He would be looking for me and he would come find me. I can assure you --

Q Was that where you were?

A Yes. I was in a phone book making a call. I knew it would be a long time before I would get another chance, so I just dropped right off in the men's room to make a pit stop before we went. He was very resourceful. He didn't have to worry about me, because even if I missed the bus, I could get a ride or call a taxi or whatever. He was always concerned about me and others.

Q What piqued your interest in NASA in the first place when you got out of college?

A Well, I didn't have that much interest in terms of me

becoming a part of that, I didn't think. I was going to take the traditional engineering job locally and end up being a plant manager of a tire plant or something. There was a lot of industrial-type companies there where they hired mechanical engineers and all that, but there was a co-op student in my class, and he co-oped down at NASA. He was really high on the program, and he told a lot of us, "You need to come down and see what they are doing. They are really serious about going to the moon." I thought it would be something way down the road or that they would play around with it and it would never pan out. I didn't really think it was that reliable a type of job. I said, well, I had better get something safer; they will play around with that for a few years and then the program will be cancelled and I won't have a job. (Unintelligible)

*riskiness of
NASA job*

Q In '63 that thing was (Unintelligible), wasn't it?

A Well, it was. Still, there weren't a whole lot of people in the country that believed we were really going to go to the moon. We were very busy and we all knew it. Many times people would make the comment, you guys really believe you are going to do this, don't you? They didn't really believe themselves, but they believed that we believed it. Anyway, I came down on spring break, and I went around and interviewed some people at NASA and went into the test lab and got to witness a static firing on a Saturn 1 stage. I was on top of the block house right out in the open. When that rocket stage lit up, it just vibrated the place -- and the sound. It was just overwhelming. I was so excited about that. I said, "Wow! I want to work on these rockets." Anyway, I didn't really want to go to design lab and work on the drawing board and all. I wanted to be out there working on the hardware and doing all the tests and helping develop those (Unintelligible). I came right into the test lab right out of school. I got a job offer on the spot and I took it on the spot.

*1st real
job*

Q So, when you came down for spring break --

A Right. They offered me a job. I said, "Sure, I will come." We didn't talk about pay or money or anything, which was pathetically low at the time. Private industry was paying so much more. Of course, I didn't know a lot about finances at that time. I was just a poor college student and didn't require much money except to buy books. As it turned out, there was a tremendous difference in salary, but had it not been for the overtime, I could not have made it, it was so pathetically low.

*low
pay*

Q I didn't realize the pay then for starting engineers --

A I came to work as a GS7 engineer and the pay was \$6650. Typically, the job offers out of school were going on \$10,000 or 12,000 and that type of thing. So it was 6650 versus 12,000, and that's a big difference. I thought that I would go work hard and

I could make it because I was going to be working a lot of overtime. At that pay rate, you would get overtime. The lower-level engineers got overtime.

Q I recently heard that Dr. von Braun was only making a little more than 30,000 when Apollo 11 --

A That's about right. He was not a wealthy man. I think it was fortunate that he had that time from Fairchild-Hiller as vice-president (Unintelligible).

Q They thought that that was probably around 250,000 for (Unintelligible) at Fairchild.

A Yes.

Q I interviewed Ed ^{Uhl} ~~Euwel~~ the CEO at Fairchild at that time, and he (Unintelligible). I should have asked him what von Braun made, but I didn't.

A It was a tremendous leap in faith. Money was never very important to him as long as he was doing what he wanted to do. He liked to live the high life, but he could also eat at Burger King or fast food or whatever. He wasn't that picky. It depended on what the schedule was.

Q But he did enjoy the finer things, didn't he?

A Sure. Oh, yes.

Q Considering his upbringing, too?

A Right.

Q Nice furniture and a restaurant with violins?

A Right. You can't do things today like you could do back then with the contractors. They can't lavish you with a lot of these things and amenities that he was accustomed to with the contractors.

Q Tell me some of the other humorous ^{events} or surprises that happened when you traveled with him.

A Okay. Number one, like I said, he was a very outgoing, gregarious guy. He had an insatiable thirst for knowledge on any subject; it wasn't just space travel. So, you need to understand that he was that type of person. He liked to know everything about everything.

Q I have a whole chapter that is going to be titled something to do with the Renaissance man. His interests were so broad.

A In terms of ~~Unintelligible~~ ^{humor} -- it wasn't funny to me at the time, but when I think back on it, it was. He was a night person, and he was notorious for not starting early meetings or getting up early. Of course, when we would go to headquarters, you are already on the Eastern Time there, so you lose the hour there. You must be in these meetings -- if you are scheduled to go before a Congressional subcommittee hearing at 9 o'clock, you had better be there. You have to be there. So, I would call him -- we would agree the night before. "Okay, we are going to meet for breakfast downstairs. We will meet there at 8 o'clock."

"Traveler"??
V.B. lifestyle

Limited to
thirst for knowledge

might
late
sleeper!

Add to
Shaner's
summary
"OR: Renaissance
Man"??

"Traveling
Man"?? 7

(cont'd)

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Eight o'clock would come and no Dr. von Braun. This happened all of the time. He was notorious. I would call his room, and he would say, "Good morning. I'm not dead. I will be right down." He would hang up the phone and go right back to sleep again. I would have to go up and beat on his door and then he would answer. He would say, "Yes, yes. I will be right down." I would make him walk to the door and then he would open the door. He would be there in his shorts right out of bed. He hadn't taken a shower; he hadn't shaved. He lied to me all the time. He would tell me he was shaving and he would be right there, but he would go right back to sleep just as soon as I would leave him alone. So I learned not to trust Dr. von Braun when he would say he was up. I would go beat on his door in the morning and make him open that door and let me in his room, and I would nag him to get him ready.

Late sleeper!

Q It didn't take too long to learn that.

A No. ^{So} That was one of my jobs: to make sure that he got there on time. He was a master psychologist. (Unintelligible) a politician. He never tried to appeal to the masses like a politician would. He knew who the important people were, so he was an expert at manipulating people to get them to do what he wanted them to do without being domineering. He was always making like it was your idea and not his. He was real good at that. Many times he knew the answers to his dilemma or problems, but he wanted you to come to the conclusion and offer the solution. There would be a lot of funny things about that. One of the things that he ^{called} caught me in one day about is he was getting ready for the meetings at headquarters. His concern was he had this Mercedes that he dearly loved. It was about a year old, and he just worshiped that car. He didn't want a scratch on it or anything. His dilemma was that he didn't know how he was going to get that car to Washington. (Unintelligible) This was not a convertible; it was a sedan. He considered having the thing shipped by rail car. He considered hiring a driver to take it for him. He could not do it because of his schedule, and he had to get there at a certain time. He had a very demanding schedule, and he couldn't afford to take the two days or whatever to do it. He asked me, "What ^{can} should I do with my car?" I said, "Dr. von Braun, do you want me to drive your damn car to Washington for you?" He said, "Would you do that? Would you be so kind?" So I drove his Mercedes to Washington for him. I went over and got the Mercedes an afternoon before I left. I remember bringing it home and parking it inside my garage, you know, and showing it to my kids and wife and taking pictures of it. "Here is Dr. von Braun's beloved Mercedes in my garage."

Some people would say he was

a master psychologist, politician

re: v.B.'s Mercedes

He had checked out these plans. (Unintelligible)

Q I bet you guarded it with your life.

A Oh, all night. ~~There was~~ a little downer on it, ^{sitting} because ^{when I got there,} I gave him [↑]

(cont'd)

when we got there, he asked me how I liked driving that Mercedes. How did I like the Mercedes? Of course, I told him, "I would really rather have a Buick." That was the slogan back then. I don't know if you remember that. All the advertisements said, "I would really rather have a Buick." I told him that is what I drove and I would really rather have a Buick.

Q What was his reaction?

A I kind of felt that way because the Mercedes had a real tight steering on it and you had to steer it all the time. I said I was sure glad the big, old U.S. luxury cars -- driving that was like driving a sports car. You had a sharp turning radius and had to really keep it on the road all the time.

Q Which is probably what he liked. Suspension system.

A Yes. And it had a very tight, hard (Unintelligible) It didn't have that nice, soft touch, but it was a performance car. So I understand that. It is kind of like a Corvette; they are made for high speeds. I always (Unintelligible) his credit

cards, let me tell you that. We tried them. I carried his credit cards, and I took care of checking us in and checking us out of hotels. I paid the restaurant bills for our dinners and all that. I always had his credit cards. I would give the credit card. I told him, "I can't use your credit cards!" just sign your name." So, in all the times I did that, nobody ever questioned it. I would give them the credit card that said "Wehrner von Braun," and then I would sign "Thomas L. Shaker," and nobody ever questioned it. When I went to Washington with his car, I would stop and buy gas, two or three times, and use his credit card, and nobody ever questioned me on that. Of course, he never carried cash. He never had money. So I would always have to carry the cash. Maria, his wife, and I would get together, and Bonnie and Maria and I would sort everything out when we got back home. Bonnie was his secretary. So I would sort everything out, and I would tell Maria, "Okay, Maria, he owes me so much --" you know, "She always settled up." He wouldn't even bring (Unintelligible). She wouldn't even know where he stayed or what the amount was or anything, so I would always give Maria the receipts from the credit cards for the hotel bill and all that. She was the bookkeeper, the accountant, the banker, and all that.

Q (Unintelligible) or anybody was going to be tipped, he would have to do it. He didn't carry any money with him anyway.

A They were so happy to have me -- Bonnie and Maria. I have talked with both of them, and they are the ones that told me, "Take care of him and we will settle up when you get home. Don't you worry about it." So I had open (Unintelligible) I could get my own airplane ticket any time I wanted, and I had open advances on travel allowances. I could just go to Travel and

Cont'd.: Mercedes to Wash.

When we traveled. More on Wash. & Mercedes. Also: no cash for V.B. - just credit cards.

home a receipt or anything.

travel \$ \$

write

very

Carried

V.B. replied:

\$203. or whatever

She took care of all home finances & everything.

(Cont'd.)

9 travel orders - unlimited travel orders. I carried my own control book w/ travel requests, and...

I needed. Then

get \$500 or \$1000 or whatever, and then all I would do was just file vouchers, when we got back; but I didn't have to go get travel orders to go anywhere.

Q (Unintelligible)

A At travel request, I could just sign my ticket anywhere I wanted to go. Money was no problem, I just had to keep up with it.

Q How many days would you say on the average during the month or whatever you were on the road?

A During that period, I would say at least two-thirds of the time, and maybe three-fourths of the time, if not more than that. There would be times we would be gone for two weeks at a stretch. (Unintelligible -- background noise increasing)

He would mix business with pleasure, with the purest sense. He gave a lot of speeches back then, and he got paid for them. They'd give him \$5000 as an honorarium or whatever, and he had a maximum limit on how much he could collect per year. He was smart enough that he worked the system and all that. He would work all these things. If he had a trip somewhere on business and then that evening, he'd be a guest speaker at some big dinner or something. That way he (Unintelligible) and took it out of his own pocket. Whereas, if that wasn't business, he'd have to go buy an airplane ticket on commercial air; whereas, if it was business, he could fly the NASA Gulf Stream. There was nothing wrong with that. He never made trips without (Unintelligible).

He always went where he was told to go when he was told to do it. (Unintelligible) sup just for the sake of going somewhere. He didn't make up any trips

Q He didn't have a lot of personal choice?

A He had every choice, but what I am saying is, there were so many demands on his time, that there would be ten times more than he could do in a day. He would make the selection on what was the most important. In reality, he didn't have a whole lot of personal choice, because the demands on his time were so great.

Q From others I have gathered that (Unintelligible) were intent on maximizing his time --

A Absolutely. (Unintelligible) he was just

Q -- that the (Unintelligible) business or personal enjoyment --

A There was no distinction. He just kept going. I always found it attractive and he did, too. (Unintelligible) Again, (Unintelligible) with all the dinners that we would go to, that before Dr. von Braun would get up and give a speech, he always felt like he had to introduce me to the audience. There might be 5000 people sitting out there to a sit-down dinner; and I didn't like him to do that. It embarrassed me. A lot of times he would pick a spotlight on me and I would have to stand up. I would come back and say, "Dr. von Braun, don't do that. Please don't

Cont'd: Travel & \$8

* The V.B. "Working" system

* "Boss" Spotlight on Tom!

business.

Social things in with NASA business.

banquet. That way, he didn't have to buy an airplane ticket

traveled w/ a tax.

He did too. That was just std. uniform @ nighttime. You had to put on your tax & go to some big, fancy black-tie thing. Again, something humorous about all these

he'd have them put the

— big, sit-down, fancy

(Cont'd.)

(cont'd.)

Tom Shaner

embellish it 3-99

"Boss" embarrass-
ing Tom!

do that." The more I protested, the more he would ~~embarrass me~~
the next time. When he would get done with his introduction, if
he were the most important man in the agency, then I was the
second most important man in the agency. ~~I felt like~~ without me,
he ~~couldn't do~~ anything. That's the way he would introduce me.
He would embellish it, like I say, and the more I complained, the
more he would -- He would really get a kick ^{big} out of it. He loved
to embarrass me. He got a big thrill out of embarrassing me.
The more he could embarrass me, the better he liked it, you know (laughing)

Because,

(?)

→ I don't know if you want to put this in the book or not. I
will just tell you. It's a little off-side ~~in~~ things.
Everywhere we went, they always had a hospitality room set up for
him in some fancy hotel somewhere even though we weren't spending
the night. It was just some place for him to crash for a little
and get some rest, freshen up, or whatever. There was never a
time when we went to these hospitality rooms where they didn't
have a real nice liquor set-up there in the bar. They would have
bourbon, scotch, gin, ~~and~~ everything. Part of my job was to gather up
~~split~~ the loot before we would leave. We would always split it.
So he felt like it was his, you know. That was part of the deal.
He would always share it with me, whatever. (Unintelligible) →
Getting low on gin. We would split the loot.

hotel
booze *
("Boss"?)
("Travel"?)

He'd say,
"What do you
need? Do
you need
any of this?
I'd say,
"Yeah, I'm
getting
low on
gin."

Q Especially a guy living on government wages.
A It would be like 5 o'clock or whatever and he just gave a
speech or whatever. He would come over and we would have to
leave very shortly, like in 15 minutes. We got the loot as we
were taking the Gulf Stream on to Philadelphia or wherever that
night. He would say, "Tom, did you check the room?" I would
say, "It's all in the car ready to go." He always wanted to know
if I checked the room.
Q Some of his speech writers have told me that he had on so
many occasions would be the good guy for an article that they had
helped write (Unintelligible) then he would put his own touch to
it, and more often than not, he would (Unintelligible). Ordway
A Right. I know he collaborated with Art Williams and others
on some articles, books, and that type of thing. Speech
writers -- he didn't like his speech writers, I can tell you
that. He didn't like any of the material they prepared for him,
ever. He wouldn't even use it unless he was extremely tired, and
he would just ad lib everything.

Q Someone told me he reworked the text --
A Oh, yes.
→ a lot. On speeches, he didn't use a prepared text. He
didn't use prepared text at NASA headquarters. You know all
about the geographies and all that. He would make his speech
without a ~~geographies~~, without words. He never used any word
charts. His presentations consisted of photographs. He would

graphics? viewgraphs,

have pictures. He would have a picture of a firing. He would have a picture of a space craft. He would have pictures of the astronauts in zero-G, but he didn't have written words on charts. He did all that right out of his head. That made everybody so nervous, because they never knew what he was going to say. He was unpredictable. He would not confide in them what he was going to say, and a lot of times he didn't make up his mind until right before his presentation. Von Braun, if it were something really, really important, gave the presentations himself. He never let Eberhardt Reis or Bill Lucas or any of those type of people -- when you are trying to develop a new program and you are trying to carve out an assignment for the Marshall Space Flight Center and you are trying to develop a strategy on how you are going to go to Mars or this or that, he would never trust anybody else to present that. He would do that himself. In fact he would do it by speaking, but you had better have your tape recorder, because you are not going to have a lot of handouts with all the printed words. You had better listen to every word the man says, because he had it all up there, and he had it all laid out and planned and all that. His presentations were nothing more than photographs and that type of thing. He gave all his speeches right off the top of his head. His great speeches were off the top of his head. He would take something and Public Affairs would take credit for it and he would lay it aside. He would react to the crowd and the audience. Also, that was another one of my jobs. He always wanted to know how did it go, how did he do, how was this and how was that? He was childlike in some ways, because I could hurt his feelings, and I could tell I had hurt his feelings, but I would rather be honest with him. So when it didn't go over well, I would say, "Don't make mention of that any more. That didn't go over well. I heard some groans in the audience when you said that." He wanted me to be very candid and honest with him, but I could tell when I wasn't just giving praise that I had hurt his feelings a little bit. He told me he wanted me to really talk straight to him. He never, ever wanted to hurt anyone else's feelings. He was very sensitive to that. He was very, very sensitive. He never publicly or privately embarrass anybody or ever chew them out for anything. Like I say, he was a master psychologist where he would bring them around to his way of thinking, where they thought it was their idea. He would get frustrated sometimes, because he would have some pretty hard heads out there sometimes. Like I say, he never embarrassed someone or criticized someone. Now, he would come back and be so mad and say, "That damn, so and so." He would get frustrated with me because he knew it wouldn't go any further than me.

V.B. Speaking style

V.B. Outright speaking

Very quiet, abrupt

Q I gather on occasion when -- not necessarily heads had to

roll -- some straight talk was necessary, he might turn to Eberhardt Rees to do that.

A Right. I remember when we were developing the plans for the Space Shuttle Program. ~~NASA headquarters was~~ I believe the center director was going to come give a proposal to Headquarters on how this Shuttle Program ought to be ~~done~~ and what the responsibilities should be at each center, and headquarters. Headquarters had given some guidelines and directions to each of the centers. They were telling Marshall; "now, you ought to propose this, this, and that." Of course, von Braun listened to all that and took all that in and had his meetings with all the top guys at Marshall. ^{run} Everybody thought they knew what von Braun was going to do. (Unintelligible) He was going to be the man in charge. He went up there, and everybody thought that they knew exactly how the shuttle was going to go and what Marshall was going to do, and all that. Just to show you how unpredictable he was, he went up to headquarters -- and I mean he came pretty close (Unintelligible) everything lock, stock, and barrel, the total Shuttle Program, he was the boss. (Unintelligible) Marshall was going to manage the total program, and develop the orbiter, and Marshall was going to train the astronauts, they were Marshall was going to do it all. He went in for everything, lock, stock, and barrel. And

Politically, that didn't go over very well at all. But ~~he~~ He would always go for the whole enchilada on everything. He was a big thinker. ^{He never thought small.} He always thought big. I am sure he did the same thing on the Saturn ^{Program} and the Apollo Program, you know, that Marshall could have done it all. That didn't endear him with Chris Craft ^{out} at Houston and some of those others, you know. There was a lot of animosity toward Dr. von Braun, from headquarters, from other field centers. They were extremely jealous of Dr. von Braun. They were jealous of him because of his tremendous intellect and, because the guy was famous, and most people in the country thought that he ran NASA -- they thought he was the head of NASA. ^{No. 1} There were times when he would be introduced as the director of NASA. He never corrected anybody, by the way. He never corrected them. They didn't even know. ^{No. 2} Number one, (Unintelligible) Many times he would be introduced as the director of NASA, or the head of NASA, or whatever. So he had that. (Unintelligible) He was the man behind the space program. ^{fame. People}

Q Was he just (Unintelligible) autographs?
A ~~Yes~~ ^{be sieged for}
Q Everywhere you all went?
A Absolutely. That was another part of my job, to chop things out, because he would never be the bad guy, but I could be the bad guy. So, that was part of the act, and I would get tough

V.B. - big thinker, going for it all for MSFC

w/ in NASA! them

Autographs "Fame / Celeb."

And they dismissed it all. to pitch it proposed even the management. They didn't need HQ's - Marshall was going to

NASA was not headed by a director, but by the Administrator. believed in W.v.B.

(Cont'd.)

autographs
Fame

cut off the

with him and tell him we had to leave, you know, and I would cut off the reporters, ~~as~~ other people getting autographs or whatever. He would say, "Oh, no, Tom, just give me five more minutes." And I would say, "No, we have got to go right now." He was always like he didn't want to, and I was the bad guy, ~~he would say~~, "I am so sorry."

Q Did he ever try or have a tendency to want to go out to dinner (Unintelligible)? ~~→ mcognito?~~ → You brought it up: "besieged by auto-graph seekers."

A Oh, ~~another~~ a funny story. He was very recognizable. If you saw Dr. Wehrner von Braun, you know who he was, because there were pictures on Time magazine, and in the news media, and his photograph was in the newspaper. And he was a good-looking man. He had a very large head and very recognizable features. He had strong, visual features, so he was very recognizable. Everywhere you'd go, people would want his autograph. So, we could not go into a restaurant like ~~normal~~ other people. He would pick the restaurant where he wanted to go, and everybody would go there → I would get reservations. Then we would go to the restaurant, and he would either hang out in the car or he would hang out beside the building. I would go in and get ~~a~~ ^{us} a table, and then I would ask the waiters, "Do you have a side entrance where I can bring in this party that's ~~with~~ with me tonight? I ~~couldn't~~ ^{can't} bring him in the front door, ~~he'd~~ be too recognizable." Then I would get seated and go out the side door and bring him in from the alley or wherever, and we'd ~~would~~ be back in a dark corner in the restaurant, ^{where peop. wouldn't see him.} But if anybody recognized him, they'd ~~would~~ be over ~~and~~ wanting his autograph. So, many times I would bring him in through ~~a~~ side door or something like that.

Q If somebody came over to his table ~~or~~ thought they recognized him and approached him, would he acknowledge who he was?

A Oh, yes. Nobody ever acted like they didn't ~~think~~ ^{know} who he was. (Unintelligible). They always knew who he was, and would come up and ^{say} "Dr. von Braun, I'm so happy to see you." He was always very cordial with him and all that, and he would always give autographs, ~~he never tried to deny that~~ → always. He never turned down an autograph.

Q One fellow, a former NASA employee, told me a little story about (Interruption -- background noise increases)

A → We had to make a plane connection. It was extremely important that we make that connection. We were running late. There was no way we could ~~get~~ (Unintelligible) and make that plane connection. I had talked to the airline representative and told him how important this was, that we ~~got~~ ^{had to} get on that plane. So we commandeered one of those little four-wheel ~~things~~ things that haul the luggage. I grabbed him and said, "Dr. von Braun, we have to ~~ride~~ ride." We went out the side door there, ~~they stuck us~~ ^{got a ride.} in the back of this cart, and we were sitting there holding ~~the~~ ^{the}

"Fame"
tried to dodge public:
side doors, alleys, etc.

Rush
for airplane!

(Insert:) The things I had to do to make sure he met his schedule.

who I had, and

(cont'd.) "Come on, carts threw his luggage in this little thing, stuck him"

* (The plane had already left the gate.

(Cont'd)

I mean, this thing was not made for passengers!
But

"Boss" for plane!
Personal for Tom

on, and luggage. That driver was driving that thing as fast as he could go and we were just hanging on. The plane was already at the gate. So we went out there and got on that plane after it was back. (Unintelligible) We went on that cart that hauls the luggage racks. (Unintelligible) Dr. Von Braun was sitting on top holding on for dear life. (Unintelligible) Whatever it took, he'd do it.

go, out across the runways and everything. already on the airstrip.

Q You were married and had children at the time?
A Right. (Conversation) I had just had my second daughter at the time, and I swear she didn't see her until she was about two years old, because I was gone so much. Then I would come home and want to pick her up and hold her, and of course I was a stranger so she would cry and scream and all that. I would unload and load a suitcase and be gone again. (Unintelligible) She didn't know who I was until she was two years old.

know who I was

Q Who were some of the other VIPs or celebrities that you met in the course of your travels with him?

A Nixon and Dr. DeBakey. Von Braun was not a big politician in terms of trying to deal (Unintelligible). He never had any great ideas for dealing on a global scale for helping humanity that way, but one-on-one, he would do anything for anybody that he ever could. He was always wanting to help anybody, one-on-one. (End of tape. Conversation picks up mid-statement)

V.B. DeBakey case?! (see notes!)

A -- long-range plan for NASA. He wanted to be a proper (Unintelligible). He didn't want it to just be a one-shot thing like going to the moon and that's it. He told Wehrner that there was nobody in the agency that could do this kind of planning except him. He was the only man that had that foresight, imagination, and all that, that could put together a totally integrated space program for the next 20 years. It had a lot of elements to it. It was not just landing on the moon or going to Mars or whatever. It encompassed everything: a new stable of launch vehicles, earth orbiters, space stations, a permanent base on the moon, Mars landing, and all that, a very comprehensive space program for the next 20 years. They had a close personal relationship and tremendous respect for each other, (Bob Bingham and Wehrner von Braun).

ending plan.

Tom Paine

Q That's what I have heard. Others have told me that, too.

A Anybody who would suggest that von Braun was forced into doing anything just didn't know von Braun very well, because that man was in total control (Unintelligible) to seek his destiny.

Q What was the big rush in making him going public with the word of his reassignment, if you will, with him still away?

A (Unintelligible)

Q -- begun to leak out or there was a fear that it would leak out or something?

A Well, I can't remember the details of what was happening in the news media and all that, and I don't know how --

Tom Paine, V.B. & Wehr. yrs

Safe on announcing v.B. Wash. job

going to take the

Q I don't recall -- it was not
A It was not supposed to have been announced until he got back. He was on vacation and then he was going to go to headquarters and then they were going to have a news conference, and Tom Bingham was going to introduce von Braun, in front of the headquarters, but it was going to be done like that. Now, how it got out earlier and how it leaked out, I don't know. But you can't keep any secrets from headquarters. It got out from some of the underlings. And it messed up the plan, because it was not going to be announced that way. It was going to be announced jointly, by Tom Paine and Dr. von Braun together.

he'd come to

Paine

Q I see. I guess it looks a little suspicious.

Smister or

A There was nothing suspicious about it, because it had been talked about a long time. He told me -- he confided in me -- in the past that his only reluctance to do that was because of his German colleagues.

his house,

Go to Wash. decision to

Q That was what I was going to ask. I am sure he saw to it or one of his conditions was that Eberhard precede him for at least for a couple of years.

succeed

A Right. That is correct.

Q And he figured that would provide some security.

A Right.

Q But (Unintelligible) could never be able to

them like Dr. v.B. did.

A They knew that Eberhard was going to take care of Dr. von Braun. They didn't have the respect for him like they did Dr. von Braun. He was just one of the guys to them. He just happened to be deputy when (Unintelligible) A. B. But everybody thought they worked for von Braun, you know, and he created that organization, and they would never work for anybody except von Braun.

Q. He just

He was the only guy that could make that type of a massive organization work. He had people reporting to him, but he did that so that they could all keep their importance whatever.

way too many

feeling of

which was something of a nightmare.

Q Somebody has told me the way that Herman Weidner got selected to be a kind of a buffer or go between -- well, not really a "buffer," that's not right -- or a conduit to von Braun was at one point he did determine that he just had too many people and that you let his chief and other senior lieutenants pick (Unintelligible). He then joked about it wouldn't be (Unintelligible).

A They were going to combine all the engineering elements at the center, all the laboratories and the sites and all that and put them under one director. They were going to put all the program management under another guy, and all that. The real important part would be the director of plans and (Unintelligible) because that's where all the technical talent would be. (Unintelligible) That's where almost all the engineers -- that

Scientists

Science & Engng. talent would be.

of Science & Engineering.

and projects

and scientists

would be. That

^ was the bread and butter and the glory of Marshall.

Q Did you get any feel for something else that I have been told by other people, that Mrs. von Braun talked Dr. von Braun into the decision in that while he may have had reluctance to go into Washington for reasons of leaving his team unprotected -- then secondly, there were several people that said he was warned that he would be eaten alive in Washington.

There was nobody up there that could eat him

A No way. ~~Nobody ever said that he would be eaten~~ alive.

Q I wouldn't have felt (Unintelligible) director apparently has almost autonomy, complete, or absolute autonomy, obviously to a point, but up there he would be a rather (Unintelligible)

another guy in the senior ranks.

A (Unintelligible) and you have to remember who he was: He was Dr. Wehrner von Braun, capable of going to a senior ~~with any~~ contractor, making boucoups of money. ~~At that time, they didn't know there was (Unintelligible)~~ like they do now.

And
have restrictions on employment,

It was an open-door policy. You could go from government to private industry, back to government. Now you have to be out for five years before you can go back. ~~Anything that had to do with a contractor in the way of awarding a contract or evaluating a proponent (Unintelligible) money, awards fees, and all that, you can't work for them for five years.~~ You didn't have that restriction back then. You could walk right ~~to NASA~~ and go to work and walk right into the CEO's office across the street at Grumman or whoever. ~~then~~

out the NASA door

Q Which he wound up doing with Fairchild.

A Right. That's right. He was in high demand.

Q What I was about to address, and it may not have been significant at all, is that Mrs. von Braun did not ever develop any great fondness for small towns. She had grown up (Unintelligible)

A Right.

Q She was eager to go.

A Yes.

Q And she really thought she would have greater anonymity up there to be a more private person rather than somebody -- a big fish in a little pond.

A She was excited about it because of the availability of the arts ~~and the museums and the concerts and all that.~~ ~~That was the point.~~ I don't think that anonymity was a factor there.

Q A number of people have told me -- and they are not anti-semites either, nor am I -- that (Unintelligible) Jewish ~~rather~~ relished the opportunity to get out of (Unintelligible)

NASA's Mafia
the knives against v.B

~~All of this is overdrawn and overly dramatic~~ (Unintelligible) where he had been impervious to --

~~He could hold his own as director, but when he got up there some of the Jewish members of the NASA hierarchy from Silverstein to Low~~ ~~to Shear~~ -- I think he was the public affairs chief for a

Scheer

He was in a relatively low-paying Civil Service job,

Mary & Wash.
kinda

at 10 or 11 o'clock,

He never worried abt. any of those people anyway.

long time -- (conversation)
A He didn't deal with them. He dealt with Tom Paine.
(Unintelligible)

Q ^{the 20-year} But Tom Paine left in a disagreement with Nixon over policy.?

A Von Braun came up with the plan, a long-range plan, and Tom Paine was excited about it and he was all for it. It was the greatest ^{integrated} space plan he'd ever seen. ^{to go present it.} It showed the budget buildup to, like, ^{anyway.} (Unintelligible) He got on Nixon's tail (Unintelligible). It showed the (Unintelligible) twelve, or fourteen billion dollars, for so many years, and all that, you know. They met with Nixon. I was not there. I didn't go to that one. It was a late night meeting, in the White House, and (Unintelligible)

Q Paine and von Braun went to it?

A Yes, Paine and von Braun. Von Braun did all the presentation. Anyway, Nixon didn't pay much attention to the details, didn't show much interest in the plan. He just looked at the budget numbers and said it was ridiculous. He said, "You can forget about that." (Unintelligible) "Whatever you can do for five and a half billion, that's it."

(Unintelligible conversation) Inflated now it would be quite a bit more than that. It might be about what we have now. So that ended the meeting with Nixon. You could call it a "disagreement," but it was just, (Unintelligible) ^{Nixon said it's} politically not acceptable. (Unintelligible) ^{was not in the cards.}

Q That's really what I meant, that they were rebuffed.

A That's right, rebuffed. Anyway, I was at a meeting sometime afterward, Tom Paine called von Braun and met with him again, and told him of his decision to go back to General Electric. He said, "I have no interest in (Unintelligible) if that's all we are going to do. I am going to go back to General Electric, back to private industry, and I suggest you do the same." So that's when he went with Fairchild ^{from} ~~to~~ He told me, "I never intended to retire on what I made at NASA. I always knew that someday I would have to go with a contractor to make some money, because I have never made any money in my entire career with NASA. I am sure he had a lot of bills and all that and children to educate. He said, 'I need a good five years to work with a contractor where I can make some big bucks and get out of debt and save up some money for retirement.'"

Q That's what he got but the hard way with his illness and death. ^{his time there. my}

A He enjoyed -- he looked forward to working with a contractor for about five years to get out of debt and save money for his retirement. (Unintelligible) He also said (Unintelligible). I don't know anybody else out there (Unintelligible). When they didn't want him to leave and there was denial on both parts when they thought that he was ramrodded and all that, they didn't force him out of NASA. That was a good time (Unintelligible).

Paine/Nixon/V.B.!

then peaked, came down.

it's

Leaving NASA, joining Fairchild

?

5 1/2 billion - Level program. No increases. I'm a man that still has a lot of debt. I've got still to do. And so he got on Nixon's calendar & they're going to go present it. It showed the budget buildup to, like,

He always had the ability to do that at any time, to leave NASA for a contractor. (cont'd.)

carrying this agency

"People are not interested in space anymore."

Tom Shaner

3-9

... contractor. I don't ~~know~~ ^{anybody} else out there at the Center (MSFC), I don't know any ~~of~~ ^{of} these other Germans that could go ^{command} the salaries that he could get. It was selfishness on their part, when they didn't "You're not going to ~~be~~ get ~~any~~ any money, and you're not going to get ~~those~~ grandiose schemes."

want him to leave.

And it was denied on their part when they thought he was ramrodded and all that.

Nobody forced him out of NASA.

I mean, that was a good tonic for it to happen.

Nixon had said:

Wash.

Q They had the plan which could be taken off the shelf at any time. ^{that}

A Right. That's right.

Q I am sure it included our visiting the moon, the Mars mission --

A Yes.

Q -- and space --

A And the space station. It ~~also~~ had ^{to it} another earth orbit space station, but it also had a space station out in the neutral part between the earth and the moon where it would just stay there. There were a lot of elements ^{to it}. You know, I didn't really have time to go into all the details of it. I really didn't have time to study or look at those, but I was just was running ragged all the time trying to coordinate him and keep him going and all that. (Unintelligible) He was not railroaded or ramrodded, because there was nobody in headquarters that had enough intellect to ever ~~stop~~ Wehrner von Braun. He was too smart for all of them. ^{do} You never had to feel sorry ⁱⁿ for him.

Wash.

But I am absolutely convinced that

Q I heard (Unintelligible) When Paine left -- or maybe while he was still there -- a number of people tried to shortstop requests for von Braun to speak. They might come into public affairs and (Unintelligible). And I am sure he got many more that he could fill.

A Yes.

Q Other people would decide what (Unintelligible).

A Right.

Q They finally had a decree that (Unintelligible)

A I can't comment, because I wasn't --

Q You weren't there.

A Yes.

Q But it was that kind of thing that they tried to keep some of those speech request away from him.

A Yes, sir.

Q I see.

A So, I am sure people wrote in all the time. He would go through that mail at home and everything. He would bring things into work and go through them.

Q They could have easily circumvented.

A Right. (Unintelligible) He was at home. It was not like he maintained a lot of undercover and all that.

Q Did he maintain some contact with you after he went to Washington?

A No.

Q I guess he was caught up --

A Yes. Right. No, we never small talked and he never called

me and I never called him. ^{always} When he would come back to Huntsville, I would ~~go~~ and see him. Every time he came to Huntsville, I saw him, for whatever the deal was. I was always glad to see him and he was glad to see me. I didn't feel like I should impose myself on him. After all, I was ~~in the~~ lowly asst. (Unintelligible).

Q When you are the personal assistant to somebody --

A ^{oh, yeah,} You can (Unintelligible) ^{can pack a lot of vion.}

Q Especially when it was you who went back and breezed by the (Unintelligible).

A I was always the one who was approachable. They would come to me on anything and everything.

Q And how he felt about certain things?

A Oh, yes.

Q It was up to you? (Unintelligible) ^{road.}

A Discretion was a big part of it, because he always maintained the high ~~standard~~. There were people who didn't know him or didn't respect the way he was, but he would never do or get involved in things like our president has today. Von Braun loved jokes. He loved to hear good jokes and he loved to tell good jokes, but he never -- not of a sexual nature and all that. He was above all that. A lot of people didn't understand that.

A lot of contractors would approach me about women, ~~barrings~~ and all that ~~stuff~~ ^{kind of thing.}

Q I have heard a little about that.

A ^{I set them} ~~It was~~ real straight on ~~that~~ that. He didn't do these kinds of things ^{for him} and neither did I.

Q Other than when he interviewed you and you were the first of the three finalists, other than asking you or talking with you and finding out that you didn't want that job -- or you certainly didn't apply for it -- your answer was probably something that he wanted to hear. Did he ask you anything else that was designed to be (Unintelligible) of your personality or your values or anything like that? Do you recall? ^{- if I drank alcohol.}

A I recall that he asked me if I drank. Of course, that ~~put~~ ^{took} me ~~back~~ (Inaudible), and I didn't know what he was feeling for here. I said, "Well, I'll have a drink socially. I can take it or leave it, but I don't have any (Inaudible). I like to drink socially." He just said, "I never ~~sleep~~ with a man who wouldn't have a drink." So, I guess that was the right answer.

Q Any other questions like that?

A Well, there was the time we were (Inaudible) such a state of shock. ^{I was in} ^{no, not at}

Q Did he want to know if you went to church regularly or if you were an Eagle scout?

A No. He was more concerned about what I had in mind as a career. He was concerned that I was going to be a dedicated

"Good."

objections.

trusted

evidently I gave him

V.B. & morals; & joking

* job interview & "drinking"

a little bit

But I'll tell you, you could abuse that position if you wanted to, in terms of what you could get from contractors and all that.

(cont'd.)

job interview

He could fly airliners. But

person to NASA that was important to him, and that I was in the right mind for space exploration, launch vehicle development, and all that. That was going to be a big part of our lives and something that I wanted to do and be involved in for an entire career. He was concerned about those type things, but otherwise he didn't want to waste his time for a couple of years. He was grooming me for a career in aerospace, the space program.

of like mind
my life & I was going to

Q He saw this as an opportunity -- he wanted to make sure that someone could take the delegated responsibility down the line.

A Right. He wanted to make sure that I would try to take advantage of these opportunities. I probably didn't, but --

Q While you are thinking, either Jim Daniels or Frank Williams that told me about a flight once on a NASA plane with Fletcher -- the administrator.

A James Fletcher.

Q He came from the University of Utah and was a practicing Mormon. There was a steward aboard the plane, and Dr. von Braun and Jim Daniels ordered a drink, bourbon and something. Fletcher said, "I will have milk." They brought it to them. Von Braun, in a kind of teasing way, said, "Jim, you are having milk there and we are enjoying these fine mixed drinks; it's too bad your religion doesn't allow you to drink." Fletcher thought about that for a moment and said, "Wehrner, it's too bad your religion doesn't allow you to have more than one wife." Fletcher was a teetotaler.

I said Dr. v. B had an amazing intellect. The man could do anything he got his mind to.

A (Inaudible) He would fly jets. He loved to fly any kind of aircraft. He couldn't, or wouldn't, operate a simple thing like a VCR. Those things frustrated him. You heard the old joke about him getting (Unintelligible) and a flashing zeros. (Inaudible) Those things would frustrate him, and he would tear up more VCRs just out of anger and frustration. He would beat on it and throw it on the floor. Then you'd have to go get the thing repaired.

Piloting, but trouble w/ electronic get going!

Q That fits in with a story that his barber here in Huntsville told me. He cut his hair for 12 years. He told me about one of the daughters coming in with a metal (Unintelligible), and he had managed to get this intricate battery out. Dr. von Braun for the life of him could not get that back in there. Then one of the daughters came and said, "Give it to me." She immediately got it in there.

A We were up for one of the -- he never missed a launch, by the way, and never missed a landing. I think he always -- when I say he never missed it, he watched it on TV or something if he wasn't going to be there. We were in his office and he called several of us in. He had a TV in his office. It was one of the Apollo landings, splashdown. We were all sitting in there,

(cont'd)

"Tom, what
in his office,

(cont'd.)

Trouble w/ TV!

Good story!

about 12 or 15 of us watching this parachute opening and this capsule coming in. The TV reception got to be terrible looking. (Inaudible) It was kind of a sepia color. I just casually got up and walked over to the TV and found the little door and flipped it down and turned the color knob on it. It came in and there was a blue sky and the water and real good color. Dr. von Braun said, "What did you do? What did you do?" I said, "Oh, my God, I'm in trouble." I just adjusted the color on the TV. Do you want me to put it back the way it was?" He said, "I didn't know you could do that. It's been that way for five years!" There was not a person in that room in all that time ever suggested or got up to change the color. They just all sat there. He could be very animated, with that German accent. ~~you know~~ He just took me aback, because I thought I had upset him.

and the sun - in

and he had

Q He thought you had really worked some magic.
A Yes. It was beyond -- I had just adjusted the color with the knob right here.

Q Do you have any recollections on the way he conducted meetings with his staff people or lab directors or whatever?
A Everybody got the chance to have their say, everybody. He would never make a decision until everybody had their say, and then, when they would all be done talking, he would ask questions. He would penetrate to get a better understanding, but he wouldn't disagree with them and he would never say, well, that's ridiculous and this and that; you know, like Bill Lucas would have done. He would never do that. He wouldn't make the decision until he had gone around the table and everybody had their say. Then he would stand up and he would go back and address each and every one of those guys. Then he would ask them about what they said about this and that; but then he would say, "But, we are not going to do that." Then he would make the decision. It was not a consensus; he made the decision, but everybody had their say. Then they understood his rationale and why he would disagree and wasn't going to do this or that. A lot of times he might not say anything and they never knew -- you know, he just took all that in and they didn't know what he was going to do with it. A lot of people would think they knew what he was going to do with it, but he was very unpredictable. He was always full of surprises. He always went for the full enchilada, like I said. He never thought small; he always thought big on everything. So many people around him never could think big like he could, so they couldn't conceive that he would do this or that because he was such a big thinker and they were small thinkers.

* Manager: conducting mtg's!

V.B had temper

Q Did he have a temper? Did he lose it from time to time?
A Yes. Yes. He was not perfect. The smaller the group, the more likelihood he would lose his temper. When we were going ^{would go}

But not in public.

(cont'd)
new story: Meetings "Manager"?

(cont'd.)

those people were. I'd find out who they were, write a note back to him, and then

"Manager" Sizing up people in meetings

to meetings, he would always size up the audience. He would look in that room, and he would not speak or anything until he knew who everybody was. He would give me little bits of paper and he would walk down there. (Inaudible) He would want me to go find out who the speaker was. He knew everybody in that room before he would speak. He would size up the audience every time he came into a room for a meeting. I am talking about when he was away from Marshall. He knew the people at Marshall. We'd go up to headquarters or whatever, you know when we'd go up to wherever.

would write down: "the guy 4th from the left, the guy over there?" so he could choose his words carefully.

Q When there were not necessarily introductions --
A Yes. You know, all the big wheels already knew each other, but he didn't know if there were some staff assistants or some senator from some committee or this or that. He wanted to know who those people were are.

Q Shrewd?
A Yes. They may not be really important, but he wanted to know who he was speaking to (Inaudible) so he could choose his words carefully.

Q Backing up to the beginning, how long had you been at Marshall when he selected you?
A I came to work for Marshall in June of '63, and he selected me in '69, so about six years, and they were just right after the Apollo landing, Apollo 11. It was probably around August or so when I went to work for him. I had been there about six years.

Q You retired from Marshall?
A Two years ago in January of '97.

Q What was your position then?
A I was a project manager.

Q Was that in the test facility?
A Oh, no. That was in the mathematician program at Marshall. Again, the laboratory provided the technical support, but the centers are not the same anymore. They are not organized like they were back then. Each lab director used to be a team with his own little system and all that. It's not that way any more.

(Conversation)

Q Questions keep occurring to me. Congressman Tiger Teague's name keeps popping up, and I am sure he was in a critical position a chair of appropriations or whatever --

A Yes, he was.

Q Do you remember any specific stories? I understand he and Dr. von Braun were pretty tight and would go fishing and hunting.

A Yes. Right.

Q Was that mostly fishing or --

A I don't know about the fishing and hunting. I know they were really tight, and real close, because whenever he would come into the room up there to one of those committee hearings or whatever, Tiger would jump up and he would go greet Wehrner and

Olan? Olin?

v.B

* "politician"

(cont'd.)

"Politician" (Tiger Teague, et al.)

(cont'd.)

give him a big bear hug. They would carry on and all that, you know, and dropped all the formalities.

Q They made no pretense about it? *personal*

A No, they were great friends.

Q There must have been relationships like that that certain other people envied and were jealous about.

A Yes.

Q I am sure there was some genuine friendship there between them.

A Oh, yes. *But it was also* ~~(Unintelligible)~~ *have* were very important that he had that friendship. Like I say, von Braun was a master politician; although, he didn't try to appeal to the masses. He always thought that his time being as limited as it was that he should spend time where it really counted, and among people who could influence people. In other words, he was not going to try to influence the masses; he was going to try to influence the people in power and then let them do whatever they had to to influence the masses.

that was were in power and people who could influence all these other people.

Q Maybe very early on in the Collier's articles that he did and Disney films and everything like that, he was trying to fire the imagination of the mass public.

A Yes, but I think he learned along the way somewhere that you get more bang for the buck if you go to the important people, and that was where he spent his time.

A. He (key)

Q Talk about a man for all seasons. Apparently, he was in a class by himself as a technical person, too.

A Yes.

Q I have gotten a number of stories where he just zeroed in on some technical minutia -- *me*

A That's right.

Q -- that fixed the problem, *me* engineering trick or something.

A It's amazing how he could do that, and people who would be talking to him about things were so in awe. They would be scared to death and all that. I have seen people who couldn't even speak they would be so nervous and scared to be in his presence, and he would put them at ease. He would get up and go and put his hand on their shoulder and start talking to them one-on-one.

Bob.

"Let me see if I understand this, problem. If I have got this right, what you are telling me is that --" and then he would start talking and get them going again. He was giving them a jump start when they would lock up on him. Other people out there would say, "Get that guy out of here," and they would chop them down and get them out of there; you know, but not von Braun. He wouldn't do that to anybody.

Q You know, there are stories like that about his warmth and his humanity.

A He had a lot of humanity.

he'd and pull things out of them

"Manger/Leader" (Compassionate)

re: WWII / Nazi era, etc.
(humanity...)

Q I think they give lie to some of these historical revisionists who are coming up with these stories about his -- during the Third Reich era and that he was heartless over slave labor and all that.

A I just couldn't believe that. He was ^{also} a realist. He knew what he could control and what he couldn't control, and he knew what influence he could have and what influence he couldn't have, and he knew what would get him in jail and what wouldn't get him in jail. From that aspect, you know --

Q And what would allow him to continue his work or to sacrifice his life over nothing.

A Right.
(Conversation about historical revisionists)

Q But his human qualities just seem to kind of give lie --

A Yes, you don't change like that. You don't develop those human qualities overnight. ~~when you are just trying to make a change~~ and have a reformation like that. It was genuine.

People don't change

There's no doubt in my mind. He genuinely liked people. He was a great one-on-one person; he would do anything he could to help you out, one-on-one, but didn't necessarily think and scheme out and go help a hundred thousand people or ten million people or anything like that.

Q Unless it was through some educational fund → Satellite into villages

A Right. (Conversation)

Q Where there any incidents with politicians or public office holders, other than what you might have mentioned, that come to mind?

A No, nothing that I can recall. Like I said, my tenure was so short with him, and a lot of the times I was not in his presence all the time, because I am off in the wings doing this and doing that. While he's in there with some politician, I am off doing this and doing that, trying to do my thing, you know.

Q (Conversation -- Simington, eight engine story)

A Of course, he could have come up with it off the top of his head, too. You didn't have to do much priming on him.

Q It was all there.

A Yes.

Q And he sort of had total recall?

A That's right. He was a good listener. He really listened to every word those people said while they were having their say. He was real good at that. He was a sharp listener. He'd ~~would~~ store knowledge, knowledge on a lot of things. You would always have his undivided attention. If you spoke to him, he heard what you said. He listened and he remembered.

"Manager" & "Boss"?

Keen, And That's how this he's putting all so he can come back to them.

Q He's just an amazing personality in so many respects.

A Right. (There is skip in the tape here, but I believe this is the same interview.)

absorb

Q Obviously, Dr. von Braun was very good at reading people and character assessment, I guess, of people, Tom, are there any specifics that you might recall? Was he a pretty infallible judge of people?

A Yes, he was pretty right on about everybody, pretty right on about them.

Q Just his life's experiences, I guess, helped.

A When I think back to his assessment on some people, he was pretty right on on every one of them. I don't think anybody fooled him.

Q Did you ever know -- (End of interview)

Reading people

Thos. Shaner 3-4-99

asst. to the Director ^(taped)
in '69-70 - (right after
April. 11)

trav. w/ him - "and he
trav. a lot" -

- took care of him on the road - kept up w/ coord. & communication -
- began @ age 29 -
- selection process narrowed no. down to 3 - then v. Braun interviewed - chose him 1st -
- was in Test Div. or Lab.
- ~~to~~ v. B wanted young person, tech. background
- engr., grad in '63, came right to MSFC after college
- was in awe of v. B
- met Neil Armstrong in Tom Paine's office
- genius, but also great human being - warm, gregarious -

v.B always considerate of
him & his well-being
- intro. to Nixon, astronauts,
et al.

- looking for Tom
in restroom, knocking on
stall doors

• came into Test Lab right
out of school - spring
break

• insatiable thirst for knowledge
- broad interests -

- v.B was a night person -
didn't like to get up early -
- wd. plan to have 8 AM b' fast -
notorious for oversleeping
- had to beat on door, nagging
to get up, bathe

- moving to Wash. -
had Mercedes - 1 yr. old
~~to~~ sedan - beloved car -
worried abt how to get it
to D.C.
- no mishaps
- V.B. asked how he liked
it?
- Tom always carried V.B.'s
credit cards
- was on th road at least
 $\frac{2}{3}$ of time during period
- pd. speeches, w/ yearly
limit -
- maximized travel/speech
opp's -
- always intro'd. Tom S. -
loved to embellish &
embarrass him.
- always had hosp. room -
took booze

- didn't like set, ^{prepared} speeches
- didn't like words on view-grafs — just used photos, or preferred that

— Tom was ~~at~~ asked how speech went — assess it

— (was V.B.) child-like in getting his feelings hurt by negative reaction —

— never wanted to hurt anyone else's feelings

— V.B. thought big — went for the whole show —

— other centers & field ctr. dir's jealous of V.B.

— So famous

— autographs, press

— instantly recognizable — everywhere —

— V.B. pick restaurant — stay in car, come in side or back entrance

- tough making plan connections
at time - grabbed motorized
cart -

Nixon
Dr. DeBakey →
N. Armstrong
Mayor Daley

*
arranged
for free
heart surgery
for Greek
Mayor

① Call Tom S.
for repeat of
this story.
(Tape missed it)

② Tom:
v.B only
reluctance to
go Wash. was
his concern for
his German
colleagues or
team mem's -
and not his
"German past"??

* v.B strove to help people
one on one - w/ folks he
knew, or met, or worked
w/ -

"In no way was v.B
railroaded into going
to Wash. It was a totally
vol. thing."

• Tom there (present) for dis-
cussions w/ Paine & v.B

• Tom tracked v.B down in Fla.

- vB big concern was security of his time
 - vB 20-yr plan
 - Paine
- retirement

Tom

- June '63 - started @ MSFC
- began w/v.B - Aug. '69
- retired Jan '97 from MSFC
- as project mgr.
in Science & Applications
~~area~~ Directorate

#

Foster

Interview Tom Shaner?!

and Tom Shaner~~X~~ was relatively junior at that time. Werner decided that he needed a "horse holder," so we brought Tom into the office, and Tom really did go around with Werner and carry his bags and miscellaneous stuff. When Werner moved to Washington, Werner had this Mercedes Benz convertible, one of those fancy two-seaters. Tom got the job of driving to Washington. They loaded it down and Werner and his wife flew and Tom Shaner got to drive that fancy little car up there. He might have some things to say, too, about his relationship for about a year or so with Werner in that regard. This was about the year before Werner went up there. But he helped carry his furniture up there and drove that car. He had some fairly intimate relationships with Werner in a short period of time.

(Conversation)

boating

This is kind of a funny story. This was related to me by Frank Williams, who was present when this story happened. While we were in Washington, Werner had some vacation time and he was going to go out into the Chesapeake Bay. They were going to go fishing in Chesapeake Bay and he rented some kind of a boat. For some reason -- I have always regretted it -- I had some commitment and I didn't take this trip with him. They went out there fishing with Frank Williams and a couple of other people from the office, the planning office. They dropped anchor and Werner forgot to tie the end of the anchor and the anchor and the rope just went. (Conversation about Frank Williams, living in Slidell.)

Wash. Y15.

Von Braun was always asked to speak a lot, and when he was here, he had a few others that would make a speech for him when he couldn't do one. When he was in Washington, particularly in the Tom Paine era, Tom Paine put out an edict of who could and who couldn't speak for von Braun. I thought that was a kind of interesting list. Astronauts could speak for von Braun or Leonard Jastrow, director of Goddard Institute of Space Science, could speak. He was a high-level, scientific guy. I was always very impressed with him when I heard him speak. (Conversation)

Wash. Y15.

One other thing which was rather frustrating to him, very frustrating to him, when he was the center director, he could go out and say anything he wanted to say. After all, that is the role of the center to propose things. But when he got to Washington, they put constraints on him. He had to speak the party line. He was the number three man in the agency in those days, and they put constraints on him. The administrators staff wanted to review his speeches. Well, Werner never liked to repeat a speech verbatim. He liked to ad lib a lot. So this made his speeches more stilted, too, when he was up there. It was a shame to see that.

Q Getting back to this authorized substitute speaker list, was