

Book review in December 2003 issue of

# Spaceflight

The Magazine of Astronautics and Outer Space

Published by the British Interplanetary Society

## The rocket team remembered

During the IAF Congress in Bremen, Germany (29 September - 3 October 2003) Fred Ordway III, took time out from a busy schedule to appear at the Astro Info Service stand on the UK Pavillion, to sign new revised copies of the book *The Rocket Team* published by Apogee Books.

The original edition co-authored by Ordway and the late Mitchell R. Sharpe was published in 1979 and spanned a couple of generations from the 1920s to the 1970s telling the story of Wernher von Braun's rocket team.

Fred Ordway had worked with von Braun at the former Army Ballistic Missile Agency and later at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center. In the late 1960's he had asked von Braun if he planned to write an autobiography to which came the reply - emphatically no.

He was however, convinced someone should write a book on the team of engineers, scientists, Technicians and researchers who became known collectively as "von Braun's rocket team".

The result was a ten-year cooperative project between Ordway and from 1973 his co-author Mitchell Sharpe. It would be a long and difficult process to research, compile and edit the book from the 260,000 word draft to the 90,000 - 120,000 contracted length. The contract was a joint US and British publishing effort and after a year of cutting and trimming the text, it was agreed in 1976 that the manuscript would be around 200,000 words.

It would be a further three years before the book appeared firstly on British book stalls in June 1979. The book did well and in November of that year the US edition appeared followed by a paperback edition in 1982.

During the ensuing 23 years, Ordway continued to recheck and update information in the manuscript and began to question why they had discussed the Luftwaffe's V-1 flying 'buzz bomb' so much since, unlike the V-2, it was not a rocket and was not developed by the von Braun team.

Ordway also reviewed what happened to the Peenemunde scientists who did not end up in America after the war, which was not covered in the first edition. It was during discussions with Rob Godwin in October 2002, publisher of the Apogee book collection, at the World Space Congress in Houston, Texas that the idea of a new edition was first discussed.

The plan was not to change too much of the main line text but to 'do some editing, clarify a few points, add and delete small items, beef up the index and incorporate a number of reader

suggestions collected over the years'. The new edition is therefore basically the same as the 1979 edition but with these new points added for greater clarity.

The Subject of the remaining members of the Peenemunde team is mentioned in various cited papers and articles in a new preface to the 2003 edition and a section called 'The Others'. There is also a tribute to Mitchell R. Sharpe Jr, who sadly died on 6 January 1997, by his daughter Rebecca Sharpe Burroughs.

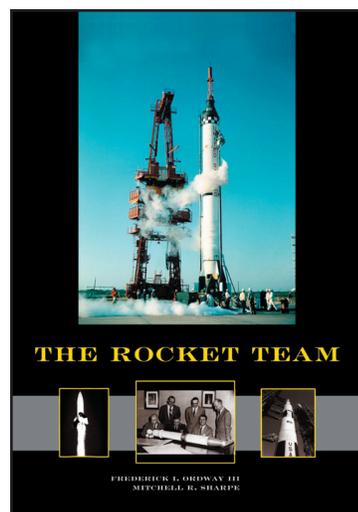
The story remains unchanged, and hence no major re-write but what is a huge bonus for this new edition is the incorporation of a DVD-Video. Included are hours of rare footage of some of the early German rocket pioneers from the 1920s; video clips of rocket launches over a 40 year period (1920s-1960) and a documentary on Americas first satellite Explorer 1. Also included is a very low generation colour film of V2 launches from Peenemunde and New Mexico; tests of the Redstone rocket that took the first Americans into space; official government footage introducing the von Braun Saturn rocket with period animations; the first primate flight of the famous Able and Baker monkeys, a tribute to Mr Missile Major General Holger Toftoy who is credited with assembling the Rocket Team in America and two extremely rare lectures by von Braun filmed ten years apart explaining his vision for manned space flight.

Some of the original film of von Braun's lectures were found by an inquisitive worker as he walked past a rubbish skip. He noted several sealed film canisters on the top of the skip and when he opened them, inside were the von Braun lecture master films. Who ever discarded them probably thought no one would want film of old presentations, probably out of date, and not seen for some time.

New storage space was probably required and reel to reel film was becoming old technology. Fortunately they were found and now appear on the DVD in the new edition of *The Rocket Team*. Apparently the older editions are now collectable (especially the British edition) but the newer edition with its updates and the priceless DVD is certainly recommended. For those who have never seen the first edition, this is a marvellous opportunity to obtain a copy of a book that was a must-have edition to space flight libraries in the late 1970s.

Thanks to, Fred Ordway and Apogee Books for the additional information.

Dave Shayler



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