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Das mehrsprachige Webportal publiziert fortlaufend Informationen zur historisch-politischen Bildung in Schulen, Gedenkstätten und anderen Einrichtungen zur Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts. Schwerpunkte bilden der Nationalsozialismus, der Zweite Weltkrieg sowie die Folgegeschichte in den Ländern Europas bis zu den politischen Umbrüchen 1989.

Dabei nimmt es Bildungsangebote in den Fokus, die einen Gegenwartsbezug der Geschichte herausstellen und bietet einen Erfahrungsaustausch über historisch-politische Bildung in Europa an.

Wernher von Braun – An opportunist?

„Braun was not a Nazi by conviction – at most an opportunist.“

(Eisfeld

S.74)

This is not only Eisfeld's point of view, all the other biographers point out Braun's egotism. His attitude first became evident in 1932, when he joined the „Reichswehr“ (army) for financial reasons. Before he joined the armed forces, Braun was still an active member of the astronautic association and worked on the development of a fluid missile there. When chronic shortness of money set in, he unscrupulously took part in a weapons project, which, on the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, was surely on the verge of illegality.

About Braun's entrance into the SS:

„Should I do it or not? Would it be of use to me or hurt me?“ (Neufeld 1995;

S. 179)

Braun discussed this question with other Engineers, when it came to the entrance into the SS. But he probably asked himself similar questions upon admission into the NSDAP. In a written affidavit after the war he stated that he had been officially called upon, but he must have known that this step would open up unimagined possibilities for him. He also soon realised that in the „organisational Jungle of the NS-Regime“ (Broszat 1983) a membership with the SS could be a significant benefit to him.

For this reason he joined the „Schwarze Orden“ in the rank of an „Untersturmführer“ on May 1st 1940 and was promoted to a „Sturmbannführer“ by Himmler within three years. During his time as a technical director of the army experimental station Peenemünde under the Nazi Regime he developed the terror weapon V2.

Wernher von Braun:

„As a German scientist under Hitler I was responsible for the V2 program, where we

developed the deadly missile weapons with which the Nazis terrorized their adversaries towards the end of the war.“

He unscrupulously used all the inhumane possibilities the National Socialism presented him with, only to realise his dream of the production of a moon rocket. He thereby accepted the death of thousands of people, who lost their lives in Mittelwerk, without in any way resisting the „annihilation through work“.

Von Braun denied ever having been in Mittelbau, as, according to him, development and production of the V2 took place in different locations.

Yet many reports and documents show evidence of his involvement in the proceeding in Mittelbau-Dora.

A surviving concentration camp prisoner tells:

„[...] the German scientists led by Prof. Wernher von Braun also saw everything that went on every day. When they walked along the corridors, they saw the prisoners' drudgery, their exhausting work and their ordeal. During his frequent attendance in Dora, Prof. Wernher von Braun never once protested against this cruelty and brutality“

Even seeing the dead did not touch him:

„On a little area beside the clinic shack you could see piles of prisoners every day who had not survived the workload and had been tortured to death by the vindictive guards. [...] But Prof. Wernher von Braun just walked past them, so close that he almost touched the bodies.“ Erlebnisbericht Adam Cabala, in: Fiedermann, Heß, Jaeger: Das KZ Mittelbau Dora. Ein historischer Abriss. Berlin 1993, S.100

„The fictitious separation of National Socialism and missile research, as it has been constructed again and again in the legend of Peenemünde, never existed in reality.“ (Weyer 1999, page 28)

„We despise the French; we are deathly afraid of the Russians; we don't think that the British can afford us; so all we have left are the Americans.“ (Huzel,19; Ruland 273/274; Ordway/Sharp,274; Eisfeld, 157)

This was the reason for one of Braun's colleague's decision to get involved with the Americans. Wernher von Braun had a similar explanation for his motives:

„My country has lost two World Wars. This time I want to be on the winning side.“

At this time Germany was in ruins and Wernher von Braun's missile project had taken the lives of about 20,000 people. But like the phoenix rises from its ashes, von Braun went to the USA with a „clear conscience“, to take part in a new project aimed at developing a military missile.

Even though he had experienced how thousands of people lost their lives in Germany, he still pretended to be involved only in the production of the weapons, not in their utilisation.

A verse from a song by Tom Lehrer from the year 1965:

„Once the rockets are up,
Who cares where they come down?

That's not my department Says Wernher von Braun.“(Eisfeld 1996, page 234)

This is how von Braun showed his opportunist point of view his whole life. His success in missile engineering was wrongfully isolated and glorified; his achievements and his person became a legend. His achievements are inseparably linked with the production of weapons of mass destruction. The route to his success was paved with blood and sweat of in numerous concentration camp prisoners. Even though he did make groundbreaking progress for humankind, this does not excuse his attitude that unscrupulously put his dreams and visions before the fate of others. Because even reaching the moon is not so important “that it excuses the participation in mass murder.” (Anders, page 190; Eisfeld 1996,S.34).

Wernher von Braun

1912	<i>March 23rd:</i> Wernher Magnus Maximilian von Braun born in Wirsitz (Posen)
1925 1930	attendance of Hermann-Lietz-boarding school in Weimar, later Spiekeroog
1930	Student at the Technical University TH Berlin; member of aeronautic association; cooperation with Oberth; <i>September 27th:</i> Opening of the „Raketenflugplatz Berlin“ (missile launch)
1931	student at ETH Zurich
1932	<i>December 1st :</i> civilian employee of the Reichswehr in Kummersdorf; graduate student at Berlin University
1933	<i>January 30th:</i> Adolf Hitler becomes Reichskanzler (chancellor)
1934	<i>April 16th:</i> Completion of dissertation; <i>December 19th/ 20th:</i> launch of two A 2 („Max and Moritz“)
1935	<i>June 27th:</i> resolution to establish a missile research institute in Peenemünde
1937	<i>May 15th:</i> Technical director of the east plant of the experiment station Peenemünde (later army experiment station Peenemünde); <i>November 12th:</i> Application for admittance to the NSDAP; <i>December 4th:</i> false starts of the A3
1938	<i>October</i> successful starts of the A5
1939	<i>January</i> Beginning of work on the A 4; <i>September 1st:</i> Outbreak of WW2
1940	<i>Mai 1st</i> Braun's entry into the SS
1941	<i>August 20th</i> visit with Hitler
1942	<i>March 18th:</i> false start of the first A 4; <i>October 3rd:</i> A-4-missile flies 85 km high and 190 km distance; <i>November 22nd:</i> Authorisation of mass production by Hitler
1943	<i>June 2nd:</i> request of concentration camp prisoners for Peenemünde; <i>8. July 8th:</i> visit with Hitler; <i>August 17th/ 18th:</i> British attack on Peenemünde; <i>December:</i> start of production in Mittelwerk; shooting tests in Poland
1944	<i>March 22nd:</i> Incarceration by die Gestapo; <i>September 7th/ 8th:</i> deployment of A 4/ V 2 against London and Paris
1945	<i>January 31st:</i> Evacuation of Peenemünde; <i>April 4th:</i> Evacuation of

	concentration camp Mittelbau-Dora; <i>May 2nd</i> : capitulation of the missile team; <i>September 18th</i> : departure by plane to the USA; <i>October</i> : arrival in Fort Bliss
1946	<i>April 16th</i> : launch of a V 2 in White Sands; <i>December</i> : arrival of the families
1947	<i>March 1st</i> : marriage to Maria von Quistorp in Landshut
1948	<i>December 9th</i> : birth of daughter Iris Careen
1949	faked entry to the USA; work on the multipurpose starter missile for the military arms department
1950	<i>April 1st</i> : Technical director of Development Operations Division of Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama
1951	<i>October 12th</i> : Symposium in Hayden-Planetarium in New York
1952	<i>March 22nd</i> : article series in „Collier´s Magazine“; <i>May 8th</i> : birth of daughter Margit Cecile
1953	<i>August 20th</i> : launch of a Redstone-missile
1954	work on Orbiter satellite; <i>October 4th</i> : scientists committee proposes earth satellite in international geophysical year
1955	<i>March 9th</i> : Disney-Show „man in space“; <i>April 15th</i> : naturalisation in the USA; <i>August 3rd</i> : decision for the Vanguard-missile
1956	<i>February 1st</i> : technical director of Development Operations Division of the Army Ballistic Missile Agency (ABMA) in Huntsville; <i>September 20th</i> : record flight of Jupiter C
1957	<i>October 4th</i> : Sputnik launch; <i>November 8th</i> : mission to launch a satellite with Jupiter C
1958	<i>January 31st</i> : launch of Explorer satellite; <i>July 8th</i> : foundation of the NASA; mission to build Saturn; <i>November 26th</i> : Beginning of Mercury project
1959	<i>October 21st</i> : Transfer to NASA; resolution for moon landing
1960	<i>June 2nd</i> : birth of son Peter Constantine; <i>July 1st</i> : conversion of ABMA to the George Marshall Space Flight Centre (MSFC) of NASA
1961	<i>April 12th</i> : Flight of Juri Gagarin; <i>April 15th – 19th</i> : Invasion in the pig bay; <i>April 20th</i> : Kennedy's assignment to Johnson to develop a space travel program; <i>May 5th</i> : Flight of Alan Shepard; <i>May 25th</i> : Kennedy announces goal of moon landing; <i>27. October 27th</i> : maiden flight of Saturn I
1962	<i>February 20th</i> : flight of John Glenn; <i>June 7th</i> : resolution for moon orbit Rendezvous-manoevre
1963	<i>January 8th</i> Honorary Doctor of TU Berlin; <i>November 22nd</i> : assassination attempt on Kennedy
1965	<i>May 23rd</i> : first Gemini flight; foundation of the „Amicale of Camps de Dora-Ellrich“
1966	<i>February 26th</i> : maiden voyage of Saturn I B
1967	<i>January 27th</i> : death of astronauts; <i>November 9th</i> maiden voyage of Saturn 5
1968	<i>December</i> Apollo 8 circles the moon
1969	<i>July 20th</i> : Apollo 11 lands on the moon
1970	<i>March 1st</i> Deputy Associate Administrator for Planning of the NASA in

Washington, D.C.

1972	<i>January 5th</i> : Nixon decides in favour of the Shuttle; <i>July 1st</i> . Vice president of the department for engineering and development of Fairchild Company Inc.
1973	treatment of a tumor
1975	hospitalization
1976	<i>December</i> Von Braun retires
1977	<i>June 16th</i> : Wernher von Braun's death