

Kummersdorf (Gut) – Wernher von Braun

Wernher von Braun, born on the 23.03.1912 in Wyrzysk (Wirsitz), in the former Prussian administrative district Posen, belongs to the most important personalities of the rocket research and the astronautics of the 20th century. In his personality one can find apart from a great curiosity a highly scientific level, a strong will to the technical realization of scientific discoveries, an almost unique organization talent, the feeling for power constellations and the ability, to make difficult and complicate facts clear to everybody. These special qualifications are the key traits of his career.

No other place as like the rocket testing ground in Kummersdorf-Gut makes it clear at the same time, how these traits in a totalitarian regime can be abused in an awful way. Wernher von Braun has involved himself more and more in the terror of the National Socialist regime in the course of his career – from an hanger-on to an accomplice.

Nevertheless his skills and his character helped him to start a second career after 1945 (image 1, image 2, image 3, image 4) in the USA, which highlight was the Saturn-V- booster rocket and the manned space flight to the moon.

About the person

Wernher von Braun shows even in his school-days great interest in physical - technical processes and an almost unrestrained fondness for experimenting. A telescope, given by his mother, stimulated his interest in astronomy and astronautics. So it is reported that, during his school-days on the French grammar school in Berlin, he let a vehicle, equipped with firecrackers, race through the Tiergarten. When he was 14 years old, he belonged to the fascinated audience of Hermann Oberths science fiction novel „The rocket to the space of planets“. Wernhers weaknesses are mathematics and physics, but when he noticed, that these subjects are very important for a professional study of rockets, he improves himself before the school-leaving examination without difficulty.

His special knowledges and his fondness for experimenting lead him after the school-leaving examination 1930 to the „Club for astronautics“, founded 1927 in Berlin. When this club presents its skills on the 1.12.1932 to the experts of the the army of the Third Reich on the artillery range in Kummersdorf, end up as dramatic failure, von Braun realized quickly, where he can invest his knowledge and his interests optimal: in the department of testing of the weapon department of the army, leaded by Walter Dornberger. As the only one from the club of astronautics, he accepts the tempting offer of the army and continues his researches and tests behind military fences. Here he gets financial support as a „student trainee“, here comes also a big part of his dissertation about rockets with fluid drive into being. His research work is extensive and reaches from the rocket-propulsions, the ignition- and combustion processes and the gyroscope - control to the materials. After the successful dissertation follow the even more successful starts of the rockets with the aggregate A

2, tested in Kummersdorf again and again, on the 19. and 20.12.1934 on the isle Borkum.

The still under the armament supervision of the contract of Versailles started researches in Kummersdorf change radical with the takeover of Hitler – from now all and everybody serve the boundless armament. While the research- and development race for the better rocket, von Braun is always on the right side - private research at the plane industry is also replaced as the own ideas of the air force. Von Braun designs 1935 a completely new rocket research institute: He chooses the location Peenemünde in December in the same year, where on the 1. April 1936 already the land purchase as a part of an 11 million RM worth of community program is done. With every further step von Braun leaves his astronautics plans and gets more and more into the war machine of the Nazis: in demand are only explosive effects, targeted precision and gigantic numbers of peaces of a mass production – for the rocket project there is no other way to survive in a tangle of priorities of the world war, getting out of hand. And von Braun always takes part, up to the horrible tunnel of Mittelbau Dora, the underground mass production of the aggregate A 4, at which thousand of people work on inconceivable conditions and were gone to rack and ruin. Long ago he has joined the SS and at the end of 1942 he is “promoted” to a “Hauptsturmführer” (a middle rank in SA and SS, it was roughly equal to that of a 'Captain' in the regular army).

The survivors of Dora go through the chaos of the fall on the death marches, while von Braun and his colleagues expect the arriving Americans in the spring of the Alps on holiday conditions. The hide of the documents in Thüringen rescues the rocket team. Instead of an execution of the sentence, new employment conditions and their almost finished parts of rockets await them in New Mexico. Again von Brauns visions of outer space fall behind, because weapons have priority for the Americans in the starting arms race of the cold war – last the Redstone, equipped with nuclear warheads on the basis of the A 4 aggregate.

Just at the end of the fifties apart from the arms race the contest about the manned space flight and the first moon flight takes place. Just now the ideas, which have occupied von Braun since his youth, are in demand, earth orbit, space capsules- and space stations, space shuttles. Now there are others, who step out of the shadow of Wernher von Braun and replace him in the NASA – with his death 1977 an era ends

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