Wiesman, Walter. January 24, 1990. Interviewer: Michael Neufeld. Auspices: DSH. Length: 1.5 hrs.; 29 pp. Use restriction: Open.

Wiesman begins by discussing his early life, education and parents' occupation. Discusses his drafting into the Luftwaffe (1940); service as radio operator/instructor. Drafted into valve lab; its relocation after August 1943 air raid; becomes administrative organizer of valve lab. Discusses Klaus and Walther Riedel; von Braun; Medaris and Lindenmayr. Discusses the inappropriateness of term "rocket scientist"; doubts about Nazi propaganda; contrast between his views and most members of rocket team. Discusses evacuation to central Germany in February 1945; first contact with Americans; role in management reorganization and internal communication at Fort Bliss and Huntsville; legacy of Peenemünde for organization in America; decision to retire from NASA (1970).

TAPE 1, SIDE 1

1-2	Birthplace, birth date, parents' occupation, and early life; attitude to the Third Reich
3-4	Education and drafting into the Luftwaffe (1940)
4-5	Service in the Luftwaffe as radio operator/instructor
5-6	Encounter with Klaus Riedel and drafting into the Peenemünde valve laboratory
6-7	Relocation of valve laboratory to Anklam after August 1943 air raid; and relocation to Friedland after another raid; combination with materials testing
7-8	Assigned to Flakversuchstelle; contrast between FVS commander and VKN commander
8-10	Difficulties with the old Army administrative system
10-11	Had little contact with people at the top; knew Klaus Riedel; valve laboratory under Walther Riedel
11-13	Luftwaffe/Army relations good; Wiesman and many others discharged from Luftwaffe and VKN; anti-intellectual attitude of VKN commander and NCOs
13-14	Role as administrative organizer of the valve laboratory
14-15	Impact of dispersal on efficiency probably more favorable than unfavorable
15-16	Evacuation to central Germany in Feb. 1945; first contact with the Americans

TAPE 1, SIDE 2

16	Organization of the evacuation to central Germany; evacuation from there by the Americans after the end of the war
16-17	Location at the end of the war and entry into US service
17-18	Little pretense to working in Thuringia; knowledge of the evacuation of others to Bavaria
18-19	Inappropriateness of the term "rocket scientist"
19-20	Doubts about Nazi propaganda; opposition and brief

	arrest of Lindenmayr
20	Party and SS membership often honorary
20-22	Role in management reorganization and internal communications at Fort Bliss and Huntsville
22-24	Management philosophies and reorganization at Huntsville under Medaris and at NASA
24-26	Legacy of Peenemünde for organization in America; von Braun's personal management and leadership style; styles of Medaris and others at Huntsville
26-27	Decision to retire from NASA in 1970
27-28	Contrast between his views and most members of the rocket team; their tendency to stick with their laboratories

Interviewee: Mr. Walter Wiesman

Interviewer: Dr. Michael Neufeld

Location: Huntsville, Alabama

Date: January 24, 1990

TAPE 1, SIDE 1

DR. MICHAEL NEUFELD: The way we start this thing normally is just to get a little biography leading up to this, so your original German name was Walter Wiesemann.

MR. WALTER WIESMAN: Wiesman, with an e in the middle and double n.

NEUFELD: Two n's, right. And your birth date?

WIESMAN: August 30, 1920.

NEUFELD: And your birthplace?

WIESMAN: Dortmund, West Germany, in the state of Westphalia.

NEUFELD: Now West Germany. At that time it was in Prussia.

WIESMAN: My wife's from the same city.

NEUFELD: And your parents' occupations?

WIESMAN: Well, my father was a very skilled cabinetmaker. He, like many people in his age group, got caught so to speak in the First World War, and was allowed to serve four years in the trenches, and then had to regroup his life in the inflation and through the depression and all this, see, so, he was born in 1892, so you get an idea, he was in that age group. And Michael, I can't help, I have put my life into perspective through recent lectures, you know, and it dawned on me, since I have spent only 25 years in Germany, and I'm in my 45th year in the United States, so it dawned on me, by the evaluating really the sequence of my first 25 years, that between the fact that I am an immediate post-World War I baby, then inflation, French occupation in that part of Germany, political turmoil, depression, dictatorship, World War II--there is nothing normal in that sense about my first 25 years. This is why I took to this country, when I arrived in December of '45 in El Paso, I was in civic work within a year, because, especially with my interest in music and arts and entertainment, I had witnessed how a government can pay for such things, but also eventually will tell you what the arts are all about, and allow you or not to enjoy

it. So I took, you might say, to the flip side of what I had learned as a young man in experiences, and this is what got me into civic work so early, to avoid having the government do the things that I had witnessed, without even at that time being old enough to fully understand the scope of this kind of interference.

NEUFELD: You would say that in the Third Reich you had a sense that it was a dictatorship and that you were a little uncomfortable with that dictatorship?

WIESMAN: No. I tell you why. See, when Hitler took over, I was 12. I did not have enough knowledge of history, of any other form of government, due to the age. And then when the war started, I turned 19 that week, and became a soldier soon thereafter. So I had a void of understanding. See, you can only, as you well know, compare to have judgment, and I had nothing to bounce this experience against, see. It just dawned on me, later, even, during the war --see, there was one feature about Peenemünde, it was a fairly liberal outfit, and the scuttlebutt and the listening to Radio London and all, I mean, privately, was not an unusual thing. And when you began to realize later how your contractors are eliminated, due to air raids, and the government pronounces the glorious victories, you can't help starting to think. This is, of course, the mind of 23, 24. You begin to wonder and have some doubts, see. Oh yes, quite an experience.

NEUFELD: Your father I guess would be described as a master artisan, small businessman?

WIESMAN: Yes. He ended up, due to the inflation and turmoil, the political turmoil, spending 25 years as a technical man, a specialist in the municipal theater, in the opera, mostly. So I grew up, so to speak, almost behind stage.

NEUFELD: Really?

WIESMAN: Due to having the privilege of--so yes, that stirred me up in many respects, see. And then of course, you know, that generation, I witnessed that, and again I realized only later what World War I and the subsequent events had done to folks in my parents' age group. So that, politically, as you well know, may have planted seeds for the future, see, that I couldn't at the time even recognize. Maybe they didn't know themselves what happened, see.

NEUFELD: So did you complete Gymnasium? or Realschule?

WIESMAN: Yes. I, however, you know, at the time, had to go in the fourth grade to an entrance examination to even be accepted, and this was not the gymnasium but Oberrealschule, and I was

accepted, so, in what would be our fifth grade, I started a six year cycle at Oberrealschule, with the mandatory languages, the whole thing that we here miss out on, see, in general education, see, and I upset my principal teacher when I decided, after six years, to take that level, the "Einjaehrige" as it's called, instead of going to Abitur, because our school had been picked some years back by one of the most progressive employers in Dortmund. This was the regional office of Deutsche Gasolin AG, the first and only synthetic gasoline factory. This was the regional office. And I had an enormous internship for three years, with rotation in the departments, including introductions into the oil refinery that belonged to the company, the port operations in Duisburg, where I took the train for 90 days, back and forth every day, and the advantages, they paid for two-thirds of all my night school tuitions. So by the time I wasn't quite 19, I was probably better equipped for a professional life than having Abitur. And maybe I had an intuition even then, bingo, the war started. Had I stayed in school for the Abitur, my age group was the first one to be allowed the Abitur in eight years, instead of nine, due to the war, and everybody immediately became an officer candidate, and very few of them came back. The damned war lasted too long. The buddy who sat with me on the same bench for sixs year to this day is still living in Dortmund, he was just a lieutenant, and he was kept in Russia until 1951. He returned a broken man. He even visited me here once, see. But I have had this so-called luck in life, the timing and things. And this is how I was drafted and got into situations after basic and after technical training. I ended up as an instructor at an air force communications school. The basic purpose of my and two other companies, military companies, was to train the ground operators for flight operations. In those days, there was no advance radar and all this. It was still the old Q groups, in Morse Code and all. And after they went through certain basic technical training, we would have 90 days to bring out a new flock of these people, for a minimum signal they had here as to their level of competence.

NEUFELD: You mean a badge.

WIESMAN: Sort of, yes. See, from then on it was a coincidence. I became not only an instructor, but there too, maybe my organizing ability, I became what was then called Unterrichtsleiter, meaning curriculum coordinator, a sort of a head teacher, you might say, and I was corporal, big deal, see.

NEUFELD: Now, let me get a couple of details. So you were drafted into the Luftwaffe.

WIESMAN: Well, first six months, Arbeitsdienst, you know, the mandatory six months.

NEUFELD: The labor service.

WIESMAN: Yes, six months.

NEUFELD: That would have been the fall of '39?

WIESMAN: No, I was drafted on March 1, 1940, and then in October, 1940, went into the Luftwaffe, into a communications training regiment.

NEUFELD: Did you volunteer for that?

WIESMAN: No, this was my draft age, period.

NEUFELD: They just said, this is what you'll be.

WIESMAN: Well, I had a preference in terms of communication. See. But I don't think it made much difference. It was just luck probably that I got into that one, see, and the usual 90 day boot camp, see, and then transferred to additional technical training.

NEUFELD: So somewhere around 1941 you became an instructor, approximately.

WIESMAN: Yes, I was partly in preparation for flight training, at a school where the onboard operators were trained. But my blood pressure got in the way.

NEUFELD: Where was this?

WIESMAN: In Erfurt. Erfurt, Bordfunkerschule. Bordfunker you know was the radio operator on board, see. But my blood pressure got in the way. So I was transferred to go to the ground operations, the counterpart of the Bordfunker, and this is where I ended up as teacher, see.

NEUFELD: So you were in the air force for a couple of years?

WIESMAN: Yes. Because after I was written off for flight training, there was no space for me, obviously, see, so I ended up on the other island, where Peenemünde is here, I ended up on the other island, the Luftnachrichtenschule Dievenow. See, Peenemünde is on Usedom, and Dievenow is on the island of Wollin. You know the delta, the Oder delta, see, and this is how it ended up.

NEUFELD: That's to the east of Swinemuende.

WIESMAN: Yes, in that neighborhood, see. And of course you know, I had no idea at all that within hollering distance, there was Peenemünde, see. And I was picked, so to speak, again it's one of

those coincidences my life consists of, by Klaus Riedel, a man well known to you. It was a coincidence. We ran into each other, by sheer coincidence, at a restaurant when I was waiting for a ship to take me back to my island, and he asked me what I was doing, and he was the wildest man I had met, with a heavy leather coat and the first man who had ID cards from all three services, and I knew it was fishy. Found out later, he was one of the top guns, so to speak, in terms of the imagination of Peenemünde. Within 90 days I was transferred from that school, as an enlisted specialist at Peenemünde.

NEUFELD: Where did you bump into him?

WIESMAN: Well, in Swinemuende, what happened is, once you had been in flight training, you still had to make an annual physical, and three of us were waiting to get back to our island that night after going through the physical. There was this bearded stubbled civilian sitting at our table, and started talking to us, and we were bumping each other, "Hey, watch it, this guy," you know. That was Klaus Riedel.

NEUFELD: And that would have been in '43 probably?

WIESMAN: Yes, early '43, because I was transferred to Peenemünde on the 1st of May 1943. And I found out then, Michael, my later explanation was something I observed almost throughout my 25 years in government. There was this highly advanced technical mission, with top level people, pitted against what I call an archaic administration, not blaming the people in the administration but the methods, the systems, totally out of sync with the progressiveness and the flexibility needed to do very advanced technical work. I had no idea then, I wouldn't have been able to describe it, but the purpose, and I was designated by Wernher von Braun's deputy, who screened incoming specialists like myself --

NEUFELD: --was this Eberhard Rees?

WIESMAN: No, no, at that time, he is the one who died during the air raid.

NEUFELD: Ah, Walter Thiel.

WIESMAN: Thiel. See. And he was sitting in the air force commandant's office, with my 201 file, and he points at me, and he says, going through, and I wondered, what is this civilian doing with my 201 file? I had no idea who he was, see, we were standing there before the commandant, and he says, "Lindenmayr needs him," and Hans Lindenmayr, a private yet in the air force, was looking for an administrative assistant who could relieve him and his group of 220 people, the so-called Armaturenlabor, which

was really the valve laboratory, one of the most crucial points at the time, I found out later, due to the exotic fuels and chemicals and all. There was no precedent for even gaskets to take that kind of stuff, see. So Hans Lindenmayr had his hands so full, and he was simply looking for someone who would take anything that was not directly related to the technical mission off his hands. Within eight days he said, "Look, you're on your own. If you need help, tell me. Otherwise --" Within less than 90 days after that, the air raid came. And Michael, I think, in a sense, you know, Sherman said "war is hell," but I also learned that war creates the wierdest opportunities, whether one knows this at the time or not, whether it's in combat--in my case, through the crazy air raid on August 17, 1943. And we located that lab to a place called Anklam in Pomerania, Pommern.

NEUFELD: Yes, I know where that is.

WIESMAN: And the place was selected because there happened to be a huge air base with sufficient hangar and barracks space to accommodate our lab, because we were flattened in Peenemünde. There was no way.

NEUFELD: You mean the valve laboratory was particularly hit.

WIESMAN: Well, it was one of the ones that was hit. And we started to rebuild, and I began to learn some of the weird intricacies, where for instance, in the process of rebuilding, through some contact in Amsterdam, American made machine tools show up. Talk about a weird war, see! So you begin to think as a young man, wait a minute, what the hell goes on here? See. But you just get it going. Michael, within a year we were flattened again in that same place. There was not one bomb outside the fence. It was all inside.

NEUFELD: An American raid?

WIESMAN: Oh yes. See, this was also --and the air raid was not then in my estimation directed towards us, we were too small, but that whole air base was the principal logistics base for the entire 6th Air Fleet in Norway.

NEUFELD: That was its primary role, that air base.

WIESMAN: Yes. We just happened to be in that mess. We moved about 20 kilometers, 25, again to the south, to a place --Friedland, in Mecklenburg, in the state of Mecklenburg. There was a vacant facility of the department of agriculture, a sufficiently large hall for us to get settled again with our precision machine tools and design and even to a modest degree, small test stands that we could get going. And then at the same time, a sister lab within the same directorate, the material testing lab ended up in a

place called Sadelkow, only maybe 15 miles away, because they had to be relocated, and administratively speaking, the combination of the two was called Peenemünde 10, as an independent administrative operation. So while the technical bosses of course had their contact in Peenemünde, we were totally on our own in the management and administration, and only a daily courier, a driver, a PFC and a sergeant, two very savvy characters -- even the food, we had to furnish food and everything. There was nothing to be had. And that ended up then with the decision that you are well aware of, of late 1944, to move the entire operation to the west.

NEUFELD: Okay. Now, I want to stop you and go back over a couple of things. When you went to Peenemünde in '43, you were officially assigned to this paper unit Flakversuchstelle?

WIESMAN: Yes. That was my place, and the commandant, I don't know if the name has ever been mentioned, at that time he was still a captain, Koenig. A very polished elegant university professor. In contrast, I say that, to the commandant of the army outfit. He was --oh --

NEUFELD: Who was that?

WIESMAN: Heigel. I don't remember his first name. Heigel, who, Michael, was about as anti-intellectual, and of all the things to have that kind of enlisted personnel while in the air force. I was wearing civies within a month, because I had to deal with so many people of high rank and all that it was just an understanding, see, that we could operate this way.

NEUFELD: Was his office, Koenig's office, was that in Peenemünde West on the air force --

WIESMAN: Oh no, this was as a matter of fact in the main administrative building, see, because he was a highly respected man and part of the outfit, since all of his personnel were strictly working for Peenemünde East. It was a separate--oh, there may have been a few in West, I can't judge that, see.

NEUFELD: You didn't have much to do with the West.

WIESMAN: No, we didn't have anything, except maybe for some technical reason, that someone had some reason, but for my functional point of view, there was nothing.

NEUFELD: You said you had one more comment.

WIESMAN: Well, about September, October of 1943, I was called by the first sergeant, and while I was of course officially still designated but I was in civies and he said, "Tomorrow morning at

10 or so, in uniform, see the commandant." You know, you're a soldier, you say: what the hell did I do? Well, the long and the short, that morning we saluted and he said, "Please, gentlemen, please sit down," and we said, "It can't be too bad." Well, the long and the short, Mike, he said, "Gentlemen, I cannot give you a raise in view of your work in recent weeks and months, especially during the air raid, but I am at least authorized to promote you ahead of your time." I ended up being the youngest sergeant. But he was really the polished professional. And that in itself sort of --well, we had very little contact directly with him, but it was an intellectual climate that he created, where you felt sure, you did your duties still as a soldier but we had no big barracks duty and all this stuff, see. Because you know, those of us specially, well, all of us, in essence, through air raid and all, hours were not counted any more, you just did the job. So it was the first experience of an unusual way in a comprehensive maybe later called project management, whatever.

NEUFELD: Yes, it wasn't so much worried about the formalities of the military hierarchy.

WIESMAN: As a matter of fact, Michael, I have later in retrospect called the air raid almost a blessing in disguise, because the things that up to that point were administratively speaking a hangup to us were simply eradicated.

NEUFELD: Such as, what kinds of problems?

WIESMAN: Well, you see, even primitive supply problems, like you can't have this and this, there were no questions asked any more. See, the priorities to get these labs going again would just override any of the traditional thinking. See, we still had, I even remember names, the traditional army warrant officers, the administrative officers, not the field type, but they even had the name Zahlmeister and Oberzahlmeister, all related to money. But they were still controlling supply systems and all this. And that came out of a tradition that you couldn't blame them for.

NEUFELD: It was the old Prussian army tradition.

WIESMAN: Well, and to say, look, to really question everything, "Why do you need this?" When in reality the mission is what counts. Hell, he's only a channel, a funnel, see. And the craziest thing is, later on, in Fort Bliss or Huntsville, I ran into the same damned problem.

NEUFELD: It was the interface between sort of the civilian and the --

WIESMAN: --yes, we'll get to this later in the interview, and this is how part of my work in organizational communication

started, see.

NEUFELD: So as far as you were concerned, when you first started there the problems mostly stemmed from sort of the old army supply system that existed at Peenemünde East?

WIESMAN: Yes. See, Mike, Peenmunde of course was still fairly young even then, but you see, there is even in industry a comparison. When you have a very advanced type of mission, especially on a product or on an idea that hasn't been tackled before, why should you superimpose a traditional support system? It is more than administration. Even the personnel people argue with you, this is the kind of job description -- No, because it hasn't been done before. So you see, that is part of the problem, and this is why I later on explained that I was in no-man's-land, by understanding the needs and accepting them without hesitation. So I saw the unusual type of work, the understanding for the technology, I just knew, and then to try to persuade, to cajole, and really get things going. As von Braun used to call it "greasing the skids." And that was what I learned so quickly, and again, my intuition, whatever, helped me a great deal. And then maybe, since I never really get mad. Even in those days, there was something you can handle by knowing the people, being respectful, and still get the job done, you know, and so they suddenly said, "Hey, watch this kid."

NEUFELD: Trying to talk them into giving in and giving you what you wanted.

WIESMAN: Remember, the old definition for diplomacy, "the art of letting someone else have your own way"? Oh yes.

NEUFELD: So when you came there, did you have much contact with Wernher von Braun or anyone higher up?

WIESMAN: No.

NEUFELD: You just immediately --

WIESMAN: --I, you see, when you envision, well, Klaus Riedel, soon after we arrived, Klaus Riedel was staying in this same group. He invited us for a Sunday in his home. And we got to know him better. Unfortunately, as you well know, he died, wrapping his American-built sportscar, or some sportscar, around a tree, you know.

NEUFELD: Yes, in middle '44.

WIESMAN: Yes. But no, you see, even our directorate, of which Konrad Dannenberg was the deputy at the top, this included the valve laboratory and materials testing, that was a directorate of

more than 600 people total, of which we were two key units. So at the most, at my level, and especially in view of the coming air raid, you didn't meet many people, because you really had --I remember, you might say, my counterparts at the directorate level responsible for support services. They too were a pain in the neck, for they too I don't think ever really understood the importance of the mission, not the details of the mission technically, but to realize this is a one of a kind thing that has never been done and it deserves one of a kind treatment in support services.

NEUFELD: Civilians too?

WIESMAN: Yes. Well, it may have been just soldiers like me assigned. But basically, there was no hierarchy, military hierarchy.

NEUFELD: Most of the people didn't wear uniforms.

WIESMAN: Oh no. See, that lab, the directorate had no, let's say, an officer responsible. The responsible director was Walter Riedel. This was Walter Riedel II.

NEUFELD: Number 3, right? There was Klaus Riedel was II and then --

WIESMAN: Yes, you're right, you're right, Walter Riedel the Third.

NEUFELD: It's confusing.

WIESMAN: Oh yes. Oh yes.

NEUFELD: Now I'm confused here. You were under Thiel, before he was killed in the air raid.

WIESMAN: Oh no.

NEUFELD: Propulsion and testing.

WIESMAN: Thiel was merely the man who made a choice with the commandant when new soldiers arrived as to where the assignment would be, depending on certain needs, but the director, see, Thiel was the deputy of the whole shooting match, of the technical side, but then the directorate to which my lab belonged was under Riedel III, see. So that was in a functional, the test area was a totally different thing, with Heimburg and Hueter and such people, you know. Yes.

NEUFELD: So then you were transferred--oh, I had one more question about this. As far as the Luftwaffe-army relations were

concerned, as far as you were concerned it wasn't a problem at all, it was a non-problem, you were just integrated into the organization, and there were army people and Luftwaffe people and nobody paid any attention to that, is that more or less the way it worked?

WIESMAN: Yes. Maybe at a higher administrative level. But my immediate functional concern, to get the lab going again, especially after the air raid, there wouldn't be any problems whatsoever, see. Except for still formally belonging to the military unit as a soldier, see. Michael, we jump a little, because it's a very closely related topic, the conditions, especially on the army side of the military unit, got so bad that in February, 1944, several hundred, I don't know the number any more, but several hundred army VKN soldiers were discharged and made civilian employees. Because this Major Heigel and his so-called top sergeants --see, there were no other officers. Every company had sort of a top kick who was totally anti-intellectual.

NEUFELD: These were old NCO types.

WIESMAN: Could be even reserve people, see. But the conditions got so bad that Walter Dornberger pushed through a rule, and even I was discharged. We were transferred formally to the army command for about two weeks. I even changed uniforms. And in February of 1944, several hundred of us were discharged, in a formal discharge from the military services of Germany, and became civilians.

NEUFELD: You became civilian employees of the army ordnance office?

WIESMAN: At that time it may have been still called Peenemünde or even Karlshagen Zehn, the proper name, see, but in any case, at that time, and this is one item, as a healthy young man, I sure had to explain to the American forces. They say, "Wait a minute, this is a fake, you were healthy, why the hell were you discharged?" Nobody believed it. I would say, "Over there, see."

NEUFELD: So you think it was basically Dornberger's doing that resulted in that discharge.

WIESMAN: Yes. He was to me, for my knowledge, the key, because see, we were in such a relatively elegant situation in the air force outfit, but in the army, you know, they had, to give you an example, one company almost existing solely composed of PhD's and master's levels. They were so hated by their own commanders, they would be even addressing them, "Oh, you Brain," this sort of language. It was the most anti-intellectual. And this was part of the reason, because the work load and the expectations were such

that the last thing you needed was this kind of thing.

NEUFELD: And you worked twelve hours a day.

WIESMAN: It was certainly an unusual step, at the height, well, almost the end of the war, only a year to go virtually, see. Oh yes.

NEUFELD: Your transfer from Luftwaffe to army, do you think that was just a bureaucratic maneuver?

WIESMAN: Yes. Had to be. Had to be, because the Luftwaffe people could not be discharged. It was strictly an army order. So, I never forget, because I was the ranking NCO, and this small outfit came from the air force then for this two or three weeks. I had to report this outfit to Major Heigel, and he touched my jacket and said, "Well, I guess, Sergeant, we are now taking off this beautiful coat." He was even envious that the air force had better looking uniforms. The guy was a psycho from the beginning. He was a primitive public school teacher from Pomerania, was a reserve office who was a big cheese, almost like a TV character today, you know. "And you will like it!"

NEUFELD: Did VKN still exist after that point? Was there still some kind of organization left?

WIESMAN: I don't know for sure, but I know that not all of them were discharged, but I'm not sure.

NEUFELD: It sounded like there was some skeleton left.

WIESMAN: I could even, by the spring of '44, so many things had happened that you couldn't call it a disintegration but the priorities were so clearly evolving that all these administrative matters didn't matter any more.

NEUFELD: Things were getting more and more ad hoc.

WIESMAN: Oh sure. You played it by ear, you know. And met the demand, see. Oh yes. That will give you an idea, even about the growing logistics problems. I mentioned earlier the kind of gaskets and stuff, because in the valve development, in those days, even today, look how often you hear at the Cape "the valve is stuck" or something. This is still a tricky area of rocketry. But even to get, let's say, a newly developed material, and to get 12 sample gaskets, I would send two couriers across Germany. There was no reliability in the mail system, in the rail system, as shipping. And those two couriers, soldiers assigned to me, were simply going for the stuff and coming back. Maybe even splitting it up between them. It was that crazy, due to air raids and what have you. People are astonished when they hear this kind

of nitpicking detail that you have to cope with, see. Oh yes.

NEUFELD: So when you were in Anklam, you were under Lindenmayr, right?

WIESMAN: Oh yes. Sure.

NEUFELD: You were sort of the organizer, the administrative officer, left him to deal with the technical problems.

WIESMAN: Yes. Sure. See, housing was virtually non-existent in Anklam, so we even to a modest degree remodeled barracks for the people. We had to have our own kitchen. With nothing, see. So it was even then a very improvised life, and with more, nearly two years to go in the war, see, but even then -- see, when our oldest was born in Anklam, Monica, and Erica was living outside of Anklam in a one room flat in the home of a manager of a big estate, so there too it was --

NEUFELD: That was your wife that was living there.

WIESMAN: Oh yes, our oldest --

NEUFELD: --you were living in a barracks?

WIESMAN: Oh yes. Our oldest was born, well, Erica initially moved into the barracks, but the closer we got to Monica's birth, the more at ease we were about having her living outside the place, see. Yes, our oldest was born on October 23, 1944.

NEUFELD: So you were scraping for food and things like that?

WIESMAN: Well, there were rations from Peenemünde. These two couriers I mentioned, this was their daily run. And there were organizers. You know, I often feel that I may have lived with "Hogan's Heroes" when I see how we operated, you know. Pretty cool bunch of characters.

NEUFELD: You needed those kinds of guys.

WIESMAN: Yes. I learned the good old American term later that reminded me of my method. It's a very scientific method, "hang loose."

NEUFELD: So how did you feel it affected the organization's efficiency, this dispersion into--I mean, certainly there was a lot more of that, a lot of laboratories were sent out, they were sent farther down the island, Usedom, they were sent out to the mainland, and so you were no longer concentrated all in one place.

WIESMAN: I probably would not be the best judge of that, since administratively it had less of an impact. As a matter of fact, it may have been an advantage, to be forced to be independent. Technically I could not judge it. It may well be that let's say the individual department head within that one laboratory of 220 had a lot more traveling to do, to go to conferences and all sorts of things, but I could not have any reliable memory of this sort of thing.

NEUFELD: Do you remember Lindenmayr having to drive over to Peenemünde a lot so he was away most of the time or half the time?

WIESMAN: Oh yes. And by that time, we had such a well-oiled support system that he had the least concern about these things, see. Because I got the hang of this fairly early, and had good people. My deputy was twice my age. Very reliable old accountant, see. I left him with all the administration and stuff. See, then, of course, this was all culminating in the late 1944, early '45 decision on the part of von Braun and his top civilians to move the whole outfit west. And I found out later, that move and the way I handled my part of it was the reason why I'm here. I had a letter from Wernher von Braun by name designating me as the man responsible for moving this "highly classified project into a predetermined area in central Germany." That was the text.

NEUFELD: What do you mean, not just your laboratory?

WIESMAN: Well, both. Both, the two.

NEUFELD: The two laboratories.

WIESMAN: Oh yes. See, what was then designated as Peenemünde or Karlshagen Zehn, see, that was Karlshagen Zehn, and my orders were to move Karlshagen Zehn. So the result, by about the 10th of February, 1945, our train moved with 54 freight cars, both labs, completely dismantled. The work force of the two labs was about 350. Now, they did not all go on this train, because there were still a few private cars, a few were still looking for their families, but the key to it was, there was not one person wanting to stay or go to the east. And that, and then we had about 240 women and children in four pullman type cars, but no sleepers, just the regular passenger cars. And it took us five days, five long days, through the air raids and being in marshalling yards under air raids and all this, to get to a place called Leutenberg in Thueringen.

NEUFELD: The date again was February?

WIESMAN: I moved this train around the 10th of February, 1945, as a result of this order, see.

NEUFELD: Okay, and somewhere around the 15th you reached Thueringen.

WIESMAN: Yes.

NEUFELD: And where was that in relationship to --the center was of course around Mittelwerk.

WIESMAN: Yes. This was, by German distances even, fairly far removed, because it was only about 10 kilometers or 10 miles north of the Bavarian border.

NEUFELD: So you moved down near Coburg or somewhere there?

WIESMAN: No, the principal city was Saalfeld. That was the county seat, see, and it was very near, something that I didn't even know existed, Lehesten. You've heard that name?

NEUFELD: Yes.

WIESMAN: I found out later that Peenemünde had an operation there.

NEUFELD: Yes, that was the --actually I think it was a branch of Mittelwerk, but anyway, there was the --engine testing --

WIESMAN: --well, it was initially --yes, engine testing, see, similar to White Sands, where the natural formation, the rock formation, was used aa the chute for the flames and the water, see. But there was no relation, except that Karl Heimbug came frequently through Leutenberg, and I wondered at first why, and then I realized he was really the titular head over Lehesten, as the man for the test stands, see. I settled. We had taken a completely dismantled barracks system, because the material testing people had lived in barracks and had their labs. We took this whole barracks system down there, and we were able to unload our freight train, and we had enough barracks and tents to protect our valuable precision machine tools and all this.

NEUFELD: So they had prefab barracks that could be taken down and put up again.

WIESMAN: Yes, in that sense, yes. But you see, there was no more work to be done. There was no facility. We located our whole storage operation on a soccer field, and by bringing the people, we lived, most of the people, in triple deckers, even in the city hall assembly room. In other words, in that little old place, Michael, if I remember correctly, the initial population, regular population would be about 1500, and they already had 1600 additional refugees by the time we arrived, see. So we just existed. So there was no more work to be done, and the first

American contact directly related to our mission was a Major Robert Staver, later on Stanford professor. Bob Staver came about 48 hours after the combat troops. The combat troops came through Leutenberg on April 13, 1945, and Bob came, looked for me, he had my name, I have no idea from where, but he then, this was the first official contact, and I wouldn't say we were under protection, so to speak, but we had an entirely different relationship, in terms of the contact with combat troops and all, see. You have questions?

NEUFELD: Yes. I do have questions.

TAPE 1, SIDE 2

WIESMAN: Michael, when I mentioned earlier that from what I heard later from bosses and colleagues, that the way I not only worked before the move but during the move caused a good bit of attention. You see, for instance, even to get that train, I had my driver take me to Schwerin, the capital of Mecklenburg. I got an army major out of bed at 3 in the morning, and showed him my order, and he said, "You realize there are no more freight cars?" I said, "Major, that's why I'm coming to you." Within 48 hours the first cars were coming. In other words, you couldn't do anything else. When I negotiated during that same visit, with the regional service responsible for those barracks in the corps, I signed an agreement they would be restored right after the war in their original condition. And I called the lab from Schwerin. We already had an emergency switchboard near the entrance. And there's an enormous noise, and I asked the young lady on the switchboard, said, "What the hell is happening here?" "Oh," she said, "Mr. Wiesman, they're loading barracks." I said, "What? I just signed an hour ago. Give me Ernst Klaus," he's now deceased, and he said, "Oh man, we trusted you. When you left yesterday we started dismantling." In other words, Michael, it is amazing how these things come together. See. And then I used the phrase now, my war was not over on VE Day. I tell you why. Before the damn thing, we were in what would be the next zone generously given by the Western Allies to the Russians. By being that 10 kilometers or miles on the wrong side of the Bavarian border. The American counterintelligence office in Saalfeld was not allowed to even admit the Russians were coming. I knew it, from refugees. The long and the short, two days before that deadline came, well, around June 20 or so, 1945, the CIC came to me and said, "Look, it's happening. Day after tomorrow you have a train. You have 100 pounds of personal belongings per person. You're not forced to go. We can pull you out." That is how at least a portion of the old valve laboratory, most of them, and a few, but the material testing had already relocated somewhere else again, that's how we got out. And we ended up with this outfit in Stuttgart, in a suburb of Stuttgart called Waiblingen, in a deserted school house. Fortunately there was a kitchen downstairs and there was a

mattress factory in the neighborhood. I put the whole outfit, by families, modest separations with some screens, into that house. We started our kitchen. I still had the payroll to meet. I had enough money. So you see why I say my war didn't end. I did not disband the outfit formally until mid-July, 1945. They had to go, including myself even, to re-establish official contact with Witzenhausen and such places.

NEUFELD: Witzenhausen is one of the places where the Americans had members of their team, right.

WIESMAN: Well, yes, see, and not only that, yes, Michael, you see, historically speaking, when you see and read accounts of these days, they concentrate on where von Braun was. And I often have to explain to people who interview, you may get an entirely different perspective of what happened on such and such time and date because we were so separated. It isn't true that we were all together all the time. On the contrary. See? And this is where my independence--hell, I wasn't 25 yet--became sort of an unusual thing. But good grief, I tell you, when I turned 25 in August of '45, I was an old manager. Because, you know --and yet, it was almost like a challenge, the thing, you know. But this was something else. And this is when I was told by August, late August or so, that I would be offered a slot on the team. And I signed my contract with the US Army, the US government, on September 15, 1945. That is the date for my official entry into civil service.

NEUFELD: US civil service, yes. So when you went into --I've forgotten the name of the town in Thueringen again.

WIESMAN: Leutenberg.

NEUFELD: Leutenberg, when you went into Leutenberg, you were there but you were not under pressure, or you wanted to keep up at least the appearance of working?

WIESMAN: No. Michael, you see, the conditions were such, with Peenemünde literally having moved away, and the proximity of combat troops and all, there was not even the pretense. There may have been some contacts made. But from my point of view, there was no pretense, because you had no location. There wasn't even power to speak of, see, in the small place.

NEUFELD: Yes. That's interesting, because I get the impression that perhaps some units, some sections that were much closer to the center of you know, like in Bleicherode and so forth, where the von Braun group was and you know at Dornberger's headquarters, they had to go through the motions of working.

WIESMAN: Oh, sure.

NEUFELD: Because they were closer to where Kammler was and the SS.

WIESMAN: Yes, sure.

NEUFELD: And they had to keep the SS happy.

WIESMAN: Yes, specially since you well know, that was among the choices left to von Braun and his top technical civilian people in late '44, early '45. This was one of the options, to continue working, so they had to do this. But in our location, it was really a little old place in a valley, beautiful, but nothing happened whatsoever, see. As a matter of fact, even then, I made an effort, if people would have still a home somewhere, to get them out and going, see. But you know, the conditions, under combat conditions, because at that time, remember, even in the rural district there was already heavy fighting, so maybe Leutenberg was relatively safer under those conditions than trying to go into a totally unknown situation.

NEUFELD: You were not aware, or were you aware of the evacuation of the top people to Bavaria?

WIESMAN: Yes. As a matter of fact, I had a very unusual thing happen to me. When I received orders to send certain people, I heard a voice on the telephone shortly, a day or two after, I've never been able to identify the voice, had no reason to, and the voice simply said, "Don't send them on joint orders. Give them individual orders and tell them to move very slowly." And it wasn't a Bavarian voice like Lindenmayr, see. But this way, some people were still here, had their individual orders. I'll never forget, one character came back and said, "I lost the way." In other words, they knew without being told, to play it cool, see. And so --see, I don't think we had that many high level people, that were highly placed specialists. But yes, there were, some of our people were ending up in Oberammergau or-- there's no question about it.

NEUFELD: So maybe some of the top scientific people got the message that they were supposed to go down there.

WIESMAN: Well, see, Michael, in our way, in our operation, there was barely any mention of science. This was a hardnosed engineering outfit, see, but they were important, sometimes more important at that stage of the game, because you know, Wernher von Braun was the first one to stress, way into our time here, for God's sake don't talk about rocket scientists. Don't you realize, we are the first engineers who made something with all this science.

NEUFELD: I agree, I think the term is silly.

WIESMAN: Oh yes, it's over-rated totally, but it's glamorous, you have to be --to this day they call me "rocket scientist" when they introduce me for a speech. I say, "Whoa." They say, "Well, what do you do?" Michael, could we, in view of time elements, switch now to the time in the US.

NEUFELD: Yes, I just have one important question I want to do here and then we can do that. That was your comment you made in passing, that there were people listening for radio and so forth, so did you get the impression that at least later in the war, when you came to the last two years of the war, that a lot of people were questionning the regime or wondering whether you were going to lose?

WIESMAN: Yes, from our point of view, it was probably more a pragmatic evaluation. We, even this one little laboratory with 220 some people, had more than 30 industrial contractors. And when you see your contractors being eliminated through air raids, you begin to wonder. And it's just a logical thought process without any great political implications or any likes or dislikes, it's just a realistic appraisal. And when you hear on top of it Lindenmayr, my boss, was about as anti-Nazi as people come. See, Bavarians usually were either for the Nazis or against, there was barely anybody in the middle. Lindenmayr made it known from the beginning, to me privately, see. He was very outspoken. He was another man who was, by the way, for a brief few days, arrested by the Gestapo.

NEUFELD: When was that, was that not in connection i--

WIESMAN:--'44, around in that time.

NEUFELD: Around the same time.

WIESMAN: I don't think they held him very long, but still he was one of the people, maybe due to his outspoken attitude, see. But see, when you bring this evaluation, and you can't help then wondering, what the hell is this war for, see, especially in the face of all the glorious reports that Josef Goebbels turns out, see, so there's a sober realism that sets in, and we probably as a family, my wife and I, made a decision even in '44, at least early '45, if we ever had a chance to get to America, that would be it. Because see, with nothing left in the Ruhr district where we lived, when the war ended, my parents had just moved into their eighth habitat, see. So all this is a sobering effect on a young man who had heard nothing but the Nazi philosophy, see, and you begin to just put it all together, and too late says too, let's think about this.

NEUFELD: This is a sensitive question, but as far as Peenemünde itself was concerned, did you notice the party have a significant

impact, or was it absent when you were there for a few months? You know, because there are a lot of people at the top levels who were members of the party, mostly because they had to be and didn't have much choice about it.

WIESMAN: Not only that. First of all, again, at my level, even if there had been an influence, maybe the Dornbergers and von Brauns would have known about it, but there was also another method that is not unknown even to this day --when one is made an honorary such and such to keep them in line. Even the British nobility, if you talk about having certain awards, for instance, remember in the old royal houses, whether you made Prince such and such the honorary regimental commander of another country, all this stuff. And especially Himmler had a weird way. Again it dawned on me, I'm a voracious reader of what happened in Germany, I had no idea at the time, but, but really making honorary whatever in the SS, and with this, have an influence that at the time I couldn't have possibly guessed, see. So this is not unusual, that they used in principle a method that is not unknown, to "reward" people, and yet in reality keep them in line with your influence, or even swing them over to your side, see. Oh yes, sure. You know, Dornberger, way later, once at a reunion here in Huntsville, he asked me -- see, we had never known each other, and he asked me, he said, "What did you do with something like von Braun's letter?" I told him then, I said, "Look, maybe you wouldn't even want to know today." He looked at me. He said, "You know, when you sit up there, and you wonder, what are these young people doing?" I said, "General, we got out, see." "Yes," he said, "but it gives you pause to think, the caliber of people you had and all this." Michael, let me switch to the time here, because the parallels related to what I found and faced and had to cope with professionally are so almost, well, not only similar but almost equal. Examples that we run through in a hurry. One of the first key problems in Fort Bliss was the lack of a sufficient and modern supply system. An example, the Army was thinking in terms of the standard Army ordnance, Corps of Engineers supply. There was a big scream among the troops, our troops, even in the development of modest new test stands. The long and the short, the warrant officer, John Lockwood, to this day a big buddy of mine living in San Bernardino, one day John was fussing at us, "The God damned Dutchmen" and this sort of thing, "This army has won every so and so war and you tell me you can't use my supplies?" I went to the CO, Jim Hamill, who was a year older than I. We had a pretty good relationship even early on. And I said, "Major, suppose I take John by the hand,--" and you didn't have to do, Mike, even after one day, John's smart enough. He said, "Why in hell didn't anyone tell me?" In other words, again, you had the same challenge, to do the most unusual work, even the demands on high pressure pipelines on the test stands could not be met through standard suppliers. Yet the sole source purchasing was a crime, almost. In other words, "By God, you can't do this

in the army!"

NEUFELD: You have to have a competition every time, bids.

WIESMAN: But even then, remember, we're talking about less than a year, at best a year after the war. So this is where I learned my first lesson. Once again, it's not the ill will of these people on the support side, it's the fact that top management doesn't realize that they're part of the team. It's not "us and them," it's "us." Let's switch to Huntsville, By the time we came here, the same Jim Hamill assigned me to start a technical supply planning outfit to match the Army's supply and procurement system by having six commodity type planners, common hardware, chemicals, whatever. It was the most unprecedented step and the supply office nearly screamed about this kind of interference. We were once again the interpreters of the technical needs fed into the existing system. I met the S-4, his name shall remain secret to protect the guilty, an old-fashioned Army Reserve major, and I called politely to his attention that he was holding up the project. And he said, "Sir, it is my privilege to hold up purchase orders." I said, "Major, I'm sorry, but these fit into a time table." "What do you mean, young man?" Problem, he had never really been told. So it caused me to crack, by that time I was a bit savvy in my poor English, to crack the line that, "if they would ever abolish our technical misson, the staff of Redstone would have paperwork for three more years and never known the difference." Michael, the next step, Jim Hamill and Wernher von Braun agreed that we need to know a lot more about how the Army operates in order to succeed. For three years, with my agreement, I was assigned on a rotating basis to various offices in the staff of Redstone. I had a chance to study supply, logistics, comptroller. The Army sent me to top schools. In 1954, I became von Braun's operation chief in the reorganization. The title didn't exist before. In the Guided Missile Development Division. And Wernher only said, "You have learned enough angles that you know what to do now." I said, "Yes, sir." You see, I had learned by that time how flexible the system can be, if you just know what to do. I had also gradually, with the help of the first general officer ever to command Redstone, Brigadier General Tom Vincent, up to that time they had some old colonels but Tom Vincent brought in a different outlook on life, and we began what later on became known as organizational communication by having regular briefings for the top people in the staff and such things. A typical additional example, the personnel office was convinced we were snowing the living daylight out of them just to get more money. They didn't believe the job descriptions. By that time, I had enough contacts. One day in 1954, the regional director of the Civil Service Commission, Hammond Smith from Atlanta, came over here with seven or eight staff members on an old DC-3. By nightfall they said, "You guys are right. There's never been any work such as this." The personnel people were

startled. So you see, again, once the personal director who was a sharp cookie understood what the whole thing was, he had very much less of a problem to cope with it. This became a tremendous point in the combination, when Bruce Medaris took over the newly created Army Ballistic Missile Agency on February 1, '56. To Bruce Medaris there was never any "us and them," it was only "us." By that time, Michael, we had worked for ten solid years, for the Army, for the US government. The change, by just changing the attitude, was the secret partly of the technical success of ABMA. Because all the haggling, as to what you're entitled to, and no, you can't have this, was totally submerged. The mission was the only thing that counted. I, in the process, became one of Medaris's protegees, a member of briefing teams and this sort of thing, because by that time I understood the system. I'd had at least ten years now in government. To continue this thread, one more example. From 1965 to 1970, --no, let me go back a little. What we learned the first year with Medaris caused me to establish what in 1957 became the first comprehensive internal or organizational communication program in the government. It was a totally unknown field, except for in industry, IBM, GE, Standard Oil, B.F. Goodrich, just to name a few big ones. In general this was as totally new area. It was so new that the Civil Service Commission refused to even recognize my job title.

NEUFELD: What was your job title?

WIESMAN: Internal Coommunication Coordinator. They said, "There's no such animal." But we hung loose, we made it an advanced form of employee relations, and they bought it. The long and the short, we became known, even in those early days at ABMA, we were started --within a year I was making presentations at the top level to the Civil Service Commission as to what this could do for internal spirit and cooperation. It culminated, Michael, when we applied in 1965 to NASA this concept on a vastly advanced scale, because we'd learned enough, even outside of the agency, in industry and government and universities like Purdue, and I had, before I left government, for five years, '65 to '70, a program called "Wall-to-Wall Organizational Communication." That allowed the top management, von Braun and others, to even have the use of highly respected summer consultants and assistants in that field, like Phil Tompkins, PhD from Purdue. Gary Richetto was a PhD candidate from Purdue. Phil Tompkins as a result, among other things, was responsible for assuring the academic solid basis for Gary's work. There are on record here items, at the Marshall center as well as out here at the space center, of the work these two in particular did as part of my staff. It was so unusual, Michael, that when I left the government after 25 years service on the 15th or around the 15th of September, 1970, what we had done had become so well known even beyond the borders of the US that I made part of my living for a while as a consultant in this field. But it all came as an accumulation of this

experience of "us and them." Because eventually, if you create the right spirit, all the way to the janitor, people have no idea what this means, really. This is where gradually people began to call me a humanist. I said, "Gee, call me professor." But see, that is really a lesson of my life, and after all, this is now close to 20 years since I left. See, I'll be 70 this year. But this lesson has never left me, because the basic principle, and even some methodologies, are as applicable to volunteer work, work in your continued professional life, that you think in terms a comprehensive work force and what you may miss if you don't have them spiritually, so to speak, on board. And really make them feel --with Medaris it was almost second nature to him. There was no such thing as an outsider, see. Even the people assigned to us by other parts of the Army and the Navy, even though they were not directly under Medaris, but they were members of the family. I'll never forget, during the Polaris, well, before Polaris, we had a joint project going between ABMA and Navy. Bill Hassler, full fledged four striper, see, with two other officers and a secretary -- well, Bill was officially the representative of the Navy. But Bill Hassler was a member of the family, see. All this, to the say, Michael, people talk about this in Huntsville. And what we did was nothing but take the bold step of applying some well known basic principles of behavioral and social sciences, communication arts and sciences. We simply had the guts -- I compared what we did with what the engineer does for the natural sciences, except in the natural sciences you can be a darned sight more certain. In the social and behavioral, you're guessing. But there is enough evidence in research and literature that you say, by God, here these slices are so obvious by now, let's do something with it, just like the engineer does. And this is what caused such an attention in the university and academic community. I'll never forget, a very respected man in that field, by that time he was already an emeritus professor at Colorado, who, after one of my presentations at a conference, he came to me, he said, "Young man, I had no idea somebody was using this stuff we were talking about." It was typical. I simply --and this is, Michael, if I go back to my initial statement, about the man who said about intuition and common sense and all --Phil Tompkins was the next one who took me under scrutiny. I purposely, during his first year summer consultant, had him in my own office, and he asked the same question, he saidk, "Wait a minute, do you know that Lazarsfeld did this?" -- And then he looked at me and said, "Do you mean you don't know Paul Lazarsfeld?" I said, "Should I?" The point was, again, maybe my very pragmatic approach, and by that time, you know --see, when I left government even I was in my 34th year of work since my interneship, and maybe my pragmatic approach. But they were so astonished that I didn't know about the literature and research being done, and simply intuitively had said, "Hey, that's the way it is." And this is what taught me so many lessons. And as I said, 20 years later I'm still applying them, and what I call

recycling or re-potting, see.

NEUFELD: Now, I want to ask a question about management, in the little time we have left here. A lot of people I've talked to on the team give a lot of credit to Wernher von Braun.

WIESMAN: Yes.

NEUFELD: And I was wondering, first, what you could tell me about his management style, and sort of where he fits in terms of also other people's contributions, such as yourself, Medaris, others, in terms of making the system work in the United States. And another question is, and these are maybe too many questions at once, but also sort of what was transferred over from Germany to the United States, and what's new in terms of management and organization in the United States.

WIESMAN: Michael, from my point of view, what was transferred over was merely my own experience. I don't think there was any concept existing in terms of let's say, identified management methodologies. Von Braun's personal style and intuition. Dornberger's personal style. Anything but a barking general. In other words, when I spoke of even people like my air force boss, Hauptmann Koenig, see, these were cultivated people who respected others, respected their professional judgment, their personalities, their idiosyncracies. This became Wernher von Braun's strong suit. He not only respected them, he baffled them frequently with how much he knew about their discipline. I really believe, Michael, that management as we know it today could not have been defined in a methodology at Peenemünde, partly due to the circumstances, especially to air raids and all this. Indeed, some of my former German colleagues, and I found out later as a consultant, this is by no means limited to them, considered up even to the mid-fifties, management to be an evil that would take their time. It was not unusual, and I repeat only one quote, when someone said, "We don't have time for this management crap, we have work to do." It dawned on me then, the way we talk about management today, almost an equal to leadership, is so different, because even when the Army sent me to school in the early fifties to study all sorts of things, management was almost looked at as a separate science, not as a means to bring things together like a systems approach, project management and all this, see. So von Braun, later on as I read his speeches and articles and all, he had this, I repeat again, the respect for people's ability. He also knew that particularly in terms of what I call the "College of Cardinals," the Haeussermanns, the Heimburgs and all, the Geisslers, he had to play them, keep them all happy, and yet come up with results finally. So his ability to be patient, to understand them and to bring them together, to me is the key. Wernher was such, beyond his obvious ability as an engineer, he was probably as much of a philosopher. I once said, he is the man

for at least half the seasons, in terms of when you read, and these were not written speeches, I knew they were his ideas, but he had probably more of a religious sense than one would expect from an old Prussian family and all this. There's a certain tradition. But the encouragement that came, probably through him and then also beginning in '56 from Medaris, that people would without hesitation admit they made a mistake. That kind of openness. And it culminated, to some degree, Michael, in my last program. Phli Tompkins was charged by Wernher von Braun to interview some 50 top people. The results were startling. I don't mean bad, but very illuminating. Wernher listened in an executive session to a presentation and simply said, "Okay, Phil, be ready to present this to the same 50 people." That kind of guts. Whether they were critical of him didn't make any difference. Phil was here recently. He's now a very respected man, once again, in Colorado, turned down the deanship, he loves to be a professor and do research, but to this day, this is one of the things probably more studied by researchers and historians here, just this man Wernher von Braun and his influence, see. With Medaris, it was more a military style, but probably best expressed that Medaris was the man who demanded the absolute objectivity in staff studies. I have seen other officers in the Army. We once had a commander at Redstone in the olden days where you would find out from his secretary what he wanted to hear. So you see, I have, and I've benefited from this--there's another man, much less known, but had a great influence on me, General Jack Barcley, (John A.). Jack was Medaris's deputy initially, then took over ABMA when Medaris created the Army Missile Command in '58, and I worked for Jack for quite a while on his immediate staff. See, there too, they may have had stars but they were cultivated people, great personal respect for other human beings and all this. So maybe it was a coincidence that this is part of the total result, finally. We lost that touch in between, at Marshall. It was not until J.R. Thompson came on board that the mind opening process began again. See. Michael, this is not criticism of the others in between. There are certain personalities that just cannot do this, call it genes, whatever, see, who cannot quite cope with this kind of open freewheeling personal contact, I don't think. This was by the way one reason, one, not the only one, why I left so early. I could sense, there was no room for the foreseeable future with the way I operated. And I wasn't leaving in anger. I gave ten months notice, that I was ready at age 50, with a 25 years service, to voluntarily take my pension.

NEUFELD: You knew that Apollo was winding down.

WIESMAN: I didn't even bother about Apollo. I looked at the internal mood of the center, see. So it wasn't the technical side of it. I had so much going for me at the time that, I have no hesitation, sure --Lord, we were happy. By the time I retired

finally, our two children were through at the university and married. See, I retired with a very low pension, obviously, at age 50, see. But still I have never regretted it.

NEUFELD: It reminds me of a comment you made when I met you last time, which was, you felt that some of the people, some of the old team may have hung on too long.

WIESMAN: Yes. Michael, I have done considerable work in retirement planning and studied various aspects that are contributing factors. And there is a time in life when, due to circumstances, you get a signal, and if you're smart, especially if you have something to offer, to get out, and do not believe that the world's coming to an end because you're getting out. I don't know if I told you the story at the time, about this being indispensable? A good story. This big old Big Daddy, sole owner, founder of a company, really hesitates to turn his business over to the boy. The boy is only 38! Finally reluctantly, grudgingly, he does it. A year later someone corners the old man on the golf course, "Charlie, how goes it?" "It's disgusting. The boy's making mistakes right and left. And profits are up 18 percent." Michael, there is a time in life, sometimes it comes early, sometimes later, when you degrade yourself by hanging in, believing that this is so important, when the circumstances that you can judge tell you differently. See? I know it's, to some people, it's an insult, but this is a fact of life. And those people who know what they want and go after it again, especially at the time when some of these crucial decisions have to be made by some people --good Lord, their pension was already between 1500 and 2000 bucks a month, see! But still, it was a matter probably of pride and feeling insulted, not being recognized. See, I've always looked at myself as a career government employee. I had my own career plan. I did not belong. I was not married to a laboratory, which was a habit in the old German group.

NEUFELD: Yes, they stayed at the laboratory.

WIESMAN: Wernher understood this. I had a rotation going for myself, had a tremendous experience, whether I was in the staff of a general officer, like in organizational communications. This exposure opened my eyes, in many ways, see. My public speaking, good Lord, you know, as of this year, I've been on the circuit for exactly half my life, for 35 years. The exposure was tremendous, for the Army, for NASA and on my own, see. So I look back without the slightest regret. As a matter of fact, I am not humble about being fortunate, because there is a reason why you get picked at the right time by certain people, you know. You just happen to be in the right place, and have the guts to say, "Yes, I'll do it." See, because that's my style.

NEUFELD: The culture among the team is largely, you stay with your laboratory.

WIESMAN: Yes.

NEUFELD: Your life's work, and that continued on through to the end. It was a little harder for them to adapt, I guess.

WIESMAN: Yes. Not only that, Michael, I probably, with my experience at that time, had better options within the government even to change. They were simply the specialists in a very narrow field, see. And then it isn't easy any more, because obviously they were not going to leave Huntsville, see. But this isn't an easy decision to make. To me, it was.

NEUFELD: But for them it was difficult, because with Apollo winding down, Marshall had to be cut back, and cutting back is not pleasant.

WIESMAN: No. And then, Michael, there had been a rumbling for quite a while, because year after year you saw only the German names in the top hierarchy. There was no question that young, younger US born citizens were certainly groomed, you could see them come up, but this may have been a bone of contention in the minds of some people. And I was --see, one significant item about the influence that I have gone through, except ever since Medaris took over, '56, for the next then 14 years, I never had a German born boss. See, that gave me such a different outlook and experience.

NEUFELD: And you had a very interesting independent view of what was going on.

WIESMAN: See, that may not have been the greatest loyalty to the team, but I did more for the team in this respect, by being on the outside, so to speak, especially when you see the notes between von Braun and me in my scrapbooks. In 1960 when NASA started here, I wrote a note to von Braun. I said, "Look, here's my situation. I'm doing a very interesting job for General Barcley." And von Braun in his generosity simply wrote across my informal note, "Great. Jack needs good people too. Holler if you want to come back." See? It's this sort of attitude. Because Wernher knew what I was doing with Jack. It was two years later that I went to MSFC. No, I've had a life that I look back at with great satisfaction, and I really built on it. One last comment: people have called me a late bloomer. I said, "Folks, I've been blooming all along. I just re- pot myself every five years." Really, even out here, the work I do here with the space center, we've never before until last year added my lecture on the historical, political and economic implications of missiles in space. See, and on the adult level, this is not for the kiddies,

but the adult level, and especially the teachers who come through UAH in the official four day courses, they need an eye opener. Hell, they all believe science can exist in and of itself, not in our political system. You need to understand the implications all around you, see. So that was a brand new field that I tackled, and it was quite good.

NEUFELD: Good. Well, thank you very much.

WIESMAN: Oh, sure.

NEUFELD: It was a wonderful interview.