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Peenemünde Interviews Project: Walter Haeussermann 1/24/1990 (Tape 2 of 2) A

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WEBVTT

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<i>WALTER HAEUSSERMANN</i>: Ingenieurschule Darmstadt.

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<i>MICHAEL NEUFELD</i>: So you came over then... By the time you got to Fort Bliss it was almost the beginning of 1948.

<i>WALTER HAEUSSERMANN</i>: Yes, it was January '48 when I arrived.

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<i>MICHAEL NEUFELD</i>: You were... When you went over, were you consciously coming as an immigrant, that is, with a feeling that you were going to stay in the United States and move here, or you didn't know...?

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<i>WALTER HAEUSSERMANN</i>: The agreement was that I have a commitment for half a year. During this time, the commitment was mutual: I could withdraw, or the United States could tell me, "We don't need you any longer." And, in addition was the agreement that, if I accept then my wife could join me, or everything would be done that she will join me as as soon as possible. So, of course I accepted, gladly. My wife joined me then in September '48 in Fort Bliss.

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<i>MICHAEL NEUFELD</i>: But I, your expectations when you went were, that it would be permanent or it wouldn't be permanent, or... you'd just wait to see?

<i>WALTER HAEUSSERMANN</i>: For me it was clear, that I could stay. Yes. And I wanted to stay.

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<i>MICHAEL NEUFELD</i>: Was that because... you were interested in the opportunity, working in rocketry? Or you were concerned about Germany's condition, or daily life...?

<i>WALTER HAEUSSERMANN</i>: No, I think the main thing was that I wanted to continue in this profession, which was for me very challenging and I didn't see any future in this aspect, of course, in Germany, nor anywhere in Europe at that time. By the way the Russians had-- pardon me, the French...

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...immediately after they learned that I had an interrogation for going to the States in Wiesbaden - how they learned about it, I don't know - I got a phone call from the French who wanted me to join them. And several of the Peenemünde group actually went to France.

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<i>MICHAEL NEUFELD</i>: Your reaction when the French...?

<i>WALTER HAEUSSERMANN</i>: Well I said, sorry, I have already made my mind up. I want to go to the States.

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<i>MICHAEL NEUFELD</i>: I mean, I suppose it's... Part of it always was, it seems to me, that the Germans had a better opinion of the Americans than of the French.

<i>WALTER HAEUSSERMANN</i>: No doubt. Well, it was the land of the future, let's say.

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<i>MICHAEL NEUFELD</i>: So that image was still pretty strong...

<i>WALTER HAEUSSERMANN</i>: Yeah. In my opinion, if anything can be done in the future of rocketry, then it would be in the States.

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<i>MICHAEL NEUFELD</i>: Was there an influence from the 1920s and earlier in your youth in those days, or was it hard to pin down when it was?

<i>WALTER HAEUSSERMANN</i>: The Germans, as far as I knew them at that time, the general opinion was that the United States is the land of the future.

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<i>MICHAEL NEUFELD</i>: [[mic noise]] So you came to Fort Bliss, you came to the desert at the beginning of '48. Of course a number of people had been there up to three years. Well, not three, I guess. A bit over two years.

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<i>WALTER HAEUSSERMANN</i>: Yes, that was the only disappointing matter, that there was practically no contact during this time with them. And that gave me a little hesitant, it caused a little delay. I wanted to have first some information from them. And then Dr. Hoelzer and Dr. Steinhoff made a phone call to Germany which was at that time in '47, almost unheard of. And I spoke to them and got the answers I wanted to have from them on my questions, and then I made my final decision to come to the States.

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<i>MICHAEL NEUFELD</i>: What could they tell you?

<i>WALTER HAEUSSERMANN</i>: Well, I mainly asked about the development possibilities here, what they had been doing, and what is their opinion of the future to continue with the rocket work.

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<i>MICHAEL NEUFELD</i>: So they gave you the impression that they thought there was a future, right?

<i>WALTER HAEUSSERMANN</i>: Yes.

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<i>MICHAEL NEUFELD</i>: Because I know there was some disappointment in the Fort Bliss period, the fact that not enough was going on...

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<i>WALTER HAEUSSERMANN</i>: Well, the disappointment was, in my opinion and for me also at the beginning, that we had extremely primitive laboratories. See, we had practically to start from scratch. To build up even power distribution panels in the barracks and such things. Some of our fellows had to go underneath, yeah, the Black Widows, we had to pull the cables through. And such things happened.

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And of course this was kind of disappointment, you couldn't right away start what that what you had in mind - it was a long road. But we made it, and especially one thing was nice, especially for Dr. Müller, that ideas brought from Germany for future research could be pursued.

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<i>MICHAEL NEUFELD</i>: You mean in the laboratories at Fort Bliss that you were...

<i>WALTER HAEUSSERMANN</i>: —And in the workshops.

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<i>MICHAEL NEUFELD</i>: ...when you finally managed to accumulate enough equipment and so forth.

<i>WALTER HAEUSSERMANN</i>: Right. And in so far, I was in a better situation than those who arrived two years earlier, because I found already a certain basis on which you could start.

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<i>MICHAEL NEUFELD</i>: So you immediately started, picked up where you had left off...?

<i>WALTER HAEUSSERMANN</i>: Right, yes.

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<i>MICHAEL NEUFELD</i>: ...with the simulation and so forth. Yeah, at this point I'm kind of wondering just how much we can cover. It could take hours to do another 30 years of 'in the United States', which is hardly realistic in terms of covering the whole career. But in a summary way then, you...



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