

*U.S. Army Military History
Institute*



**SENIOR OFFICERS
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

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DR. JOHN L. McDANIEL

Interviewed by

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not be of interest to you, but one of the primates lived until about six months ago. It was at the space museum here in Huntsville and finally passed away with considerable more fanfare than most of the scientists get when they pass away. In thinking back on the activities that allowed Dr. Von Braun to be successful in carrying this out, I think there are some key ingredients if you would like for me to discuss them.

INTERVIEWER: Dr. McDaniel, the activities that allowed the US Army to put a satellite into space obviously did not happen overnight. Could you give us some insight into what actually happened behind the scenes in the Army preparing to put that first satellite into space?

DR. MCDANIEL: The activities that caused this to happen related to General Medaris, Dr. von Braun, and a very dedicated team of scientists and engineers. Let me tell you a little bit about some of the things that happened. Dr. Von Braun was one of the most dedicated scientists and workers probably that the United States has had. His enthusiasm as he would brief at the Army, the Department of Defense, or at Congress was contagious. As an example, several times I have started discussions with him that were very interesting

to him. We might be in the middle of the room when we would start, and as his enthusiasm would build up he would begin to walk towards you, and before you knew it you had backed up until your back was against the wall. The work hours, and I speak directly from the time I went into ABMA, and I worked at ABMA for about three years -- but not during some of the times that I'm talking about here. The work was seven days a week, and the work was on an average of 14 to 15 hours a day. So you had the charisma, the knowledge, and the accent of Dr. Von Braun. The accent was most important. Those were some of the physical ingredients that he had, plus his team. This team was not only a team of the hundred-odd German scientists which he had, his team was also developed with the civilians that he was associated with. As an example many of you have read the tragic story of Colonel Nickerson, John Nickerson. This related to the problem of the Air Force. We were trying to work out arrangements and relationships with the Air Force. We weren't doing too well, and so Colonel Nickerson and his assistant Colonel Lee B. James, who is still a resident of Huntsville approached the problem aggressively. Apparently Colonel James didn't do much because he was not tried, but Colonel Nickerson was tried for giving information to Drew

Pearson. In those days when you gave information to Drew Pearson, and he published it, that was a sure way to get it out to the public. This was an article which was critical of the way the country was managing this relationship with the Air Force, and who got the space mission. Remember now that the Army was trying to get the space mission. The Army never did get the space mission. The part of the Army that worked on space became Marshall Space Flight Center, or NASA; but the Army never did get the space mission. The competition was very severe, and many, many people were concerned. In the case of the article which Colonel Nickerson sent to Drew Pearson, which was published, there was a big investigation on the Arsenal as to who did it; and the investigation was conducted the whole week. All the files were looked at, and everybody was talked to, but nobody could find out who did it. On Saturday, as the group was getting ready to return to Atlanta, one of the individuals said, "Why don't we check this typewriter ribbon here on a typewriter?" That typewriter ribbon contained the article, and this was the way the John Nickerson case was broken. He was placed under house arrest, and there's lots of history in a book or two, so I won't go into that. In regard to General Medaris -- General Medaris was the man that

also had considerable charisma. He was a man who was totally dedicated to what he believed in, and what he believed was that the Army should have this mission. He did all he could at any level -- local, state, national -- any level he could to bring it about. To give you an idea of the charisma, and I think I should, because I think it will be of interest to you to explain a little about General Medaris, who is now a priest and a friend of mine. I have listened to him preach on four occasions and he is a very fine man. In the morning, when he would be coming to work at about ten minutes till eight, you would see a lieutenant colonel walk out to the sidewalk at the point where the general's car would be pulled in. There were double doors going into the building -- there would be an officer standing at the first set of doors, an officer standing at the second set of doors, and an officer standing at the elevator with the elevator on hold. An officer standing at the top of the second floor where he would get off the elevator, and then there was an MP who was as tall as you could get in the Army dressed with his white leggings. He would be standing on a block that was about six or eight inches high, which would make him taller, and this was entering into the office which General Medaris occupied. Anyway, the