
In Memoriam

Arthur Rudolph, space pioneer

by Marsha Freeman

On Jan. 1, the man who built the Saturn V rockets that took Americans to the Moon, Arthur Rudolph, passed away in Hamburg, Germany, at the age of 89. He had come to the United States with Wernher von Braun at the end of the Second World War, and had become an American citizen in the mid-1950s, while he was working for the U.S. Army developing the missiles for NATO deployment in Western Europe.

With his transfer in 1961 to the Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama, operated by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), Rudolph was given the task by von Braun of managing the largest, most complex research, development, and manufacturing job in history—the Saturn V Moon rocket. After the successful lunar landing of the first Apollo mission, and having received NASA's highest awards, Rudolph retired from the space agency at the end of 1969.

After more than a decade of retirement, in September 1982, Rudolph received a request to answer questions by officials of the recently created Office of Special Investigations (OSI) of the U.S. Department of Justice. On Oct. 13, without a lawyer present, Rudolph spoke for five hours with OSI Director Allan Ryan, Deputy Director Neal Sher, and trial attorney Eli Rosenbaum about his activities in Germany between 1939 and 1945. Rudolph did not bring a lawyer because he knew he had already answered all these questions upon entry to the United States nearly 40 years earlier, and because he had nothing to hide.

Five months after a second interrogation, in July 1983, Arthur Rudolph received a letter from OSI Acting Director Neal Sher which said that “preliminary decisions had now been made,” which he wanted to discuss, and he recommended that Rudolph bring a lawyer this time. The OSI told Rudolph's lawyer that they had “documentary evidence and personal testimony” that would prove Rudolph's responsibility for war crimes during the time of production of the V-2 rocket. The OSI told Rudolph's lawyer that they could divulge neither the evidence nor the witnesses against his client.

The OSI offered the 77-year-old rocket pioneer, who had suffered a heart attack in 1974, a deal. If he would surrender his American citizenship and leave the country, they would not prosecute and he would not lose his and his family's sole source of support, his government pension. Afraid that he would not survive the ordeal of a trial, and seeing no way he

could raise the funds to take on the U.S. government, Rudolph signed an agreement on Nov. 28, 1983 on the OSI's terms. On March 27, 1984, he and his wife, Martha, left for West Germany.

Evidence? Witnesses?

Shortly after he arrived in West Germany, Arthur Rudolph formally renounced his American citizenship, as he had agreed to do. The West German government sent a note to the U.S. State Department protesting that it had sent a man to their country under a U.S. passport, then revoked it, and left Rudolph in Germany with no passport and no visa. Since he had given up his German citizenship to become an American, Arthur Rudolph now had no citizenship anywhere. He was a man without a country; what his longtime friend Hugh McInnish called an “American in exile.”

Had the story ended there, it would have been tragic enough—a hero of the greatest moment in the U.S. space program, forced to live out the rest of his life exiled from his friends, family, and adopted country. But that was not the end of the story.

Arthur Rudolph applied for German citizenship. On July 19, 1984, the German government asked the OSI for the evidence it had against him, for use in the investigation they were conducting concerning his citizenship application. More than nine months later, on April 26, 1985, the OSI finally responded, sending the German embassy in Washington a list of nine witnesses. The Attorney General of Hamburg, Harald Duhn, began an investigation.

What Duhn found was that four of the witnesses knew nothing about Rudolph, two gave unfavorable testimony which was rejected because they had no first-hand knowledge, two were mentally unfit to testify, and one gave favorable testimony. In March 1987, Rudolph was notified that there was no basis for prosecuting him in West Germany, and he was granted citizenship.

In his book, *An American in Exile*, Hugh McInnish states: “The OSI, in its so-called investigation, uncovered nothing about Rudolph that the government hasn't known for the last 40 years. Rudolph's entire case, in fact, can be summed in just two simple facts: 1) He committed no crimes, and 2) what is now known about him has been known since the end of the war.”



Author Marsha Freeman with Arthur Rudolph, the man who built the Saturn V rockets that took Americans to the Moon.

If, as in the John Demjanjuk case, the OSI *knew* Arthur Rudolph was innocent of the charges of war crimes from the beginning, why was this case ever pursued? There is no question that Rudolph was the first (and only the first) target of the OSI among the German space pioneers, because he was on in years, frail of health, and isolated, living in California, thousands of miles away from the large group of his retired German-American NASA colleagues, in Huntsville. The OSI took a gamble that it could coerce him into giving up without going to trial. But why were some of the most prominent men in the space program on a Justice Department hit list in the first place? As it has turned out, the German space pioneers were not alone.

Space and defense under attack

While Rudolph was suffering the humiliation of being called a Nazi in the international press, and public officials called for NASA to take back the Distinguished Service Medal it had granted him for his accomplishments in the Apollo program, NASA itself was being smeared with headlines about the Rudolph case which made reference to "NASA's Nazis." At the same moment, the head of the space agency himself was coming under attack by another arm of the U.S. Department of Justice.

On Dec. 2, 1985, James Beggs, then NASA administrator, along with three other former or current officials of the General Dynamics Corp., the nation's number-one aerospace defense contractor, were indicted on charges of violation of, and con-

spiracy to violate, Armed Services Procurement Regulations. On June 19, 1987, the U.S. Justice Department was forced to drop all of the charges against the company and the four defendants, when William Weld, head of the DOJ Criminal Division, could not explain how 82 boxes of documents that had been obtained by the defense under the Freedom of Information Act, had been "overlooked" by the prosecution.

The fact that Beggs and General Dynamics were exonerated did protect the defense industry from a precedent the Justice Department had hoped to set, which was to cripple the research and development efforts of private companies engaged in defense work. The cooperation between industry contractors and the military services, to preserve the nation's defense R&D capabilities, were the real target of the DOJ action.

But Beggs's exoneration did not come in time to prevent the near-destruction of the manned space program by the fatal launch of the Space Shuttle Challenger in sub-freezing weather conditions on Jan. 28, 1986, by the acting administrator who had been appointed when Beggs was forced to step down as NASA head.

But the Justice Department was just getting warmed up. On June 14, 1988, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Naval Investigative Services raided the Pentagon in "Operation Ill Wind." Once again, William Weld, a central figure in the "Get LaRouche" task force that had tried to eliminate Lyndon LaRouche's influence in strategic and economic policy matters in 1986, was in charge of this attack on U.S. de-

fense capabilities.

When all the dust had settled, very little corruption, or "white collar crime" had been uncovered, but the Pentagon raid had been dramatic and far reaching. Companies that were already laying off workers, shutting factories, and getting out of the defense business, thanks to President Reagan's efforts to "balance the budget," now saw that at the drop of hat, they could be in court on criminal charges.

Target: space science and astronauts

Since 1984, NASA has been engaged in a program to build a permanently manned space station in Earth orbit, for scientific research and exploration. Key in that endeavor is the research in life sciences done at the NASA Johnson Space Center (JSC). In December 1991, the FBI began an operation it called "Lightning Strike," supposedly to investigate complaints of fraud and corruption at JSC in Houston.

But the FBI was not trying to find criminal behavior on the part of NASA employees or industry contractors at the Center; it sent in an FBI agent to try to entrap innocent victims. In December 1993, Operation Lightning Strike ended when NASA astronaut David Wolf, who had been one of the targets of the undercover operation, appeared on the NBC nightly news to blow the cover off this "investigation." He stated that there was no predisposition to crime, or suspicion of such, on his part, yet the FBI agent had called him up nearly 20 times

to try to get him to accept a favor for influence peddling.

As in the Rudolph case, those eventually accused were coerced into making a deal with the Justice Department, pleading guilty to charges of which they were innocent, in order to avoid trials they could not afford. The only case that went to court from Lightning Strike, ended in a hung jury. The DOJ has stated that it will not try it again, because it does not think it can win the case. Similar to the Rudolph case, these civil service employees, working on a government salary, felt they could not take on the U.S. Justice Department.

From the dawn of the space age, there have been anti-American British think-tanks, such as the Tavistock Institute; pro-Soviet saboteurs, such as those who established the OSI; anti-industrial environmentalists and their followers, including the off-shoots of Prince Philip's World Wildlife Fund, who have had the U.S. space program in their sights. They recognized its ability to inspire an entire people, and to mobilize the nation's scientific and industrial capability.

Without such a capability, and that required to defend the nation from attacks of all kinds, the United States is in a weakened position from which to fight internationally for the American system, as opposed to the systems of the British Empire and the former Soviet Union.

Arthur Rudolph's accomplishments will be recorded in the history of this century. The accusations against him should be erased in exoneration.

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