
Stafford Museum adds (another) piece of history

Michael McChesney
Staff Reporter

The Stafford Air and Space Museum received yet another unique piece of history. A German V2 rocket engine is on permanent loan from the National Museum of the United States Air Force.

“We are very lucky to have this here at the museum,” said Museum Director Lynne Thurman. “There are a very limited number of these rockets still in existence. I think there are less than 15 in the country.”

The V2 rocket was originally developed by the Germans as a super weapon, by German rocket physicist and aeronautics engineer Wernher von Braun.

“Wernher von Braun was able to convince Hitler the V2 rocket would be the ultimate weapon that could change the outcome of the war,” Thurman said. “He was actually interested in getting into space but lacked funding.”

Thurman explained the rockets were built using money from the German government and slave labor. Around 20,000 concentration camp prisoners were forced to aid in the construction of the rockets. Sadly an estimated 9,000 of those slave laborers died during the construction process.

“This rocket engine has been restored and refurbished by Don Stroud over the last two years,” Thurman said. “It is completely authentic. It has several bullet holes in it and is stamped with a swastika and German eagle.”



Michael McChesney/WDN

The Stafford Air and Space Museum received a German V2 rocket engine from the Museum of the United States Air Force.

Hitler later placed a contract on the lives of Wernher von Braun and his family explained Thurman. This contract spurred von Braun to surrender himself to the Allies and in 1960, he became the first director of NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center. His works largely contributed to the U.S. being able to get to the moon.

• Please see **Stafford**, Page 8A

Stafford

• Continued from Page One

facility and V2 production plant,” Thurman said. “The U.S. military loaded rockets and information on a train and sent it to a U.S. base and then loaded a train full of rusty farm equipment to Russia.”

Thurman explained the capture of Peenamunde was part of Operation Paperclip and was designed specifically to capture the design of the V2 rocket.

The new rocket is just one of thousands of space and flight artifacts on display at the museum.

Many of the items on display are unique to the Stafford Museum.

“This AMU (astronaut maneuvering unit) is the only one in existence and we have it here in Weatherford,” Thurman said. “It was used for space walks but it burned so hot astronauts had to wear metal pants to keep their suits from burning.”

The two space suits worn by Tom Stafford will only be in the museum for a few more years Thurman explained.

The suits are on loan from the Smithsonian Institute but will soon be placed in cold storage to prevent further deterioration.