

**Transcript of an Oral History Interview in the collection of the
BREVARD COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION
308 Forrest Ave., Cocoa, FL 32922**

Nancy Yasecko: Now we're beginning. We're gonna talk about your origins. When were you born? Where were you born, and why did you come here?

Guenter Wendt: Okay. To start of with, I was born in 1923 in Berlin, Germany. And about 1925, my father immigrated to the United States [00:00:30] and eventually divorced my mother. I grew up and went to school in Berlin. I studied in Berlin until it was kind of interrupted during World War II when I was drafted in the Air Force and among other thing, I flew as Flight Engineer on night fighters.

So then after the end of the war, there was nothing for an aeronautical engineer to do in Germany because we were not allowed to build aircraft or anything of that nature. [00:01:00] So I took a potshot and thought maybe my father was still alive and well, who had become in between an American citizen. And last known address, I was lucky, he lived in Saint Louis and I made contact with him. So a couple of letters back and forth, eventually in '49, I was able to get a visa to leave Germany and come over to Saint Louis, where I right off hand started to look [00:01:30] for a job.

Now, my dad had actually spoken with Mr. McDonnell, who used to run McDonnell Aircraft, who used to own McDonnell Aircraft in Saint Louis. And he said, "Oh, yeah, we can always use a good aeronautical engineer." So I went for an interview, but then it turned out that the Navy turned it down because legally in '49 the United States, we are still at war with Germany. Plus, there was classified material and I couldn't get any classification. So, [00:02:00] I had to find some other jobs.

So applying for all kinds of jobs, I eventually wound up as a truck mechanic. So I worked a couple of years as a truck mechanic and then I got permission from a congressman to make licenses for aircraft and engine mechanics and instructor's ratings. So I made those ratings and worked then for Ozark Airlines. It was the beginning of Ozark Airlines as a matter of fact. When we started out to these five, [00:02:30] old DC-3s to fly out of Saint Louis. But it was very interesting, I became the ground instructor, and then in 1955 I became a citizen. And within three months, I was employed at McDonnell.

So needless to say, I got back into engineering again and after working on some military projects, I heard the rumor there was a civilian project called Project Mercury. So by that time, I was pretty tired of military things, [00:03:00] anyhow. So I found out who was running the program and so on and what they needed. So then I sold myself to them that they just had to have me in the program and lucky for me, I was accepted and then started out in the Mercury Program.

That was all of the time and we planned Mercury, that I became valuable [inaudible 00:03:25] with the Von Braun Team, because the first flight we were going [00:03:30] to make was the Mercury Redstone. Redstone being built by the

Army Arsenal in Huntsville, and we made rather frequent trips to Huntsville to coordinate. And eventually, Dr. Von Braun and myself became pretty good friends.

So in 1958, I came down to Cape Canaveral for a different program first on a little missile type job. And then I was asked if I [00:04:00] would like to move down here for Mercury. So it was four other people, we opened the McDonnell Operation in Cocoa Beach and it was quite an adventure to be here in '59.

It's a matter of fact, there wasn't much to be had. We had a two lane road going to the Cape and if you wanted to make a 7 o'clock starting time, you better be by 5 o'clock on the road because it was bumper to bumper traffic. And we [00:04:30] had the old Polaris Motel, that's when you stopped in the morning and from then on, you could just about walk faster than you could drive. But these were the beginning days and there wasn't much to be had. We had the greatest attraction was the Starlite Motel, which had a fantastic bar there that showed some of these pictures that you light up, you know, with black lights and so on. It eventually burnt down.

But for the first month [00:05:00] we all stayed in motels and then later on, I rented a house on Merritt Island and eventually bought the house I'm living in now. But in these old days it was great. We could drive on the beach. You didn't see many people. You could fish from the beach and all this. So that was a pretty good time we had, except there wasn't much in the line of entertainment.

We had one old movie house called [00:05:30] The Barn Theater and if you wanted some live entertainment, the best thing you could have was on Friday nights, they had next to The Barn a little store that had weekly auctions. And this was a place where really, they were selling snake oil and whatever you can envision, they were selling at the auction. It was really good entertainment.

It was also educational because what frequently was auctioned off were furniture sent on from Air Force personnel [00:06:00] that were transferred. And you could study things, and interesting enough, the items that went for the highest price were always kitchen sets because women would get in love with a certain kitchen set and bid higher than they could buy it from Sears and Roebuck out of the catalog. So it was really a interesting road there and it was our one and only entertainment really we had, unless we wanted to go to Orlando, which was quite a bit away from us.

[00:06:30] So, needless to say, we also, what they called the good old days, were good old long hours. Twelve and fourteen hour days were not uncommon and you had to frequently just make do with things that you had. For instance, I remember one time we were running on Mercury and Redstone pad and was already 6 o'clock, 7 o'clock at night and we had about another hour's [00:07:00] worth of tests to run and it became decision time.

If we shut down, it takes us two hours to power down, then send the people out. We lose another two hours for them to come back and then two hours to power up. So I sent out a trial balloon and thought maybe all the engineers and all technicians would be willing to stay if we get them some sandwich and some coffee. So they agreed to do that, so I called at that time Bernard Surf and has sent me a hundred ham and cheese sandwiches and two urns of [00:07:30] coffee to the south gate and we picked it up and we actually saved a lot of time by us keeping ongoing. And at that time, it was also very easy to do because the company gave us a free hand, with other words, I could pay for the ham sandwich with petty cash.

So these were the early beginnings when we had time at a premium. As a matter of fact, it got so bad that Dr. Debus [Dr. Kurt Debus] installed [00:08:00] some foldable beds in the building right next to the block house. There were, when it wasn't time, you know you had sometimes you got off at 8:00, 9 o'clock and had to be back in at 5:00 and you figured it takes you two hours to get home, it was much easier to just stay there and sleep. Except these bed had a nasty habit. If you rolled toward the wall, that's where they were hinged and the spring would fold you up right into the wall. In [00:08:30] the middle of the night, you would wake up, you'd say, "Oh, what happened to me? I mean you know, I'm completely in a box." But, it was better than, you know, not sleeping at all.

So these were the early days when we spent what we call now the good old days but what actually were really long hours. I mean 80 hour weeks were not uncommon for us, seven days a week.

Nancy Yasecko: And you couldn't tell your family what you were doing, or ...?

Guenter Wendt: No, with us, we were able [00:09:00] to tell them pretty much what we were doing since we were not a classified program. But it was at that time still where everything at the Cape was classified and if you recall the early 60s and so on, I think the average was three out of five missiles launched used to blow up. So people would go out and get all kinds of schemes to find out when would we launch.

And I remember one thing was easy, right at the Port Canaveral they had a camera station and frequently we would go [00:09:30] out and watch out when he opens the shutter on the front, we said, "Aha, now it goes." And then just to be scrubbed again and try again. But with Mercury and so on, this was pretty open because like it was a civilian program. We could tell them pretty much what we were doing. So these was the old days when we were trying to get the Mercury and Gemini off the pads.

Nancy Yasecko: You met the astronauts, you became friends with them I suppose.

Guenter Wendt: Oh, [00:10:00] yeah. I had very close contact with all of them because, see I was in charge of the preparation of the spacecraft itself. So the way my job description

actually read, that any and all activity in and around the spacecraft and its attending GSE had to go through me. And I worked through established channels, you know, in order to get the work done. I would interface with the engineers and the supervisors and the inspectors, but essentially I pretty much controlled [00:10:30] what we used to call the white room.

This is when John Glenn eventually, as you can see one of the pictures on the wall there, he hung a title on me. He said, "You're the Pad Fuhrer because you kind of run it like a dictator." I always told him, "It's not really the case, I mean, it's pretty much a democracy. Do what I tell you or get off the pad." And that became pretty much later on, the story when Pete Conrad, [00:11:00] he was asked once by Neil Armstrong, he says, "How do you get along with this guy?" You know, and Pete says, "Oh, it's simple. Just do what he tells you." Armstrong said, "What can he do? I throw a switch whenever I want to." He says, "Oh, nothing. He steps on your fingers." It wasn't that bad.

But we used to have many, many stories, you know, that we worked together because I would hear what they complain about. What could be changed, [00:11:30] what should be changed and so on. And needless to say, getting everything ready. At that time, the Mercury spacecraft was not the most comfortable thing to be in. Even they had couches, which were molded to their own body. But for four or five hours laying on your back with your legs up high, you know, that was not the greatest thing in the world. So--

Also, what happened is that it started to be picked up rather frequently [00:12:00] with the press to get to the astronauts interviews, interviews. So when they wanted to get away from things they would just disappear and come over to my house where [inaudible 00:12:12] at that time I had built this room we are in here right now. And they could do whatever they wanted to. Either they were at my house or with another fellow down the road, Jim Bishop. And we were the two people that made astronauts or their families disappear because it can get pretty hairy [00:12:30] when you have a whole group of reporters, nothing to do but trying to get an exclusive interview or find out something the other guys don't know. So frequently we had to escort, take the families from the onslaught of reporters.

Nancy Yasecko: There's a lot of serious work going on, but I guess there was some humor at the same time?

Guenter Wendt: Yeah, what happened is, you know, when you work these long hours, after a while you realize unless you can [00:13:00] laugh at yourself once in a while, you're going to go off on the deep end because the responsibilities are such that you make a mistake and you blow yourself to pieces.

So especially where I was, when we were putting the flight crews in, there was nobody around for three and a half miles, like in Apollo, except my group, you know, and then the astronauts. So needless to say, I spent many, many a night

just [00:13:30] thinking what can happen and how can I prevent it from happening.

So we found a way to relax every once in a while by playing what we called, what Wally Schirra really came up with, 'I Gotcha'. I Gotcha was something you did to your fellow worker or astronaut, but it had to be something that hadn't been done before. It had to be unique. And went to quite some great extents to things that happened to [00:14:00] us, let me tell you. Luckily we were at that time, it was pretty neat, because very few of these stories hit the newspapers. So they respected our privacy there. That and we normally weren't talking about it anyhow, but it was the two big 'I Gotcha's,' you know.

Just to give an indication of how far we went, Pete Conrad one night, when he came out of the trainer, he went ahead and outside the training building he found a four foot black snake. So he broke in my desk center drawer and stuck it in. [00:14:30] The next morning there were six of these guys standing around just waiting to see what happened when I opened my center drawer. So needless to say, when I opened my center drawer there was a real mad black snake and I backed up and tore the telephone right out of the wall, you know, and they said, "Aha, gotcha."

See, you always get even then, though. So when he had run to an interview, a TV interview on camera at the headquarters building when he was late, so he jumped in front of the cameras [00:15:00] putting his coat on. That's when he found out I had the sleeves sewn shut. So, see this is how you get even.

I mean we had lots of those things that we did. But you had to know the dividing line between what is funny and what is insulting, and luckily I can't even think of one incident where the line was overstepped, you know. It was many, many interesting things were done, but it always was new and one of a kind.

Nancy Yasecko: [00:15:30] All the work you were doing at that point was very much pioneering and new. It hadn't been done before and that all of the procedure manuals hadn't been written yet.

Guenter Wendt: We are talking about going back to the old days where everything was new. As a matter of fact, in these days, we used to freely trade between contractors. The one guy says, "Do you have a sheet of aluminum? I need some of this." And [00:16:00] the guy says, "Yeah, could you help me some fittings of this kind of nature?" "Yeah, come on over you can get some of those." And it was rather a great camaraderie between even individual contractors.

And like you say, procedures, they were rather small, I remember in my document, I still have the launch con from Shepard, which was about 40, 50 pages. Now when you compare, with the five volumes right now off a shuttle launch, that's [00:16:30] quite a long way in between. We also made many

mistakes. You know that you learn from your mistakes, because everything was new but, we survived and we learned from our mistakes.

So the main thing was, as a matter of fact, frequently I have been asked, which was the most important launch in your activities and interesting enough, it was not the landing on the moon but, the most important one, the most remarkable one was Shepard's flight, because when [00:17:00] he went to fly, that was a time when you still saw three or four out of five missiles blow up. And the story was, "Oh, there goes another nose cone." You know. You build another nose cone and you try again. But, all of a sudden you realize, "Hey wait a minute, there's a guy in it, somebody you know, and everybody else knows and you can't just say, Hey, let it go, you know, we'll get another one."

As a matter of fact, there was a little story and there was a funny. [00:17:30] I used to belong to the Presbyterian Church on the Beach and John Glenn was a Presbyterian and one year, before Glenn was very well known, we had the young people staying at the church for two weeks, you know, for a camp-type thing. And they asked if we would give them a speech in the evening. So I asked John, I said, "John, you want to come along. We have some young people, you know last year of high school or first year of college." So he says, "Yes." The way it turned out he was a little late, though I said, "Okay, my friend [00:18:00] John, who works for Langley," I mean, at that time, NASA was still at Langley, "He'll join me a little bit later." But I didn't them the last name.

So then we talked and then finally John showed up, I introduced him. I said, "This is John." I said, "He works for NASA at Langley." And we let it go as such. Then I thought, "Okay, let me see what happen when we get a little bit in the interesting side." So I asked the question. I said, "You know, the way missiles explode," and things like that, " [00:18:30] What do you think is going to happen, or what should we do if one of the seven doesn't make it back?"

Well, the kids thought about it a while, then one boy said, "Oh," He says, "That isn't that bad. I mean, take another one, you've got seven of them, don't you?" After he said that, I said, "Yeah, as a matter fact, now let's see how one of them would feel." I said, "You know, I didn't give you the name, but John's last name is Glenn." And I said, "He is one of the seven. Why don't you ask him what he thinks about that?" [00:19:00] and the guy really recovered fast. He said, "Oh, oh, where's a hole I can climb into?" But we did so frequently, in other words, to go out and interface with young people and so on. And you could get some interesting stories out of it.

Now needless to say, that in between, the paperwork increased tremendously. But so did the complexity of the missiles and so on. But I still think even today, there's too much paperwork. [00:19:30] In the early days, you had an electrical engineer and you said, "Okay, go ahead and apply electrical power." And a few minutes later, the guy would come back and say "The electrical power has been applied."

Now, you go ahead and he says, "Okay, on panel R12, throw switch XXX to the on position. Then go to panel so and so, do this and this." It's ridiculous. I mean, we have to assume that the people know what they're doing and let 'em go ahead with it. [00:20:00] So that's private opinion again, you know. So these were the so called old days.

But I interfaced with all the astronauts and it was rather interesting. Each one was a individual. None of them were like the others.

Nancy Yasecko: How would you characterize each of them?

Guenter Wendt: I mean, if you want to go through the whole list, I mean, they were naturally ... Shepard [Alan Shepard] was [00:20:30] one of the most technically knowledgeable one. I mean he was fast on the draw. He could, when we called the abort sequence, he could run this thing off in such a fast time that nobody could even follow him. And he was very, very technically inclined.

Gus [Gus Grissom] was a little bit more on the quiet side, you know. Then, Glenn [John Glenn] was really the Boy Scout if you want to call it that way, because [00:21:00] he always had in mind, "I'm in the limelight and I have to represent the United States no matter what I do." As a matter of fact, one time he, his wife and Scott Carpenter was a spec-op pilot, and Scott's mother, we had dinner. I think it was the Holiday Inn or some restaurant on the beach. And a boy came up with a picture, shoved it in front of John. He says, "Here, sign this." Now, during dinner. I was tempted to tell him what he could do with the [00:21:30] picture, but John just signs the picture and gave it back to him and the guy didn't even say thank you. I mentioned to John, I said, "You know I don't think I would have been that tolerant." And he just looked at me and says, "Hey, that you have to expect that, it goes with the job." So he was really very quiet on that one.

And naturally, Wally [Wally Schirra], he was the one who was always thinking of ways to enliven the [00:22:00] whole team, and so he was a great practical joker. So the same way, I mean, with Gordon Cooper. Gordon and these guys could always come up with something you hadn't seen before.

As a matter of fact at one time, Dee O'Hara, she was the astronauts' nurse, in the crew quarters with Dr. Douglas who was the astronaut physician. And she complained that Wally was always slow, not even providing the urine sample that she needed to have. [00:22:30] So she made that official complaint and the next morning, in front of her office there was a five gallon jug with a greenish brown liquid in it, with foam on top and still warm, you know, and it says, "Wally's urine sample for one week."

So needless to say, I mean, it was always a lot of back and forth, and all of these guys used to run the Corvettes, which was pretty neat; except Cooper offered [00:23:00] me once a ride from the Mercury, from the Atlas pad and it was a very neat U-turn curve and I think we didn't use more than two wheels to get around

it. I told him, I said, "You know, I'd rather fly this thing, I mean, the spacecraft, than drive with you, because that's more dangerous than anything else." But then Cooper was always, he wanted to race cars. He did that until they finally levied the boom on him and said, "You couldn't do that anymore." They were pretty much individuals.

Nancy Yasecko: Did Carpenter [Scott Carpenter], he had a Corvette too?

Guenter Wendt: [00:23:30] Yeah, I mean they all ... See Jim Rathman used to furnish all of them with Corvettes and they were always gray at that time. They frequently got chased by the Cocoa Beach Police. But that was just, it went with the territory, you know? So--

Nancy Yasecko: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Did they bring their families with them to Cocoa Beach?

Guenter Wendt: No, the families would come pretty much after full launch or when they were staying here for longer durations, you know, they would come. [00:24:00] But other than that, the families were not always here, no. They would more or less come to one or two days and then go back home to Houston. Except for launch, then they would come and show up, you know.

Now it was different when we went into the Apollo Program, because then we had the four week quarantine where even people like myself, I was a primary contact, and we were the only ones that could make physical contact with the astronauts. And then the wives [00:24:30] would come and we had a beach house, which is still there on the beach, where they could spend some time together and things like that, because they weren't allowed to leave that.

And that's where the fish story comes in. When they weren't allowed to leave, I sometimes would drive up there to the NASA causeway and just pick them up in my boat and we'd go water skiing or we'd go fishing and things like that, which was legal as long as we didn't make contact with any outside person, though it got to be a hassle. I didn't like that primary contact, [00:25:00] because when you're called in and said you had a cold, you had to come in. They swabbed your throat and then did this and that. The cure always was just about killing you, but then they wanted to make sure they didn't have any bacteria on the flight crews. So that was ...

There were only about 70 or 80 people that were for each flight, were primary contacts and the families would then sometimes come down and stay a week or two.

Nancy Yasecko: So you got to know their families.

Guenter Wendt: Got to know their families. As a matter of fact, I made it [00:25:30] a habit in the Apollo program, I would always give them a tour of the spacecraft, you know. Once we were shortly before launch, to see where their husbands would spend

their time and I think it made a great hit with them because they were much more satisfied with seeing the spacecraft, you know, and seeing what goes on.

Just like the same thing on the Mercury at one time, Ann Glenn was asking me, "Could you actually guarantee her a safe return of John?" I said, "Ann, anybody who will guarantee you that is lying [00:26:00] because there's nobody who can guarantee a safe return." I said, "The only guarantee we can give you is that at the time we launch, that if I know of something, which would be detrimental for the flight, I can stop it. But other than that, I could not guarantee a safe return." And they more or less bought into it.

Nancy Yasecko: On the last tape we started talking about the seven astronauts and there were two more to talk about. What about Carpenter and Slayton?

Guenter Wendt: Now, Carpenter was actually [00:26:30] a quiet one. He was a back-up for John Glenn and he worked with him extensively. And he always looked to me like the fellow who always has bad luck, you know. I mean, he had an accident and I think he broke his wrist or did something. But he was a very, very pleasure to work with.

Now, Slayton, especially after he was disqualified [00:27:00] so to speak, you know, because of his heart murmur and he became the director of the astronaut office, it kind of became known that he was running the show and that he could decide who was going to fly next. So you never wanted to cross up good old Deke. But here again, I think he was very, very disappointed, you know that he couldn't go and it was until we flew the ASTP [00:27:30] that he finally got to go.

I think possibly what the medics there did to him was something that they just didn't know enough about that time, you know, because the heart murmur that they were saying later on, says, "Oh that shouldn't have disqualified him in the first place." But you realize when you put that much of your life into it, it's a great disappointment if somebody says, "No, you can't go."

So he was--oh, we got a sea [00:28:00] cow in the canal right now, sorry about that. He was pretty much the man who was assigning astronauts and trying to keep them in line and all that jazz.

Nancy Yasecko: Okay. Let's talk a bit about the Race for Space.

Guenter Wendt: Now, the race as it turned out to be, it really didn't get started until Sputnik was in orbit. And the sad part about [00:28:30] it was that it was more or less a political race rather than a technical race, because way before that the Army team, under Von Braun, had actually the capability to launch and explore before Sputnik, but somewhere along the line it was decided that the Navy with their Vanguard Program would be the first one to launch a satellite. And only after several [00:29:00] failures of the Vanguard was permission given to launch the Explorer 1. Now this could have been avoided, but again, it was decision, which was not

necessarily a technical one. But needless to say, everybody jumped on it and said, "Okay, we are now in a space race."

And Russians came up with a pretty good show. They always beat us, you know. Man in space, woman in space, a dog in space, [00:29:30] and so on. The only thing they couldn't beat us in was going to the moon.

So I guess sometimes you get from the technical aspect into the political aspect and that's hard for technical people to comprehend because there are too many ramifications in it. But we made a big hit in the world with John Glenn's flight because we were so open, see. Everybody could see it. Everybody knew [00:30:00] about it and we didn't hide anything. That made up for quite a great deal in taking the glamor away from the Russians by showing, "Okay, we are wide open. You can see our rockets. You can see our astronauts. You can see what we do. We show you when we launch." So that came in pretty handy then.

Nancy Yasecko: They didn't do that.

Guenter Wendt: No, they were still extremely secret about all their activities, and as a matter of fact, until glasnost [00:30:30] came about, they still didn't permit regular visitors to their launch facilities and so on. So--

Nancy Yasecko: There was the sense though, that we might lose the race through the 60s.

Guenter Wendt: No it came pretty close because Kennedy had said in this decade and we were already in the middle of '69, so there were finally some decisions made [00:31:00] to go take a step, you know. One of the big, I guess, all the public successful steps, was the Borman flight, you know, when he read from the scripture there, which brought up another interesting little side story that came up.

And it was after he read this, a Japanese reporter here from the motel in Cocoa Beach called NASA and says, "You know, [00:31:30] I didn't quite get whatever he said. Is there any handout that we can have to get the correct wording?" The NASA guy, being on the ball, he says, "Are you in a motel?" The guy says, "Yes, I am." And he says, "Look in your drawer, you'll find a little red book that says, "Gideon Bible"." He goes, "Yeah, I have it." He says, "Now look on page so and so, on the Genesis." The guy found the spot, he goes, "This is what he said." "Yes, this is what he said." Guy said, "Thank you, you NASA folks think of everything." That was [00:32:00] one of the little stories you know, where we have a once in a while get a laugh out of. True happenings, yeah.

Nancy Yasecko: There was a German community here in this area. Were you a part of that?

Guenter Wendt: Now, actually not really a community per se. I mean, they were, Cocoa Beach wasn't that big and Merritt Island wasn't that big but there were several Germans that originally came down with Von Braun and so on, and then came from Huntsville to here and they lived in [00:32:30] that area. But there wasn't really

that great of a community affairs going on because everybody was really too busy to do things. So there wasn't much what you could call a community per se. but everybody knew everybody, that's no question about it. But now, quite a large number of them have passed away by now.

Nancy Yasecko: [00:33:00] The program owes a lot to the Germans who came here. With Von Braun and Kurt Debus.

Guenter Wendt: Yes, I think there was, they contributed quite heavily to it and the development of the rockets because the big rockets, you know, the one we used for Apollo were actually designed by people from the original Von Braun team. [00:33:30] Then the spaceport putting it together here was Debus's doing. So, yes, there were quite a few contributions I think folks made. And the other thing was that Von Braun had a marvelous way of handling congress to get money approved for the programs.

As a matter of fact, I frequently when I talk to people, I give them two examples of where [00:34:00] the fight started was. For instance, there was one time when they were budget hearing for NASA, there was Proxmire who said, "We are pursuing a way to go to outer space to see if there's life anywhere in the universe." He says, "This is a futile attempt because there's none." And the NASA leader of the budget team said, "Senator, you also need to consider, before 1491, nobody believed there was an America [00:34:30] because nobody ever had heard of it, and therefore there was none."

And one of my other famous stories from Von Braun, I picked up from him himself one time. He went to a budget hearing and they said, "You know in our age of computers we should really eliminate the costly man in space program because we can do everything with computers." And Von Braun had really a nice prepared answer for that. He says, "Ladies and [00:35:00] gentlemen, you got to understand the best computer in the world is the human brain and it's the only piece of equipment that can be mass produced by unskilled labor." He again, he got his money for the program. He had a good, good way of doing it.

I think in a way, reflecting for myself, I believe the many, many changes in the leadership that have taken [00:35:30] place over the last few years, you know, reflect on it, that we don't have as strong a leadership as we had and that evidently penalizes the program because today you can go on the street and says, "Okay, who is the head of the space station project?" People even living in this community don't know. So it gets into the political end of it, you know, and [00:36:00] it's a shame because in my line of thinking, a nation that deletes the research and development programs is a nation that will lose it's economic standing in the world.

I think in a way you can see it in Great Britain, when they became socialistic and everything was state-owned and they cut back on research and development, they no longer became a world power. So I'm a strong believer [00:36:30] in funding research and development because this is where our future lies.

Nancy Yasecko: People talk about spinoffs from space and I think what you're talking about is the greatest spinoff, just the quest for knowledge and always pushing the limits of what we can do.

Guenter Wendt: Well, as a matter of fact, you know the cliché is always, "Oh, yeah, they gave us a Teflon frying pan." Which is ridiculous because the greatest [00:37:00] achievements are not just, they are, I mean, in this type of thing, but all the medical things. Demilitarization. Your communication equipment. And all these things that, as a matter of fact, our whole computer industry had greatly profited from the research and development. We couldn't have been the number one producer in the world of computers if it hadn't been for the space program.

These are the spinoffs and they said, "Now why would you send money to the moon?" We never sent money to the moon. It always was [00:37:30] staying right here on Earth. We never spent it on the moon. So that's the reason I say we need to go ahead and spend moneys on projects and I'd like to see more Earth oriented projects that if I would favor a item that could be generated, would be a free, have a breakthrough that lets us transmit electrical energy without wires. We could really [00:38:00] all run electric cars and heat our homes with electricity, no pollution, nothing, if we learn. Because there's a lot of electrical power to be had, right in this space. And if we learn how to conduct it, or how to transport it, without wires, that would be an achievement that would be really a jump in mankind. So there are many, many projects that I could think of that could be done, which [00:38:30] would benefit mankind tremendously.

Nancy Yasecko: You mentioned something that really has a lot to do with the ecology, trying to reduce pollution. There's still a lot of wildlife out around the Cape. Did you run into any wild creatures in your ...?

Guenter Wendt: Oh, it got to be a rather a big news and there are two things. I came home one night around Pad 3437 [00:39:00] and to the right and left of the road were 37 deer just standing looking at you, and you had to worry about it, that they didn't jump across when you were passing them.

The other one, when you talk about wildlife, had a interesting thing and that was again, it was ... As a matter of fact, it was in the early days of the shuttle program. I was working. I had the safety organization for Rockwell at this time, the operational end of it. [00:39:30] And one of our lady inspectors told me that on second shift when she went to her car in the parking lot, there was a 16 foot alligator between two cars.

Needless to say, it kind of upset somebody, including myself and I decreed that, "As of this afternoon, we will have lights in the parking lot." Which they said it couldn't be done, but then when I mentioned that, "If they don't have lights, [00:40:00] there will be no workers." Then, surprisingly, by 2 o'clock, there were all kinds of portable lights there because can you imagine walking in a parking lot and meeting a 16 foot alligator? So, yes, they had lots of wildlife out there.

As a matter of fact, close to Pad A, there's a undercut on the road where you can see the biggest trout you have ever seen in your life. I mean, 10, 12 pound trout just standing there, except you aren't allowed to fish. [00:40:30] So yes, there's lots of wildlife and it's pretty much what ... As a matter of fact, they have to get rid of it, transfer some of it out. Because you probably read the stories about the wild hogs, you know, that uproot the orange trees and things like that. And one fellow worker that worked with me, he got a brand new car and two weeks later at night time, he hit one of those hogs, wiping out the whole front end of his car.

So there are [00:41:00] many, many, many animals. As a matter of fact, what they do is I think they have like a park service there that collects the dead rabbits in the morning and feeds them to the-throws them out for the alligators because they are just laying on the road. They have a rather large number of deer out there. As I said, it becomes a danger to the public, because if you drive at night and one jumps in front of you, it comes right through the windshield.

Nancy Yasecko: I know there are a lot of birds that come through in the winter.

Guenter Wendt: [00:41:30] Yeah, there are lots of birds because they got lots of waters there, you know. It's an ideal place. Same way with the eagles, you know that eagle nest that there that is on State Road 3? The eagles come back every year.

Nancy Yasecko: Have you seen them?

Guenter Wendt: Oh yeah, I've seen them many times. Yeah, you can see the young ones and later on they'll sit on top and not flying yet, but evidently the mother pair comes back. And the nest itself is something like several hundred pounds now, they think it's maybe 400 [00:42:00] pounds. Because they add, every year they add to it. So there's lots and lots of birds.

But interesting enough, even when you see close to the launch pad, the pelicans and so on when we launch, they just fly off and come right back. It doesn't bother them a bit. So once, we were worried about it might disturb them. Evidently they get used to it really quick like. No, there's a lot of wildlife out there.

Nancy Yasecko: [00:42:30] Sometime they used to call looking for rockets bird watching, around here when people didn't know when launches were.

Guenter Wendt: Oh yeah. Yeah I know, they used to call the missiles birds, you know, I mean rocket. But at one time, I mean, I remember we were the highest in the nation here in Merritt Island. It had the largest number of species. It was seven, I guess maybe, 10 years ago, when they count the birds around December and I think here on Merritt Island we had over 220 some odd different species [00:43:00] of birds here. It has decreased now because there's much more build up, but there used to be lots of wildlife around here.

As a matter of fact, like I mentioned also, when I was looking and talking to you, there was a manatee swimming in the canal.

Nancy Yasecko: It's interesting to see the old and the new together out there. I guess when you first came here, the Cape had some houses on it.

Guenter Wendt: Oh yeah, there were quite a few houses at the Cape and then also there, at the [00:43:30] Kennedy Space Center. I mean the whole area where the launch pads are. There were lots of houses, there was a whole subdivision. And they moved all the houses, some of them they kept for a while, you know, as storage space, and then they moved them all except that beach house. The beach house is the only one that's still standing there that's being used, as a matter of fact.

Nancy Yasecko: It's still being used?

Guenter Wendt: Oh yeah, still being used. As a matter of fact, they have a conference room there and sometimes before flight, you know, the crews get together and have a small conference talking about what goes on. That beach house is still [00:44:00] there. There's refrigerator, a microwave oven and you can have some food there. Whatever you need.

Okay, you have another question you might want to ask?

Nancy Yasecko: Well, I'm interested in asking you about mosquitoes.

Guenter Wendt: Oh, mosquitoes, at that time, they were a little bit on the heavy side. As a matter of fact, we used to get the spray plane over here and the trucks that do the fogging, which helped a great deal, [00:44:30] but then just as self-defense, a lot of the individual homeowners, we had a little gadget you put on the muffler of your lawnmower and at the airport, you could get for free, the material that you run through the lawnmower muffler, which made a heck of a big cloud and you could get rid of some of the mosquitoes. But it was rather interesting over at the Cape, I mean at night time there was no way you could be outside [00:45:00] without mosquito spray.

Plus the other fact was, I remember in the very early days, in Hangar S where we were first working with the Mercury spacecraft, they had these trenches where they had the electrical cable in it. The standard word was, if you pull on a cable and it pulls back, leave it go, it is a snake, because there used to be quite a few black snakes in the cable trays and if you pulled on one, you ought to put it back real quick like.

[00:45:30] Plus rattlesnakes. I mean, rattlesnakes we have out there too, and quite a large number of things. So, yes, you had lots of natural wildlife out there and the mosquitoes were not the ones you really wanted to have because it got to a point where in the evening you really had to juice yourself up with mosquito repellent just to make it, which didn't do too well because heat, humidity and that

spray on you, that was kind of [00:46:00] not too pleasant. But that's all you had, I mean you couldn't do much about it.

Nancy Yasecko: Did the mosquitoes ever get into the machinery? I guess this was not ...

Guenter Wendt: No, mosquitoes didn't bother us too much, but we had rabbits and other animals that would eat the insulation of the cables in the wire trays and frequently we would miss electrical signals and find out that either the rabbits or some other creatures [00:46:30] had eaten through the insulation on the cables. That was not too unfrequent out there. You had to worry about this.

In the spacecraft itself, we didn't have too much to worry about. One time we did have some ants in a Gemini spacecraft. Somewhere along the line they got in and we had to actually bait them to get out of them, because the last thing you want to have is a couple of ants keeping you company there at night in a spacecraft [00:47:00] 160 miles up in space. So that wasn't too bad. No.

The other one was that on Pad 19, we had a red owl that took up residence way up high and would provide us with some drippings and some left over bones and things like that, which we didn't appreciate. So--but then again, I mean, it's their territory.

Nancy Yasecko: As well as the wildlife, [00:47:30] you had to contend with the weather and there's quite often storms and lightning out of ...

Guenter Wendt: Yes, now, yes, these are all things that are given and you just have to make the best you can. As a matter of fact, when you talk about wildlife and ...

One before the Mercury Program, was on another program where we had a little sonnet rocket and every night at 5 o'clock, we would get a family of skunks come in and eat all the bugs that had fallen down from the electric [00:48:00] lights, you know, during the night. Whenever they moved in, we moved out because it only took them 10 minutes, except one time there was a Air Force colonel in there and he was trying to see how secure we were and he snuck in and he met the skunk. Needless to say, they wouldn't let him get in his car to go back to party, they put him in the back of a pickup truck. But this is all natural wildlife so you take it as it comes along.

[00:48:30] You mentioned one other thing about the social life, you know we had some very good German restaurant here and that led up to another old Mercury story. During the Atlas Program.

At that time, Scott, you need to understand in Project Mercury, the astronauts were on 5 PSI, 100% oxygen air, so to speak, okay? And it was closed [00:49:00] loop system. In other words, air was always be regenerated, some oxygen added to it and some CO2 absorbed by a CO2 absorber, but not much else. It wasn't very highly sophisticated.

So one time, during a test, when you listen to the headset, the next thing you heard a noise like "Oh." Oh, everybody kind of set up, they didn't know where it was coming from. We had another one like that, "Oh." And after it occurred a third [00:49:30] time, they I guess, by that time, the doctors in the blockhouse, they stood on their chairs and said, "Scott what is wrong? What's wrong? We have a problem? We have to terminate the test?" He says, "No." He says, "But it's the last time I'm gonna go to that German restaurant and have beer, sauerkraut and beans." So needless to explain as to what happened inside his suit.

Nancy Yasecko: There was a couple of [00:50:00] years, I think they did a kind of an Oktoberfest in Cocoa Beach. I don't know if you remember.

Guenter Wendt: At one time, yes there was an individual who actually would roast a half or whole steer on this pit. They really had a big one going. It was actually a German restaurant and this guy, he put up a big tent and brought all the things and he actually roasted a whole steer on it, you know. [00:50:30] It was a pretty good imported beer and all this jazz. They had some good things going, but later on, I think he elaborated too much and I think eventually he went broke on it. Because you know, when you have a good thing going, you got to know when to stop and I guess he just enlarged, enlarged, enlarged until it got too big.

But the other thing socially what we did too, is after each flight, I would arrange [00:51:00] for the launch crews and their wives to have a party where the flight crew would come in and tell us what really happened on the flight. So we would have a dinner at one of the restaurant where we had actually guards guarding the entrances to keep news people and other people out of it because it was the only way we could have them really telling us what was happening on the flight. And needless to say, nobody ever divulged to the press what was said. It was pretty neat and it was a good morale booster too because, you know, [00:51:30] when you have that much free time donated to you, you have to give something back to the people too, and that was one way to do that, to reward them for all of their efforts.

Nancy Yasecko: Right after a launch, everybody would be up and often go somewhere. I guess.

Guenter Wendt: Oh yeah, we had big parties and it sometimes got out of hand. People were thrown in pools and things like that. Yes, we had some real dandy launch parties after that. They were great.

As a matter of fact, [00:52:00] for Glenn's flight, there was a bakery here and he had made a four foot tall Mercury spacecraft out of cake, except we scrubbed about four or five times and that cake got pretty old after a while. But just one of those things, you know, we never knew when we were launching. So that was one of those things, but we did have nice launch parties, yes.

Nancy Yasecko: Where would you go? [00:52:30] What places?

Guenter Wendt: Normally we would pick a motel that had a swimming pool and so on and we would have it outside, you know, to accommodate all of the people. As a matter of fact, what would happen is most of the contractors, like General Dynamic for the Atlas, you know, or Martin Marietta for the Gemini, they would, each contractor would have their own parties and you would go from one party to another.

And for the parties I [00:53:00] mentioned, where we had dinner parties, we had them, let's say, at the Cape Colony Inn, which is now a different name. Wherever, there was a place sufficient to entertain about 300 people. As a matter of fact, on the last Gemini flight, where I got this one check you see there, the one for one million Deutsche Mark for unemployment compensation, courtesy of Lovell and who was the other one? [00:53:30] Aldrin. When we had that party, at the end, after they give us their story about what happened on their flight, a couple of deputy sheriffs arrested him.

And after everything was silent, they wondered what happened. Why would they be arrested? Then the deputy sheriffs let them know there was an individual who claimed to have passed a worthless check. In the background, it was I with my big check, I said, "I'd like to cash it now." So these were the little things we used to do to lighten up our [00:54:00] daily life.

One the things that happened to me is you see the really big check I got here, and the reason I got it is since I was spacecraft oriented, it means I was taking care of the spacecraft. Mercury and Gemini were built by McDonnell Aircraft in Saint Louis. The next program, Apollo, was built by North American. So they told me that I would now be out of a job and to tide me over, they handed me a check made out [00:54:30] to myself for one million Deutsche Marks drawn on the Bank of Lovell and Aldrin and you'll notice one thing is here, the date changed, because November 9, November 10, November 11, because twice we scrubbed before they actually went. See this nice little check was handed to me and I had it.

Then, except after the flight, when the crew came back to tell us what happened on the flight and we had a dinner with all the families [00:55:00] of the launch crews at the now it's a skating rink here on Merritt Island, after they delivered their speech, two deputies arrested them and after everybody was aghast and wanted to know what really happened to them. Then the deputies explained to them that they were arrested because they were passing a worthless check. Though in the background then I held up my check, I said, "I'd like to have my check cashed at this time." That's the reason you have one of those things again, [00:55:30] you know. A check, and I still keep it as a souvenir.

Nancy Yasecko: What are those other numbers in the corners? Do they relate to anything?

Guenter Wendt: Actually yes, these actually, Gemini launch vehicle, Sawyer number 62. See these were actually the ones that were and these were the spacecraft 12, the official drawing number was 52-3100. So they used all these numbers in one way or another. [00:56:00] So it's a neat souvenir to have.

Okay, now what you are seeing here is a trophy trout. Now the story on this one is rather interesting because during the Apollo days, the crews were quarantined for about one month prior to the flight and only a limited number of persons were permitted to make physical contact with them called Primary Contacts.

[00:56:30] So since they were confined to crew quarters, they couldn't leave KSC unless under very strict circumstances. What we could do is, I was permitted to drive with my boat all the way up to the NASA Causeway and we would go and go fishing and catch fish. Now, also, they knew that I used to catch quite a few fish and having been in my home, they always would tease me by not having a great mounted fish on the back of the living room wall. [00:57:00] I said, "I don't need that." And they said, "Oh yes, you definitely should have a trout. I mean, you should have a trophy on your wall."

On the most important flight, the actually Lunar Landing, I was up in my normal station, at the White Room, 365 feet above sea-level and the flight crew showed up and after a while, I could smell something like what smells like fish. Now [00:57:30] that was very strange to me because why would it smell like fish at 365 feet up? If there was dead fish on the beach, that was one thing, but why would it smell up there? I thought nothing of it and we exchanged little presents with Aldrin and with Armstrong, and the last one to get in was Mike Collins. Now when his turn came, he reached behind him and he had a brown paper bag in my nice clean white room, which was illegal to begin with, [00:58:00] and out came this trout, mounted like that. "It's a trophy trout," He says, "Now you have a trout for your wall." And he said, "I hope you will display it."

There were only three things wrong with it. To begin with it is only eight inches long, which is illegal size. Secondly, it wasn't cleaned. And thirdly, it wasn't preserved. The only thing it was, it came right out of a deep freeze.

Later, I found [00:58:30] out that the Fish and Wildlife people actually got him that trout the night before and they just put it up on the board and I believe, Joe Schmitt, the suit technician had his hand in it and they nailed it on the board, put it in the freezer and then took it out to present to me.

Now what do you do with a trout like that? You can't hang it on the wall, so I wrapped it up and put it in the freezer. Where it stayed for about 22 years because I couldn't get anybody [00:59:00] to touch it to preserve it. Finally, I found a company in Saint Petersburg that was freeze drying pets and I asked them if they wanted to have a crack at it and they said they would try it. Then they managed and three and a half months to freeze dry it and now I can hang it up on the wall.

So when we had the reunion here, the 20th anniversary of the Lunar Landing, I invited the flight crew again, you know, I said, "Hey folks," I said, "How about a [00:59:30] nice dinner at my house?" They said, "What are you serving?" I said, "How about a fish dinner?" Collins jumped in and says, "No thank you, I don't think I care much for a fish dinner because I believe you still have a trout that I

don't care for." I said, "Yes, that's the one I was gonna serve you." I showed him what I really had. These are the little things that we used to do to each other, you know, to play and it meant actually, they were what we called Inside Stories. You see, the outside people wouldn't know what happened [01:00:00] or what really came about it. So that much is the fish story.

Now one other story I need to tell you about is because I'm very proud of it and that is after the Challenger accident we had, it was decided to create a memorial for the astronauts. Then I also realized over the years that we had about seven people that we had killed on the pad, technicians strictly in the line of duty, and I approached [01:00:30] the Astronaut Memorial Commission and I said, "How about putting their names on the memorial?" Which was turned down. So then I asked if we could have another memorial for them and again, it was turned down. By that time I was advised whilst I was working there that the center didn't want it and I should not pursue it anymore.

So then I retired and I was now in a position that nobody could fire me. I started to pursue my [01:01:00] quest for a astronaut memorial, except it would be for the technicians. And one month before the big astronaut memorial was dedicated, there was a dedication ceremony. I have one picture there where we dedicated a memorial to the people that lost their life in the line of duty and they were not astronauts. But I could not see a differentiation between the life of one or the other. So that's the reason I worked so [01:01:30] hard for them.

What I did is I got all my old friends, astronauts and so on, engaged in writing letters and calling the center director, the head of NASA and everybody else, to go ahead and get permission to have it done. So finally, we did get it done and we dedicated that one, one month before the major one. And as a matter of fact, we had some of the family members of the people we killed there. So that was one item that I was very, very pleased to have accomplished because it meant [01:02:00] a lot to me.

Guenter Wendt: Okay now, actually you can see, that the center director, General McCartney and myself on the day we dedicated the memorial for the people that lost their life in the line of duty at the Space Center. The memorial right now is located between the Imax and the other theater inside. As you can see, it's a nice [01:02:30] gadget.

Nancy Yasecko: Very nice. I like it.

Guenter Wendt: I'm very proud of having got that one done.

Nancy Yasecko: It's a dangerous business.

Guenter Wendt: It is and it is never something that you can assume nothing will happen. There are lots things you play with, explosives, with high pressure gasses, with poisonous propellants and things like that. The worst thing that can happen to you is if you

get complacent and you think you know all the answers. That's when it's going [01:03:00] to come and get you. So it's not a routine business that you would say like a railroad station or an airport or things like that. Because it can never be like an airport, because each flight is different. Each flight has a different crew. Each flight has a different payload and probably a different mission. So this will never be just a routine thing.

Okay, here you actually get a handle as [01:03:30] to an idea as to what it looked like on the Apollo launch. Many, many hours prior to the actual launch, you see the street blocked up by these cars and vans and so on, that wanted to see the launch. So that would be the time, several hours before launch when I go in and I took these pictures, of us driving into the Cape to get to work.

So here you see the old South Gate. [01:04:00] And for many people, it became actually like a picnic affair that they would bring all their goodies there and spend the night there and just watch for the launch. There's the old sign of the Air Force Station. [01:04:30] What you see in the background, as a matter of fact, is one of the blimps that was used to watch the drug trafficker and things like that.

Here's an overview of the launch area. As you can tell, that is somewhat [01:05:00] of an old video camera and actually it was a movie camera that did that and it got transferred to a video. In the background, you see now an Apollo launch vehicle and here's we are coming out. The area's already cleared of all personnel because you can see the oxygen vapors coming off the launch vehicle itself and we are on our way out to go ahead. We are driving out to prepare the spacecraft for the crew [01:05:30] arrival. I believe a little bit later you will see from the top, actually the astronaut van coming out to bring out the flight crew.

This was neat for me to drive through the gate without having to show a badge, because at that time we didn't have any guards or anybody else there stopping us. It was always nice that we could do whatever we wanted to do because there was nobody else around, except we had to be a little bit careful of [01:06:00] TV cameras following us or watching us because, you never know what would show up later on.

Here you see actually the ice formation on the rocket and what you're seeing coming off is actually oxygen vapors. Now then, every once in a while, big sheets of ice would come down. Okay, let me stop it a second here.

One of those days I took a sentimental trip through the Cape and by the way, the flag [01:06:30] you see blowing in the breeze there, at the South Gate is something that I put there and then the Air Force said it couldn't be had and I helped them out to get a flag pole there.

And here we are at Complex 14 where it shows all the flights that went out and the Mercury Atlas flights. And next to it is the memorial, I mean not the memorial, but actually, the--whatever you want to call it for the seven astronauts. So this is

Pad 14 in the background. [01:07:00] I wanted to take all of these pictures before the gantrys and the things disappeared because eventually they rusted out. Here's Complex 19, the Gemini complex, where we launched all these birds from one complex. And it was a rather interesting time there because they were coming in very, very short order.

There's the old structure, with the main structure laying down on the block house on the left hand side. [01:07:30] This was the launch configuration. Now today, all this stuff has been removed because the same base, this is the old Apollo launch pad they originally want for the early models of the Apollo. This is also the place where we had the fire.

And here we're taking a little trip through the space museum, which is open to the public on Sundays, but that's the only time it's open. [01:08:00] And I took a quick trip there to keep on film what was there or what is there for the next generation to look at it. Here is the old Redstone gantry with a Redstone missile in it. As you can tell, it's a long way from what we have today with climate controlled white rooms and everything like that. We had an old rickety elevator going up and down the side of the [01:08:30] structure, which was hair-raising to begin with whenever it was working.

Some of the old rockets that used to, well there's a Polaris in the center, a Bomarc and a Thor and there's an Atlas laying down. That is the famous red bird, snark that used to land frequently right off the beach. They used to called it snark-infested waters because some of them just laid right in. It's an old [01:09:00] nose cone with a beryllium heat shield to survive the reentry. There's a Titan rocket, two stage. That was the same that we used for the Gemini program.

Now you got to look at the plumbing, the plumbing, a plumber's nightmare, right? These are the engines. And by the way, this is strictly a hypergolic [01:09:30] rocket with hypergolic fuels in it. I got lots of footage on that one. [01:10:00] Here we go, that was ... What was that one? Was that the Navajo? I think that was the Navajo, yeah. That eventually was re-dubbed the Never-go.

And an upper stage shown here. I think-- there's an old German V-1, which were little bus bombs that they used to send over to England and so on, and they captured one [01:10:30] of them. Pretty good shape yet. It shows the, interesting enough, this is a pulse jet and when we go to the new airplanes, we eventually will probably wind up with pulse jets again. Though full circle, it goes around and comes around.

There's the Atlas. [01:11:00] That's a Minuteman, one of the earlier models. That's a LL-B, I believe. Oh, no, this is ... Let's stop a minute because this is off a commercial [01:11:30] typed film. You want to stop it, just let me go fast forward on it. Coming up here.

Guenter Wendt: There. See, this is the old Pad 34 where we actually had the Apollo fire where we lost Grissom, White and Young. So the white hump on the right side of the block house, but again, this structure, by now has been completely leveled and the pad has looked like a wasteland of nothing. This are the so-called [01:12:00] S4-Bs that we launched from there, you know, in the early stages of the Apollo Program. There you see a launch from ... Let me see what that was. It's hard [01:12:30] to tell from that film, if it was an S4-B or it was a big one.

Nancy Yasecko: It's an Apollo.

Guenter Wendt: It's an Apollo, yeah, but I'm not sure if it's a Saturn 5 or it's the S4-B. The Saturn 1.

Nancy Yasecko: There was 1, and then the S4-B and then the 5.

Guenter Wendt: Now see we used the one, the very first manned Apollo flight after the fire [01:13:00] was the one with Cunningham, Schirra, and Eisele. That was on the smaller rocket. Then after that, we also launched the LEM from the small rockets from Pad 37. But then we went to the big ones. [01:13:30] Let me to speed it up somewhat.

Nancy Yasecko: Well, you know what you haven't said is who shot this?

Guenter Wendt: Oh, I shot all those films, yeah.

Nancy Yasecko: How were you allowed to take a camera on the base?

Guenter Wendt: Oh, no, if you stayed, you were allowed on launch days to take it on the base, you know, up to the visitor [01:14:00] area. And this is actually taken from where you could take picture.

The other ones, the one you saw close up and so on, they were, I carried the cameras for astronauts' use. That way they could take, I had all the 35 millimeter cameras, if they saw something they wanted to put on film and not be bothered, you know, with couldn't take it along, and so on, then they could use my camera and I furnished [01:14:30] them the film later on.

Nancy Yasecko: It's a wonderful memento. I don't think there's anything else like it in the world.

Guenter Wendt: Yeah, it's whenever you go back, you know, it's something that sometimes hard to believe that it all happened. See the old Conclave there and the old build on the film. These were the days of the eight millimeter [01:15:00] movie cameras. That was a night launch, yeah. I think that one lights up the neighborhood pretty nice.

Nancy Yasecko: That was 17?

Guenter Wendt: I'm not sure, which one it is, but I think it could be Cernan's Flight 17, yeah. Well this is Saturn 5.

Nancy Yasecko: [01:15:30] Again, this is from the astronaut's camera?

Guenter Wendt: This is from the cameras the astronauts borrowed yeah, to take these pictures. You see, on my crew, I always had one back up astronaut. So one that didn't fly. Otherwise, see we were out there before the flight crews got there, and these pictures were taken beforehand. So the astronaut and my close-out crew, what we call the close out crew, he was unable to take these pictures for his own home use. See [01:16:00] this is taken now from the general viewing area.

Nancy Yasecko: Did you take these films back to Germany with you to show them?

Guenter Wendt: I don't know, I probably showed some-- took some of the films back to Germany to show them over there, yeah. But it's hard to do because their projectors run on 50 cycles, we are running on 60 cycles and so on. And see our [01:16:30] video doesn't play over there either because they got the different system.

Speaker 3: This is a beautiful launch.

Guenter Wendt: Yeah they did a good job of transferring it from the old video film over to the video tape and from the movie film.

Nancy Yasecko: Did you breathe a sigh of relief as the ...

Guenter Wendt: No. They were like they were stages, in other words, [01:17:00] I mean, once they cleared the tower, then you know it's a little bit safer. And then once they are up, the first stage burnout, then you know they could always make it back, you know. There were stages.

The same way, once they were in orbit, then you didn't worry much about it until they came back and you saw the three parachutes. That was another one of those things you wanted to see. See most of these are morning shots, you know [01:17:30] when I have to get up early to get out there.

Nancy Yasecko: This is the street you live on right?

Guenter Wendt: Yeah, see that's, I had a little old Volkswagen and I just put the camera in the window and shot these pictures going out early in the morning to be ready for them.

Nancy Yasecko: There's no one else on the road here.

Guenter Wendt: No. It could be that these were taken at one of the, what we call it, [01:18:00] the dry runs or things like that. Now that's just showing how to get there. See, I'm on

the Cape now and there's the old Pad 34. No, that's there sorry. No, that's the missile, okay that's the other one. That's Pad 5 but, 75 again.

[01:18:30] One time I let the astronaut drive it and [inaudible 01:18:33], I don't know if you can see it but that son of a gun was going about 90 miles an hour. I said, "Damn it." I said, "Driving with, look at it how you went through the gate you watch it." I think when we come up through the gate. Here comes the gate, see it? Man he was driving all right, and I was hanging on for dear life there. Middle left turn across the gravel and I think we slipped [01:19:00] half way across that one.

Nancy Yasecko: He was excited that day.

Guenter Wendt: I mean, they always drive fast. Let's face it.

Nancy Yasecko: Which astronaut was driving? You recall?

Guenter Wendt: I hate to say this because he is still pretty active in the program, I better not give him a black eye because I know who that was. It was fun at that time.

Nancy Yasecko: This is Apollo 11, isn't it? This footage.

Guenter Wendt: I don't know if this is 11 or not. I don't think this is 11 [01:19:30] because 11 we didn't do much of that picture taking and so on because it was just too critical.

See, we only had 90 seconds once the crew got there before we put the crew in. If we didn't blow the time on any kind of delays then, we had 90 seconds. See that actually is a backup pilot. He just put chlorine injection into the drinking water system.

See this, some of our little presents we had. [01:20:00] For instance, I mean, the one crew member he was bugging everybody for getting tickets for the VIP site. This one was the, I'm not sure, which one it was, his wife was expecting a baby. We gave him that doll to practice diapering a baby. These are inside little jokes that we used to make. So there we are checking the, that's Grissom. [01:20:30] That guy passed away too. He's checking the O2 content in the crew cabin, the pressure in it.

I believe the one you see in there is Crippen [Robert Crippen] because he was my backup pilot several times. Now he says ... Yeah that's Crip.

Nancy Yasecko: It looks like him.

Guenter Wendt: Yeah, that's Crip. See he's a Center Director now. [01:21:00] Boy, it's getting hot in here. That's one of the suit technicians. See what's burning there is the hydrogen gas that is vented out. We have to, it's highly flammable. They're burning [01:21:30] it in the burn pond. Our worry was that we had a hydrogen

leak and you know hydrogen it explodes from 3% to 97% so we were scared blowin' off our you-know-what. Okay now see, when we open the white room, we had a picture like that. This is not it. That's from the strut.

Nancy Yasecko: Since, this is a new tape you should [01:22:00] probably tell us who shot this.

Guenter Wendt: Okay. Oh no. Again we are on the pad itself. And one of the members of my close-out crew was taking these pictures. And what you see here is the white room that actually opened up and there's white open spaces now. You have to watch your first step because the step isn't there but the landing is 365 feet below.

Here you're looking down on the build again. Lots of ice formation on it. [01:22:30] The oxygen venting off. And these pictures were taken from the structure itself. Here we go, that's just prior to the close out crew leaving the pad. And having closed up everything, just taking a last view around and showing the slide wire, where in case something would go wrong.

Oh I think I went a little bit ahead of myself, [01:23:00] because, I believe this is a sequence where the astronaut van comes up and brings the flight crew. Yes. Here you can see it. There is the astronaut van bringing the flight crew out. We had little bit time in between where the backup astronaut could take some pictures.

So here we have the little van coming out. That's the doctor and the flight attendant in there, the suit technicians in there. And only the suit [01:23:30] techs and the astronauts would come up and the rest of the people would leave the pad.

First you can see around the launch pad, there's lots of water. Ideal fishing ground expect nobody's allowed to go and fish, but maybe that helps us all in the long run. It's good, yeah for fish hatcheries and for renewal of our natural resources.

Nancy Yasecko: So this is [01:24:00] the view from the rocket.

Guenter Wendt: That's the view, actually you have from the rocket. Yeah from right from the launch tower itself. There you see the hatch has been closed. See they only have the windows here. And see all the side panels have been removed so we are ready to clear the area. One last look in a window. And I always used to tell them, that the next one looking in the window better be a frogman(?) or you're in trouble.

So here we are at the foot of [01:24:30] the gantry, loading up our equipment and ready to go back. See, the rocket could be armed once we passed road block 11 or road block 5 for that matter. Then they could arm the rocket. And because there's an escape rocket on [01:25:00] top, if something could stop below, they could take the capsule away, with the escape rocket. We made sure that they don't have that thing armed while we are still around.

The wind must be going pretty good. There, see that's part of the suit technicians, with all their gear loading up in their station wagon. [01:25:30] Oops I think we got somebody who took an illegal picture. Not me.

And here we are going back. That's now actually, time wise we had to pass the road block at T minus 55 minutes. Other than that they would have to delay somewhat. We never delayed a rocket launch. But we never had a problem that was blamed on our crew and we never delayed a rocket launch.

Nancy Yasecko: This [01:26:00] is the view from the roadside there.

Guenter Wendt: This is actually a view that might be another film that I took. Oh yeah, see there's the motley crew there, the close-out crew that we had there. And at that time we created this thing of having flame proof coveralls, which are now being used by race drivers. We actually originated them by using Nomex. We worked with DuPont because we were a little bit worried about catching fire or things like that.

[01:26:30] This is all the way from the far back area. It always takes a little while for this thing to get off because ignition of the main engines was 7.6 seconds before liftoff. As a matter of fact the rocket had to burn off fuel because it was so heavy it wouldn't get off. See, then it took 10 seconds to clear the tower. Once you cleared the tower you were a little bit easier because, see, if something goes wrong now they could eject with the [01:27:00] capsule itself and the escape rocket. The first contrail you're probably going to see is during the area of maximum dynamic pressure, what we call Max Q.

There it [01:27:30] goes. See this thing we were waiting for then was at 2 minutes and 12 seconds or there about to have the, actually the first stage drop off. [01:28:00] Okay. There we got another interesting thing there. I think probably [inaudible 01:28:03]. There you see the stage just [inaudible 01:28:11].

Nancy Yasecko: Okay.