

In Memoriam

Alan Arthur
(MAC) McDonald

27 May 1908
6 November 2003



Private McDonald
on guard duty at Camp-X, 1942.

"Let us learn our lessons. Never, never believe that any war will be smooth and easy. Or that anyone who embarks on the strange voyage can measure the tides and hurricanes he will encounter. The statesman who yields to war fever must realize that once the signal is given, he is no longer the master of policy but the slave of unforeseeable and uncontrollable events.... Always remember, however sure you are that you can easily win, that there would not be a war if the other man did not think he also had a chance."

Winston S. Churchill
My Early Life: 1874-1904, 1930.

VENGANCE Weapon

Birth of A Titan

It is difficult to say what is impossible, for the dream of yesterday is the hope of today and the reality of tomorrow.

Dr. Robert H. Goddard

Königsburg, East Prussia, Germany 24 December 1927

"Rockets? Space Travel? What next? I suppose you believe that green-skinned Martians with insect eyes and gills are about to invade Earth. You have been reading too much of that French fellow Verne's romantic nonsense. Pure fantasy. Claptrap for children. You're eighteen next month, Reinhardt Wilhelm, not twelve!"

Willi flinched inwardly at the memory recalling when, at twelve years of age, he'd had his first disastrous encounter with rocket propulsion. Strapping six skyrockets to his wagon 'Komet', Reinhardt Wilhelm von Bressler lit them, sending the cart trailing smoke and flames, careening down the street and into the park. The rockets exploded majestically only seconds before the flaming missile plunged into the river. Taking her infant ward into her arms, a terrified nursemaid rushed off to inform the police. As he was fishing the charred remains of his 'Komet' from the Pregolya River, two constables arrived and took Master von Bressler into custody. His father, Walter, by right of birth a Baron and by profession a neurosurgeon, reluctantly paid the fine. Only after receiving a stern warning to forgo future foolishness, Von Bressler the younger was released. News of Willi's audacious feat and subsequent arrest served to rocket the lacklustre student of science and mathematics to instant notoriety and fame, in equal measures.

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The Spaceflight Group

Breslau, Germany, 25 December 1932

I do not know what I may appear to the world; but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me

Sir Isaac Newton 1642-1727

*Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night:
God said, "Let Newton be!" and all was light.*

Alexander Pope 1688-1744

"Are you expecting visitors, Professor?" Willi shouted to be heard over the wind, stamping his feet to maintain circulation. Straining to see through the brilliant early morning sunlight, he could barely make out the silhouette of an approaching automobile through the sparkling ice crystals.

"Not that I know of, Reinhardt. Hand me the nozzle. Good, thanks. Now, the small open-end wrench. Hold the torch closer so I can see the... Fit, curse you, and don't you dare cross-thread this time! Damn! The 'o' ring slipped out again. My fingers are ice. Ah, there you are, you little beggar." Lang bent down to retrieve the small rubber washer from the snow. Slipping it carefully over the threads of the fuel nozzle, he hand-threaded the assembly into the fuel-line's copper nipple. "It's in. Wrench, please. Snugging up nicely. *Wunderbar!* Finished. That won't come loose again," he commented. "How's our time, Reinhardt?"

"I make it six forty-two and thirty-five. Seventeen minutes, twenty-five seconds to launch time," Willi answered, glancing in the direction of the car on the perimeter road. "Let's hope that this wind dies down. Forty kilometres an hour¹ is ten more than our calculations allow for."

"All will be fine. Is the tea kettle on?" Blowing on his hands

¹ 25 mph

for warmth, Hermann Lang stepped back to survey the spindly, pyramid-shaped launch assembly that they had nicknamed 'the birdcage', now topped by the three-metre long 'rocket.' "Who in their right mind but you, Rudi, Paul, and me would come out here at six a.m. Christmas morning? Why do you ask?"

"Does Father Christmas drive a black Mercedes Benz Cabriolet? It's turning in. There are flags on the fenders. Take a look, Professor."

"You're joking! Oh, my! That's the General's."

"What General?"

"Our new boss, possibly. Colonel General Siegfried Hoffman. He's not due until January second. I was going to tell you. Look lively, Reinhardt. Where are the other two?"

"Behind the shed, preparing to fill the fuel tank."

"Go fetch them, please, and come right back, looking neat and smiling! Perhaps not too neat," he added wryly.

"Right away.

"Paul, Rudi, the Professor wants you out front, now! We have a VIP visitor! A general! Wipe off the grease. Quickly!"

By this time, Willi could make out the insignia on the Benz's twin flags. "Reichswehr², General Staff Officer," he muttered. "Very well, let's give the gentleman a show, lads!"

"Dr. von Bressler, come here please and greet our visitor," Lang shouted.

"Coming, Professor.

"Front and centre, boys. Don't be shy. He won't bite you!" Willi added encouragingly as Rudi and Paul scrambled to tidy up.

Willi waited as the driver opened the front passenger door, expecting to witness the appearance of a figure of heroic Teutonic dimension. Colonel General Siegfried Hoffman bounded out of the Benz, a 1.7 m³ compact bundle of smiling affability. He was clad in a grey fur greatcoat reaching almost to his ankles, and trimmed with a black fur collar, causing Willi to suppress a manic urge to burst out laughing, being reminded of a childhood storybook about mythical bands of furry elves roaming the Black Forest. Introduced to Hoffman by Lang, Willi reached out to shake the General's ham-like hand.

² Reichswehr: Germany's army, was regulated under the terms of the 1919 Treaty of Versailles. Renamed Wehrmacht in 1935.

³ Five feet, six inches