

British Rocketry Oral History Programme Conference 2004

The British Rocketry Oral History Programme (BROHP) Conference 2004 was held at Charterhouse School Godalming between Wednesday the 14th and Friday the 16th of April 2004. The conference covered such diverse subjects as Surface to Air Guided Weapons, Women in Aerospace, History of the use of Hydrogen Peroxide as a rocket propellant etc.

I travelled down to Charterhouse on the Tuesday evening and stayed on site overnight so that after breakfast on Wednesday morning I could set up the Black Knights display in the main hall (see stand photo's Black Knights and other exhibitors in the photo gallery - **BROHP Conference 2004**). The conference started with the Charles Martin lecture given by Derek Bollworthy on the career of Charles Martin and the Hatfield Test site for systems testing on Blue Streak. Professor John Allen and David Ashford (see photo gallery - **BROHP Conference 2004**) talking about the European Aerospace Transporter Project followed. In the 1960's a No. of European Aircraft companies produced designs for spaceplanes all of the Two Stage To Orbit (TSTO) type. The differing designs were shown and in particular the evolution of the Hawker Siddeley Aviation Advanced Projects design was discussed.

After lunch the conference broke up into parallel sessions so delegates had to choose which session they wished to attend, not always an easy task! I chose as follows

High Test Peroxide (HTP) 1

John Scott Scott introduced the session and described Pre World War II (WWII) German work on Hydrogen Peroxide by Professor Hellmuth Walter. Seamus Reddin went on to give a photographic record of the German work on HTP. Peter Stokes described the work currently being undertaken by the Rolls Royce Heritage trust to bring out a publication tracing the development of Hydrogen Peroxide Rocket engines from their start in Germany to work carried out in the UK by the Rocket Propulsion Establishment (RPE) at Westcott to the "contractor" companies such as Fairey Aviation, De Havillands, Armstrong's, Napier etc. This publication is also to contain a paper by former Kummersdorf West, Peenemunde and Westcott employee "popa" Reidel. Seamus Reddin then gave a very interesting talk on post WWII HTP technology transfer to the UK.

Coffee Break.

The Cold War

Matthew Grant gave a talk on how the Cold war was presented to the public contrasting the civil defence organisation and those involved in CND. Nick Hill (Author of A Vertical Empire) gave a talk titled Skybolt and the British Deterrent. This detailed the Skybolt system, the US cruise missile which was to replace Blue Steel in RAF service, but which was cancelled and led to the UK acquisition of Polaris. A UK version of Skybolt codenamed Pandora was also described. Michael Goodman spoke on Intelligence Aspects of the British Test Detection programme. This provided a fascinating insight into the British Nuclear weapons testing and detection programme.

Over dinner a presentation was made to Roy Dommett celebrating his work at RAE Farnborough on various rocket and missile programmes. Dave Wright one of the

conference organisers (Dave and Lesley Wright's and Nick Hills photo's are all in the photo gallery - **BROHP Conference 2004**) acted as host for this "this is your life" type event and many of Roy's ex-colleagues related tales of his amusing activities over the years. After dinner most people congregated in the bar where more tales of Roy's various activities were told.

Thursday

After Breakfast and a quick check on the Black Knights Stand it was straight into-High Test Peroxide (HTP) 2

John Scott Scott introduced the session and introduced Andy Jeffs formerly of RPE Westcott. Andy (see photo gallery - **BROHP Conference 2004**) who started work at the RPE in 1946 talked about the early days at Westcott with particular reference to the Germans employed at the site and the HTP work. Peter Stokes then described the HTP engine work done by De Havillands, followed by David Andrews former Chief Designer at Ansty who described the work on HTP/Kerosine and LOX/Kerosine. Last in this session was Jim Laxton formerly of Napier's (part of English Electric) who spoke about the development of HTP catalysts and there application in Rocket engines such as the Scorpion.

Coffee Break.

Eric "Winkle" Brown gave a fascinating talk which started with a description of how he entered the Second World War. Before the outbreak of WWII Eric was an exchange student in Germany and on the morning of the day that war was declared was awakened by the SS bursting into his room and removing him from his digs. He was held for three days before being bundled into a car and being driven to the Swiss border. His own car a small British sports car was driven along behind by a large SS man who's head stuck up above the windscreen and of course was buffeted about by the wind much to Eric's delight. At the border, a bridge with nervous armed guards Swiss at one end and German at the other, Eric was released told to get in his car and drive into Switzerland. Eric asked why his car was being returned and not his other possessions and was told by one of the SS men, "that they had no spares!"

Eric reported to the British Embassy in Bern Switzerland and was debriefed by the ambassador. At the end of the debriefing the ambassador handed Eric his RAF call up papers! Eric went onto become CO of the captured aircraft test flight at Farnborough and at the end of the war was one of those tasked with interviewing captured Germans, he interviewed Wherner Von Braun, Helmut Walter, Dr Ernst Hienckell, Willy Messerschmitt, Kurt Tank designer of the FW190D and Hannah Reich amongst others. The brief details of the interrogation of the captured Germans were fascinating!

Reg Turnill the well known journalist then gave a talk on Barnes Wallis including excerpts from taped interviews.

After lunch Mark Smith gave a short talk on the 2nd edition of "A very special relationship" which he is currently working on. The book is a description of the British Atomic Weapons testing in Australia. The 2nd edition will include additional material which has become available since the original publication. Following on John Boyes gave a talk on the Thor missile the reasons for its development and its

operational deployment with the RAF in the UK. Tom Lukeman gave an interesting talk on the debate over whether to select Posiedon or update Polaris and the financial costs for both options. The presentation generated a lively discussion between some of those that were involved at the time!

After Coffee Tony Waterfall gave a talk on spin in rocketry. Kate Pyne Historian at AWRE gave a talk on “Lizzie” the first British Liquid Propellant Rocket engine, developed during WWII by the Asiatic Petroleum Company (now Shell). Christopher Orlebar gave a fascinating and detailed description of the tragic loss of the Concorde in 2000 (See The Concorde Story: 21 Years in Service (Civil Aircraft) by Christopher Orlebar)

In the evening the majority of the conference attendees attended the excellent conference dinner, which was of course followed by further socialising into the early hours of the morning. One consequence of this was that I missed breakfast the next morning including those speakers before coffee! After Coffee Eric Brown gave another talk on his war time experiences as Chief Test Pilot at Farnborough including flying aircraft from rocket assisted catapults and a detailed description of flying the Me163a and b as a glider and the Me 163b once under power (A comment was made of something like once was enough). Andy Jeffs then gave a talk on his work at RPE Westcott on rocket motor signature detection and liquid propellant recoilless guns. Roy Dommett spoke briefly on rocket operation and design including a little on exterior ballistics.

After lunch the main hall had to be cleared for the UKSEDS run ball in the evening, so I spent some time taking down the Black Knights stand and packing it away. While I was packing further talks were being given and a careers fair was run. I chatted informally to some of the students about careers in the UK Rocket motor industry. The final event of the conference was the launch of some model rockets.

The BROHP Conference is a fascinating and stimulating event (The food and the venue are good to). For anyone with an interest in British Rocketry professional or hobby or Cold War subjects the conference is well worth attending. My description above only gives a very brief description of the talks just enough to give the reader an idea of what’s being talked about. Over the last few years I have taken the Black Knights static display along to the conference and have spoken about Hobby rocketry at the conference. The organisers are very keen to promote the conference amongst the hobby rocketry community and have therefore asked if there are any topics which would be of interest to hobby fliers they are also interested in having hobby rocketry vendors at the conference. If you have any ideas about topics for discussion or are a vendor and would like to attend the conference, the organisers have asked that you contact me as there liaison with the hobby. I can be contacted through the Black Knights site at-

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