



Red Moon Rising

“Goldstone has the bird” – what a relief for the American people and what a book remembering the 50th anniversary of the Sputnik-shock.

Finishing his book with the positive report from the Goldstone, Arizona tracking station having received the first signals from the Explorer satellite Matthew Brzezinski paints an impressive picture of the space-race with much original insider information from official US and USSR sources on the political background of the 1950th. The book is a revelation for all space enthusiasts which either watched the beginning of the space activities from the sidelines or even spent their entire careers in the space business.

The protagonists Korolev, v. Braun and Medaris acted according to their own master plans, bending the official policy appropriately to implement their own dreams to go to space.

The private glimpses into the heads of the officials and politicians shed a delightful light on how the competition between USA and the USSR was initiated, culminating with Neil Armstrong’s footprints on the Moon.

Beginning with Eisenhower’s statement with respect to Nelson A. Rockefeller’s concern that Russia might reach space first “(he) ... felt no need to compete with the Soviets in this area” or Charles E. Wilson’s (“Engine Charly”) statement, who run GM (“what was good for the country was good for GM and vice-versa”) before he became Eisenhower’s Secretary of Defence: “I wouldn’t care if they did”, through the underestimation of Russia’s capabilities (“a country which can not built any decent cars or shoes”) the story describes very skilful the events leading to the shock induced by the first Sputnik beep-beeps on Friday 4th October 1957.

Interesting is also the description of the uncomplicated Russian approach to solve rocket leaks in the early days by freezing them.

Unprecedented is the first chapter of the book allowing the reader to ride on an ill-boding V-2 towards London letting him listen to the vehicle’s internal mechanical monologue (nowadays called “sequence of events”).

A great book which describes the beginning of the space age by putting the historical information in context with today’s knowledge rather than just presenting the story as it unfolded at the time.

In my judgement this is the best Sputnik-book ever written since it also describes very authentically the nerve-wrecking endless minutes the first launch teams endured during countdown, lift-off and first acquisition-of-signal and which every operations team – be it east or west of Tyura-Tam - went through ever thereafter.

Oct 2010 by Joachim J. Kehr, Editor SpaceOps News (joachimkehr@opsjournal.org)