**MSFC HISTORY PROJECT**
**INTERVIEW WITH AMOS CRISP**
**INTERVIEWED BY STEPHEN WARING AND MIKE WRIGHT**

Waring: Would you just tell me how you came to the Space Flight Center and then we will lead into other stuff.

Crisp: My name is Amos Crisp: and I was hired in 1963 to come in as a Speech writer. My background is featuring writing on newspaper and Army Public relations. I came actually in 1964 and when I got here there was one speech writer for Dr. von Braun. His name was Guy Jackson. I was hired as a second ghost-writer more or less or as a number 2 speech writer to Guy Jackson. We remained in that role, Guy and myself, until Dr. von Braun left. Unless my memory fails me it was several years, up until '70 or '71. During those years we averaged probably sixty to seventy speeches and articles each a year. These speeches and articles would range from little five minute welcomes and maybe introductions to books, to long thirty and forty-five minute speeches. Some even without slides or view-graphs, some with slides and view-graphs, whatever. The major way that we worked, (Dr. von Braun was extremely busy), we had some personal contact, but mostly, especially after I had been here for a few months, that contact was not necessary. Dr. von Braun's staff would just come down with: he has accepted a speech in Poedunk, Oklahoma or Boston at MIT or wherever it was going to be. Here's the date. Here's the audience. So we would sit down and write what we thought the Center Director should say. Of course with our experience we knew fairly well how he wanted to say it.

Waring: Did he review those speeches?

Crisp: He reviewed those speeches very thoroughly and usually made red-pencil comments. Guy Jackson and I were happy to see these comments because in our

thinking we had stimulated the man and made him think. Now and then a speech would come back with hardly any marks and to Guy and I that meant he either didn't read it or we didn't stimulate him. So there was no pride of authorship in Guy or I in that our material was changed. We actually wanted it to be because we were making him think. We were giving him ideas and he would pencil whole pages in what we had done. Yes, the work was reviewed.

We would do speeches, articles. For instance I recall doing an entry on Saturn Rockets in some big encyclopaedia series. That kind of thing.

Waring: Did he give you outlines in advance?

Crisp: Usually not. Sometimes if he felt something was extremely important he would call one or both of us up and talk about what he wanted to do or say or be written in that particular speech or article.

Usually not, because especially after a few years, we were so familiar with his delivery that such meetings were almost totally unnecessary. I would go for months and hardly talk to him. There was not that much to do to it.

We did not do his Congressional testimony. That was done by another office. But all of the public speeches we did.

Waring: What do you think were some of the major themes that he liked to emphasis in his speeches?

Crisp: For one thing we always kept a humor book. He loved humor. We would think or make up some sort of humorous phase or joke, he loved that! He looked at the future. For instance probably the favorite speech I did for him personally, was a speech he made on the night before the launch of the Apollo 11 in which he said that this trip shouldn't be considered just as a single solo trip to the moon. It was "the bellringer of the future of men." It would lead this nation into reusable shuttle-

type vehicles. It would lead to permanent stations on the moon, permanent stations in orbit, which now we are seeing. He loved to look into the future and he loved humor.

The meat of a lot of his speeches were the Apollo-Saturn. Descriptions of the Saturn 5 and the Saturn family of vehicles and how they were developed.

Wright: He had a lot to say about religion.

Crisp: Dr. von Braun was a religious person. Guy Jackson was also a religious person. Guy did virtually all of his speeches with that theme. Dr. von Braun was at prayer breakfasts. His thought was that the universe was almost too complicated to have just happened. That virtually, it practically had to have a guiding hand. He thought that to the argument of "what are we doing going to the moon, the Bible doesn't tell us to go to the Moon." His response to that was that whoever our Keeper or our God is gave us a mind that seeks perfection and that mind is seeking perfection and that is why it is doing the things it is doing. Yes he did make religious speeches. I am quoting from Guy, I didn't write them.

Waring: Were there things he specifically did to try to promote the space effort and Marshall?

Crisp: Yes, he accepted all these speaking engagements. A lot of the little things we would do might be a group come into the Marshall Auditorium and he would personally come down and welcome. It might be a two minute welcome.

That brings up another thought. Dr. von Braun was really good at speaking off the cuff. He was also an expert (this is little known in the lead industry), we would write for him, for instance, a little welcome and it would go on a typewriter, or speech writer, as we would call it. It had large type and go on a regular piece of bondpaper, shove it into the acetate, clear folder and give him his notebook. He

might not have seen this speech before, he might not have had time. We would hand it to him as he walked into the Marshall Auditorium open it up, look down and see the first page and practically deliver the first page word for word. May one or two looks and he was done with the second page. People think he was talking off the cuff.

When you get two people doing anywhere from 40 to 60 items a year. You have got a man doing a lot of speeches.

One of his more famous slogans was "Early to bed, Early to rise, Work like hell and advertise." That wasn't original to him, but he liked that. He did advertise.

Waring: Do you think later Center Directors engaged in as much advertising?

Crisp: Oh, my no. When Dr. von Braun left, Dr. Rees came on board.

Waring: He seems like a very shy man in comprising.

Crisp: He was a shy man. I went into writing virtually all of the Center's brochures. Helping with news centers, with news media. Who was after Rees? Petrone. I did Petrone's speeches. But the whole time he was here I probably did not do but three or four. Then we got Dr. Lucas. I did an item or two for Dr. Lucas. But the workload [with him] was also insufficient and I went into the news branch. I left speech writing right after Dr. Lucas came. In fact, during the tenure of Dr. Rees and Dr. Petrone, I was doing a lot of other things. Media assistance and Skylab news centers.

Waring: Were there particular ways in which von Braun sought to describe Alabama to outsiders? One thing we have found is that Alabama had poor image to outsiders. Did he encourage you to include a discussion of good sides of Alabama?

Crisp: He certainly didn't downgrade Alabama, but I don't recall a real positive effort to elevate the image. It wasn't a problem that concerned us. The trip to the moon, the big Saturn 5, the ideas for the shuttle were coming in. Image of Huntsville, I just don't recall a lot of speeches.

Waring: I am not surprised. That would be dull to a lot of outsiders.

Waring: Most of them were made up of the von Braun Huntsville Crew.

Crisp: It was a unique experience for me because, even with the astronauts and the visibility that they get, the most visible person in the space program during those years was von Braun. He was "Mr. Space". He worked hard.

Waring: Very good. That was very helpful.

Crisp: Well, if you can think of anything else, call me.

Wright: He is the best I have ever seen at having taking this material and translating it into English. He and Guy Jackson. I worked with both of them. They are the best.

Waring: That is hard to do.

Crisp: Yes, but it was fun. For a while, you did so much. Somewhere along the late 60's, Dr. von Braun came down and said isn't there another way we can say this, we have been saying this this way so long. We tried and came up with mills. So Dr. von Braun had a big staff go out somewhere, I think in Hollywood, and hired somebody, some scriptwriter to come in. One of the speeches he was going to make, this guy did it. He also had us too, as a back-up. He used ours. So he got somebody else. They brought somebody else on board that was after the Hollywood deal. He settled in for weeks trying to write the sort of generic, general Gettysburg Address

of space. He finally just faded away. I don't know what happened to him. There were no results. We continued to do his full work.

Wright: After you continued to do that for a while, did you get to the point of where you weren't sure of whether the thoughts were yours or whether they were his?

Crisp: Absolutely. Because you cut and pasted. When you got a speech assignment, you went back to your file (we each had huge files) and cut pieces out of speeches that would fit. You would change leads, you altered what you had cut out a little bit. I don't think if we had sat down and just originally done all that stuff, we couldn't have done that much material. Madison Avenues P. R. guy came in here one time and he sat down and saw what Guy and I were doing and he said, "My God, that would cost NASA a million dollars a year if we did that for them!"