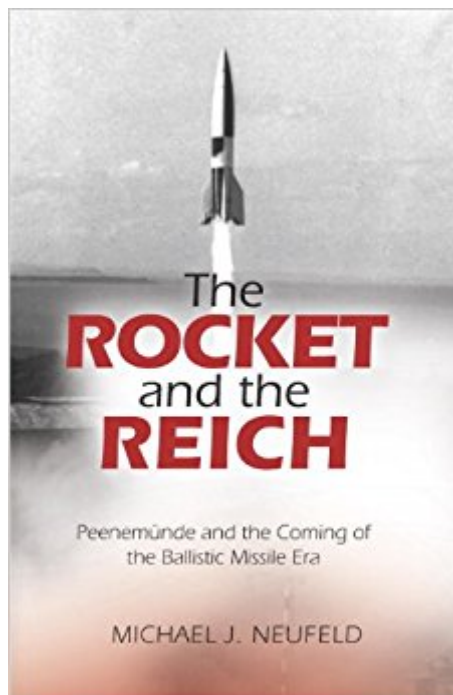




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# The Rocket And The Reich: Peenemunde And The Coming Of The Ballistic Missile Era



## Synopsis

WINNER OF THE DEXTER PRIZE OF THE SOCIETY FOR THE HISTORY OF TECHNOLOGY

Launched by the Third Reich in late 1944, the first ballistic missile, the V-2, fell on London, Paris, and Antwerp after covering nearly two hundred miles in five minutes. It was a stunning achievement, one that heralded a new age of ballistic missiles and space launch vehicles. Michael J. Neufeld gives the first comprehensive and accurate account of the story behind one of the greatest engineering feats of World War II. At a time when rockets were minor battlefield weapons, Germany ushered in a new form of warfare that would bequeath a long legacy of terror to the Cold War, as well as the means to go into space. Both the US and USSR's rocket programs had their origins in the Nazi state.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Publishers Weekly Based on previously untapped sources, Neufeld's comprehensive history of German rocket research and development during WWII includes an analysis of Hitler's indirect involvement with the Peenemunde-based project and SS chief Heinrich Himmler's ultimate domination of it. The study reveals how the decision came about to use slave labor from the concentration camps to manufacture the terrifying "buzz bombs" that, according to Neufeld, had minimal effect on the course of the war. He presents solid evidence that the project's technical director-Wernher von Braun, who later headed NASA's rocket booster program-was an SS officer, and describes his 1944 arrest accused of sabotaging the A-4 project by concentrating more on

space flight than on his duties. Von Braun was freed after several days. The author discusses the postwar rebirth of the rocket program at the Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Ala., where von Braun and several of his Peenemunde colleagues played a historic role in the development of the intercontinental ballistic missile and the space-launch vehicle. Neufeld, curator of WWII history at the National Air and Space Museum, has written a major study of the Nazi rocket program.

Illustrations. Library Journal Neufeld, the curator of World War II history at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C., provides a well-written, comprehensively researched analysis of Nazi Germany's missile program and its antecedents. The German army became interested in rocket technology during the 1930s at the urging of Karl Becker, an engineer who believed a radical new weapon could deliver a psychological blow to an enemy. The construction of Peenemunde in 1936-37 provided a focal point for research and development that made guided missiles a reality despite Germany's limited material and scientific resources. Neufeld shows that while the rocket program was not Nazi in origin, its leaders readily compromised themselves by accepting National Socialism, especially in agreeing to the widespread use of slave labor. A more ambiguous legacy of Peenemunde is its rocket technology, which decisively shaped the second half of the 20th century.

For academic collections. -- D.E. Showalter, Colorado Coll., Colorado Springs Booklist As befits the work of a National Air and Space Museum curator, this book is literate, thorough, and balanced. The last quality is particularly important given the topic, which is the relationship of German rocket scientists to the government of the Third Reich. That relationship was a good deal more complex than both their enemies and their apologists have claimed. Many of the scientists were at the very least obtuse about the military aspects of the program and turned a blind eye to the extensive use of slave labor in the V-2 factories. Neufeld avoids either scapegoating or excusing and has amassed his research--much of it from primary sources now disappearing from the ranks of the living--into what promises to be a classic account of the devil's bargain that coincidentally accelerated the possibility of manned space flight by a full generation. -- Roland Green Kirkus Reviews A dry history of the Nazi rocket program, concentrating on the development of liquid fuels for missiles. Neufeld, curator of WW II history at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum, traces the history of the V-2 ballistic missiles catapulted by the Nazis on London and Paris. He discusses the various men who participated in the secret research at the rocket center Peenemunde, most notably wunderkind German aristocrat Wernher von Braun. Of more modest social status, but equally important, was Walter Dornberger, who administered the program. Neufeld's revisionist thesis is that the scientists were not all fanatics devoted to Hitler's cause. Yet the fact is, though Peenemunde was originally supported by industrialists, it eventually became one of Hitler's

favored projects, and its scientists stood tall for the Third Reich. Many of them worked surreptitiously for German rearmament even before the war. Neufeld often verges on being an apologist for these men who used their genius for the Nazi cause while slave labor put the finishing touches on the instruments of war. He drones on in the manner of an official military historian, also dealing with the rivalries of bureaucratic "empires" within the Reich--intelligence, propaganda, etc.--as they jockeyed for Hitler's favor. In a book about rocketry one naturally expects some scientific discussion, but Neufeld's text is far too technical for nonspecialists. He is quite right in pointing out the irony of the Nazi rocket program's contributions to the Cold War: Victorious Americans and Soviets took German scientists as war booty to feed their own military machines, and Von Braun became a major force in NASA. Neufeld deserves his due for thorough research of both German and American archives, but his analysis is questionable and the writing is not up to the potential of the narrative. One cannot study science and technology in the Third Reich without raising dangerous, difficult and important general questions about the relationship between knowledge and power, the moral responsibility of scientists and engineers, and the relationship between modernity and brutality...[Neufeld] has written the first complete history in English of the story of the German liquid-fuelled rocket programme...and does not shy away from these issues.

--David Edgerton, *Nature* Absorbing...This is a hard-hitting book, but is also a fair and scholarly one that does equal justice to all aspects of the German rocket program--technical, political, moral, and human. It bids fair to become the standard work on this subject for many years to come. --Richard J. Evans, *New York Times Book Review*

The German V-2 rockets that hit London in 1944 arrived silently, having covered 200 miles in five minutes. The Rocket and the Reich...is the astonishing story of their development and how the Allies tried to kill the development teams and destroy the factories. It is a dispassionate account, but one that builds excitement and tension in the reader.

--New Scientist A truly remarkable, wonderful book. This history of German missile technology is a must...The author...has developed in a magnificent way the origins, motivations, technical development and advent of the German rockets...In a word, a very well written book. --The Space Book Board website

The definitive history of German efforts to research, develop, and build rockets during the Third Reich and World War II. Neufeld's account is both thorough and subtle, critical and fair, and avoids the twin pitfall of demonization and hagiography, which plague most other accounts of Wernher von Braun and the German rocket program. This book makes an important contribution to the history of technology, of World War II, and of National Socialism. --Mark Walker, Union College

Michael J. Neufeld is a space history curator at the National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution, and the author of *Von Braun: Dreamer of Space, Engineer of War*.

This is a great book for those interested in the Nazi interest in developing the first rocket/missiles in the world. This was one of their secret weapons they were scaring everyone with. First came the V1 buzz bombs then the V2s. I recommend this book to those interested in science, rockets, missiles and above all, the current negotiations with Iran over their nuclear weapons and missiles! It's *deja vu* with Iran and their secret programs.

excellent - best book I have read on the development of the v-1 and v-2 rocket programs

*The Rocket and the Reich* by Michael J. Neufeld Neufeld is curator of World War II history at the National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Washing DC. This book relates the interesting history of the German rockets before and during the war including the V-1 and V-2 rockets used against England in the war's latter years. Altogether 6000 V-2 rockets were manufactured and over 3200 were fired as weapons. He describes the principals in the development of the rockets including Wernher Von Braun, a Nazi party member and officer in the SS. He also reports that the SS arrested Von Braun, because he advocated using the rocket program for space travel. Von Braun was soon released because his was indispensable to the program and because he had connections. Also described is German General Walter Dornberger, who became the chief of booster development at NASA, and his superior Carl Becker. One of the ironies noted by Neufeld is that however important missile technology had become to both the US and the USSR during the Cold War, the V-2 rocket was of little military value to the Germans, because they did not have the electronics technology for competent guidance systems and had no atomic bomb. The author describes the appalling conditions of the concentration-camp slave laborers used to manufacture the production version of the V-2. Neufeld reports that many more of these slaves died producing the V-2 than were killed by its use as a weapon. Rockets were a popular topic in the 1950's and 1960's, when I was young. I have observed the captured V-2 rocket on display at the Smithsonian, and was quite impressed by its futuristic science-fiction appearance. Persons interested in missile technology would likely find this book well researched and interesting. Thomas J. Hickey

Although this was pretty dry reading, it is packed with information. Helps put the missile program in the context of history, humanity, and world war 2, at the bleeding edge of technological research.

There is also a reasonable amount of material on the Wasserfall ground-to-air missile, posited by some to be a neglected wonder weapon that might have swept the skies clear of Allied bombers if only the Reich had supported it. In fact, basic technical hurdles related to the guidance system were virtually hopeless from the get-go, the basic technology not even born yet. Absent some amazing breakthrough, Wasserfall was an idea far ahead of its time and had zero realistic chance of impacting WW2 no matter how much the Reich threw into its development. The V-2 had trouble hitting cities -- reliably hitting a bomber-sized targets with a supersonic missile was simply never going to happen.

The book begins with an absorbing technical study of the rise and development of rocketry in Germany, from the last years of the Weimar state through the pre-war Nazi state. Once the war begins, the focus shifts to an absorbing study of the bizarre empire-building politics of Nazi Germany, politics Neufeld argues were mastered by proponents of the A4/V2 weapons program at a fearsome cost. In the end, production of the A4 rocket cost far more to the German economy and in lives of enslaved laborers than it did-- or, Neufeld convincingly points out, ever could-- in terms of damage or casualties to Allied victims of "V-2" strikes. For those looking to see a complete technical accounting of the rocket itself, such details fade away in the second half of the book. What remains consistent throughout the book is the central character of Wernher von Braun, whom Neufeld points out must have a legacy compromised by his own complicity in building a rocket "empire" in Germany at fearsome physical and moral cost.

not recommendable. I have read many books on Dr. von Braun as well as the V-2 and this book pales by getting a number of facts wrong as well as needless concentration on the Dora Camp, worthy of a brief footnote if at all.

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