Mr. Jack King

Oral History

Kennedy Space Center

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Moore: Today is Thursday, June 20th, 2002. I'm Dr. Patrick Moore with the University of West Florida, Public History Program and Kennedy Space Center Summer Faculty Fellow and I'm here today with Jack King who is a former AP reporter and also known as the "Voice of Apollo" and now works for United Space Alliance. We're going to talk a little bit today about his experiences at Kennedy Space Center and his role in kind of the changing relationship between the public and the center itself. How are you today, sir?

King: Doing fine thanks.

Moore: Great, great. If we could start off. Give me a little background about yourself. Where were you originally from, where were you born?

King: Ok. I'm a true Bostonian. I was born in Brighton, a part of Boston, and grew up in Dorchester, another part of Boston.

Moore: Real Bostonian.

King: Real Bostonian and I really from a young age was interested in the newspaper business because I was following in my father's footsteps. My father was sport's editor for Associated Press in Boston for about twenty-five years. I sort of fell in love with the same type of business and started off in high school as a, as an office boy at AP during summers and actually when I was going to college I was really put on the staff. And my final year in college turned out to be an election year with AP. I was working 5:15 to two in the morning as a reporter for AP or a newsman for AP and then making a

9:30 class at Boston College, which was a tough one. I had to get a 95 in my ethics exam which was the first class at the end of the semester in order to pass the damn course because I had missed a number of, a number of classes as a result of it.

Moore: An election year. What year was it?

King: This was 1952, I guess, ’52 at that time. I, as I said, I grew up in Boson, grew up in Boston, went to high school in Boston and went to Boston College. I got a scholarship the first year to Boston College and I majored in English and I minored in math and got quite involved in a lot of the writing end of it with the college newspaper and that type of thing. So, that was something I was always interested in from the time I was a kid. I was fortunate enough, as I said, to work with AP for three or four years, first as an office boy, but then as sort of a junior, but on the staff, actually, as one of the news guys. As soon as I graduated, I got my degree in June of ’53 and the next day I was commissioned as Second Lieutenant in the United States Army Artillery because the Korean War was going on. I had joined ROTC while I was going through college. Thought it was rather, kind of, kind of wild and woolly, to be running around with a uniform in college at that time, but it grew on, it grows on you and I, it’s something I never regretted. We all knew, all of us in college at that time, that we would get involved in the Korean War in one variation or another and my Dad had talked me into the fact, if your going to go why not go with a bar on your shoulders instead of a PFC. I received my, as I said, I received my degree, then my commission. A week later I was in Fort Sill, Oklahoma and about two months later I was in Korea. So I served two years active duty in Korea and Japan in ’53 through ’55. . .

Moore: You were in Japan. Did you actually go over to, go over to Korea at some point?

King: Well, I went to Korea first. I went to Korea first and spent, probably about twelve months in Korea and then the final four or five months or six months in Japan. I was able to transfer at that particular time. And, my, my requirement was two years active duty and six years in the reserve, so when. . . I really enjoyed it. I really enjoyed it and I did well. As, career-wise in, during that, during that particular time and thought about staying in at one particular point but my interests were still in the news business and that type of thing. So I did complete my tour of duty and was fortunate enough to go right back to work for Associated Press full time.

Moore: So there was no correlation while you were in the military with anything associated to your academic training.

King: No. No, not really. I was an artillery officer in, with a 240 Howitzer which was the last of the big guns in the, in the army. Starting off with that and then involved with several others including the 105 Howitzers and that type of thing at different locations in Korea and then in Japan. But it was a fascinating experience. I regret, my personal view is that terrible word universal military training, I wonder about it at times because it helped me to mature very rapidly and it's something I never regretted was to go in and have that responsibility for two years coming right out of college. I was fortunate enough to go right back to work for Associated Press. They wanted me.

Moore: Where?

King: Pardon.

Moore: Where? When you got back. . .

King: This was in Boston.

Moore: In Boston.

King: In the Boston Bureau. And started off low man on the totem pole of course, so I had those wonderful hours, 15, 5:15 in the afternoon to two o'clock in the morning and so two o'clock in the morning to all of us who worked nights was like five o'clock in the afternoon for everybody else. But it was a great experience and it was a marvelous learning process. And I was able to grow in that job and wound up writing a weekly column for AP that went all through New England on light, it was called New England Vignettes, just sort of little light stories. And also had the opportunity to cover a variety of different things including sports activities. In the Boston Bureau we covered the whole Ivy League all over New England, covered all the football games and that type of thing, so all of us had a football game every weekend during the fall and that was added to the interest as well as the news things. I was fortunate enough to have hit very well on two big time stories at that time, we're really getting into depth here but, first was the Brinks Trial and I did the lead stories on that and then I was on the desk the night a ship called the Andrea Doria was in a collision with the Stockholm and I'll never forget. I called Coast Guard search and rescue and they told me a kid answered and said, "Yeah, this ship is the Andrea Doria was in a collision with the Stockholm somewhere off Nantucket, _____(light ship)." So I was all alone in the office and I went to the Almanac and looked up. It

was Doria, Andrea, showed a passenger list of five thousand, bang, I hit that wire just like that, writing the lead story and with the great competition between AP and UPI we beat them badly at that particular time, so I was very proud of that. What, the reason I'm mentioning these things is, all of a sudden we came up to 1957, recall very well being in the office when Sputnik went up and, at that particular point, of course we were trying to do something down here at the Cape and that was with the Vanguard Program initially. They had the lead because it was an international geophysical year that was declared by President Eisenhower at that time. So they had first dibbies at the satellite with von Braun and his team on the Army side right behind them. As we all know, the first attempt was catastrophic in that sense where there was an explosion on the pad with the Vanguard and just what two or three months later the von Braun team came down and did in fact put up the first U.S. satellite, Explorer I, and that was in 1958, I recall, about a year, yeah I guess it was about a year after, after Sputnik.

Moore: A few months after.

King: Pardon.

Moore: A few months after.

King: A few months after.

Moore: A few months after.

King: Ahh.

Moore: Now you were up in Boston at the time. Was. . .

King: Yeah I was up in Boston. What I'm leading up to is AP decided in their wonderful headquarters in fifty Rockefeller Plaza that we ought to start getting more interested in what's going on with the space program and what those guys are doing blowing up things down there at Cape Canaveral. So they decided to open a Bureau and my bureau chief nominated me to be the first candidate for the first correspondent for AP and low and behold I was selected and I was, came reported down here to Cocoa Beach, which was a very small little area at that time with a couple of motels and the restaurants, Ramon's and the Surf, were there and just two or three motels and I arrived in February, in April of '58. That was what about just three months after Explorer I went up. And so I was down here covering for AP. It was quite an experience at the start because every story that I covered was in the newspaper parlance, it was A-wire bulletin. It went all over the country and all over the world, bang, just like that. And you're kind of awed by that responsibility at the start, but it moved along very well and you got more comfortable with it.

Moore: When you were up there and, you were put in for this, were you interested in coming down?

King: Oh yes. Yeah.

Moore: This was exciting for you, the space program.

King: Sure it was. Sure it was, but it had, I was just, at a distance from it without any question. I remember after I was told that I had the assignment I started boning up a little bit and there was a nice, I'll never forget the line from Time Magazine, as you know we were having great problems down here at that time. We did get the, the Explorer up, but then there were a lot of problems with a number of the other military weapons. I'll never forget the lead line in Time Magazine, "Off the Snark Infested Waters of Cape Canaveral" referring of course to the Snark Missile. So those are just some things that came to mind. But anyway I came down here and I ensconced in the Vanguard Motel in April of '58. Howard Benedict, who is an outstanding writer, followed me after I, after I left AP, about a year later and of course Howard set up fantastic legacy as a space reporter and, of course, he's still here now and I'm still here now and we do see each other. And. . .

Moore: Now, he came down, he was, replaced you?

King: Yeah. Howard was, Howard was in the Tampa Bureau of AP and when there'd be a bigger launch Howard would come over from Tampa and we'd have a couple of people come up from the Miami Bureau and we'd all get together on the coverage, but I would be the lead guy on it. It was interesting in those days because everything was essentially classified by the Air Force. The way it worked and Howard might have commented on this to a degree, was we would meet once or twice a week with the commanding general, General Don Yates, and General Yates would hold forth, he was quite a dapper individual. I respected Don Yates a lot. He was quite a character, but it looked like he had a tailor made uniform, you know, it was very sharp, very dapper, very much in control and he'd invite the news guys in and he would tell us, "Alright, there's going to be a Jupiter on Thursday.

They'll be a Vanguard on next Tuesday." You know that type of thing. He would not give anymore information than that and so we would, we would leave and we were, part of the agreement was we could not write a thing or say a thing till actually the particular event occurred, because up to that time, what, what everybody had suffered of course was with Vanguard, no press was allowed in. And as a result there was chaotic on the part of Department of Defense, that was a Navy program, the Vanguard program, and then they finally did let the press in for the Explorer I was the first time, but under very tight restrictions. The way it compared to these days as far as the news media concerned with NASA, back in the very early days as a newsman and even in my first few years with NASA, it was a situation where the Air Force had complete control and everything was laid on with security. We couldn't, we could not go out to the Cape at any particular time. We would have to go to Patrick Air Force Base; get on a bus, the bus would transport us out to a press site. We would be under control and just kept right there. We would do our coverage and come back and that was the way the system worked. We worked with, turned out to be Colonel Ken Grine, it was Major Ken Grine at that time and Ken I believe was the number two man in the public affairs office at that time and they were pretty rigid Air Force, Air Force guys, but they would, you know, they tried to work with us as much as they could.

Moore: Were there any ways that you tried to encourage them to say, "You need to give us more information"?

King: Oh, we were, we were hounding them all the time and getting no, getting nothing out of it.

Moore: Well, certainly General Yates did come around though.

King: Well, I'll tell you, I'll tell you what happened, you see. The first thing I found out was you had to work sources, because, all we, all we knew from the Air Force was there was going to be a Jupiter on Thursday and an Atlas on Wednesday. Well all of a sudden things would start to develop and I'd come in at a certain time and the guy at the motel counter, who knew me, would say, so and so's in and that would mean that somebody, somebody from either the Army or the Air Force associated with a particular launch vehicle is in and you knew something was coming up. 'Cause they didn't tell us about all the ones that they were going to launch. At any rate, to jump ahead here, we started out and we would, as I mentioned, we would, we'd go up, we'd have to out to Patrick Air Force about an hour and a half before the projected launch time, get on the bus, and go out to, go out to the Cape. The only press site was Press Site 1 which was covering sort of the southeast side of the Cape with the smaller launch pads and that type of thing. Then, we also, we also, covered the main vehicles we covered at that time were, let me think now, we had the Thor, and the Jupiter. And in those days that was still a battle, a big battle between the Air Force and the Army on who was going to have the intermediate range ballistic missile. They were both so called IRBMs and we just had coming in the Atlas, which the, which was the first of the ICBMs. The only vehicle we had that could go intercontinental range at that time was the Snark and the Snark was jet powered and I always had that picture of 50 Snarks going into Moscow and their chugging along at about 600 miles per hour, so your dropping off their nose cones and taking care of all those terrible Russians, because of course, this was the height of the Cold War at that particular time. But. . .

Moore: Did you really see the Snark as, as kind of the protector at that point?

King: Well, I didn't necessarily, but it was being projected that way, but of course the Atlas was already starting to phase in, but the Atlas was having tremendous development problems at the start as just about all of our launch vehicles did, with the exception of that wonderful Saturn V, but. . .

Moore: Now I want to go back before you go on.

King: Yeah.

Moore: You said that it was being portrayed that way.

King: Yeah.

Moore: Was this was what the military was telling you, this is our savior, the Snark is going to be our key?

King: Ah, never said it was our, never said it was our savior, but, you see, the problem was at that time, we were very behind in the missile race, and this is even before Kennedy came in and, we knew we were behind and the Russians had the big launchers and we just had the small stuff. No, it was just, it was just sold as it can go in, it can go 5000 miles and come back type of thing, ok? So, there wasn't too much stock put in that, but that's the way it was at the start. Northrop, of course, who was the developer, was pushing it real hard and they were very proud of it and it was an interesting little vehicle really, because it would go out and then they'd bring it back and land on the

skid strip and that type of thing, but of course this was completely overtaken by the Atlas. This was a whole new thing and all of a sudden we're getting something big and loud and more powerful. Well, my experience over those next few months were that to go back, we'd get on the bus and go out to the press site. The phones were dead, ok, and the phones would not be turned on 'til one minute after liftoff and then Ken Grine would come up and give us a two paragraph statement saying an Atlas was launched at such and such a time and it was part of the research and development program. Bang. That was it. Now as newsmen, of course, we needed more than that and so we would, it turned out, you found out pretty soon, you could develop some pretty good sources, some different people in the military, in the, in the, in the contractor business and everything else, sort of pushing their own particular efforts, without violating any security at that particular time. We weren't out to violate security or hurt the, you know, hurt anything along those lines, but you did, we were in competition. I had the UPI guy right there, Andy Taylor initially and then several others and we had the same competition that the wire services always had, you know, you wanted to, you had to beat the other guy out in that sense. That was the whole concept of a wire service. At any rate I had to find out about six or seven different ways to explain, describe, in the second or third paragraph of my story, how this blew up and you didn't want to be repetitive, so you had to, you had to really work at that, but that, what I'm leading up to is, my first experiences were that just about everything was blowing up in my face there at the time of the launch coverage, certainly we had certain ones that went through. The Thor and the Jupiter were swinging along pretty well because they were more advanced and, as I say, with them it was the battle between the Air Force and the Army. The Air Force finally won out and the Jupiter came back into the, and von Braun turned that into a different type of planetary vehicle, planetary launch vehicle and that type of thing, but there was great competition at that time. The chief public information guy for the Army came down. We had to go out

to dinner and he was telling me all the, praising all the aspects of, of the Jupiter and so, those things, those things would go on. And actually, you had a competition between, with the, with that Atlas, you had a competition between the Ballistic Missile Division out in California and General Yates and his team here. So, they would have representatives come in and there were different ways that you could get information on how things went. I had a wonderful guy who preceded me just during the, during the Explorer, during the Explorer I mission. I'll think of his name in a minute. He was a great aviation writer for AP. And he was meticulous in his filing system which I never was and he left me some great files on different vehicles and that type of thing. One of them was called the Bull Goose which nobody knew much, much of anything about. And I, when I first arrived I had gone up to Ken Grine and Sid Spear who was his boss, Colonel Sid Spear now that I think of his name and said, you know, at a certain point, where I'm the AP guy, I'd like to go in and present my credentials to General Yates, you know, and kind of meet him. And they said, yeah, sure kid, we'll take care of it, you know. Nothing happened. So on this particular day where, where I sort of made my first mark with General Yates, other than just covering the regular coverage, was I came in, back to the motel and the, the guy jumped over the counter to me and he said, the Goose Man's in. And I said, the Goose Man, what do you mean? And he explained that the Bull Goose was developed by Farichild and this guy was from Fairchild and whenever he came in the Bull Goose was launched. Now, that was a highly classified missile. General Yates never talked about it. Ok? Because they used to sneak things off on us. So, there's the Bull Goose, if you want, if you want to think of it, this is going back to the Snark now, picture those fifty Snarks going into Moscow, ok. Well the Bull Goose was a fiberglass missile that would go in and confuse the, the radar, so those, so those Snarks could go chugging into Moscow and at that time that was a big deal. It had confidential written on the side of it. Ok? And it was fiberglass so it wouldn't be picked up by the radar. They were still working on that very quietly.

Well, I kept on checking on a number of things and I had a wonderful photographer named Jimmy Curline who would come down from Tallahassee with AP all the time, do the photo coverage. We got to know each other and we're very close and worked together. And sure enough everything came together and I had enough sources and everything else where we got the binoculars on the Cape right from the, the motel in Cocoa Beach. Sure enough, this silver streak shot off, just at the projected time. I jumped on the wire and said the Bull Goose, a missile so classified that it had confidential on the side was launched today and highly secret and this type of thing. Well, a half an hour later General Yates' secretary calls and she says, Mr. King, General Yates would like to talk to you. You know, I had seen him, I had listened to him in briefings and everything else. . .

Moore: And been trying to see him.

King: Right. And he got on the phone and I said, General Yates, I've been looking forward to meeting you. He said, good, get your ass up here in 45 minutes. So, sure enough I went up to Patrick and went into see Yates and, he said, where the hell did you get this Bull Goose story and this type of thing and I explained the whole situation and I said, I said General, you know, you didn't, you didn't tell us anything, but, you know, these are the facts. I said, was it wrong, and he said, no. He said, the problem is, Murray Snyder, who is the undersecretary for public affairs with the Defense Department called me and chewed me out and so we reached an agreement after that and he said to me, anytime you're going to bust something, I won't try to stop you, but do me the courtesy of letting me know. Ok? And so we had a wonderful relation after that and I did do that a whole number of different times. There was some Venus probes and some other things, you know, a lot of things were very dramatic in those days. And. . .

Moore: Did he ever ask for your sources?

King: No, no.

Moore: He just wanted to know.

King: No, he just wanted to know. He just wanted to be on top of it. He knew better than to ask for the sources. He knew he wouldn't get anything on that, you know. So, it turned out to be a good relationship. It was a fascinating experience at that time, as they say, the, there were big pluses and big minuses as these things developed. I had developed a source with Vanguard where he was right in the blockhouse and two minutes after launch he would tell me we were ok or it's going off line. And so I just put that in the story. You just develop the source as a news guy through different means. We also had, I also worked with a couple of other people, a real character named Doug Dittera, and you might have heard, Doug's name will come up in times in the history of this place. Howard worked with, knew him very well. And he was quite a, quite a character, kind of an old disgruntled guy, but always, always, being the great, wanting to break the news and that type of thing. Now his sources were in the local pubs. These were the Pan Am, guys who worked for Pan Am, who at that time was the base contractor and these guys would be in there having a few beers and Doug would strike up a conversation and pick up a few things, you know, and so we'd share those different things as it went along. So it was a real interesting experience. I decided to leave AP after, after a year and I went up to Philadelphia to work for a magazine for a while, but that was a very short while because at that particular point, coming up on 1960, NASA made the decision to establish an

operation at, at Cape Canaveral, which they did not have before other than bringing people in and bringing people out. NASA was, what, established in 1958. The, the seven astronauts were named and at that particular point the von Braun team was brought over to NASA. They had been at the Army Ballistic Missile Agency in Huntsville and the launch operations portion of that under Kurt Debus came down to Cape Canaveral and that was the first time there was a physical presence there. Well, NASA offered me the job to be the first public, public information guy at Cape Canaveral. I knew the people in Washington because I had worked them, was sort of a fledging group at that time under Walt Bonny, who had been the NA, he had worked with the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics for many years. He was a fine public information guy and he was smart enough to hire a couple of very good journalists who jumped the fence like I did. We were really accused of jumping the fence by our fellow news guys in those days. They really looked at us as traitors going from, from working as a newsman to going to the public information side, or going to PR side, which was very interesting.

Moore: Before you go on, I want to go back. . .

King: Yeah,

Moore: . . . just briefly. When you were on that side, cultivating these relationships for information, very different, than perhaps during later years, was there a. . .

King: Oh yeah. No question about it.

Moore: There was, why, what was it, how was it that you were able to cultivate a confidence in these people that they would to give you the information on a regular basis. I think now, perhaps, there might be more investigative fear of investigative reporting or, which has a more negative term. What was it then that enabled you?

King: Well, it was, it, I look at as really a personality type of thing where you get to deal with people. You get to know, you get to know people, and once you, you know, I became a part of the area. I was, you know, a thing I've always, I've always talked about, even going back to those days, but I'll talk about it more once it became NASA, but everybody talks about Cocoa Beach in those days, of all the bars and the neon signs and that type of thing and the news guys come in and there's great partying and then they leave. Damn it all. We had a whole group of young, very capable people, aeronautical engineers most of them, who turned into, who we turned into aerospace engineers. This was the, the space program started ten years earlier, but this was really when it was starting and what were we doing. They were well educated, well educated, they were married, they had kids. We, we built, we worked on building the church, we built the, the various schools, the primary school which became known as Freedom Seven, the junior high school. We're all very proud of, those were things that were going on at the same time. Everybody thinks it was just a great heyday of, of, too much, too much partying and too much, hard work and too much partying and that type of thing, but it was far beyond that in the minds of many of us. I'm. . .

Moore: No, it's fine.

King: I'm detracting here to a degree.

Moore: No, that's great, but I understand.

King: But, that was the spirit of things. Going back to the sources as you got, as you got to know people it had to be a situation where you kind of, you kind of locked in with them if you will and it sort of grew from there. And you had, you had some people who were always eager to tell because they, they knew something type of thing. I never looked it as being un-American or causing any problems along those particular lines, because that's the way the news business goes, you see. Historically it's gone that way for hundred and hundreds of years.

Moore: So then you have this transition where you are. . .

King: Yeah.

Moore: . . . now working for NASA.

King: Right.

Moore: Your fellow reporters were seeing you as a traitor in some respects for jumping the fence, but did they also see this as an opportunity to have one of their own on the other side?

King: Yeah, they did, they did. But it really didn't work that way because we knew, we, we had our own ground rules on how we were going operate. Now the big thing that occurred of course

when NASA came in is, up to then as I said, first you had the Air Force, tight security, ok. Now coming in as the first NASA element here is all these people who worked for the Army Ballistic Missile Agency who'd been working under the same tight restrictions and that's, that's the way the thing worked. It started off as the launch operations directorate under, under Kurt Debus. And now another thing that's forgotten here is, by many people is at the same time, when we think of, when we think of Debus and we think of Mercury and Gemini and Apollo and we think of Chris Craft and all the, the wonderful guys in Houston. There was another element there that was, that was just as, that was tremendous and that was what had the ignominious name of unmanned launch operations and this was the team that evolved out of Vanguard and they were the ones who were launching all the communications satellites, all the, all the space probes, all the lunar, all the lunar flights that preceded man's activities going to the moon and, meteorological satellites and they're, sometimes they're very much forgotten and that was a team that I worked with just as much as I worked with the, the brighter lights, if you will, which was manned space flight and found that just as exhilarating working with those guys. There was a guy named Bob Gray who just recently passed away who ran that operation. His deputy John Neilon still lives here in Cocoa Beach. He'd be a wonderful guy for you to talk to, John Neilon, N-E-I-L-O-N, and he's right there in Cocoa Beach. And it's, it's interesting because that's a thing that's often neglected. You look at this place and everybody thinks of Kurt Debus. With all due respect to Kurt Debus, there's a lot more than just that and regretfully it's too forgotten in many ways. I had just as exhilarating experiences doing countdowns and working with those guys as I did on many occasions on manned space flight. The satisfaction of seeing that, seeing that thing separate and knowing that probe is going at, to such and such a place, for knowledge and everything else and I mean that very sincerely and the great, the key to me was, they're a great group of people. These people in the space program, then and now, the reason I'm

out here now, I'm no kid anymore and far from it. The reason I'm here is that I'm fascinated to work with these people, the guys and the, the guys who are putting, working on the Shuttle and that type of thing and to be with them and to participate in it from that particular sense is always fascinating to me. So it's always been a people thing and I've just admired and respected them. They're the ones who have really done it. Getting, alright, getting back to where we were in 1960, I came in I think it was June of 1960, that was when the, the Debus team first came down. Now we were reporting to von Braun in Huntsville at that time. It was not a center, center or anything else and I was the lone public information guy and of course you had all these guys coming down from Huntsville, all of whom knew each other. Then you had a whole number of newcomers like me and a number of others and I actually started off, my office was up at Patrick Air Force Base in building 425. . .

Moore: So you were still near Ken Grine?

King: Yeah, yeah I was, at that particular time. He was in another building, no, he was, yeah he was in another building at the same, same place. And we had known each other of course and so that, that helped to a tremendous degree as I was starting out with NASA. We had a number of other people up there and then the Debus team was located right out here at Cape Canaveral at the, at the place that it is still there now used by the Air Force. I, I had some tremendous challenges at that time. I knew what the job was. I was working with a good, good team of people out of NASA headquarters on the public affairs side. Now the challenges were twofold, really, number one, the biggest job I had to do, the biggest PR job I had to do was with our own people, at our own NASA people in order to get information that I could pass out to the news media. They had the military, they had the military mind, number one. You know coming out of those classified programs. Number two,

we had an attitude on the part of many people, why the hell should we tell the press anything, all they do is write stories that knock us and that type of thing, because in those days the missile race was going on and the press was jumping all over us as they had all over the Air Force before that because these were the early days when things were just starting out. By the time we launched Alan Shepard, what there'd been a man, a dog, and I guess _____ (Terish Culver) had gone, so, you know, it was, we always had to face those particular things and very quietly on the unmanned side. We were, we were really doing things, which the Russians hadn't spent that much attention to, which I felt very, very proud about. I will never forget one of my first exhilarating experiences was we launched a big balloon called Echo back, it was probably about 1960 and it was just, was a communication experiment where you could bounce radio signals over it, but you could see it and every night I'd go out in the backyard and see Echo pass over. Now this was 1960 and that was a fascinating thing, this little star going by. And a number of other, the whole team did the same thing, every night we're run out in the backyard and take a look, you know. So there, there were experiences like that above and beyond the tremendous activities that were going on as we prepared to put man into space, which is a wonderful story in itself. I was fortunate. I had to jump right in on that and was fortunate the main operation was out at Hangar S at the Cape, that was where the Mercury spacecraft was and one of my first wonderful experiences was I had got to know John Yardley who was the, the top, top guy from McDonell on the development of the Mercury spacecraft and John took a couple of us out to Hangar S and just, even though everything was, nobody could get close to the Mercury spacecraft other than the workers and the technicians, I had the wonderful experience right from the start of John took us out and said this is this is this is this and gave us a full run down on the thing. And it was Paul Haney and myself. Paul was a public affairs guy from Washington. And boy I had a green book full of notes on that particular thing and that was the

learning process as we went along. Getting back to the, the whole aspect of trying to get information, finding out what was going on, as I say, that was quite a challenge and you had to win people over and you had to show them that it was to our benefit and to, to their benefit to get the good word out on what was going on. Sure it was still going to be slammed if something goes wrong, but it, it slowly evolved, but it, as I say, it was a battle, cause there was two aspects, number one, the security minds at hand and number two, the fact of why the hell should we tell them anything because they just say nasty stuff about us, you know. So that was quite a bit.

Moore: Now there was a real transition though in, in, where Ken Grine was coming from, this is the Air Force, these are the policies, etc. NASA came in, this is a public organization, you are here for the public to disseminate information. Was there a, how did the cooperation evolve between those early projects when you came on board to, not only the NASA human space flight but as well, the expendable launch vehicles, in communicating, how was it that you opened those doors and kind of broke away from the tradition of the Air Force and control?

King: Well, actually, the way it started, one of the difficulty was, as I mentioned to you, the press wasn't allowed to go out to Cape Canaveral, no how. And they had to get on the buses and even, even at the time NASA was there, was established, they could not go out except for launches. So our first office, our first public information offices were located in Cocoa Beach. I wasn't out in Cape Canaveral, because all of the, all the press was in that particular area. They couldn't, if I was out at Cape Canaveral, they couldn't get out to see me. And so how could I do my job. So that was readily understood. We were, my first office was in the, about three or four different locations in Cocoa Beach for a different missions and that type of thing. As the government, once again, would

get the lowest bid and that type of thing, and we'd go into another location. So, so that was fine as far as dealing with the press was concerned, but keeping up on what, what was going on out there when I'm 25 miles away, I had to spend an awful lot of time going back and forth and it was, once again, it as the typical PR job if you will, as I said, the biggest PR job was with our own people, it was getting to know them, getting to work with them and that type of thing. Now one person I started off with right at the start, who became one of the key people in the whole Apollo program as far launch operations was concerned was Rocco Patrone. I don't know if you've ever heard his name or not, but Rocco was just an Army Major as part of the ABMA team and Rocco grew to become the whole director of launch operations for Kurt Debus and was the guy who really was the driving force behind really knitting this then KSC team together to make it work. And I've the world's greatest respect for him. My fortunate thing at the same time was Rocco was very aware of the benefits of public affairs for the agency plus the fact that we had to follow the NASA mandate of telling everything that was going on. So that was the process that just continued to evolve and evolve over a number of years. What was helpful of course. . . go ahead.

Moore: What did he see? What was, how did he recognize the inherent value in, in tying the public to this, in getting the information out?

King: He. . . trying to think of the best words to describe it. It was him as a person. I mean, he went, he went beyond the job at hand. He was more of a humanitarian in a way and, and so, I think he understood it more readily than, than your basic engineer did. The engineer is out there doing a particular job. Rocco could look beyond that and a number of other people looked beyond it within NASA, which helped tremendously when you, when you're working with a whole group that

came out of the military thing. Now I'm not trying to be negative of them. They were, was a marvelous team and they had their noses right there knowing what they wanted to do and they were going to do it very well, but that, that was their focus and a number of people could look beyond that and so within the organization those were the people that I worked with and we slowly brought things around. Kurt Debus with all due respect did not have much respect at all for the public affairs thing at the start.

Moore: Really?

King: But the people around him did. Yeah, he wasn't that interested in it. Then that's why I dealt with a whole number of other people at the same time. I'm sorry to put it that way, but, that, that was, that was part of my challenge.

Moore: Was it just something that he came around on?

King: He came around on, too, sure, because the way he came around on it is the way the attention grew on the particular program. I mean once we started getting into project Mercury and doing the launches and that type of thing it was a whole different world. With project Mercury, you had the, you had the top press in the United States coming down here for every one of these launches.

Moore: Now this is kind of an interesting change from some people's perspective because the argument has always been, whether it's completely accurate or not, that, that von Braun's attitude

was very much, I worked at a previous government system where it was very secretive, nothing was able to come and then Debus, being kind of part of that, the Germans coming along shared that kind of view that it has to be a public sharing kind of a prospect.

King: Oh yeah, I think he's, I think he's spoke that way, but I, I don't feel that I got tremendous support right from the start from his particular inter-directorate on these particular efforts.

Moore: There were other more important things to take care of. . .

King: Exactly. Yes. Exactly right and I don't mean, I don't mean any more than that. He wasn't against it by any degree, but it wasn't something that they thought about that much at the start. Now certainly von Braun espoused that, that was a natural thing to do coming out of the experience of the, of the German team to start off with and then, and then under ABMA, under Bruce Medaris, which was a very tight, tight-knit group back at the start of the program. So, that's sort of where we were and I was, my, my efforts were really just trying to develop good contacts within our own organization as I got to know people and I, I like to think that you have to have a mutual respect with people in order accomplish what you what to accomplish and for them to accomplish what they want to accomplish. And I think that that went that way. I got, I got a tremendous amount of help as I went along. I could jump ahead in a minute on the Saturn V, you know, when they told, when I was doing the countdowns and they said, my God, we've got to do the countdown on the Saturn V, I spent hours and hours and hours with the guy who nobody knows named Clyde Netherton and I'll never forget him. Now Clyde was one of the guys who was orchestrating the Saturn V countdown. This was, this was still in the early sixties and I would spend hours with Clyde. I'd say, ok, at this particular point

1 what's this, what's this, what's this, what's going on, you know, and I'd write it all down. I'd do the
2 same, same way with the space craft test conductors. There was a tremendous amount of homework
3 to do these things if you wanted to do it right. I'm jumping ahead but, the reason I'm saying that is
4 because of the people. They would take the time and, with me, you know, I'd come in and, Christ,
5 he's, he's got a job to do and he's going to sit down and this public affairs guy's coming in and I got to
6 sit down and give him countdown 101. Well, yeah, but he did and a number of people did, they came
7 forward and I got tremendous help from these people and it was really, really working at it. And, at
8 the start, going back to another aspect, I'll try not to jump around too much, but the other big
9 challenge I had in addition to getting people to cooperate on one side was the fact that, I would, I
10 came out of the writing business, ok, as newsman, I was a writer and, my God, we were just
11 assaulted by the networks, ABC, CBS, and NBC wanting to get things geared up for the first manned
12 launches. Now in my particular mind, I had, you know, I didn't know how to connect one thing to
13 another as far as anything concerned with television was concerned, so I was fortunate enough to be
14 able, one of the first people I brought on board was a gentleman named, Gaither Cartee, who has
15 kind of a funny, a funny, reputation. He was with NASA here for about twenty years. He was quite a
16 character. But damn it all, what he did for me at the start, he knew the TV end of the business. We
17 had another guy from headquarters and they were able to put those aspects together working, now
18 this is where Ken Grine comes in, and the Air Force guys because it was their property out there and
19 their support was tremendous, putting together, putting together the whole television operation for
20 Press Site One, that was our first press site. We had to build a press site, another press site to cover
21 the Mercury-Atlas launches and the Gemini launches because that was the other side of the Cape,
22 and Ken's people, we worked with them, we gave them requirements and everything else, but they
23 really put that thing together, and he had a marvelous team of just, there was probably just about six

1 or seven of them, public information guys and they just melded together. He had some ornery old
2 sergeants who were, who were just tremendous when it came to getting the work done. I had to, I
3 had to turn people around in our organization to get financial support, facility support and everything
4 else, and at the start they were saying, you know, what are we doing this for, you know, why, why
5 should we spend money on this. So we had to do a PR job once again and I don't mean I did it all on,
6 by myself, don't misunderstand me, but you really had to turn these people around and it was
7 accomplished, it was accomplished. And it turned out as, as stubborn as they might be at the start
8 they was overly supportive once, once we got things going, so I can't say anything critical on that
9 particular area. It was just growing pains over the first couple of years, but it was a great experience,
10 once again, working with people. So, that was the, that was the big challenge, was how are we going
11 set up, you know, Cronkite's coming down, Huntly, Brinkley, Frank Reynolds, Jules Bergman, BBC,
12 and just, you name them, and the Germans and, you know, the Japanese, ultimately, and we just had
13 a tremendous crowd of people and as I said, they were all the top news guys. When we get into the
14 Shepard launch and then the Mercury launches you had the top people down here. You had the
15 Watergate guys from, from the Washington Post. You had some of the, some of the top writers,
16 Pulitzer Prize winners. A wonderful guy named Jerry Green from the New York Daily News who was
17 a police reporter, who had just, but a top notch news guys in New York and he was covering the
18 space program and so it was, it was a fascinating thing and of course everyone of them wanted more
19 information. But we were at that particular stage where we had matured to a degree and a wonderful
20 thing happened to support our whole public affairs effort at the, at what was to become the Marshall
21 Space Flight Center here at the cape, initially with the, with the space task group guys who came out
22 of Virginia and then ultimately went to Houston, became the Johnson Space Flight Center and so
23 that, so we had, we had a good group of public information guys there and we had some key people

in Washington who were seasoned veterans. And the one who really came in and took over after about two years was a gentleman named Julian Sheer, who was a news guy coming out of North Carolina and he went to work as the associate administrator for public affairs in NASA headquarters. At that time a wonderful gentleman named Jim Webb was the NASA administrator and I don't know whether you've heard much about Jim Webb, but he's really the guy, he's really the administrator who made this program. He had, he came out of the Bureau of the Budget of all things and just, just walked up and down the halls of Congress as determined as possible to get support in the early days for the Mercury program and he was just a dynamic leader and Julian went to work for him and they just, they just tied in together beautifully. Now Webb gave Julian the support, Julian was able to present that support to the different centers and that type of thing and as a result our support increased to a great degree and I've got to give him credit for that because that added some authority to the whole situation. Now, just about all of us were news guys. We were pretty good, we could, we're pretty good writers. So we're able to put together the information pretty well. The press always wanted more or they always wanted what's negative or that type of thing, but I'm really proud of, of the press kits and the information that we put out for the press.

Moore: Now did you sense that the press was looking for the negative at the same time. . .

King: Oh to a degree. Sure. They always were, because of, because, once again, of the space race and that type of thing. Are we really going to catch up or what's the situation?

Moore: So it was more of where do we stand kind of thing not the. . .

King: Yeah, but it was, most of the coverage was positive. Anytime anybody dropped a bolt, if we scrubbed today that was a major story, all over the world. This was all front page stuff in those days, because it'd never been done before. So, the negative, the negative things would be along those lines. If something, if, if we scrubbed, if we had a problem with a, before we launched Glenn, we, my God, we did one launch with the Redstone, Mercury Redstone, where the, the engine ignited then went back on the pad, the, the system recognized that as engine shutdown and the parachutes deployed. It was the craziest looking thing you'd ever want to see, there's the Mercury Redstone sitting on the pad, the engines had shutdown and the parachute's hanging out. That was the parachute for the Mercury. So, things like that, things like that occurred. There were, there were all kinds of things that occurred. What just before we launched John Glenn, I think two missions before they were blowing, blowing up an Atlas to smithereens. And so those, those were things, sure those were negative stories, believe me, as that went on and, and it was proper, it was proper, because those things were occurring. There's no question about it. But we're taking it, we're taking every, every, every chance as far as safety of the crew and everything else. I've never had any doubt about that, although, when we got to, we did start rushing too much, that resulted in the loss of three wonderful guys and that was Grissom, White, and Chaffee, but that came later and I'm not an expert in that particular area of the space craft development, but they did go too fast and ironically they gave up there lives, but thanks to them things worked after that. It's a hell of a way to look at it, but it's true, jumping ahead again. Ok, at any rate, we get down to, we're leading now into the Mercury launches and before we launched the Mercury, before Shepard is launched, NASA announces that one of three astronauts is going to make the first flight, Grissom, Glenn, or Alan Shepard. Now as things moved along everybody had a pretty good idea that Shepard was going to make the first one. Particularly since Gus was running all over town partying a little bit and, and Alan was much more

serous about his preparation. Because they stayed right there at the, they stayed at the Holiday Inn at that particular time, right there in Cocoa Beach. So, these, these things were going on and of course, once, once we get ready to launch the first thing we do is launch the chimps. It was Ham, which was a marvelous experience on my part 'cause once again I was out there and the veterinarians were taking me through, they were treating the chimps just like they treat astronauts. You had a prime chimp and a backup chimp and, and they check out their spacesuits, give them physicals and everything else. And so I got quite involved in that and then, of course, Ham was successfully launched, came back, cute little chimp with the, with a jacket on. Now the big battle with Ham was, that the chimps came out of Holloman Aeromed in New Mexico, that's where the chimpanzees were and, they brought, they brought them in and the big, the big thing you wanted was you did not want to personify the chimps because if anything happened on the flight and the chimp was killed you don't want little, little Ham or little so and so. . .

Moore: America loosing one of their little. . .

King: Oh, that's right. . .

Moore: . . . little heroes.

King: So, the way, the way NASA played it working with the Air Force, meaning, since they had the chimp program, was Ham was Animal Subject 65, and he was identified as Animal Subject 65 until the mission was successfully completed. Now, the real interesting thing is Ham wasn't his real name, his name was Chang, that was the nickname they gave him and it was determined that we

didn't want to have any, any concerns about Chinese Americans or anything else. This was on NASA's part so the name was changed to Ham which stood for Holloman Aeromed. The interesting thing is the backup chimp's name, original name was Elvis. Now that was fine because the chimp had long sideburns. The only problem was it was a female chimp and so we didn't think it was a good idea to identify the, the backup chimp as Elvis so that name was changed to Patty, which apply stood for Patrice Lumumba, who was then a tyrant in the. . .

Moore: Zyre, or Congo.

King: Yeah, in the Congo. That, that was sort of the, the sense of humor of the Holloman guys, you know. We'd made discussions on this and we told them there was no way you could, you could launch a Chang and that type of thing. This is a minor sidelight, but a wonderful experience at the time going through that.

Moore: Well, how were they sharing this with the public? I mean, was this, this was all internal.

King: We weren't sharing anything with the public; that was all internal.

Moore: That wasn't until, wasn't until it was successful.

King: All the public knew at that time was we were going to launch a chimpanzee and the identification was Animal Subject 65. Before we launched it, Howard Benedict, through his great sources and Al Webb who was the UPI guy, they all knew that the name was Ham at that time. They

knew nothing about Chang, but they knew about Ham. Chang never got out. So that, that was just some sidelights along those lines. Well, anyway Ham made this great flight, came back, put a jacket on him. He had his little diapers on and gave him an apple and that type of thing and then we're getting ready for Alan Shepard. Now this is when things really started to pick up. This is when the press comes in and they're going everywhere and they're talking to people and wanting to know everything. We, we gave out just about all the information and didn't withhold anything for any particular degree, but they always wanted to know something more. This is, a lot of people might not agree with this, I'm not speaking for myself, but of course, in those days the press was all over, their interest was intense in what was going on down here and the coverage. And of course once you let them in launches the, that, that, that was really high. I feel, because the capability of a lot of people within our organization that we were able to serve up things on a silver platter. We could of served up the information on a paper plate and they would have grabbed it. I like to, I like to think, I'm proud of being a part of this group and I'd like to think we served it up on a silver platter. A lot of news guys might disagree with that, but nevertheless I feel that way and I feel very comfortable with that and very proud of being a part of it, from the, from the working end and the news end. And as I say, we had a good, a good team of people together, from the Headquarters, good guys at Marshall, a guy named Joe Jones who was terrific. The guys from Houston were, were excellent and so we had a real good team and we all worked together on those.

Moore: And you had a good working relationship with the press.

King: Yeah. We had a good, oh, we had a terrific working relationship with the press. My, my thing with NASA for the, for the fifteen years, let me see, I was with NASA for seventeen years,

seventeen years, I guess, no, I had two years with the government, about fifteen years with NASA. And it was always a thing, went from Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo all the way through with, in the new center I exaggerate we'd fight all day, say, why this, why that, why that, and we'd say this is way it is and that type of thing. At six o'clock at night we'd all get together and have dinner, a whole group of us and, you know, we're all good friends and it was a marvelous relationship. It was, it was and adversarial relationship, which it should be, and then, and then it was just, just friendship, and I still have many of them, hopefully many of them who are still alive, who are, who are friends now. And I go to New York or Washington and have an opportunity to get together and so, that was a big, that was big difference, I think, with the news media. See I kind of think everything changed with Watergate, but we can get into that later. But, I'd be, the news guys were, were a fascinating group and as I say, it was really good working with them. So we get into, we get into the Mercury program and all of that worked fine. I must, I must say the one doing the countdowns at that time was John Shorty Powers. Shorty came out of the Air Force. The Air Force donated Shorty to NASA right at the start of the program and Shorty was a feisty, little, capable guy who really made his mark, if you will. Shorty handled the seven astronauts and was known as the eighth astronaut because of a lot of publicity that he got at the time and he did the early countdowns. He, he instituted the phrase, A-O-K, which I never heard an astronaut say, I've never heard, I'd never heard the word before. Maybe it was somewhere. Might have been in the Air Force or somewhere, but I never heard the word A-O-K, and he quoted Alan Shepard as saying, everything's A-O-K. Alan Shepard never said, everything's A-O-K, but nevertheless it was another piece of, piece of work there.

Moore: We need to change the tape.

{tape change}

Moore: Alright, this is June 20th , 2002. This is the second tape of the interview with Jack King. I'm Patrick Moore, University of West Florida and Kennedy Space Center. You were just sharing with me kind of this progression in the relationship during the Mercury program and the successes of the Mercury program and how your role as a reporter prior to coming into NASA and working for NASA, benefited you.

King: Well, it was, it was extremely helpful and particularly what was helpful was the fact that I was a space reporter, if you will, in addition to having, having been, having the general news experience, because, then going to the other side, if you will, as the news guys looked at it in those early days, was, was helpful because I had a better grasp than my colleagues who, the same way, Paul Haney, had worked for the Washington Post, Al Alabrandro, no Washington Star, and Alabrandro, Washington Star, Julian Sheer had been with, the Charlotte newspaper. We had a, we had a whole number of people who came out of the news business because it was the best, it was the best place if you will, the best training ground for this new NASA public information guy if you will, because you had the capabilities to, to write, to get messages across, but in addition to that having been a newsman before that you had a better feel for what they were after and you could prepare for it. Very many times we fought for the news guys to be able to put out more information on things. A number of our people out of NASA headquarters were very hung up on launch dates, you know, upcoming launch dates in the Mercury program, and that type of thing, saying, we don't want to give them out. We're an open program. It's not classified. But they still would hold their guns, not tell the date.

Moore: Why were they worried?

King: Pardon.

Moore: Why were they worried?

King: Because if it slipped then they, then they would be on the record as saying that it was going to be launched at a certain time and we had a number of slips at different times with problems with the vehicles and, and that type of thing and the launch preparations and it, it was covering themselves and sometimes, sometimes they were very strong and won on that within the NASA, within the NASA organization, but there were no big secrets to the best of my mind that were ever withheld deliberately from the press, but there were these, maybe they're more than foibles, but they, they wouldn't, those are things that the press wouldn't get at the particular time. They'd get it as it came down the road, but there were a number of things along those lines. And there were efforts to cover up problems at different times and we had to fight over those. I'm jumping ahead. When I was in Houston and the stamp caper came up, this was, this was on Apollo 15. I'm jumping ahead now. With Dave Scott and his crew and they, it turned out that they had, were being paid off for, for bringing a whole number of stamps back from their flight and there was a lot of efforts to cover that up, but Chris Craft, who was the director of the center. I went to him and said, we can't, you know, it's, we're going, we got to come out with it all, and I recommend we come out with it, all of it right now. He said, go, and we did, but there were, there were a lot of bitterness within the NASA

community, but it was the only way to go if we were going to keep, if we were going to keep our face, ‘cause otherwise, it just would have, we would have been clobbered.

Moore: Now, you were over at Houston?

King: Yeah, I, I was in Houston. I didn’t get into that. I was, I was here, I was here at KSC from ’60 to ’72 and then I went to Houston, ’72 to ’75. I had the opportunity of, during the first negotiations with the Russians. We went over, we went over one month after Nixon did into Moscow to negotiate the Apollo-Soyuz mission and I loved it, I loved it in Houston as well. But very bluntly I got an opportunity I couldn’t refuse in 1975 to go up to Washington and go to work for the Energy Agency. Energy was the big thing at that time and this was when they brought in the Atomic Energy Commission and everything else. They offered me the top job and I, that’s the only reason I left the space program was to do that, but that, so I jumped ahead, but just. . .

Moore: We’ll get to the AEC stuff.

King: Talked about that stamp caper. But getting, alright, getting back to Mercury, of course the attention was tremendous. We, we pulled it off. I think we pulled it off very successfully. Shepard, Shepard’s flight was, was terrific. It was still a drop in the bucket when you think of what the Russians had done, but all of a sudden we’re starting to move. And the attention. . .

Moore: Were you. . .

King: . . . is coming that way.

Moore: You were aware of this though. Certainly we were behind. We did the suborbital launch and they had done the orbital launch.

King: We were always, we were always hit with that by the news media, by editorials and everything else. We were always behind.

Moore: I hate to, I hate to. . .

King: Now at this point Kennedy had come in and right after, right after Shepard's launch Kennedy was so much on the bandwagon without any question. Now there's interesting things that have come out recently about how Kennedy really felt about the space program and there's things with Jim Webb who was the NASA administrator and Kennedy did support it but for his own reasons and that type of thing. But boy, when Shepard was launched, no, I guess it was when, when Glenn was launched, Johnson, the vice president, was at the skid strip, Kennedy was at Hanger H, Hanger S, welcoming him back and everything else, because they were all jumping right in. And of course, right after the Shepard launch, you may recall, that's when Kennedy said, let's go to the moon.

Moore: Rice University.

King: And, that was, that was a tremendous thing. Now that was another thing that I look back on and I'm so fascinated with is seeing that stuff on paper first talked about. How do you get

this giant rocket from, from the barn down to the launch pad? Do you float it down, do it send it down a railroad track? All these things were looked at and I, I was, I was, I wasn't directly involved, but I was, I was involved in the sense of what was going on.

Moore: Now you were privy as the mouthpiece in essence to what was going on, the mission, where we were going. . .

King: Oh, yeah.

Moore: And when Kennedy made the speech that says, before this decade is out we're going to send a moon to the moon and bring him safely back to earth. . .

King: Oh, we'd already been working on it. I was aware of. . .

Moore: I realize. . .

King: . . . Saturn.

Moore: for, for you, was this, this was not that big a surprise that was coming? Were you prepared for this in a PR sense?

King: It came earlier than I thought it would and more dramatically than I thought it would, because of Kennedy and it was a great impetus to us, there is no question about it. He just, he

turned all of us on at the same time and I think that made a tremendous difference on, on what occurred in the ensuing years, without any question. I, I personally, now I'm from Boston, I'm, I'm an Irish man, and so I guess you might think I'm kind of partial about Kennedy but at that particular time as far as the space program was concerned it was great, couldn't have been better.

Moore: Did things change dramatically after that statement?

King: Oh, yeah.

Moore: In terms of press, I mean, we, we. . .

King: Support, congressional support, and, the media interest just got bigger as it went along. There's no question about that. Let me jump into, of course, the next, the next major one in our little chronology here, 'cause we're jumping around a little bit, was the John Glenn launch. Now that was quite a fascinating experience in itself, because John was originally supposed to be launched like in December of '61 and he went in February of '62 I believe. Then, there were about five or six scrubs in between. Every time there was, the news guys were all over the place down here, as we tried to launch, in November, then we don't launch, bang, you know. They write their stories then they all head out and then they come back a few weeks later and so we, we had this onslaught going on, back and forth, as we tried to launch John. Now a lot of the problems, they weren't all necessarily technical problems, there were weather problems and the classic thing was that after every, after every launch attempt, Shorty Powers would quote John Glenn as saying, well, I'm just as happy we didn't go because we're learning things as we go along. Some very trite statements, you know. Saul

Pett, who was the Pulitzer Prize writer for Associate Press who I knew was down there covering the launches and, I'll tell, I'll tell this story for what it's worth, and Saul said, what I want to do one of these days, Jack, is we'll be out there out at the press site and John Glenn comes down the elevator after the scrub. I am going to lead a whole press contingent, we're going to run right across the boondocks, we're going to go right into the pad, pad 14, I think it was pad 14, we're going right into pad 14, push the guards out of the way, and I'm going to go up and grab John Glenn by the spacesuit and say, John Glenn, say shit once. Instead of these glorifying terms that Shorty Powers used all the time. So, that, that was sort of the attitude as it went along. Now an interesting side light is the U.S. press was coming back and forth, the Brits were here to stay. They were here for four months. The British news guys who were a very delightful group, once again, they were the top journalists from, from the U.K. Reggie Turner who was sort of the Walter Cronkite, if you will, of the BBC. A wonderful guy named Ronnie Bedford who had been a longtime science writer, who had gone to Antarctica, had gone to the North Pole, gone everywhere and was just a marvelous guy who played the piano and that type of thing and those are just sidelights, but it was, I got to know those people very well. Ronnie had very poor eyesight. He had very thick glasses and the first time he drove from, from Orlando airport, it was with another, another, Brit, whose name I forget right now, but he was a long time writer, and he was driving him from Orlando to Cocoa Beach, because of his eyesight, he drove, he drove right into, they took the 520 causeway out here after coming from Orlando, just headed straight down and drove into the Atlantic Ocean. It was a classic. He had bad eyesight. You know, he didn't take the turn. (laughter) There were things like that. Classic, classic lines, somewhere along the line, a British writer was overheard calling into London, of course you know what they had the six hour time difference and everything else. I think he said, words to the effect, well, I just want

you to know NASA says that everything is tick-tick-ettee-boo right now. That's space talk for A-O-K. I think is the way it as worded, so things got a little jumbled up there as it went along.

Moore: Dealing with the British press here. This was an American program, _____ by Americans, on American spacecraft.

King: Yep.

Moore: Apparently there was some issue going back to the, the battle between the Atlas and Redstone. . .

King: Yeah.

Moore: . . . for the first launch. Tell me about the British press and kind of their view. Certainly they had ownership in this process as well.

King: Ah, yeah, they, I'd, I never saw any competition or I think their attitudes were really the same. They were fascinated with it just like, just like our American press was. They could be a little more jaundiced at times, but, generally I, I felt that they, their coverage was pretty straightforward along those lines. I didn't see a big difference there. . .

Moore: Well, were they. . .

King: If that's what you asking.

Moore: And I guess maybe what I'm asking is, were they impressed because of great American ingenuity or were they impressed because of what we were doing for the benefit of mankind?

King: Secondly, no question about it. . . and the fact that there's a man on there. Yeah. I would say so.

Moore: Was it the fact that it was American?

King: It was. . . no, no, American ingenuity, no, no.

Moore: Now, at the same time, though, we are having a competition and whole driving force behind this program is almost exclusively competition with the Soviet Union.

King: Oh yeah, no question about that. That's what Kennedy used right from the start, the missile gap.

Moore: So, we, we have this, we have this odd paradox, the pressure the, the amaze, the amazement at what's taking place in terms of humankind, but at the same time, what's taking place because of competition.

King: Yeah, what's also taking place is the turtle's catching up with the hare, to do a reverse on the story, but we're starting to catch. And see, there's always been a thing that, that, that we preached and that was the fact that the Russians, yeah the Russians, had the big launch vehicles and the big vavoom and that type of thing. We had to because we did not have that power capability, we had to miniaturize and now when you're getting into these aspects and space probes and everything else, miniaturization is a very critical thing, if you want to get things done, if you want it to work right, and if you want backup systems and everything else, which we were able to do much more effectively than the Russians were able to do. The Russians would get the big thing up there, but then you have to see how it works, at least, that was, that was the story at the time, but they were ahead and that was the Cold War and that was the race there was no question about that. Everybody was aware of that all the way through. And you hear Mercury astronauts who were getting on a little bit, but nevertheless they'll still talk about that particular, all of us will at that time. That was, that was the World Series, you know, I mean, we, we, people were thinking about fallout shelters just a few years before that. It was no joke by any degree. And this was the, the front competition, if you will, that made a difference and we just, we just persevered and just kept it going. Now at the same time that we, we're preparing, we're working with Shepard and Glenn and leading into the Mercury launches, a whole team of people here is working on how we going build this whole operation, we got to take over 88,000 acres out here in the Merritt Island launch area. We want to do this and we want to do this and we want to do this and it's, it's see all the designs taking place. Check with Kay Grenta, the first news release, I wrote the first news release saying we're going to acquire all this land and she has it in the NASA news center, you know Kay I think already. She's got the news release. I wrote it out of, out of, Marsh, out of, out of Huntsville, announcing the fact that NASA is going to acquire 88,000 acres out here for the, for the Saturn and Nova program. We had a, we had a rocket

called Nova that was even bigger than the Saturn V at that time, that von Braun had. Never came to pass obviously., would have been. . .

Moore: Speak to that a little bit, the, the notion of a Nova, this, this vehicle, the idea of a single vehicle that will take us to the moon and return us back to earth in one shot in essence without going into lunar orbit, in a roundabout way.

King: Well, I think, I, I, the Nova was never really fully, fully described other than the fact that it would have much more capability than the Saturn V. It wouldn't necessarily be able to go directly, I don't think, but it could up horrendously more of a payload, and in the back of von Braun's mind was Mars.

Moore: With the Nova?

King: Yeah, I think so. You see, von, see von Braun had a plan for landing on Mars in 1975, which is interesting, but that's, that's just a, he had a proposal back in the, back in the sixties to make it to Mars by '75. The, oh I'll jump ahead and tell you what happened there, but that's, that's, that comes later with the end of Apollo and, of course, the interest just starts to go down and you had the three "E"s, I've got to remember them, energy, economy, and environment, and that's where the money started to go versus the space program. And the combination of, of, that's what started the lack of interest was the fact that the whole's country's attention, the missile crisis, the energy crisis killed us and the economy in the late sixties. Look at the late sixties, look at what had happened in the sixties, which we see on the history channel and everywhere else and you had the

assassinations, you had the protests, you had this, that, they started the Vietnam War. In the mean time we happened to land a man on the moon. There were so many things going on at that time that certainly somebody better equipped than I can from a historical point of view, can point out that it was bound to occur perhaps under those circumstances. There was no way to keep it up. Once again we're jumping ahead.

Moore: Going back to. . .

King: That's another story.

Moore: Was von Braun's decision, when, the construction of the VAB and all the facilities they were building out there, was, when did the Nova approach get scrapped, or do you have any recollection?

King: No, year's later. . . They, it never really got off the ground, but I, I believe, we'd have to double check, but I believe the, the vehicle assembly building was built to hold the Nova. There was more room in there as I recall. And all the, all I remember about the capabilities of the Nova was it was just going to be a hell of a lot more powerful than the Saturn V and the makeup of it would be a different question, but I don't know how far that went, at least I lost it at a certain time. It never, it never came to the front other than right at the start when we talked about the start of the program and there was a Saturn V and there was a Nova, I think there's, I think in that news release the Nova is referred to, which as I say, Kay has. So at any rate, this as we're going along and getting into Mercury and Gemini, the, this work is starting on this whole program to set up the facilities for the, for

the Apollo program and the, and the lunar flights and, just to, to see that right from the start, I remember the first time the crawler rolled, I put the silver dollar on the, on the track and crawler went over that and I still have that silver dollar, which was the first time the crawler ever moved. And, you know, you remember things like that.

Moore: Did it crush the dollar?

King: Oh yeah, dented, but it's still there.

Moore: Still there.

King: Because it's crushed rock, you know.

Moore: It wasn't, not like a train, it didn't make it smooth, but it. . .

King: No, no, no, no bent it to a degree. But, the, and there were a lot of tremendous challenges there, there were big questions about whether that crawler transporter would ever work. And the construction, the construction of the, of the VAB was an extraordinary exercise within itself, pounding all these steel things deep into the ground. At that time making it a big deal, it's hurricane proof, even though it's now questionable whether, what it can stand up to, about, winds above 125 miles per hour and with the shape it's in after forty years that's another question altogether, too. But, at that time, that was, it was built along, according, according to those particular lines and it was built to hold what, four, four Saturn Vs, which was going to be quite a launch rate, you know. That was the

way it was going, looking at the particular time in the heyday of the early sixties. So those things were taking place while, while we're, while we're getting into the Glenn flight and then getting into all the Mercury flights, twelve of them.

Moore: The Gemini flights.

King: The Gemini flight, I'm sorry, and the Gemini flights. While all those things are going on all this remarkable stuff is taking place out here on the other side of Cape Canaveral, as they're digging holes and things start to, start to stick out of the ground and building the Shuttle, the crawler transporter right on site, it was so damn large you had to build both of them right here. That was the only way to do it. Murray and Power Shovel I remember and Bucyrus Erie with the, doing the, doing the work. A local news man attacking the, the crawler from the time it started, writing negative stories, saying its never going to work. Rocco Patrone would go out of his mind and say, what are you doing Jack, you know, and we'd go back and forth on things like that. So those, those are memories again. . .

Moore: And you're feeding information about each step of the way to the press. . .

King: Sure, yeah

Moore: . . . through your role?

King: Yeah, that's right, that's right. So, as I say, as I say, there was more than just the manned flights that were going on here, a hell of a lot more than just those, when you think of once again, going back to the unmanned guys, they were still advancing, we were going to Mars by that time, we had launched the Pioneers that actually went out of, out of the, out of the solar system, we're getting back, starting to get back a lot of knowledge, the communications satellites becoming a much more sophisticated each time, the meteorological satellites the same way, so all those things were going on. See, I, I did more than three hundred, or three hundred and fifty countdowns because of all the unmanned stuff that went on at the same time.

Moore: When did you start to take over countdowns from Shorty?

King: Ok, well as far as the countdowns, right from the start, I did all the unmanned stuff in the sixties and then as, as Space Task Group, and then became the Manned Space Craft Center, before the Johnson Space Center, I had the responsibilities for Mercury and then when Mercury was completed, Paul Haney at the, at the Manned Space Craft Center did Gemini Three which was the Gus Grissom flight, the first flight and then at that particular point, we had pushed, not, I don't mean me personally, but, the then Kennedy Space Center had pushed, were we KSC at that time, we might have been.

Moore: What year?

King: They were pushing, this was '64 I think, '64.

Moore: ‘Cause we became Kennedy. . .

King: Yeah, we. . .

Moore: . . . a week after his assassination.

King: Yeah, that’s right. Was pushing, saying, look, we want our guys to do the countdown since we’re responsible for the launch. As soon as it clears the tower, Houston, you got it. So once that determination was made, I was, I was given the assignment of doing the countdown commentaries. And, then Mercury, oh and, Gemini, it was fascinating because you had to run from one place to the other, see, first with the Air Force we’re launching Atlas/Agena and that goes up and then you got to run to another control center for the launch of the, for the Titan, for the Titan with the Gemini on it. So that, that was quite a, quite a dance, doing two countdowns on the same day, first an Atlas to get the Agena up and then coming over and doing the Titan with the, with the Gemini astronauts. So I started on Gemini 4, which was, of course the flight where Ed White did the first space walk and then from then on I did all the countdowns all the way through ‘til, all through Gemini. I did Apollo, all of Apollo, starting off with the unmanned launches and the Saturn 1B’s at Pad, Pad 34 and 36 and then the, the Apollos, I did all the Apollos, except, I didn’t do Apollo 13, of all things. I had my deputy get some experience, Chuck Hollinshead and I had Chuck do Apollo 13. That’s very ironic.

Moore: So it was your fault.

King: Yeah, that's right. Or it wasn't my fault. . .

Moore: It wasn't your fault.

King: It wasn't my fault since I didn't do it. But that was his decision, a decision we made, I wanted somebody else to get some experience, so Chuck did Apollo 13, then I did 14 and 15 and by the time Apollo 15, I had been given the job of director of public affairs at the Manned Space Craft Center in Houston. So then I went to Houston at that time in 1972, so that's sort of the history of those. But at the same time I was doing all the, all the unmanned stuff all the way through, so called unmanned stuff, which was a terrible name for that organization, but nevertheless that's what they were called. So, or maybe, why don't, if you don't mind, maybe we can wrap this up. I'd be glad to come back again.

Moore: I'll tell you, why don't we, why don't we, we'll take a break here, come back when you, at a later time.

King: Yeah, we can. . .

Moore: We can carry on.

King: We're just getting through. . .

Moore: We just kind of got through the Mercury. . .

King: Mercury.

Moore: I'd kind of like to talk some of the issues of the, the Gemini program and work our way up through Apollo.

King: Yeah.

Moore: So, sounds good.

King: Some other, some other things that I got to mention, now that I think, I always forget is, going back to the early days with AP, we had, as I told you, we had crazy missions and one of them, one fascinating experience was the Polaris. The Polaris was the Navy's first submarine missile and when the Polaris, we first did land launches with the Polaris, that was later to be launched from the nuclear submarines and to be followed on by, follow on vehicle, I'll think of the name in a minute. At any rate, the first several Polarises were terrible, they, they, on one of them, the second one, the first stage stayed on the pad, the second stage took off, went into the river right over here in the middle of Cocoa Beach, smashed in right next to a trailer court, in, in Cocoa Beach. And the joke came, nobody was hurt, thank God, the joke came out afterwards, the Polaris was supposed to an IRBM, Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile, it became an IBRM, which was In the Banana River Missile, after that. (Laughter) And at that time, I'll sing a little for you, at that time, Valere, was the popular song and the local band here did a change on it and sang it this way.

(sings) "Polaris, Oh, Oh, Polaris, Look out below, No blue, the Atlas she blew, the Thor and the Jupiter, too, Oh these birds, they keep shooting, according to Newton, Whatever goes up must go down," you know, and so forth.

{Moore laughing}

Moore: You don't by any chance have a copy of that song, do you?

King: No, no, no. Just, just remembering it. I always get a kick out of it. Ok.

Moore: Well good, we'll wrap it and we will, we will carry on.

King: Alright, I'll be getting back with you and I'm sorry to, sorry to run.

Moore: That's all right.