

Reflecting Redstone: the Rocket then and now

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It is clearly not hyperbole that Redstone Arsenal has changed dramatically from when the Rocket published its first issue on Feb. 5, 1952.

Very few buildings are standing from that time, and the ones that are have seen necessary modernization – as has the newspaper itself. Entire organizations have been created, commands evolved and history continues to be made. Through the years, amidst the beginnings – and the ends – the Rocket was there.

A look back at just a few of the major events from the Rocket's eyes:

The 50's: Rocket and space pioneer makes home in Huntsville

In 1950, Wernher von Braun and his team were transferred from Fort Bliss, Texas, to Huntsville to head Army's ballistic weapons program. Von Braun's team would launch the first American satellite, Explorer 1, in January 1958.

On Oct. 21, 1959, President Dwight Eisenhower signed legislation establishing NASA, however von Braun and his team of other Army Ballistic Missile Agency (ABMA) scientists, engineers and support personnel were not formally transferred from the Army to NASA until July 1, 1960. Von Braun would become George C. Marshall Space Flight Center's first director.

At NASA, von Braun oversaw construction of the large Saturn launch rockets that eventually took 27 Americans to the moon, 12 who walked on its surface.

Upon his death in 1977, the Rocket dedicated its June 22, 1977, front page to the legendary rocket scientist: "There has been no shortage of visionaries in the Army missile program. Many soldiers and civilians pointed the way, only a few combined in one human being vision and the ability to make the vision real. The man who did that best of all lost a long fight with cancer last week. Wernher von Braun died at 65."

The 60's: Camelot comes to Redstone

President John F. Kennedy visited Redstone Sept. 11, 1962, accompanied by Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson and the nation's top military leaders. The purpose for Kennedy's visit was to see firsthand the progress being made by NASA in America's "Space Race" with Russia.

Kennedy returned May 18, 1963, for a second visit, only this one would not be to meet with Redstone and NASA

leadership, as much as it was to directly address the workforce of Redstone Arsenal and community. More than 10,000 people attended the speech at Redstone Airfield.

The Rocket reported on the visit: "While the president hobnobbed with John Q. Public, a babe in arms touched him and squealed; a graying grandmother shook his hand and gulped; men were quietly awed in the presence of the man who holds the highest office in the land; teenagers scrambled in hopes of an autograph; and hundreds were close enough to stretch out a hand hoping for a touch, or just a greeting."

Just six months later on Nov. 22, 1963, President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas.

70's: "An air raid without bombs"

On April 3, 1974, deadly tornadoes moved through the northern part of Alabama in early evening, but the one with Redstone's number would come at the end of the outbreak, showing on radar shortly after 9:30 p.m. It moved northeast, through Morgan County, then crossed the Tennessee River into Madison. The twister bore down on the Arsenal at about 10:40 p.m.

The Redstone Rocket reported in its April 10 issue: "The post counted 26 casualties and a property loss of more than \$10 million inflicted in a few terrifying moments Wednesday night.

Even the injured called themselves lucky.

More than 1,000 soldiers – men and women – were on duty or asleep in their rooms when a tornado – the last of many that ravaged North Alabama in a night of terror dropped through the gap between Weeden and Madkin mountains and tore into the troop area at 10:48 p.m. All survived, but many wondered how as they picked through the wreckage early the next morning and got their first clear view of the destruction left in the twister's wake.

Here are some facts on what the twister did: Injuries: Redstone Army Hospital treated 26 injured soldiers; five dependents and 16 civilians, the latter brought to the Army hospital when tornadoes earlier in the evening injured hundreds in the area and jammed civilian medical facilities. Most of the soldier victims suffered cuts and abrasions when struck by flying glass and debris. All but three had been released from the hospital within 24 hours of the storm.

Loss: Official estimate: \$8,912,000 to repair or replace 96 Army buildings damaged or destroyed, some 10 miles of power and telephone lines down. The Marshall Space Flight Center had five



Photo courtesy of AMCOM History Office

In 1952, Redstone Headquarters, building 7101, was located on Redstone Road.

major structures damaged with an initial estimate of several hundred thousand dollars in property loss."

80's: The work of MSFC is again showcased on the national stage

Former President George H.W. Bush makes his first of two visits to Redstone, when then-Vice President Bush arrived and departed from Redstone Army Air-

field in October 1987 to give a speech at MSFC. The visit made the front page of the Rocket's Nov. 4, 1987 issue.

He would later return in 1990 as president, again speaking at NASA.

"Being first in space is not just America's dream, it is indeed our destiny," Bush said, as reported by the Rocket. "Let us

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Photo by Bryan Bacon

Today, the FBI Hazardous Devices School campus occupies the land on Redstone Road where the former headquarters once stood. The school, which was built in 1971, trains all of the nation's public safety bomb technicians.