Where's the Best Place to Launch a Rocket?

Potential launch sites.

As the Cold War ramped up after WW II, rockets and space became important for our nation's military and scientific goals. With rocket technology still relatively new, a launch site needed to be easily reached but a place where frequent explosions and toxic vapors would not be a danger to the local population. It also needed to have good weather and provide the best opportunity for the rockets to make it into orbit. A committee established in 1946 selected Cape Canaveral, with the nearby Banana River Naval Air Station (now Patrick Air Force Base), as the location meeting the most criteria.

Cape Canaveral can Fling Rockets into Orbit with a Nearly 900 mph Assist
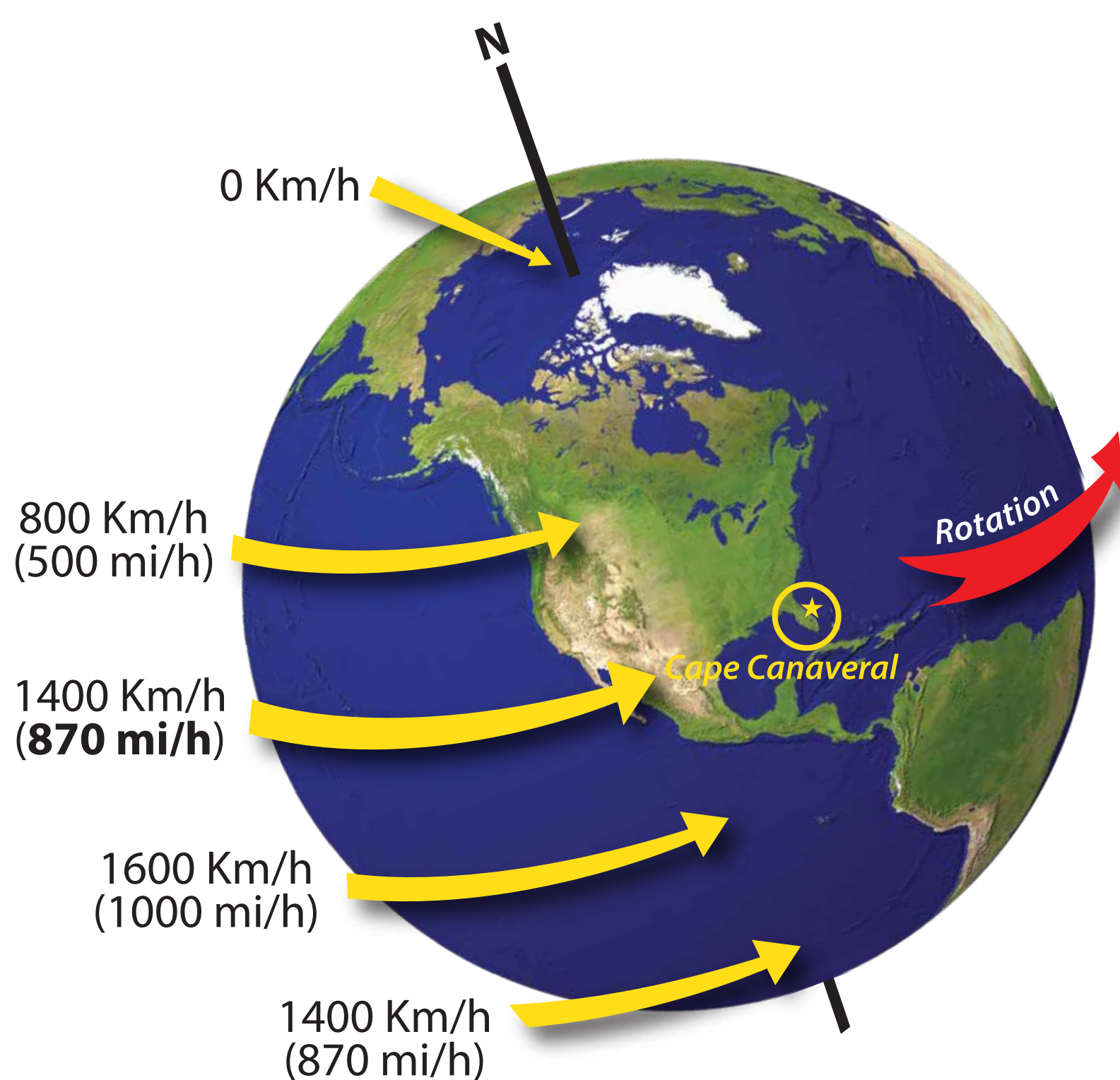


State of Florida from space.

The Earth rotates eastward, moving the fastest at the equator. Cape Canaveral was close to the equator and sparsely populated. Launching over the ocean provides protection to those on land should the rocket blow up. Launching toward the east, in the direction of the Earth's rotation, gives the rocket the added assist of the rotation speed. That speed at Cape Canaveral is nearly 900 mph. How's that for a push just by standing still?

Lighthouse Land Clinched the Deal for a Space Port

Once the population and geographic requirements were met, they had to secure enough land to build launch pads and create a buffer zone between the pads and nearby communities. The Coast Guard had bought 826 acres in 1893 to keep new construction from interfering with the Lighthouse. Thanks to the Lighthouse, land was available for the development of a Space Port. The Army negotiated with the Coast Guard for ownership. Our gateway to space was born with the July 24, 1950 successful launch of Bumper 8 from Cape Canaveral.
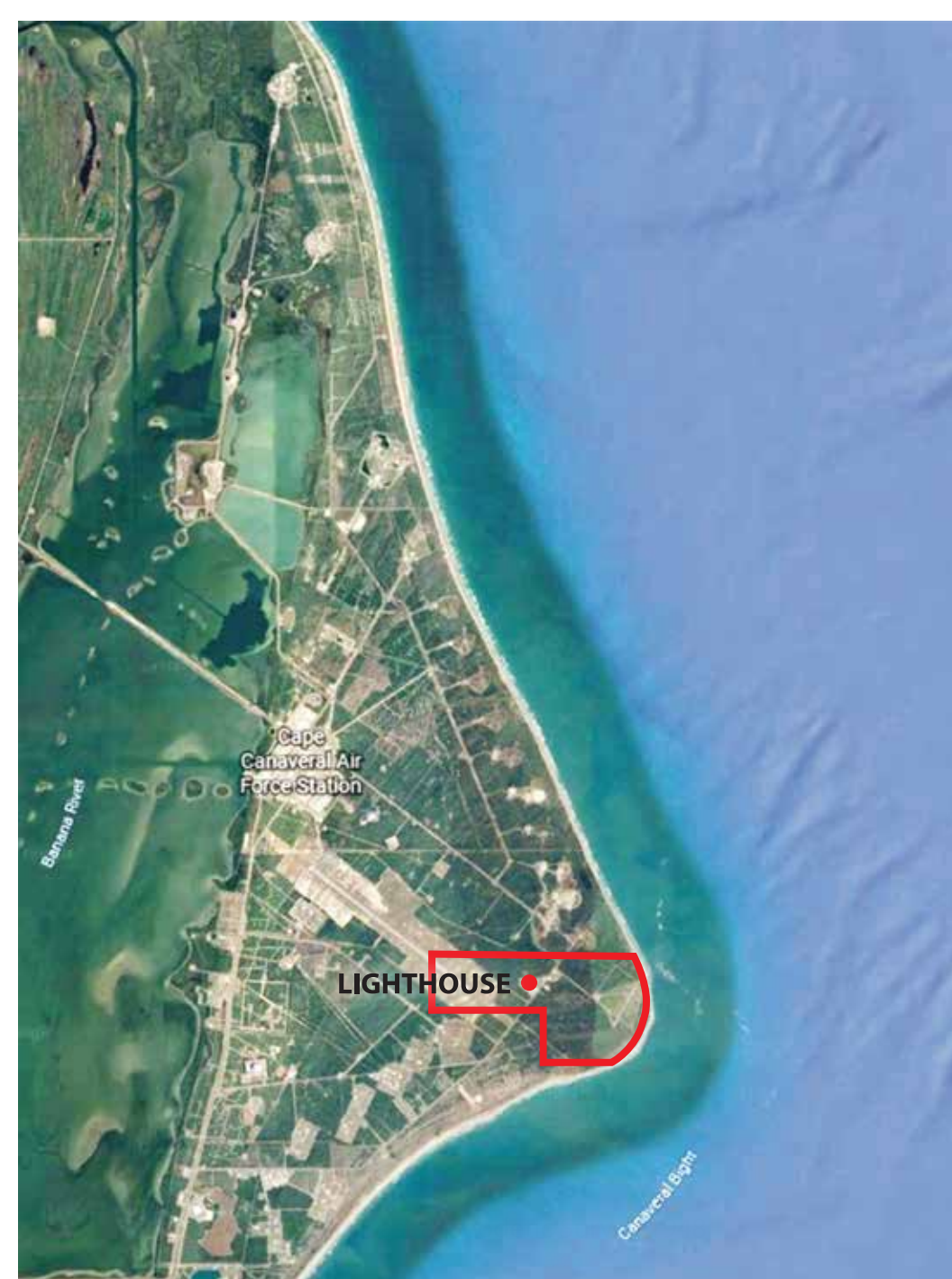
US Coast Guard reservation (826 acres) marked in red.
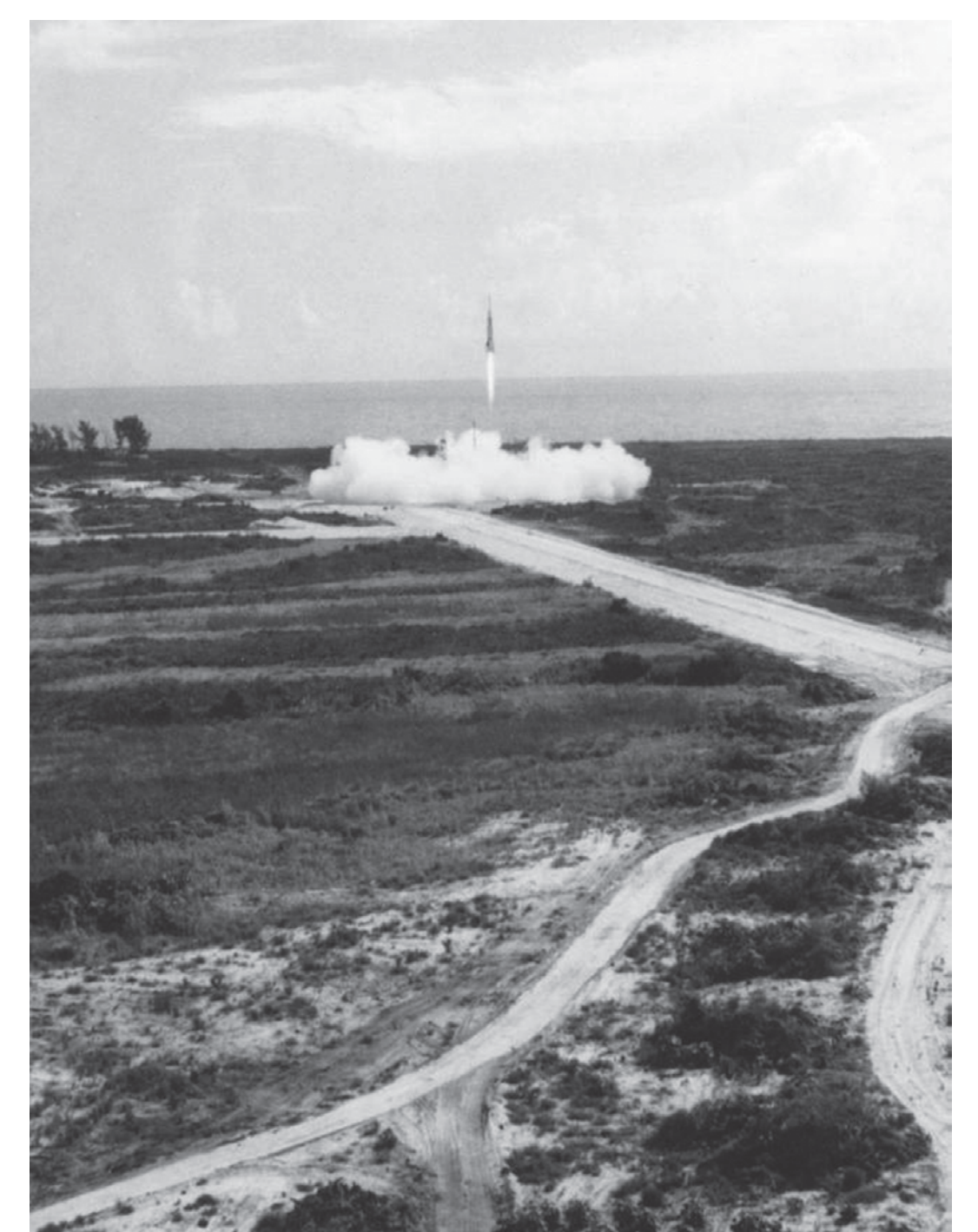
Bumper 8: first rocket launch from Cape Canaveral as viewed from the top of the lighthouse on July 24, 1950.