

# Rocket Pioneer Watches History from Atop the Lighthouse

Dr. Wernher von Braun was the driving force behind early rocket technology, first in Germany before and during WW II, then in the United States. His early work was used in military applications, but his ultimate goal was always manned spaceflight. Von Braun finally realized his dream when his Redstone was later modified to carry the Mercury astronauts into space and his design for the Saturn V sent men to the moon.



Wernher von Braun



Redstone prepares to launch, with the Lighthouse and Hangar C in the background

Cape lore says von Braun may have had an office in nearby Hangar C and witnessed several launches from atop the Lighthouse. We DO know that on May 5, 1954, he watched the 3rd attempted Redstone launch. Von Braun was with Sam Hoffman of North American Aviation's Rocketdyne Division. Hoffman related in 1972 that they viewed the proceedings "from atop an old lighthouse". The missile "rose only a few feet, faltered and exploded in a white ball of flame due to a Rocketdyne engine failure". Successes were few and far between in the early days.