



War-time rockets provide key to the stars

Clip taken from 'Timeshift: British Space Race', BBC Four.

NARRATOR:

When the Allies captured German scientists after the war, there was a chance that Britain could get hold of von Braun's rocket expertise.

CAPT ERIC BROWN:

I was, in some ways, quite astonished by what we found in Germany. It was like walking into an Aladdin's cave of advanced technology. It was, in some ways, quite a frightener to see how far along the line they'd gone in this sort of, if you like, rocket technology.

NARRATOR:

As a test pilot with specialist engineering knowledge and a rudimentary grasp of German, Eric Brown was called upon to help interrogate the German scientists.

CAPT ERIC BROWN:

Most of the scientists were not really politically motivated. What motivated them was, they were given the opportunity to practise their profession, with huge financial backing. And, of course, it was their country and I'm sure there was a sense of patriotism involved.

NARRATOR:

The prize capture was Wernher von Braun. All the Allies, including Britain, sorely coveted his rocket expertise. But he engineered his capture to be on American-controlled territory.

CAPT ERIC BROWN:

He was full of confidence that he felt he was giving himself as a gift to us. And this was because he was a brilliant scientist, there is no doubt about it. Von Braun, of course, himself had huge ideas in his own mind of where this was all going to lead to. I would say he and an elite group of his scientists knew what the potential was, which lesser men had not thought about.

FRANCIS SPUFFORD:

Wernher Von Braun said later, "Why did we decide to surrender to the Americans? Because we despised the French, we feared the Russians and the British could not afford us."

[Black and white footage of planes courtesy of the Imperial War Museum]