War Era Story Project 2012

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I am a Mechanical Engineer who was assigned to the Rocket Lab, Wright Field, Dayton, Ohio, during the Great War. One morning, on my way to work, I picked up a newspaper that had a picture of a V-1 (Buzz-Bomb) dud that landed in London. I suggested to my Colonel that I be sent to London and pick up five of these duds and bring back for study. He thought that was a good idea and left immediately. He came back with five, which were disassembled; drawings were made and an order was placed for 250 units with Willys' Overland.

These were tested at a site just east of what is now Destin, Florida. To launch the winged missile, rockets were used to propel a sled along 600-foot inclined rails. The failure rate was about 25%.

I had a concept of launching the missile from a truck, so that a system would work like artillery. You would launch a few missiles, then move to a new location and quickly launch more. This was presented to the Aircraft Lab for consideration and approval. I was allowed 10 minutes for the presentation. Approval was denied, and I was ordered to never bring this up again. The idea was obviously unworkable and nonsensical.

As I entered my office, downhearted, I must have muttered that I wished I had a Truck. The next morning, a Sergeant told me he had a truck for me, it was parked behind the test cells. I asked no questions, just thanked him.

I drove into town and found a junk yard with a crane, and welder. I asked the owner if he would do something for the war effort. He was glad to offer his help. I went back to the Field and drove out, escorting the truck to the junk yard. The Sgt. and I worked two days adding a rail system to the truck. I wrote orders to drive the truck to Fla., stopping at Army facilities for fuel, food, and lodging. In the meantime, I went to the test site and modified rockets and sled to make a launch from the truck when it arrived.

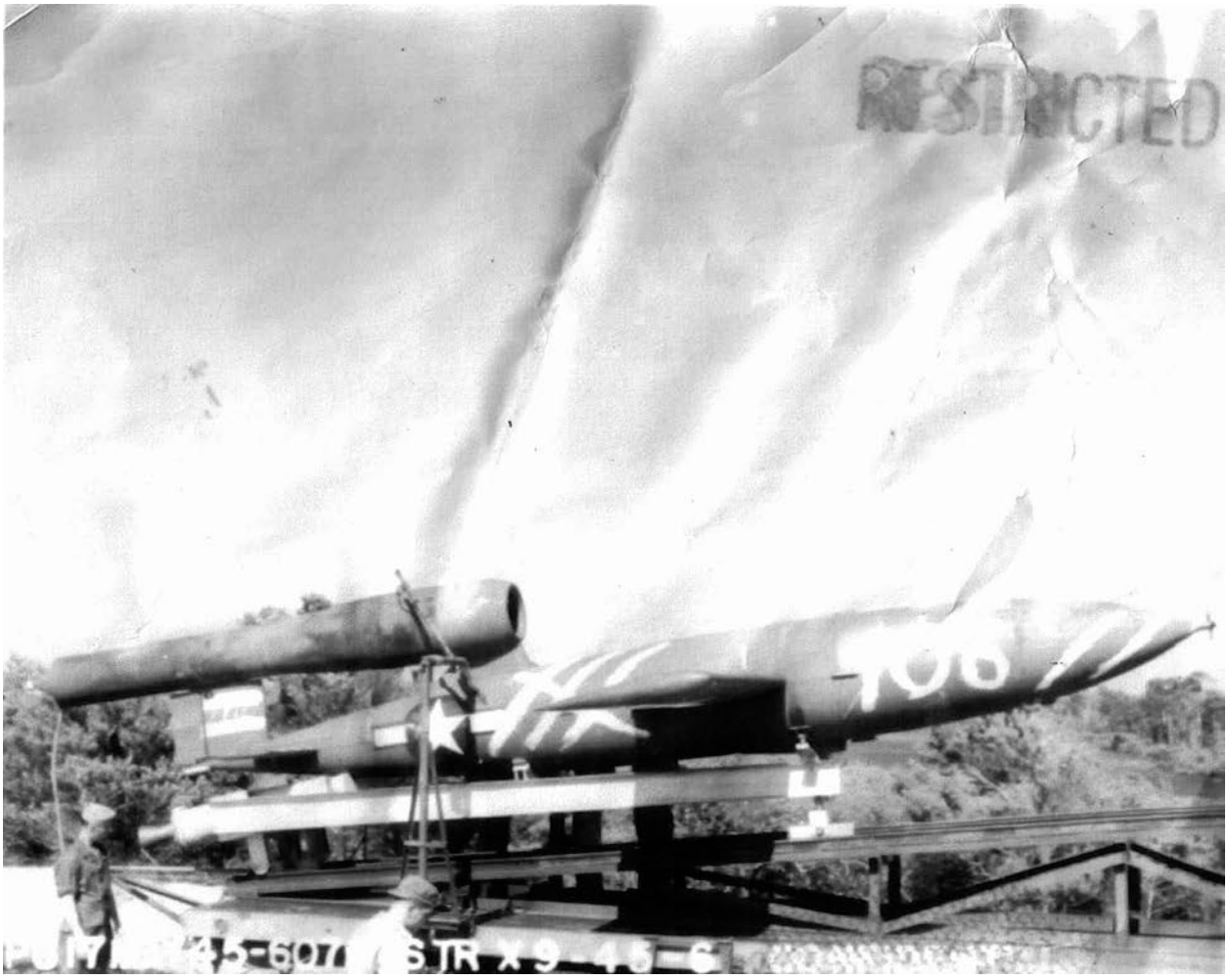
A brief description: The rockets' thrust was aligned to pass through the center of gravity of the missile-sled-rocket combination at an angle so that a vertical component of thrust supports the vehicle weight, and a horizontal component accelerated the vehicle to a speed of 340 mph. The vehicle is supported and accelerated for about 600 feet in the air below flight speed. In other words, the missile is put in the air at zero speed from a zero length launcher. It was referred to as a Zero launching System.

We are all set to launch, and the range officer refused to allow the launch to take place, except with the approval of General Gardener, the CO at Eglin Field. I sat in the General's waiting room for the 3rd day.

He came out about 10 in the AM and said: “I know why you are here. I'll give you one hour; if you don't have it launched by then, never come back into my office again.”

The fog was so thick, one could hardly see. I said a prayer. The fog seemed to miraculously lift. One could see for miles. I went back into the Generals Office and called all concerned to launch immediately or as soon as Icould get to the site. The launch was perfect. We launched many more with no failures that I recall. The Navy at Pensacola heard of our feat and came to witness. We gave them six sets of Equipment, which they adapted to a submarine. They launched the first winged missile from a submarine.

This method of launching missiles and some aircraft is still used today. This was the most exciting, and self-satisfying job of my entire career. I never wrote a report on this for fear that I would be punished in some way for disobeying an order from a superior. There is nothing heroic in this story and it is of interest to very few. Thanks for the opportunity to tell it.



The truck with missile sitting on it

3 photos (with landscapes alligned) showing missile in takeoff along flight path