Wernher von Braun was born in Wirsitz, Germany, March 23, 1912. He received a bachelor of science degree in mechanical engineering from the Berlin Institute of Technology in 1932, where he began experiments on a liquid-fueled rocket engine under Prof. Hermann Oberth. He was awarded a doctoral degree in physics from the University of Berlin in 1934.

Dr. von Braun’s work became widely known and led to the establishment of the Rocket Center at Peenemuende in 1937. Under his direction, this group developed the Wasserfall anti-aircraft guided missile.

In September 1945 Dr. von Braun came to the United States under contract to the U.S. Army, where he became project director of guided missile development for the two-stage Bumper-Wac and the development of the Hermes II.

In 1950 Dr. von Braun became technical director of the Guided Missile Development Group in Huntsville and later chief of the Guided Missile Development Division of Redstone Arsenal. During this time, the group developed the Redstone, the first large guided ballistic missile system to be introduced to the inventory of the U.S. Department of Defense. The first successful recovery of animals from a rocket flight also occurred during this time.

Dr. von Braun and 39 members of his team, along with more than 60 members of their families, became American citizens on April 14, 1955. From 1956-1960 Dr. von Braun was involved in the development of the Jupiter IRBM and the Pershing Army Missile and began a design study of the Saturn I booster. In July 1960, Dr. von Braun and his team formed the nucleus of the George C. Marshall Space Flight Center, where he served as director for the next ten years.

Under Dr. von Braun’s direction, the Marshall Space Flight Center provided launch vehicles for the manned lunar landing program, as well as undertaking the development of Skylab and the Apollo Telescope Mount. After serving as deputy associate administrator of NASA from 1970-72, Dr. von Braun left government service to become vice president-engineering and development for Fairchild Industries in Germantown, Maryland. Dr. von Braun retired in January 1977.

Throughout his career, Dr. von Braun received numerous awards, including the Department of Defense Distinguished Civilian Service Award, Distinguished Federal Civilian Service Award presented by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Engineer of the Century, Smithsonian Institute Langley Medal, National Space Hall of Fame inductee, The Medal of Honor awarded by President Ford, and many others.

Dr. von Braun died on June 16, 1977, at the age of 65. He is survived by his wife, Maria, and their children: Iris, Margrit, and Peter.