

# Comeback for the future

## Successful return of the Space Shuttles

by Yvonne Bläse and Ralf Heckel *exclusiv* for RC



11. July, Yvonne and Ralf at the launch-complex 34

After two and a half years of being grounded a Space Shuttle again stands on the launch pad at Cape Canaveral. Both authors were VIP guests of NASA's Headquarters and could follow all activities around several attempts to launch the "Discovery". There were two disappointing lift-off postponements on May 22 and July 13, 2005. While most Germans left after the second cancellation, our two authors stayed in the US although the airline wanted to cancel their tickets. So they were the only Germans witnessing the launch of the "Discovery" on the bleachers of the Saturn V-Center together with First Lady Laura Bush and the NASA-Administrator Michael Griffin.

On May 18 we took our seats in the plane to Florida. The big day is supposed to be on May 22. But together with our arrival at Cape Canaveral there arrives an SMS on



Wernher v. Braun and wife, Huntsville is celebrating the moonlanding, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1969  
Foto: Jesco v. Puttkamer



11. July, Yvonne and Mike (NASA-Administrator)



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our cellular phone telling us: "Welcome to the States. Take-off cancelled." So we are left standing in front of the KSC pretty much alone at 8 p.m. At NASA Headquarters they are trying everything to make the best out of our bad luck.. You cannot beat Americans in positive thinking. We let ourselves be infected. And no one lets us down. A breathtaking ride begins for us, per Jeep right through the history of the American Space Program. Over a distance of about 3,000 miles we get to know country and people between Cocoa Beach, Miami, Key West, Huntsville and Alabama within 14 days. They point our attention to every little pub where they used to celebrate in the times of Apollo with Wernher von Braun, where they sang or went Scuba diving on sunny weekends in the Gulf of Mexico.

The gates of the huge Space Centers at Cape Canaveral and in Huntsville are all open to us. Friendly officials-in-charge welcome us. We also meet Konrad Dannenberg (a member of von Braun's group in Peenemünde) at home and there we forget the time during long conversations. Konny D is a former inhabitant of Weißenfels and with his 93 years he's just as young as his 40 year old wife. For a whole day we lecture about International Space

Travel at the Challenger Elementary School at Miami and are showered with gifts. With a suitcase full of experiences and hard discs crammed with pictures we fly back to Germany in June. This was our first visit in the US. And we as East Germans also had to change our attitude towards

The HQ Space Operation Mission Directorate (SOMD) invites us for the second launch attempt on July 13. The time is getting short and our planned budget is already blown. So we had to had to think of something new and get in touch with Bruno Banani, a textile manufacturer. We've already

wants to do everything possible to make this start a success. It's got to work! Every American who could get some holiday, seems to pour into Florida. No matter if they are interested in space or not. You just want to be there, too. Highway 528, better known as "Beeline", from Orlando to Cape



12th July, „Nightwatch“, suddenly, the door ist open slowly, pride splendour



11th July, Yvonne with RC in front of launch-pad 39 B

this country. No single thing that we were told polemically about Americans is true. But the Shuttle is back in the VAB building. It had to be moved away from the launch pad because of problems with the isolation on the external tank.

worked with him by making a campaign for Space Marketing. We present our project, which involves a junior cosmonaut training for students. After listening to us, they say "Yes". Now it is high time; two days later we are back in the plane over the North Atlantic.

Everbody at Cape Canaveral is excited and on their feet. Not only Florida but the whole USA is infected with "SpaceFever". The world wants to take part. On all TV channels there are reports and interviews about "Return to Flight". You can feel that NASA

Canaveral is already overloaded. Everywhere all kinds of people check into the hotels. Tents are being pitched and hammocks are strung up between palm trees. Nothing can stop the Americans to travel to the Space Coast, not even Tropical Storm "Dennis", which is 300 miles away over the Keys.

"Dennis" and its weather forecasts dominate the media on July 11. Even commercials for insurance against storm damages and for power generators clamor for attention. That is so surreal! Out there's a Shuttle ready for a space

travel and folks are supposed to buy generators!

Meanwhile the storm damages at Key West are shown on TV. A pier on which we stood four weeks ago doesn't exist anymore. Our friend Henryk who's living there

of the storm filmed by the ISS crew is shown. Several astronauts and engineers are discussing risks and skills. They want to show that they are cool with things, even with a storm. Rumor has it that the launch probably will slip. Stop that now! NASA shows unity and



21th July, Huntsville, both with Konrad Dannanberg and the RTF-Shirt



15th July, New Orleans, Canal Street and Casino – the old life of a nice town

can't be reached. By noon it is becoming clear that "Dennis" will run from the North of the Gulf of Mexico right towards Pensacola.

NASA Administrator Michael Griffin appears on TV. You can see clearly that he is stressed. Footage

determination. Only a few hours later the sun shines again at the Cape. "Well done, Astronauts."

Now it is launch day, July 13, T minus 55 minutes. We're sitting in the air-conditioned Saturn V Center, only a mile away from

Complex 39 B. Yvonne goes to change clothes. We want to shoot some more photos with her in her space suit, right before the crowd will rush to the stands. The mobile phone bleeps and announces arrival of a message. It remains unnoticed. Some minutes later Wayne's wife comes and says something about "Scrapped" and "Launch". But what do you have to do with "Rühreier" (scrambled eggs) at a Shuttle start? Then the look at the cell phone. The message is from NASA Headquarters and it is short: "Launch postponed". What? Postponed? But out there is the Shuttle, and the countdown clock is running "-51 minutes". So what is this nonsense all about? The people could understand all jokes right now, but not this particular one.

But the loudspeakers come on. After a short message everyone hurries to the buses. Yvonne comes back from changing clothes and doesn't believe it. There is only time for one more photo. Everything is blocked off. Soldiers with their machine guns secure the stands. It's all accepted with composure and resignation. You know that human lives are involved, the crew's. A rumor comes up quickly, telling something about ECO sensors on the external tank.

Actually the Shuttle was supposed to take off right now. But we're back in the bus. The mood is depressed. Some sing a gospel song for the Discovery and the crew. These are emotional sounds. You have to accept that it's about the lives of humans. On the way back we get stuck in a hopeless traffic jam. Everywhere there are stands, caravans, hammocks, sunshades and cars. There must be hundreds of thousands who are on the road right now. Patiently, everyone makes their way back. Others are still headed towards the Cape, probably also caught up

by a traffic jam. We've never seen Cocoa Beach so fully crowded.

Everybody is moving away, except of the astronauts. In the evening they are at the night club, celebrating the return to old times and that everything is just like it

meetings held. We take in everything that can be done by a human at the side of the Space Program space travel and international cooperation. On July 17 we are back at the Mission Control Center in Houston and leaf through the check lists of the

Washington and also hold up the flag at the National Iwo Jima monument.

It's July 26, and we are back at the Cape. All those events within the last few days can't be digested any more, only photos are possible. In Cocoa Beach, the bus again collects us at our hotel. But this time we already depart early in the morning. The VAB building rises red out of the Indian River when Eileen Collins and her crew are getting into the van. The sky is cloudless and so hope upraises anew. Our group is reduced to half of the size it had before. The beaches and the streets are empty, too. Nobody today really believes in a successful launch.



19th July, Yvonne and a main engine

was before: „Launch slips are better than no launches.” But we are truly determined to stay at the side of the Americans every single minute, just as long as it is possible. Now we are not going to fly back until the Shuttle has launched. Even if we have to carry it with our own hands.

Konrad Dannenberg reports over e-mail from Huntsville on our mobile phone. We're calling him, everybody's listening. There's Konny D with his young 93 years sitting in front of his computer at midnight and searches for contacts at the launch site. He can't let it go. "It's just like that", he says. "You can't do anything about it. Safety comes first".

The next morning our 4,000 miles long trek begins. We drive to New Orleans, Houston, the Stennis Space Center, Huntsville and Washington. About 4,000 photos are taken, over 100 A4-pages of reports written and unforgettable

Flight Director. Two days later we chat with the employees of the Michoud Assembly Facility and Lockheed Martin near New Orleans about the difficulties of building the External Tank. In the evening we let ourselves get seduced by Blues and Jazz at the Mississippi and ride a sternwheeler. We had no idea how full life can be! One day later we visit the firing stands of the Space Shuttle main engines at Stennis Space Center and listen to explanations about future linear rocket engines. On July 20 we present gifts to Huntsville, visit Konny D again and ride a motorcycle to the Jack Daniels facility in Tennessee. Yvonne receives an Ambassador appointment from the Alabama Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville for Germany. She is only the third foreign ambassador for Huntsville. Every German interested in an astronauttraining in the Space Camp there now can use Yvonne as contact. On July 23 we visit NASA Headquarters in

The sun is burning down on the bleachers, the countdown gives hope. Nevertheless, there is confusion. Not everyone understands at once that in the last hour before the take-off the countdown clock clicks down three times 20 minutes. Again and again the VIP guests are full of expectation and then disappointed when nothing happens on the opposite shore.

Five minutes before ignition there is movement. The First Lady and her brother-in-law, the Governor of Florida, arrive and take their seats a few meters beside us. People sing the national anthem. Before we realize it, the Countdown reaches Zero. Again nothing seems to happen. Our hearts are beating up to our necks. Breathing stops. But then steam clouds billow up right and left of the shuttle. The next second a bright light burns in our eyes. You can see the shuttle clearly climbing out of the steam on a slowly growing fiery pillar. A big "Aahh" rises from the crowds. Like a wall a rough surface races towards us over the water. Then it cracks deafening. The shock wave has reached us. Fishes are jumping out of the water as if they don't want to miss this huge event. No one is on the seats anymore.

Everybody is standing up and looking up to the Shuttle getting faster and faster. The sharp crackle turns into a roaring. Discovery draws a white and dead- straight line into the sky and through a cloud that had suddenly appeared. Where did it come from so fast?

We have only seconds for taking photos with Yvonne in front of the smoke pillar. The camera has become so hot in the sun that the buttons are sticking. "Not now, right in this moment!" But after hitting it once with the flat hand it works again. There Discovery appears out of the cloud and writes a big curve into the sky. as Almost as if it is writing with a feather between the clouds: "We're back again. Space, we're coming!" The winds up there twists the line and it looks even prettier now. Two minutes after the take-off the loudspeakers say: "SRBs separated successfully." All guests are applauding. Discovery can't be seen anymore, she's already too far away. Only the little snake of smoke gets faster and thinner till it finally disappears in a cloud. Now we can only hear a deep grumbling like distant thunder.

Little kids are crying. But the crowd still stares up into the sky and follows the line disappearing in the clouds. The hands are wet from sweating. Again the speakers: the External Tank has separated successfully. We learn later that this happened right over Germany, only 8 minutes later!

Deeply impressed, we try to organize our flight back to Germany within the next three days, while we are staying with one of our many new friends. This engineer works on the Orbiter Atlantis, and for him the Discovery is a done deal. But not so for the German media politics. At home we hear and read a lot of nonsense in the newspapers. Well, we know better, since we always

check back with the experts and pros. The media reports about the Discovery sound like the ones about the MIR space station back then. We are ashamed about this arrogance...

Right before our departure from America, we are awarded Special Memberships of the Astronaut Memorial Foundation.

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## "Kondolenz" for Columbia Astronauts



Ralf Heckel, President Dr. Feldman, Yvonne Blaese

In May of this year, representatives from Leben im All – Life in Space – of Leipzig, Germany visited the AMF.

**Ralf Heckel** and **Yvonne Blaese** presented a book of condolences to Stephen Feldman, AMF president, honoring all the crew of the Space Shuttle Columbia.

The *Kondolenz* book, initiated by Heckel and Blaese, contains the signatures of many Germans who support the American space

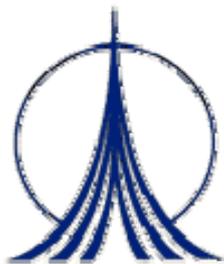
program. Also included are copies of letters and news articles dating back to February 1, 2003 – the date of Columbia's tragedy. "It is a pleasure to visit the AMF. You can be sure that the AMF, the astronauts, and their families have strong friends in Germany who hold your heroes in their memories. [We] bring back some parts of [their] souls," said Heckel.

Heckel is a marketing manager in Germany who is dedicated to the development of space exploration. He has been involved with several parascience experiments on the International Space Station that

research the possibilities for non-space industries, private spaceflight and space education.

Blaese is a communications educator and is in training to fly in space. In 2003 she was appointed as a Space Ambassador of the Moscow Aviation Institute. In this role she serves as a representative between astronauts/cosmonauts and business partners, sponsors and students.

Both Heckel and Blaese are coaches and educators for international students who are preparing for cosmonaut training in Star City, Russia in the fall of 2005. Their goal is to begin an independent international student exchange program in 2006 in support of the United States' goals to reach the Moon and Mars. They are co-founders of SAXCESS, SPACEPASS.DE and SPACETOURIST.DE, organizations whose missions are to develop space tourism and promote space education.



[http://www.amfcse.org/NewsLetter/AMF\\_NewltrSummer2k5.pdf](http://www.amfcse.org/NewsLetter/AMF_NewltrSummer2k5.pdf)

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## ISS On-Orbit Status 08/12/05

from Prof. Dr. Jesco von Puttkamer, Headquarter to Congress, White house and managements

All ISS systems continue to function nominally, except those noted previously or below.

The crew's sleep cycle shifted two hours to the right in support of medical activities required for EVA-14. Wakeup was at 4:00am EDT; sleep will start at 7:30pm tonight. The crew remains on this schedule until Tuesday, August 16.

CDR Krikalev and FE/SO Phillips pressed on in their preparations of next week's EVA on 8/18 (Thursday), preceded by the usual



**Today's weekend "bonus" image:**

Telling the Story: After attending the STS-114 launch as an invited guest of NASA/HQ, Eileen Collins-inspired Yvonne Blaese from the former (Communist Russia-oriented) East Germany briefs hometown media on Discovery's return.

spacewalk dry run on 8/16 (Tuesday). Both crewmembers worked on the EVA support panels (POV) in the Russian segment (RS) to set them up and check them out for the training run and EVA, John in the Service Module Transfer Compartment (SM PkhO) and Sergei in the DCI Docking Compartment. Preparations particularly concentrated on "degassing" the Orlan BSS water/gas separation systems at both locations, to separate water and air in the cooling system.

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## Leipzig for New Orleans



### Leipzig, 14<sup>th</sup> september 2005:

"It can be, that we were the last germans in this nice old town. We experiented it as a heart of the Soul, the Jazz and the Blues. Never we can forget this houers there in the summer of 2005. We are in trouble about the musican of the Funky Pirate Club, Big Al, and the fire workers of the Dt. No. 11 in New Orleans.

Please, send a sign of your health. We want to help."

Ralf and Yvonne on stage at an benefit-concert. They were showing the movie "Teardrops for New Orleans"

[www.ralfheckel.de/orleans.wmv](http://www.ralfheckel.de/orleans.wmv)

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"We are looking forward to the moon and await the day of our comeback to the states – in spring 2006 to Huntsville – with a complete group of the grand sons of Wernher von Braun's scientists."

Ralf & Yvonne, Leipzig, Germany