

58th IAA HISTORY OF ASTRONAUTICS SYMPOSIUM (E4)
Memoirs & Organisational Histories (1)

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50 YEARS OF OTRAG, THE FIRST PRIVATE SPACE COMPANY

Abstract

50 years ago, on November 17, 1974, the first private space company, OTRAG, was founded in Neu-Isenburg, Germany. The head of the company was Lutz Kayser, a student of Eugen and Irene Sänger. Advised by Wernher von Braun, Kayser's start-up developed a low-cost rocket using a simple design and, among other things, a VW windshield wiper motor as the engine control unit.

In search of a suitable launch site, the African dictator Mobutu Sese Seko leases an area the size of Island to the developers in Zaire. where OTRAG built its own spaceport. But when OTRAG successfully launches several rockets into the sky in the mid-1970s, a global political crisis ensues. What began as an adventure gradually turns into a nightmare, especially when OTRAG moved from Zaire to Libya.

For his feature-length documentary "Fly Rocket Fly" (www.otrag.com) film director Oliver Schwehm spent over five years researching the history of OTRAG and was able to build up an extensive archive in the process. He met more than 25 former employees, including Lutz Kayser himself, whom he was able to interview for three days on the Marshall Islands a few months before his death. In a second film, "German Missiles for Gaddafi", Schwehm researched Kayser's missile tests in Libya and was able to locate film reels of over 50 tests in Shaba.

As far as the form of the presentation is concerned, there is great flexibility: it would be conceivable to present the film (90 min) plus discussion. Or a lecture with film clips. The focus can also be defined (First years in Stuttgart / Zaire / Libya).