NASA HEADQUARTERS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

WILLIAM P. TAUB
INTERVIEWED BY SANDRA JOHNSON
BOWIE, MARYLAND – 8 NOVEMBER 2006

The questions in this transcript were asked during an oral history session with William P. Taub. The oral history has been edited for clarification purposes. As a result, this transcript does not exactly match the audio recording.

JOHNSON: Today is Wednesday, November 8th, 2006. This interview with Bill Taub is being conducted in Bowie, Maryland, for the NASA Headquarters History Office. The interviewer is Sandra Johnson, assisted by Rebecca Wright. [Also in attendance: Bill Ingalls, photographer, NASA Headquarters.]

I want to thank you again for agreeing to interview with us today, and I want to begin today by asking you how you first became a member of the NACA [National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics].

TAUB: I was seventeen years old. I worked on a railroad, the Lake Terminal [Railroad Company] in Lorain, Ohio. My brother Fred was a builder of model airplanes, and NACA was looking for model builders. They sent him a request, and my brother went to Langley [Research Center, Hampton, Virginia], and they liked him. He told them he had two brothers back in Lorain.

So I got this telegram, I have the copy of my telegram. I had a job; I was a clerk on the railroad. It was a perfect job, because I liked trains, and I had an open license, because my godfather was the treasurer of the railroad, and my uncle was the yardmaster, and I liked trains. So everything was perfect, and I was content. But I get this telegram. By special appointment I

was offered this job at Langley for twelve-sixty per annum, and here it was about aeronautical research, and I'm just a kid. So, yes, I'll take it.

So I went to Langley January 3rd, 1942, and I hired as an aircraft model maker, but my real job there was a pictorial draftsman. I was an artist. So what I would do is make perspective drawings. I would make perspective drawings of everything.

I was an amateur photographer, and my twin brother and I, we had Leicas [German-produced camera]; we had a Leica apiece. At NACA they had a lamp to photograph the spark of an engine in the cylinder, and they were never able to get a photograph. They spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on the research and development of this lamp made by Edgerton, Germeshausen, and Greer. And they were embarrassed, because they'd spent all this money, and back in that time a couple hundred thousand was millions today, and here the Photo [photography] Lab [laboratory] was never able to produce the photo.

I was an amateur photographer and I worked for Edmund C. Buckley, and he at one time was head of the Photo Lab. He asked me if I could, so I said, "Sure, let me try." So my twin brother and I researched all the chemicals and everything. We mixed our own developer, and we were able to up the film speed from ASA [American Standards Association] 100 to about 1600. Well, they were taking photographs with eight by ten cameras, so they were able to get nothing. With us upping the film, we were taking pictures by the hundreds.

Back then you had no motels or anything. I was rooming at a house, and I paid $5 a week for my room.

Then I became a photographer, but I was separate from the Photo Lab, because all of those guys, they didn't like me at all. NACA set it up that I came under the Director at NACA, Henry John Edward Reid, and Dr. James Miller, who was the Technical Assistant. I was never,

really, truly in the Photo Lab, per se, as a general photographer because of that. And, Edmund Buckley was later head of the tracking, for the worldwide tracking system. When he retired from Headquarters, he was Associate Administrator.

They found out that photography was my hobby, and then I got permission to take photographs after working hours, and I did this, and you've seen them published in the newspapers. The person who was responsible for that was Edward Kolcum, who years later turned out to be the editor of *Aviation Week*.

So anyway, I had a strange career as a photographer. I was, in a sense, independent, I didn't have to go on assignments like the others.

JOHNSON: How many other photographers were there working when you got there?

TAUB: I would say roughly thirty.

JOHNSON: And between all thirty of them, they couldn't get those photos.

TAUB: They never made a one, because with the camera equipment they had, it was impossible. Instead of shooting F-2—F-2 was the widest aperture I had—they were shooting F-8 with a big camera, and they were focused at that point where the spark was less than a quarter of an inch. With the Leica that I had, I had a focus range of about a foot to two feet, so everything was sharp. Then I upped the speed to 1600, and the film they had, they had an ASA speed of about 25. So here I was taking pictures, and here's three, four officials at Langley in this room. They couldn't believe what they were seeing.

JOHNSON: How did you know to do that and to up the speed of the film?

TAUB: By reading. My twin brother and I were amateurs. I can show you photographs I made in 1934 of trains. I was born in 1923, so that means what, I was eleven years old. It was my hobby. I've been shooting pictures of trains up till last year.

JOHNSON: After they discovered your talent and they knew that you were able to take those photos, and you were answering to the Director instead of being a part of the Photo Lab, what exactly did you start doing at that point as far as your job?

TAUB: Actually, the Director had it set up. There was a Reproduction Division. I worked in the office with the Division Chief. It was Harry [H.] Hamilton who was the Division Chief, and Fred Rector [phonetic] was the Assistant, and I was there.

I handled all the events, like special events. We had a Morale Activities Association, we had dances, we had events after hours and everything, which I covered, because we had a little newspaper, the *Bulletin*. I took pictures to put in there. Then years later they had their little newspaper; they called it the *Air Scoop*.

JOHNSON: So you supported that effort. Did you also start at that time taking pictures in the wind tunnels?

TAUB: Yes.

JOHNSON: Can you talk about that and how you managed to get those photos inside those tunnels that you were showing us earlier, and how you arranged to get those types of photos?

TAUB: Well, see this was during the war, and most, a good percentage, were taken after hours. They gave me permission to do that. I couldn't interfere with the test program. All the airplanes at that time were tested at Langley, all the war planes. You had no FAA [Federal Aviation Administration]. All the research, aeronautical research, was done there at Langley, and the war was going on, and you couldn't interfere with the work program, and they had tight schedules.

The pictures, they liked, and I had a problem. The engineers, for their report, they liked my photographs, because I took more interesting photographs than stock-type photos. But anyway, I was, per se, independent. But I didn't take advantage of it, other than I took too many pictures.

JOHNSON: Well, your pictures had more of an artistic look to them.

TAUB: Yes, I was an artist.

JOHNSON: Right. You had that art background. Because of that, they are very unique looking. How did you set the cameras up inside those tunnels to get those shots?

TAUB: Well, it wasn't easy. When you're a photographer, you lose—you get so engrossed in what you're doing, you disregard safety. I made some pictures in the wind tunnel, this wind

tunnel, and I had to take them at a certain place for what I wanted to get, but I was just under this big propeller up there. If I'd have raised my head another six inches, I'd have been decapitated, because there was no screen. But I got the picture.

JOHNSON: How did you set the cameras up inside the tunnel?

TAUB: Some of them were difficult, because you had no clamping devices, and I had to jury-rig stuff. You had this metal tunnel. You couldn't weld places because that would interfere with the flow. So as long as I didn't scratch up anything or interfere with anything, I was given permission to do it.

JOHNSON: What about the lighting in the tunnel?

TAUB: That was a difficult thing. I knew my lights, and what I would do—I was an artist. I'd look at it, and then I'd go back and make sketches, so when I went there, I knew about what I was going to do, and there was no lost motions, you know what I mean? As an artist, I was always looking for patterns. But I guess I was sort of egotistic or an egomaniac, because I found that one thing. I tried to shoot as many verticals as possible.

Magazine covers are vertical photographs, and I'd shoot them in such a way where they could use the photograph and have room for their logo. Everyone was using my photographs, and they were coming up as magazine covers. But we had no clipping service. We didn't have any public relations. The only one who really took an interest was Edward Kolcum. He was a newspaper man and had a daily press there in Newport News [Virginia], and he was interested in

photography. He covered NACA as a news story, and he was excited to see these artistic engineering photographs.

JOHNSON: Why did you feel that it was important to capture something as technical as a wind tunnel and what was happening out there in such an artistic approach? Had you seen other photographers do that?

TAUB: Well, no other photographers had. See, *Fortune* magazine, they spotted them, and they couldn't believe it, because they were industrial subjects, and no one took these type of photos with any artistic view. But you've got to remember I was an artist, and I was an amateur photographer, more than that, and I loved to take pictures, so I was looking to take pictures that were different, and that's how that came about, you know, to have a sense of the artistry to them. But some of those things are impossible, but today, with the new techniques and electronics and everything else, nothing is impossible.

I was an artist, and they gave me license to do it, as long as it didn't interfere with anything. I thought that was great. I was just a kid. I finally made eighteen, anyway. [Laughs] But it was fun. I'd never seen anything like wind tunnels in my life, and I was interested in airplanes, and that's where all the aeronautical research was done. I had nothing else to do, and I'd watch them making their runs. I'd be there in the wind tunnel, so they'd let me take pictures, so no problem. And they liked the pictures I made, so everything worked out. I was never asked to leave, never thrown out. I was in places where they pulled me in, and the one place I was pulled in is where photographers are never pulled in.

JOHNSON: What place was that?

TAUB: Number 10 Downing Street in London [residence of the Prime Minister, Great Britain]. The reason I'm telling you this story, I was planning on going to dinner one evening, and we had tickets to the shows. I didn't have breakfast; I didn't have lunch, because I had photographic activities, and at a lot of these activities, like luncheons, they never make allowances for the photographer.

So here I had gone without breakfast or lunch, and we were told, "The only picture you make is the shaking of the hands at Number 10 Downing, and the photographer never goes in."

"That's fine, I'm going out to dinner tonight." I had my jacket and I had four rolls of film in my pocket. Yes, four; I had two color and two black and white, plus what I had in the cameras.

So we made the handshake, and the Prime Minister takes me by the arm, and he says, "I want you to come in and take some pictures for my grandchildren." So we went in there, and I ran out of film. You know when? Julian [W.] Scheer was the NASA Associate Administrator of Public Affairs, and he wanted his picture taken with Prime Minister Harold Wilson of Great Britain. Well, at that time I had run out of film, and he's my big, big boss, and he wants a picture. [Laughs]

Anyway, I never had a problem, but I knew when to move in and move out. I didn't try to crowd in like paparazzi. When came to Washington [D.C], I found the photographers, the White House Press, were all gentlemen, and they made room for you, because they saw you had a badge, and they knew you were there to make pictures, so they made room. But if you ever elbowed, next time they elbowed you, and you were sent to the back of the bus.

JOHNSON: When you were still at NACA, you mentioned you had a Leica.

TAUB: My personal camera. I always carried it—but the reason I bought a Leica, it was because it had the best optics, and that was the main thing. See, at that time there were no Nikons. There were no Japanese cameras. The Japanese cameras came from the German technicians who were stuck in Japan and they couldn't get back. Sierra [phonetic] and Reick [Zeiss Ikon] used them, and that's how Nikons came about. If you look at them, the Canons were a copy of the Zeiss Contax. All the cameras, 90 percent or almost 95 percent of the camera industry of the world was in Germany; to this day the finest optics still come from Germany. But with the Leica lenses, they were sharp.

JOHNSON: Did NACA/NASA provide you with other equipment?

TAUB: Well, I was able to order anything I wanted, but I didn't order things that I couldn't use. All of them had a purpose, because you start getting overloaded. I ended up with two Rolleiflexes, and the reason for that was I had to cover a lot of events where you had to use flash, whereas that was almost a necessity. I preferred the Leica, shooting in the available light. But when you're in places like at the Smithsonian [Institution, Washington, D.C.], you have no choice but to use flash, so that's when I used the "Rollie." But the defect of the Rollie was you could only shoot twelve on a roll and you're finished.

Also, I freelanced. I've done spin-off for twelve years, by contract with NASA, and I was using a Linhof camera on a couple of assignments. I had to carry full equipment, and I'm by

myself. With the Linhof, that's big, and there was all that weight and everything. So I've bought a Pentax 6 x 7 format, and that Pentax 6 x 7 outperformed the Linhof, which is unbelievable. So I started using that, but I have a Linhof with the full complement of lenses.

When you're a photographer, you're supposed to be able to cover the assignment, which I did. I was never embarrassed by not having the right equipment. I covered my responsibility at that time. See, I was deputy to Les Gayler [phonetic], so I had other requirements other than just taking pictures.

When you're photographing an event, you don't have a second chance. You have to do it right and do it right there and then, and you have to have an interest in what you're doing. You don't look at it like, "Hey, buddy, I'll see you later," or anything and take off running somewhere. But it could be difficult. There's times when you're stuck somewhere, and nature calls, and you have to sweat it out.

JOHNSON: You were with NACA up until they formed the Space Task Group, and then you joined NASA once NASA was formed, and eventually came to Headquarters. How did that move come about?

TAUB: I was a good friend of Steve Alan Butler. He and I used to go out on double dates and whatnot; we were good friends, and he was in charge. They set up Space Task Group. I was number twenty-one. I had to give 50 percent of my time to Langley and 50 percent of my time to Space Task Group, for close to a year. The astronauts, they came aboard about '59. [Alan B.] Shepard's flight was May 5th, 1961. So all of that was a training cycle.

All the facilities then were like the Navy. Space Task Group didn't have anything. In fact, Langley didn't exactly like them being there, and where we had our offices was in the old WAC [Women's Army Corps] barracks. [Laughter] My secretary was Pat Coley [phonetic].

Anyway, I covered them both, and most of the engineers that later came were old friends that worked at Langley. Then they picked up a lot of AVRO [A.V. Roe & Company] people from Canada and some others. Then the program accelerated.

We had a shuttle airplane that flew back and forth. We had no photo capabilities, so they finally got a contract with Haycox in Norfolk [Virginia] to handle it. Langley wouldn't handle it, because it was the Space Task Group, so we had this contract lab at Norfolk although we had a good photo lab there at Langley.

Most of the people that came along were NACA, like [Walter J. "Cappy"] Kapryan. One of those Leicas, the procurement on it was by him. Years later he became one of the Launch Directors [Kennedy Space Center, Florida], so every time I'd go to the Cape [Canaveral, Florida], he'd want to know, "You got my camera?" So anyway, we got along fine, and things really picked up.

I got along fine with all the astronauts and never had any problem. I was the same age, so we were compatible. I got involved in a lot of on-time activities and some off-hour activities. It was a good group.

JOHNSON: How did you get picked to be the photographer assigned to those first seven astronauts?

TAUB: There was no one else. At that time I was the official photographer. I used to have a lot of friends who were the Chief Photographer of this, this, this, and this, and we'd have lunch one day and all that, and they'd talk about it. Their title was Chief Photographer. Well, mine was Senior Photographer, so I told them that them being the Chiefs, they were the best. In my case, I wasn't the best, I was the oldest.

But I had a good relationship. I used to once a month have lunch with the *National Geo* [*Geographic*] photogs [photographers]. They were all gentlemen first, but photographers second, and it was a good relationship, so no problem.

Everything I shot was for the press pool. Anyway, I shot for the pool. There never was a complaint, so they didn't see any point in changing, so I got stuck for every mission. You've got to remember I had a family. What I'm totally ashamed of, really, is I cheated my family of not being home for dinner for hundreds of evenings for thirty years.

I was a civil servant, and I didn't get paid for any after-hours stuff. We'd have launches at the Cape on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays, and we went in the hole to see John [H.] Glenn for twelve scrubs; the thirteenth time he launched, on February 20th. The others would be getting double time and everything else. I was getting nothing.

I had to cover recoveries. When they got into Gemini, we had that Health Surveillance Program, because I was the only photographer qualified medically, so they'd more or less fly me out to the recovery ship.

Well, they had this one hotshot engineer, a real smarty. Oh, he went into a rage, because they had to move the carrier out of the footprint, which is for the landing, to pick up his damn photographer from NASA. They had to send two helos [helicopters] up to Honolulu [Hawaii] to pick me up, and they had to move the ship.

But that was my job. I got into trouble with another guy that was the engineer, who let the captain of the ship know that he was running the program, not the captain of the ship. The captain told him, “This is my ship.” Anyway, we ran into a flap. But he didn’t like the idea that they were moving the ship to pick up a damn photographer from Washington, so him and I didn’t get along, in a sense. But the guy that saved me—you never know how small the world is. We had something come up that really made a flap.

I sent a message from the ship to Houston [Texas], Mission Control, to my big, big boss, who was supposed to have been on duty, but he was having dinner with a companion, so he didn’t get the message until too late. But I had a copy of the message that went to Houston, and there was a big flap over it, because [President Richard M.] Nixon was meeting with [Leonid I.] Brezhnev at the White House there, San Clemente [California], and they had no photographer. You’ve seen that thing at *Collier’s* [magazine], that layout? The photographer there was Ollie [Oliver F.] Atkins. Ollie Atkins years later was Nixon’s photographer, so him and I were old buddies.

Well, anyway, I’m the only one qualified medically to take the photograph. Well, this guy made sure I got the second-off chopper from the ship. I was supposed to have been in the first one. He came out there and the doctor came out there, and they got into a big fight. I was supposed to be with the astronauts, not in the second one. When I landed at El Toro [California], they waved off my chopper, and that one went in. They pulled me up on the other side, and I ran through this place, and they couldn’t figure how I done it. There was over 200 KGB and Secret Service. How in the hell did I go through that? I was at the other end.

Well, anyway, here Nixon and Brezhnev are together, and they’re waiting to take these pictures, and no photographer. So Ollie Atkins goes out to breakfast and says, “Willy is coming

to cover me." I never photographed them. So there was a big flap. But nothing happened of it, because my big boss, he received that message, and it was up to him to—but he was [demonstrates laughing], so nothing ever happened, but what I'm saying, if that wasn't there, I'd have been gone. You see all these dignitaries. But if you should ever do something that was embarrassing, you were never seen again.

JOHNSON: Let's go back and talk about those first years with the Mercury astronauts and your assignment covering them. Did you go with them for all their training, including survival training?

TAUB: Well, to tell you the truth, I didn't miss a time. I was on a minimum of 100, 150 days a year I wasn't home. I had to cover everything. I was the photographer and the only one, I had no backup. I told them I needed backup, and no, they liked me; they didn't need anyone else.

I came directly at that time under Walt [Walter C.] Williams. Walt Williams and I were personal friends, because he was a model railroader, and we had a model railroad club in Anton [phonetic]. Later he went to Dryden Flight Research Center [Edwards, California]. I sent him a launch cover for every mission.

On Apollo 204 [Apollo 1]—they had the accident. I was there within thirty minutes after. I'm not going to tell you what I photographed. I worked out of Kapryan's office; they had a review board.

Well, the accident happened. The next morning my big, big boss came down, and I had to see him in a special room. He cornered me for about a half an hour, forty-five minutes to tell

him what I'd photographed and what I'd seen. I told him, "All I'm telling you is I was on duty from this time to that time."

He says, "I don't care." He says, "I'm your boss. I can fire you on the spot."

I says, "Fine, but all I'm going to tell you is I was on duty from this time to that time."

Then he finally got up, and he shook my hand and says, "You've been assigned to the review board, and you don't leave until you're released."

Well, I was there for six weeks. I missed six weeks out of being home for dinner. They built a scale model of the capsule. The man who was in charge of the shops was Jack [A.] Kinzler. He's an old friend from Langley. So they built this thing for me. Anyway, I was still working out of Kapryan's office. They found that it was easier for me to go up in the spacecraft and take the photographs, because they would tell me what they wanted, and this is what I'd shoot. I wore a flight suit, because I had to change clothes. I came back in, and they were making an inspection, and this guy told me to get out of there. And Kapryan, he looked at him.

Anyway, Floyd [L.] Thompson was the Director at Langley in charge of the investigation and he said, "Well, he should do a good job. I trained him." He was one of the guys that came to that room when I made those photographs I told you about.

One thing about being a photographer, at times you're what they call a low man on the totem pole. When you're a photographer, you're there to do the job. I never failed an assignment. I never created a problem. I got along with everyone and most of the people who were officials, who were somewhat knowledgeable of each other.

I was covering all these Washington assignments, and one time Dr. [John F.] Victory [NACA Executive Secretary] had promised someone he'd have some pictures in two days, because this man was going somewhere. Well, he didn't get his pictures. I was driving a station

wagon, and the station wagon broke down between Bowling Green [Ohio] and West Point [New York]. It broke down in between two Indian reservations. Anyway, I had to wait for the first car to come along. It was about two o'clock in the morning when the car breaks down, my station wagon. So about the light of day, here comes the first car down the road, and I flagged it down. He took me to West Point and I made a phone call, so then he had to send one of his Army vehicles and tow the car. So Victory didn't get his pictures.

So then he found out, and said with all these test pilots, we pay them flight pay, and we got this—and we're running these tests to Wallops Island [Virginia], so we can fly to Wallops Island and then fly to Washington and drop me off. Well, this guy, that was the biggest thing in his life. He was the chief test pilot of NACA, and he was a widower, and he had a girlfriend in Washington. So every time he flew me to Washington—that was in the old SMJ trainer—oh, he'd scare me to death.

I would take pictures of people, and I'd get their name and their address and everything, and I'd send them copies. Like we had all these tickertape parades in New York; I'd send copies to Mayor John Lindsay, so they knew me well. A couple of these people got a little upset that the mayor came up and greeted me before them, and I was only a photographer.

I was in Rome [Italy]. I was sitting there having a cappuccino. You know, they have these little outdoor cafes, and I watched people. I had to wait for my flight. And here are these guys on these little motorbikes. They're chasing this girl, so she comes by and she asks if she could sit with me. I said, "Sure." She was just a young girl, about seventeen, eighteen years old. So we had a cup of tea, and they left, and after about a few minutes, then she left.

Two weeks later I went to the Cape, and this guy comes up to me, and he says, "You're so-and-so."

I says, "Yes."

He says, "Thank you for helping my daughter in Rome." So you never know how small the world is.

But you had assignments where you run into crazy stuff. But, as a photographer you can't create any bad feelings or hostility. I was fortunate, but I didn't take advantage of it.

JOHNSON: You mentioned the press pool and giving photos to the press pool. I know with the first astronauts, those first seven, there was the contract with *Life* magazine. Talk about that relationship and how you dealt with that while you were trying to cover them for NASA.

TAUB: As you know, James [E.] Webb was the Administrator of NASA, and there was some question as to the true legality, because the astronauts were military personnel, and they were government people, and it was illegal for them to contract. But since President John F. Kennedy was somewhat involved in it, and Webb, oh, he was upset.

There was some controversy. They got that million-dollar contract, and they thought they were running. It was a question. They had this lawyer in Washington who was the lookout for them. Anyway, they got a million-dollar contract, and they took advantage of it. And *Life* thought they had an open ticket. They had a photographer that worked for *Life*, and as I mentioned before, the photographers at *National Geographic* were gentlemen. This guy, [the *Life* photographer], was not well liked by anyone, because he was the world's best, and he had the biggest elbows of any man in the world, and he thought he could do anything.

Now, he was given permission for doing photo things, but there were only, if you checked my record, maybe four or five events that they gave him permission for. But he thought

Life had the open license. They did not, absolutely, and the reason for that is Mr. Webb, not me. I had to cover all events, for the reason Walter Williams was the Director of Operations.

Now, Walter Williams was the best engineer, perhaps, NACA and NASA ever had. The reason I'm saying this, he was involved there at Edwards in all the research airplanes, the X-1, the X-2, the X-15, and the works, every one of them. He was the Chief Engineer. Everything that he got involved in was a success. He was an engineer, and he would be going to these things. I worked for him, and I had no excuse but to go with him. Like I was mentioning to you about this Tom Wolfe, he writes this book and everything. A motion picture photographer was with me quite a bit on a number of occasions. His name was Larry Summers. We never seen Tom Wolfe, and my job was to be there at eight o'clock in the morning and leave when these things are over.

A lot of times those training periods would be after hours, and they'd be in the spacecraft on a mission simulation, so, hell, it would be two or three o'clock in the morning. So, you had to be there, so what do you do? You can't just let them go running off, like if something happened, the first thing they were looking at were, "Where's the photographers?" "Oh, I was down the road a bit." That won't work. You stay with it. No, I gave hundreds of hours. I never received a thank you or a penny. Hundreds.

JOHNSON: How did your relationship work with the press pool? You mentioned earlier that you were taking black and white photographs for NASA and color for the magazines.

TAUB: Well, basically it's what it was. My relationship, I was a friend of theirs. Yes, they knew what I was doing. This one photographer got a little resentful because I was doing them all, and

he thought he had—since being a member of the pool, that he should get it, one assignment. He didn't get it, and I'm trying to think of the guy—it's in that list I got made up. It was the Chief of Photo Services at *National Geographic*. At first he didn't like me, and he was looking over my shoulder, because his first thought of a government photographer was nothing but a blueprint operator or a Photostat operator. Here they were a member of the pool, and on the pool it's supposed to rotate every month. And here on this job of photographing the astronauts, there was no rotation.

So like he was watching and they were waiting for me to make a booboo, and he watched my work, and he found out I was doing better every time. So I had to cover, as it says and as the record shows, I covered the prelaunch activities, the launch, the recoveries that I could get to. The first Mercury, you couldn't, because they were short-duration flights. With Gemini I was able to get to the carrier. But we had that medical surveillance, so I had to be there, because there was no one else. That was a pain in the tail.

JOHNSON: You covered the launches, also?

TAUB: Not the launch. Years later I did. I'd set up these remote cameras. Now, see, back in those days—what I'm saying, the real pros were at *National Geo*. Jack Fletcher designed this tripping device that they could photograph the launch. What they'd do is set up the cameras in the bushes there. Well, I had done that five or six times, and boy, I was scared to death. You know why? Snakes.

They had the first launches at Wallops Island with the monkey. Anyway, they went into a hold and they gave me some time to go take some photographs sitting on the booster. They had this little rocket up on top for the eject, for the parachute.

Anyway, I'm taking pictures, and someone was playing with a radio on the beach back there on the mainland, and it triggered the rocket. There's photographs of me—no, motion pictures—of me taking pictures when this thing took off. Well, the rocket thing went this way. I'm inside, okay? The man next to me, he panicked so bad he tore his pants, and he lost his sight for almost a week. What I did, I had a camera in my hands, and I crushed the camera.

JOHNSON: From squeezing?

TAUB: Yes.

I had to cover everything. I covered Surveyor, Tyros, Nimbus.

When I went to GE [General Electric], I had problems with a few people until the Vice President of GE showed up; they were on the Nimbus. He wanted to know how I was doing and everything.

I says, "This engineer is giving me a lot of trouble."

So he told him, "No matter what, if you're a week or two weeks behind, it don't make a difference."

But what happened, the guy's name was B. G. McNabb [phonetic]. He was Mr. Cape Canaveral. Kennedy made a trip to the Cape. I took pictures of him and Kennedy. So I gave him the original film, which we had no need of. So he and I are lifelong friends. So every time he would come to Washington for anything, he'd come to see me. But like I say, I always, for

some reason, I got along that way, which was fortunate, because when you're a photographer, you can't have locked doors.

In 1966 the Space Club gave me an award, and some guys didn't like it, because I was the second man awarded. The first was Edward R. Murrow.

WRIGHT: Tell us about the Apollo 11 Presidential Goodwill Tour. How did you process your film and send it back?

TAUB: Well, see, that was a problem. I had to ship it back all the time, every stop, you know. I shot almost 200 rolls of film

JOHNSON: Can you talk about that and talk about kind of the logistics of that trip and how you worked everything as far as taking photographs during that trip and where you went and how long you were gone?

TAUB: We were gone over forty-five days. See, they had other trips before that. Their first trip was to Columbia, Missouri, which, see, their spacecraft was *Columbia*. Anyway, that was the first one. Then we also went to Canada, which came later. But I was on that job. The trip for them was like forty-five days, but for me it was like sixty.

JOHNSON: Why was it longer for you?

TAUB: Well, I had to be in Houston before.

INGALLS: So was this a charter, a NASA charter? Commercial?

TAUB: No, this was Nixon's plane. It was Air Force One, but since Nixon was not aboard, it was not Air Force One, because you look at the numbers on the tail. I was responsible, more or less, for the photo coverage plus shooting. I had to go through all the crowds and everything, and sometimes I had Wehrner von Braun. Buzz Aldrin, he was complaining about the difficulty they had with going through the crowd. Well, they had, what, fifty, twenty or thirty police and whatnot plowing away for them, and nobody plowing for me, really.

We were in Berlin [Germany], and Michael Collins, he couldn't believe it. He'd seen me over there [Taub pointing]. He seen me over there [Taub pointing]. He seen me over here [Taub pointing]. So he wanted to know, "How in the hell did you do it?" I told him, "It wasn't easy." [Laughter]

But I had a motion picture man along. He didn't know how to play it, and I told him, "Stay on my right at all times." But see, another thing about a movie, when he's shooting, he'd try to stay with the scene. Well, if you look at the pictures of that trip, in India, you'd say there were two million of them.

Then when I had free time I'd go around taking pictures of the city, to go with it. So I would shoot four, six, eight rolls of film every stop, for that one day, because they had the Prime Minister; they had this. He had a press conference. They had this and they had that. I had to attend every—and a lot of times, oh, I could have mentioned about Wilson. He asked me, "Did you enjoy your dinner?"

I didn't answer him, and the man standing—he let Wilson know, "No, he didn't have a dinner."

So Wilson, he got mad. He told him, "Well, you call those cooks and have them come back in." He was embarrassed. No, generally, they forget the photographer.

We were in Paris [France], and [George] Pompidou came up and shook my hand and thanked me.

JOHNSON: How many different cameras did you have with you on that trip?

TAUB: I had five Leicas. I bought thirty rolls of film, Kodachrome. I know it was a long trip. I had, oh, about almost $4,000 in traveler's checks. We had one guy that went on the trip with $100, and he kept giving me a fit about me loaning him some money. I told him I was buying stuff as I went along. I was buying stuff for pennies, more or less. I was traveling with someone who had money, and we went to a place, and I forget what I spent, maybe 200. I had it blocked off. The place where I really wanted to spend my money was in Germany, and I didn't have a chance. The only thing I bought was a little case. Anyway, that was the trip of a lifetime. The food was free. The drinks were free. The lodging was free.

INGALLS: When you got back from that trip and you looked at the film that you shot, did you feel like you had done the kind of job that you wanted to do? Or did you feel like you had some holes, that you would like to have done better? What was your thought on looking at the film after you got back?

TAUB: Well, if the film was available, I'd get mad again. See, the main thing on that trip was the photographs would be mailed in. When we were in Tokyo [Japan], I had the same driver that I had with Glenn, and he remembered me. So I took him to this restaurant where he had Kobe beef. I shot all these pictures, and I sent the film back, and the thing was, they were printing a photo album.

We flew in from Anchorage [Alaska], which was last; that was the fuel stop. We came into Andrews [Air Force Base, Maryland]. Then we helicoptered to the White House, on the White House lawn. Later that evening at dinner the President was given a gift. The astronauts gave him a photo album of the trip. What I'm saying is the guy or guys, they were no photo editors. I was sort of outraged at some that they chose. But anyway, Les Gaylor had this at his feet, and there was a couple of things I wanted, because they made a mistake. There were some personal pictures in there. He knew about it and wouldn't give them to me. He said he would, but when I last saw him, I talked about it, "Have you seen it?" He said no.

Well, I shot 200 rolls. I had to cover all events. Mike Collins was born in Rome, so I had to go with him to the place where he was born. When you go to a place like that, you don't say, "Oh, well," take one picture, and that's it. You keep taking pictures.

So we were in Teheran [Iran] with the Shah, and I was more in less of charge of the photographers there, so I told them what to do. "You get in this line. Stay there. Don't move. Just be quiet and don't move." So we were given ten minutes to shoot. Well, we're in this palace, but the Shah—and these guys, this was their job, photographing the Shah all the time. They were regular news. So they only had one camera and one roll of film. They were lucky to shoot that.

So we're standing there for a half hour or forty-five minutes or maybe more, and oh, this one guy, he had a virtual heart attack. I went to the hospital with him later, and he died. But he was so excited. Here he was standing there, and he couldn't take a picture. And I couldn't give him any film. I had Leicas, and he had a Rolleiflex. If you're somewhere and you don't create a nuisance, they forget you're there. He got all excited, and he was standing near me, and he dropped. I picked him up, and I thought he was—so anyway, got an ambulance, and I went with him to the hospital, and he died.

WRIGHT: Was that the most challenging photo opportunity that you ever shot?

TAUB: No. I treated every assignment—I was known to take too many photographs. You have to cover it, you know, from all angles.

Once I had to photograph the cable in San Francisco [California] on assignment and do a photo story. Well, people don't realize that cable is underneath the roadway, so, I was down there, and I had five strobes, and I had the Pentax 6 x 7. I was able to do more with that than with the Linhof. I only had the one camera, and as a photographer, you're moving around and you get carried away. And I forgot that place is greasy and oily, and I slipped, and that camera went. Boy, I was in a panic then. I thought I broke the camera, and I had no backup camera. That was the first time, but no, it didn't do it damage. But that 6 x 7 was great.

INGALLS: I have a question for you, Bill. I'm curious, out of all of your NASA pictures that you've shot, and I know there were many different shoots that were important and historic, but is there any one of them that the image itself stands out in your mind—

TAUB: The grabber?

INGALLS: Yes, that "I nailed this shot, and this is a historic picture, and I'm very proud of it." You're proud of all of them, I'm sure, but is there one that kind of stands out in your mind?

TAUB: Yes, this month is going to be an anniversary. The assassination of John F. Kennedy, and I can show you by the record, and by the record of the White House, I took the last official photograph of Kennedy. He was doing a thing. Les Gaynor and I, with the film crew, went there to the White House. It was one o'clock in the afternoon we had this, and he was going to give—it was the tenth anniversary, I think, of the Tyro satellite, the weather satellite, so we did this thing outside on the lawn. Mrs. [Evelyn] Lincoln was the secretary, and on one of the programs she mentioned it.

He came out to do this thing, you know, this little photo thing. He went back in the White House. He changed clothes, got in the chopper, went to Andrews, flew to Houston, spent the night. On Friday they went to Dallas [Texas]. He was on a political trip; it was not an official duty of a President. So that was the last—officially—government photographs of Kennedy.

To me, John F. Kennedy, he was the next thing to Jesus Christ. I was able to stand arm's length to him for three, four days. Do you know why? I was a personal friend to his two photographers, Bob [Robert L.] Knudson and Cecil [W.] Stoughton. The Secret Service man got after me about standing too close, and Kennedy told him, "You leave him alone. He's doing his job." So that Secret Service man kept his eye on me, with an evil eye, you know. [Laughter]

When you're a photographer, that's your job to be there, and like Julian Scheer said then, "I'm not paying you for any excuses."

JOHNSON: Well, we appreciate you being with us today and letting us record this.

TAUB: Well, I thank you. I'm eighty-three years old. I'm on my last run. Some of the things I've said were from a point in history that it's good. I did not expand on anything, and I detracted a lot, but you go places where, some of them, you don't want to go, but that's part of it.

INGALLS: Bill, I don't know if I told you, it's kind of ironic that the most famous picture I've ever taken was of JFK, Jr. [John F. Kennedy, Jr.], at his last visit to the White House. Tom Hanks had his premiere of his show *From the Earth to the Moon* with [President William J. "Bill"] Clinton, and there's the famous painting of JFK with his arms folded, looking down. JFK, Jr., walked away from the party and went up to this picture, the painting, and looked at it.

I ran over, and President Clinton came over, and I fired a couple of frames. The White House photographer came over as well and then shot a couple of frames, and then I left. I figured, "Well, this is your beat, not mine. It's yours. You can have at it."

Then he passed away, and the White House called me, and they said, "We understand you have this picture of JFK, Jr., looking at his father."

I said, "Well, the White House photographer should have this picture as well."

They said, "No, he didn't get it."

I said, "He was right next to me."

They say, "He didn't get it. Can you give us this picture?"

Well, the *New York Times* grabbed it; ran it on the cover of the *New York Times* the day after he passed away, and the White House made these photo albums to give to the Kennedy family of all the pictures, and they made a cover out of this picture that I did of JFK, Jr., so just because of NASA I was there to shoot this event, but it had nothing to do with the picture. Nothing to do with NASA.

TAUB: I had to cover anything they wanted. White House, I had to go, too.

Oh, let me tell you another one. The event was with the Gemini V and VI crew, and they were short of drivers, a management officer—he asked me if I would drive one of the cars. I said, "Sure." They were staying at an inn there in Georgetown. That's where they always stayed. So I went there and picked them up, so I got [Walter M.] Schirra [Jr.] and his wife and [James A.] Lovell [Jr.] and his wife. So we were driving from Georgetown to the White House, and Schirra says, "Hey, you go in this gate here."

I said, "No, sir, we're not supposed to go in that gate here. We have to go in the south entrance. They're waiting for us."

He says, "You're going in there." So anyway, I pulled up to where he tells me to go, so man, they flagged us, so we lost about ten, fifteen minutes. So then we finally went around, and someone was raising hell; we got there late.

The whole thing is you do the assignment.

[End of interview]