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is More Than Meets the e

Twenty-eight employees selected from across the Defense Contract Management Agency's Space and Missile Systems Division learned something about the space launch business Dec. 5, 2007, although it wasn't the lesson they expected to learn.

The group, which included civilians and service members, arrived at Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif., at the end of a long day. They had traveled from Los Angeles, Salt Lake City and Denver for the launch of a Delta II rocket booster, carrying an Italian scientific spacecraft into orbit.

They had rendezvoused at the Carson, Calif., facility at "zero-dark-thirty" to make the 200-mile trip to California's central coast. They were on the road before 7 a.m., just in time to fight the notorious rush hour traffic on the San Diego freeway. After getting to U.S. 101, which runs north and

During a launch, conditions don't have to be ideal, but they have to be within certain limits so the rocket doesn't veer off course or have a catastrophic failure.

(Background) **The Delta II rocket is revealed as the mobile service tower, or gantry, at right, is retracted on Launch Pad 17B at Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, Fla. (Photo by Kim Shiflett, courtesy of NASA)**

SPACE & MISSILE SYSTEMS

T — DCMA Employees Learn There ye to Putting a Rocket Into Space

By Sam Rousso, DCMA Public Affairs

south through California, the drive was much faster and smoother.

After the group arrived at Vandenberg, they received a tour of the base. A base public affairs specialist served as the tour guide, peppering his spiel with lots of local lore. Because of the impending launch, security was tighter than normal, which limited access to certain areas. A "highlight" of the tour occurred when the bus wandered into a security zone and was stopped. Security forces approached the bus with drawn weapons.

After lunch, the group toured the Range Operations Center, where launches are controlled. They even got into the main control room for a briefing where they were told why weather is an important factor in a launch.

During a launch, conditions don't have to be ideal, but they have to be within certain limits so the rocket doesn't veer off course or have a catastrophic failure. As it turned out, the briefing might have been a foreshadowing of things to come.

Finally, the time came to head for the observation point. Cameras were readied and expectations grew. Many of the visitors had never seen a launch before. The sun had set, and there were no lights at the observation post. The night was clear — although some fog was beginning to roll in. Conditions seemed perfect.

The crowd, including some Air Force people who came to see the show, started buzzing. Cameras were turned on. Then, with less than three minutes remaining before launch, everything came to a halt.

Although the air was calm at ground level, winds at altitude exceeded 34 miles per hour, which, apparently, is too much. At first it was a hold, then the window for launch closed, and then the launch was scrubbed entirely. High winds could have driven the rocket off course, endangering people and property, to say nothing of the very expensive spacecraft.

From the first days of America's space program, it has always been so. The travelers learned that firsthand on Dec. 5. They also learned, in the words of Randy Sawlsville, former DCMA Space and Missile Systems Division deputy, who was one of the participants, "It really *is* rocket science." C

A group of 28 DCMA Space and Missile Systems Division employees pose for a picture during a trip to Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif., Dec. 5, 2007, to witness a rocket launch. (Photo by Sam Rousso, DCMA Public Affairs)