



Spaceport Earth
The Reinvention of Spaceflight
Joe Pappalardo

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The author Joe Pappalardo introduces his book with two interesting quotations illustrating the quest of mankind to leave our Earth.

Socrates (attributed): “Man must rise above the Earth—to the top of the atmosphere and beyond—for only thus will he fully understand the world in which he lives.”

Hermann Oberth: “If there is a small rocket on top of a big one, and if the big one is jettisoned and the small one is ignited, then their speeds are added.” (Oberth: Wege zur Raumschiffahrt).

The author’s goal was to investigate as many as possible existing spaceports in the USA and important ones abroad. His research was finished in 2017, so the book in retrospect is a description of the timespan of the **reinvention of spaceflight** which he also describes as the transition from the conventional NASA regime to the era of Private Public Partnership (PPP) with commercial entrepreneurs offering commercial human and science spaceflight.

His enthusiasm for writing this book was awakened by his participation in the last Space Shuttle (STS) flight STS-135 at Cape Kennedy on July 8 2011. Pappalardo narrates his experience of witnessing the preparations and countdown for the STS-135 liftoff with such intensity and emotion that he came to recognize the true significance of a “spaceport”: a vast infrastructure of facilities, technologies, and dedicated teams that marks both the beginning or the end of humanity’s high-flying dreams.

This realization inspired him to visit America’s existing spaceports and document them, together with their distinctive characteristics, like a seasoned globetrotter exploring a new world. His journey ultimately leads to a compelling conclusion: as access to space becomes increasingly widespread, Earth itself may eventually become one vast “Spaceport Earth.”

He starts with the European spaceport in French Guyana a heavily guarded areal in the jungle 3,5 Deg above the equator, having majored to set the industrial launch standard, Then with the focus on America he moves on to the Scaled Composites spaceport located in the Mojave desert, called Mojave Air and Space Port, where Bob Rutan’s and Richard Branson’s Virgin Galactic Spaceplanes were tested.

As for the Mojave Spaceport Pappalardo describes the current activities and their very interesting history of origin for all the visited spaceports.

The book also describes the growing of smaller existing launch-sites like Wallops Flight Facility to the Mid-Atlantic Regional Spaceport in Virginia, the emerging commercial launch business and the Texas State Technical College’s (TSTC), Waco attempt to establish a spaceport at an existing airport and the proliferation of proposed spaceports.

Another exemplary effort was the Tucson / Pima County spaceport initiative and the goal to develop a commercial spaceport around Tucson and the emerging air-launch concept.

A brilliant success story picked up in the book was the announcement of the small Rocket Lab company to establish a Rocket Lab spaceport at Wallops Flight Facility in 2017. The company grew steadily since then thanks to its small satellite concept, quick turnarounds and appropriate FAA licenses and was able to announce in 2026 to establish the Rocket Lab in Germany “to deliver sovereign space capabilities to Europe”.

Pappalardo's map of U.S. spaceports is broader than the places he personally visited. The book's contents explicitly include a map entitled "Map of US Spaceports — Commercial, Government, Private, and Proposed Launch Sites.", so indeed the lasting value of the book twofold.

On the one hand it provides a snapshot of the transition period from governmental sponsored (NASA) spaceflight to commercial spaceflight and the spirit of optimism that prevailed at the time which even ten years after the book's publishing is still interesting to read.

On the other hand, the author meticulously compiled the services offered by the various spaceports—covering everything from customers, launch teams, technical specifications and infrastructure, maintenance, and crisis management capabilities—in a comprehensive yet concise manner illustrated by real examples that, to the best of my knowledge, has not been seen before.

With a growing the market, now boosted by the unexpected increased highly flexible military reconnaissance activities and the flare-up of military conflicts worldwide—where quick response, reliability, FAA licenses and prompt launch dates are guaranteed and provided—knowledge of and the ability to compare the specific characteristics of individual spaceports are particularly important. Although now ten years old this book still can help.

August 2026, Joachim J. Kehr, Editor Journal of SpaceOperations & Communicator

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