



David Norman Bergdahl
1930 – 2000
A Skandia, Michigan Native

Dave Bergdahl played a major role in the development and implementation of the United States Space Program. As a young engineer he started his career at North American Aviation working on the NAVAHO Program. The NAVAHO Program, an Air Force weapon system, in the early 1950's was pushing the state of the art in all technologies including; aerodynamics, guidance systems, electronics, propulsion systems, materials and processes.

The NAVAHO was cancelled before becoming operational. This advancement in all technologies became the foundation for all future space vehicles, weapon systems, modern day communications and computer technologies. This program also produced four major Divisions of North American Aviation. This was the environment in which Dave got his start.

Dave's engineering knowledge and methodical discipline tackling and solving problems became a valued asset to these Divisions. His specialties were in thermal dynamics, fluid flow and propulsion systems. Some of the significant programs Dave worked on were: the X-15, a rocket powered airplane which flew between 1959 and 1968. In this time period it set world speed and altitude records which still stand for this type of vehicle. Dave worked in propulsion design and vehicle test on the APOLLO program, which put man on the moon. This program was probably the greatest engineering achievement of this nation. Dave worked several aspects of this program, but his greatest contribution was in the development of cryogenic SATURN second stage. He also worked on the landing system for the APOLLO Command module.

He worked on the P-80 Teal Rube which was a space platform which detected movement of all types of aircraft in flight. The system used cryogenic sensors operating at temperatures of liquid neon and liquid methane. This program was pushing the state of the art of handling and on orbit storage of these fluids. Dave's strong thermodynamics background became critical part in the design and on-earth testing of this critical technology.

After retiring from Rockwell International (formerly North American Aviation) Dave was sought out by McDonnell Douglas to work a limited access program. His experience was required to jump start a hardware to build and test a space propulsion system. He generated most of the component specifications, over saw the procurement and testing of these items. His knowledge contributed greatly to the success of this significant defense program.

David Bergdahl can best be described as an "Engineers Engineer." No problem was too difficult. No matter what the problem, he would start with engineering basics and analytically work through the problem and arrive at the solution. No arm waving, just the facts. The solutions would be practical which would make a part, subsystem, or system build able, testable and functional. Dave was respected by his co-workers, his management and his customer. His contributions to the American Space Program for over 40 years were invaluable. He could truly be called a "Rocket Scientist" in the best sense of the word.

Dave resided with his wife, Kay (Bordeau) Bergdahl and 5 children in Huntington Beach, California.

Written by Merle Johnson, a fellow Engineer