

Colonel Frank S. Buzard
Inducted 2001



Colonel Frank S. “Buzz” Buzard was born in St. Joseph, Missouri, on 20 April 1921. After completing his undergraduate work in Chemistry and Physics at Washington University in St. Louis, he received a commission in the Coast Artillery Corps on 13 May 1943. Transferring to the Signal Corps in February 1944, he installed navigation aids, long-haul communications equipment for Army Air Forces units in North Africa and Europe. Colonel Buzard moved to the newly independent Air Force in 1948 and was assigned to its Security Service, where he became a communications officer and squadron commander during 1950-1956. He completed a postgraduate engineering degree from the Air Force Institute of Technology in 1950 and earned a master’s degree in mathematics from the University of Illinois in 1958.

As a Major, Colonel Buzard joined Program WS-117L, the first Air Force satellite program, in February 1958. It marked the beginning of a career in satellite photographic reconnaissance that continued for more than a decade. During those years, he served in a number of positions that entailed progressively greater responsibilities: Project Officer and Section Leader in the WS-117L Program (1958); Deputy Director and Operations Officer in the Discoverer/Corona Program (1958-1963); Technical Staff Officer and Deputy Director for Systems in the Office of Space Systems, Secretary of the Air Force (1963-1966); Program Director for development and operation of a highly successful, high-resolution satellite system (1966-1971) and Vice Director of the Office of Special Projects, Secretary of the Air Force (1971-1972).

When Colonel C. Lee Battle formed the Discoverer/Corona Program Office in 1958, he personally selected Colonel Buzard as one of two officer assistants. Colonel Buzard managed the integration of all Air Force and contractor activities supporting Discoverer/Corona operations: launches from Vandenberg AFB; on-orbit satellite commanding from the Air Force Satellite Test

Center in Palo Alto, later Sunnyvale, California; and capsule recovery in Hawaii. Based largely on his suggestions, the command system was expanded to provide greater operational control capabilities. Before he left the program in October 1963, Colonel Buzard had overseen the launch and operation of 62 Discoverer satellites—a record not approached by any other program.

Selected in 1966 to head development of a much more complex, higher-resolution photographic reconnaissance system, Colonel Buzard used the Discoverer management model. He organized a small office of highly motivated, extremely talented Air Force officers. He built a strong systems engineering and integration team, and he established organizations and procedures to ensure the free, complete exchange of information among all the various program participants. Based on his Discoverer experiences, Colonel Buzard insisted on a highly redundant system to avoid catastrophic on-orbit failures. Furthermore, he demanded a comprehensive test program for all subassemblies and subsystems, as well as thorough testing of the entire satellite in a simulated space environment. On the first launch of the new satellite in June 1971, however, an unforeseen problem arose during liftoff and threatened the entire operation. Working under severe time constraints, Colonel Buzard's team of Air Force and contractor experts devised for the first, but certainly not the last, time ingenious ways to make the satellite perform in spite of the problem. Consequently, this became the first of 19 consecutive successful missions that helped overhead imaging achieve a new level of sophistication and made possible monitoring of the SALT I arms control treaty of 1972.

After retiring from active duty on 31 October 1972, Colonel Buzard taught for 16 years in the Master of Science in System Management Program at the University of Southern California.