

Colonel Wilbert F. Craig III
Inducted 2006



Colonel Wilbert F. “Bill” Craig III was born on 6 August 1932 in Olean, New York. He received a BA in mathematics from Southern Illinois University in 1955 and an MBA from Auburn University in 1969. Assigned in 1955 to the Air Force Special Weapons Center, Kirtland AFB, he designed the delivery and aircrew safe escape tactics and helped conduct live operational testing for the nation’s only nuclear air-air ballistic missile—the MB-1 Genie (F-89J, F-101B, F-106A). In 1957—prior to Sputnik—he helped organize Kirtland’s “Moonwatch” project to create one of the first USAF satellite tracking sites.

Colonel Craig was selected in early 1961, for the original SPACETRACK space surveillance team at Ent AFB. Its mission was to detect, track, and identify all man-made objects in space. As chief of research and special projects, he conducted the first accurate reentry prediction of a satellite, Sputnik 4, in 1962 and led efforts to provide the only U.S. confirmation of a Soviet interplanetary vehicle. During 1963-64, he managed competitive software development for Program 437, the nation’s only deployed antisatellite system, and led the orbital analysis for the first seven live tests, all successful. In 1964-65, he formed a tiger team to redesign rapidly all SPACETRACK software in time for Cheyenne Mountain initial operations.

Reassigned to the Assistant Chief of Staff, Studies and Analysis, HQ USAF (1965-69), Colonel Craig led technical analysis on the first headquarters studies related to space—a long-duration orbital bombardment system (LOBS); methods for highest probability safe recovery of astronauts in emergency situations (SAFE RETURN); the first analytic demonstration that space surveillance, from the 1970s onward, should be performed by space-based systems (SOS-70); and analytic substantiation that the new Soviet SS-9 ICBM was an ineffective first-strike threat to the U.S.

After completing Air Command and Staff College in 1969, Colonel Craig served as an assistant deputy for analysis to the Secretary of the Air Force, where he developed new, balanced methods for evaluating competing national space programs. When the President declared the Space Shuttle the primary U.S. launch vehicle, he was the Secretary's representative for preparing DoD for Shuttle operations. He evaluated potential Shuttle applications, created the proposed 12-year launch schedule, and crafted the charter for, and was a member of, the NASA/DoD committee that selected the IUS as the Shuttle upper stage. When the General Accounting Office formally challenged NASA claims regarding cost-benefits of the Shuttle, Colonel Craig's analysis settled the major differences, at least for the time being.

Following completion of Air War College in 1975, Colonel Craig commanded BMEWS Site 1—world's largest radar system—in Greenland. Returning to Cheyenne Mountain, he was responsible for assessing the strategic threat to North America and operations of NORAD intelligence systems. He also led design, testing, and initial deployment of the first U.S. satellite attack warning and verification capability (SAWS), the centerpiece for the initial Space Defense Operations Center (SPADOC).