

**Major General Ben I. Funk  
Inducted 2006**



Major General Ben I. Funk was born in Wray, Colorado, on 21 April 1913. While studying at Denver University, he decided to become a military pilot and received his Army Air Corps wings in 1936. At the start of World War II, he served with the 19<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group in the South Pacific before going to Air Materiel Command (AMC) headquarters to oversee performance improvements in B-17, B-24, and B-29 bombers. As a colonel in 1945, he trained and led the 346<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group, flying B-29s in the South Pacific until the end of World War II.

After the war, he studied industrial management at the Air Force Institute of Technology, receiving his B.S. in 1948 and going on to complete the Harvard School of Business Management's Advanced Management Program. From 1951 to 1954, General Funk commanded Erding Air Depot in southern Germany as part of U.S. Air Forces Europe (USAFE). While there, he was promoted to Brigadier General at the age of 40. In 1954, he became AMC inspector general, an assignment that involved inspecting and reporting on air depots throughout the command. Near the end of that assignment, he criticized AMC support of General Bernard A. Schriever's high-priority ballistic missile development program at Western Development Division in Los Angeles. AMC responded by assigning General Funk to direct the procurement and production activities supporting General Schriever.

Reporting to AMC's Ballistic Missile Office in Los Angeles in 1956, General Funk dedicated himself to supporting Schriever's efforts to develop, test, produce, and deploy the first generation of ballistic missiles. He tripled the size of AMC's contingent at Schriever's headquarters, the Air Force Ballistic Missile Division, in the first six months. In 1958, General Funk received the first Missile Badge awarded to anyone within AMC and, in 1960, was reassigned as commander of the San Bernardino Air Materiel Area, the first depot to assume logistical support for Thor and

Atlas missiles. There he devised a system for automatic logistical support for the missiles, using early, vacuum-tube computers.

In 1962, General Funk became Space Systems Division (SSD) commander. To achieve initial operational capability of satellite systems for nuclear detection (VELA), meteorology (DMSP), communications (IDSCS), and missile warning (MIDAS), his teams at Vandenberg AFB and Cape Canaveral AFS carried out launches at a rate that remains unsurpassed. They also oversaw development and early use of the Titan III launch vehicle, which provided the primary access to space for the largest and most critical military satellites, as well as for many of NASA's interplanetary missions. Among new space capabilities launched for other agencies were the Navy's Transit navigation system, the clandestine phase of the National Reconnaissance Office's Corona program, and NASA's early manned, orbital spacecraft programs.

Support to NASA's Mercury and Gemini programs was certainly one of General Funk's most important personal accomplishments. The Air Force developed and modified the Atlas missiles for every manned Mercury orbital flight. It developed and modified three quarters of the hardware used in the Gemini program: the Titan II missile that launched the astronauts, the Agena spacecraft used as the target vehicle for rendezvous, and the Atlas vehicle that launched the Agena.

Major General Funk retired from active duty in September 1966. During the next ten years, he served at Lockheed Missiles and Space Company.