

**Lieutenant Colonel Albert W. Johnson
Inducted 2006**



Lieutenant Colonel Albert W. “Bill” Johnson was born on 13 March 1928 in Chadron, Nebraska, and graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1951. He began graduate studies in 1956 at Charles Stark Draper’s Instrumentation Laboratory, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and, after receiving his Master’s degree, joined the Weapon System 117L program team in August 1958. His initial assignment was a project officer for the recovery vehicle being developed by General Electric to return data from Earth-orbiting satellites. When the Discoverer/Corona project was formed later that same year, he joined colonels Clarence L. “Lee” Battle and Frank S. “Buzz” Buzard as one of the original team members.

As chief of the payloads division for Discoverer/Corona, then Captain Johnson’s primary responsibility was working with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and its contractor, Itek Corporation, to integrate the Corona camera with the Discoverer satellite vehicle. He inspected and accepted for the government the primary payloads, and he worked with the camera contractor to solve problems that occurred during on-orbit operations.

Captain Johnson became the first chairman of the Discoverer/Corona configuration control board, which included representatives from the CIA, National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), and Discoverer/Corona project office. The configuration control board supported changes to the Corona payload to improve performance and increase payload capacity. For example, the initial ground resolution of approximately 20 feet and film capacity of about 3,000 feet grew to a best resolution of 5 feet with a film capacity of 32,000 feet per mission.

Discoverer/Corona, as a photographic reconnaissance effort and as a scientific endeavor, benefited immensely from Lieutenant Colonel Johnson’s presence. He worked with Lockheed

engineers to develop procedures and design shields to protect the Corona film from fogging when the satellite passed through the radiation belt created by the Starfish high-altitude atomic tests in 1962. As project officer for the development and integration of the "stellar/index" camera into the system, he made its primary product useful to the mapping-and-charting community. In terms of auxiliary payloads, he became the initial project officer for development of the P-11 subsatellite, which the Discoverer satellite carried into orbit and which later became a major program in its own right. He also served as the first project officer on design of components and subsystems to detect and counter possible enemy interference with U.S. Air Force (USAF) satellite operations. Johnson worked with other satellite programs such as Transit and Vela Hotel to test their hardware items on Discoverer flights. He accommodated various USAF laboratories to fly instruments for over 100 experiments related to Earth albedo, cosmic rays, and ion charges in space. Furthermore, he joined biomedical experimenters in developing life-support and recovery packages for mice and monkeys launched aboard some Discoverer flights.

After an assignment during 1964-67 to the NRO staff, Lieutenant Colonel Johnson participated in developing the mapping payload for the Corona follow-on program. In 1973, he began a six-year assignment with the National Security Agency (NSA). He retired from active duty on 1 March 1979 and, as a civilian, worked another 13 years for Lockheed Missiles and Space Company on various defense-related space projects.