

**Major General Richard D. Curtin**  
**Inducted 1989**



Major General Richard D. Curtin was born in Taunton, Massachusetts, on 2 April 1915 and attended Brown University for two years, before winning appointment to the United States Military Academy in 1935. He graduated in 1939 with a Bachelor of Science degree. During World War II, where he was instrumental in developing tactics used in attacking German targets in areas heavily defended by antiaircraft artillery. In April 1946, General Curtin was assigned to the Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, as a member of the original faculty. From 1950 to 1954, he served in the War Plans Division of Air Force headquarters, where in conjunction with Colonel Bernard A. Schriever's Research and Development Plans Division, he formulated the original concepts for the Matador, Falcon, Rascal, Snark and Navajo guided missiles.

In 1956, General Curtin served as the Executive to the Deputy Commander, Systems, HQ Air Research and Development Command (ARDC). In February 1958, General Curtin became a member of the highly selective officer group at the Air Force Ballistic Missile Division (AFBMD) in Los Angeles. While there Curtin and General Schriever, who was then the Deputy Commander for Ballistic Missiles at ARDC, Andrews AFB, Maryland, were instrumental in communicating with HQ U.S. Air Force, the Department of Defense, and the U.S. Congress the relative advantages of USAF's continuing control of the nation's entire space program.

General Curtin became commander of the U.S. Air Force space effort. As the Deputy Commander of the BMD he developed the operational methods for space vehicles and

ran the worldwide space networks. He, at this time, was responsible for the launch, control, and management of NASA's space vehicles. From June to August 1960, General Curtin served as the Deputy Director, Systems Development, Headquarters, United States Air Force, and from August 1960 to June 1962, as the Director, Missile and Satellite Systems, Office of the Secretary of the Air Force. Under the direction Dr. Joseph V. Charyk, the Under Secretary of the Air Force and the Chief Scientist of the Central Intelligence Agency, General Curtin played a leading role both in the foundation of the super-secret National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) on 25 August 1960 and in its subsequent operation. During this time, he operated out of a clandestine office in the Pentagon. Although at this point General Curtin was at the acme of his space career, his exact achievements would not receive public note for over thirty years because of the extreme secrecy shrouding his work.

After serving with the NRO, General Curtin served as the Director of Advanced Engineering, the Director of Development, and the Director of Development Plans in Air Force headquarters. During these years, he was responsible for many new missile, space, and aircraft programs. In the final years of his military career, General Curtin served in the Office of the Secretary of Defense as the Deputy Advisor to the U.S. Ambassador to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

In 1960, he affirmed that space operations were in the here and now. He asserted, that though the United States was in the "Kitty Hawk stage" of space endeavor, that space operations were ongoing and that "space machines" were "moving forward at a rate far greater than did ... aircraft in the days of the Wright Brothers, [Billy] Mitchell, and Lindbergh." Curtin lectured about the potential of space, speaking about the Air Force's own space program and its support of NASA's programs and the benefits that the use of space could bring. However, at the same time, he explained that the military was highly selective in its development of space systems, because they were so costly. General Curtin emphasized the need for the utmost reliability of military space systems and the concomitant need for the long-lived operation of military payloads.

General Curtin retired from the Air Force on 31 October 1967. After retirement, he served as the Director of Management Engineering for Bell Aerosystems, Vice President for Development & Manufacturing for Southwestern Research Corporation in Phoenix, Vice President of the Planning Research Corporation (PRC), and General Manager of the Jacobs Company, a subsidiary of PRC. And finally, he served as Director for Technical Management of the American Defense Preparedness Association.