

Dr. Simon Ramo
Inducted 1989



Dr. Simon Ramo was born in Salt Lake City, Utah, on 13 May 1913. Ramo earned a B.S. in electrical engineering at the University of Utah and, at twenty-three, a Ph.D. in electrical engineering and physics at Cal Tech. General Electric hired him immediately. At GE, he served as section head of the general engineering laboratory and head of the physics section of the electronics research laboratory. As a GE scientist he attained world recognition as a pioneer in microwave technology and developed GE's electron microscope. In 1946, unhappy about GE's diminishing prospects in high technology and eager to return to California, Ramo joined Hughes Aircraft Company.

At Hughes, Ramo served as the director of research in the electronics department and held the titles of Vice President, and Director of Operations. Ramo instituted high-technology research and development at the company. Largely because of his work, Hughes received initial contracts from the Air Force for advanced military electronics and for R&D of guided-missiles.

In 1953, Ramo and Dean E. Wooldridge, who was co-director of research and development laboratories at Hughes, wished to discuss possible solutions to several management problems with Howard Hughes, but Hughes avoided them. Frustrated, the two resigned from Hughes on Friday, 11 September 1953. By the following Wednesday, they had established Ramo-Wooldridge Corporation and by Friday afternoon had a contract to provide science and engineering analysis to a Defense Department strategic-missile planning effort.

The "Teapot Committee" or as it became officially known the "Strategic Missile Evaluation Committee" provided overall guidance for the USAF's ballistic missile effort. It was established by Trevor Gardner who placed both Simon Ramo and Dean E. Wooldridge on this eleven-man committee. It concluded that a beginning operational capability in long-range missiles could be attained in six years if the U.S. instituted proper management, allocated sufficient funds and the highest priority to the program, and relaxed missile performance standards. The outcome would be the Air Force's project to develop the ballistic missile; a crash program about twice as big and complex as the Manhattan Project to develop the atomic bomb.

The Western Development Division (later the Ballistic Missile Division) and Ramo-Wooldridge spearheaded the American effort. By December 1957, the two organizations were supervising over 150 first-line contracts. Observers estimated that the Air Force ballistic missile program, in the late 1950s, employed about 2,000 system and subsystem contractors with more than 40,000 personnel. The endeavor not only bested the Soviets in the race to set up the first operational ICBM force, but also was remarkably free of major cost overruns, schedule slippages, and waste. The ballistic missile program was one of great urgency and the highest priority.

He left the ballistic missile effort in October 1958. Simon Ramo's effective leadership in the program provided the scientific foundation and forged the essential cooperation between the Air Force and industry necessary to begin the nation's military space program. He helped the United States become the world's leader in space technology and its applications. For his role as the leading civilian in the Air Force's ballistic missile program, the Air Force awarded him a special citation of honor.

After his days in the ballistic missile program, he continued to remain active in business and serve as a key advisor to the government on science and technology. He was chairman of the President's Committee on Science and Technology under President Gerald R. Ford and was co-chairman of the Transition Task Force on Science and Technology under President Ronald Reagan. He also was a member of the White House Energy Research and Development Council, the Advisory Committee to the Secretary of State on Science and Foreign Affairs, the Advisory Council to the Secretary of Commerce, and the Roster of Consultants to the Energy Research and Development Administration. In addition, he was a consultant for the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy and a member of the Department of Defense's Advisory Committee on the Strategic Defense Initiative. He co-founded two Fortune 500 companies. One of these was TRW, an enormously successful defense electronics firm that put together the complex systems required for the first American intercontinental ballistic missile, the other was Bunker-Ramo, a computer venture; Allied Corporation, now Allied Signal, acquired it in 1981. He also has served on the National Science Board.