

Colonel Quenten A. Riepe
Inducted 1999



Colonel Quenten A. Riepe played an important role in Air Force space history as the first project manager for the defense satellite program. Born on 9 April 1919, Riepe attended the University of Minnesota where he earned a Bachelor's degree in Aeronautical Engineering in 1951. During World War II, Riepe had been assigned as a pilot in the 17th Troop Carrier Squadron. He also served as General Patton's pilot and had spent some of the Italian campaign with Patton in "the Queen's quarters" in Palermo.

In 1951, as Chief of the Flight Research Lab at Wright Air Development Center (WADC), Col Riepe completed one of the first space utility and feasibility reports to determine methods and goals. From 1952 to 1955, Col Riepe served as Project Officer and as Systems Planning Officer in the Weapon Systems Division at HQ WADC.

During this same time, Col Riepe also served as the RAND liaison officer on the Advanced Reconnaissance System, MX-2226 (Project 1115). His liaison duties involved overseeing many aspects of the development of reconnaissance satellites: attitude, guidance, and control; a solar-electrical energy converter; intelligence processing methods; the auxiliary power plant; and the effects of nuclear radiation on electronic components.

After attending Air Command and Staff College in 1955, Col Riepe was assigned as Chief, Plans Programs Branch, Western Development Division (WDD), for the initial Air Force satellite system, Weapon System 117L (WS-117L). Then, four months after the Soviets launched Sputnik I, Col Riepe became Chief, Facilities and Test Division, WDD, for the Discoverer satellite system. He was assigned the task of implementing the complete ground facilities and support systems for this program. This included responsibility for construction of pads and the assembly building to support the firing of the first Air Force research and development satellite.

In 1958, Col Riepe served as Chief, Systems Support Division, WS-117L, for the Air Force Ballistic Missile Division (AFBMD). This was followed by tours as Director of the MIDAS satellite system (1959-1960) and as Director, 698AL Directorate, for the HQ Space Systems Division (SSD) (1961-1962).

Col Riepe's next assignment, from 1962 to 1964, was as Director of Program 437, the Air Force's first operational antisatellite system. Program 437 used a Thor booster to carry a 1.5 megaton yield nuclear warhead to a target up to 200 nautical miles high. This system, deployed on Johnson Atoll, had a variant program (437X) which envisioned using the same launch hardware to boost a camera/film return capsule of Discoverer design to the orbit of a Soviet satellite to obtain close-range photography.

In 1964, Col Riepe began a two-year assignment as Vice Commander, 6595 Aerospace Test Wing (ATW), of the Air Force Space and Missile Test Center at Vandenberg AFB, California. The 6595 ATW was responsible for conducting launch operations for assigned missile and space systems at Vandenberg AFB and Cape Kennedy AFS, Florida.

Before his retirement from the Air Force in 1966, after more than 23 years of active duty service, Col Riepe served as a NASA Board Member on the Gemini Agena Target Vehicle Review Board (GATVRB). The GATVRB investigated all aspects of the Agena failure of 25 October 1965.

In recognition of his substantial contributions, Col Quentin A. Riepe was awarded the Legion of Merit in 1965 for "exceptional meritorious performance of outstanding service to the U.S. in guiding and directing development of space systems." Col Riepe was credited with developing many of the basic concepts of space launch and satellite control. He died in October 1978.