

RAE Farnborough Space Department A History



Compiled by
Bryan Day
Publisher

The British Interplanetary
Society
ISBN
978-0-95673-827-1
Price
£10 (member)
£12 (non-member)

This excellent book covers the development of space research at RAE Farnborough from 1946 to 2001. The story starts with the formation of the Guided Weapons Department at Farnborough in 1946 and, amongst other things, its work on Skylark, Blue Streak and Black Knight.

The Space Department proper was formed on 1 January 1962 and the second part of the volume continues with a description of the work carried out during the first twelve years of the Department's existence. This involved ELDO, Black Arrow, the continuing development of Skylark and also the pioneering of electric propulsion. In addition the oft forgotten detailed work on solar cells, attitude controls, star tracking and sensors is well reported and the main satellite projects, Ariel, Skynets 1, 2 and 3, Prospero and Miranda are covered.

There follows a very good account of the role of the Space Department after it was scaled down in 1974 due to changes in Government priorities. Work was undertaken for the European Space Agency, Semi-Active Radar and support for other programmes including space radiation.

The story continues with a description of the return of electric propulsion research to Farnborough in the early 1980s and the resultant STVR satellites. The decision of the MOD to have its own communications satellites also meant satellite work could begin again in the guise of Skynet 4.

An important and interesting epilogue describes the work of QinetiQ, which was formed in the wake of the Space Department's demise at the turn of the century.

Like the best man's speech there is something for everyone in this book. The serious research student will find a wealth of information on a multitude of subjects which will enrich any thesis but the interested non-specialist will gain a worthwhile insight into a truly magnificent story of British technological acumen and enterprise. Most importantly the political story is given a welcome prominence, and along with a rich anecdotal contribution, an essential balance and structure is given to the telling.

This history has been compiled by those who worked at Farnborough, and consequently there is a distinct feel of authenticity to the narrative. The importance of such histories is best summed up in Doug Millard's foreword to the book: "The historiography of space research and development is still dominated by US accounts so this history is doubly significant, addressing as it does a gap in the UK national story of space exploration and the wider national one."

This is the second BIS publication describing the history of a British space research organisation (the first was *Summerfield* by Hugh Nicolson) and this is exactly the sort of subject the BIS should be involved with. What about Westcott, someone?

Andrew Chatwin

Go, Flight! The Unsung Heroes of Mission Control, 1965-1992



Authors
Rick Houston
and Milt Heflin
Publisher
University of Nebraska
Press
ISBN
978-0-8032-6937-8
Price
\$36.95 368 pages
(softback)

The Nebraska Press *Outward Odyssey: A People's History of Spaceflight* portfolio of books, under the guiding stewardship of Series Editor Colin Burgess, has offered a new and refreshing insight into the human side of exploring space. From X-15 to Shuttle the series has built into an impressive library covering almost a century of space exploration in, as our Societies motto states, *From Imagination to Reality*.

From the earliest rocket pioneers and theorists to the first fledging steps into the cosmos and out to the moon, through the early stages of creating permanent space stations in Earth orbit, and robotic exploration deep into the solar system to the creation of privately funded space endeavours, this series continues to offer impressive titles and works which would enhance any space library.

Continuing in this vein *Go Flight* is a much needed addition to the relatively few books which focus on the hundreds of people who occupied the consoles at Mission Control, Houston. Written by Journalist Rick Houston and former Shuttle Flight Director and JSC Associate Director (Technical) Milt Heflin, with a foreword by Apollo Flight Controller John Aaron, this book is less of a personal biography, more a behind the scenes voice of mission control

itself through the recollection of those who were there at the time.

Personal memories and stories fill the book, recalling the highs and lows of being in that iconic building during some of the most famous, and infamous events in American space history.

David Shayler

Soviet Space Mythologies Public images, private memories & the making of a cultural identity



Author
Slava Gerovitch
Publisher
University of Pittsburgh
Press
ISBN
978-0-8229-6363-9
Price
\$27.95 256 pages
(softback)

"In order to remember, we have to create our memories. And we create them out of the myths and symbols of our culture. Soviet space history myths are an odd mixture of propaganda clichés and private memories of space program participants", writes the author.

While the Soviet Union was famous for "firsts" and space spectaculars, it was also known for a lack of detail during the early years of the space age. For the Western observer, professional or amateur, the secret nature of the programme added to the intrigue, mystery and attraction to find out more. To collaborate in the gathering of information and offer analysis based upon official sources, detailed analytical approaches, and the examination and re-examination of the sparse detail of past events. As frustrating as this dedication to sifting out the truth sometimes was, and which could result in misinterpretation, it also required educated guesses, a network of correspondents, a lot of detective work, and just plain good luck. This was the genre of the Soviet space sleuth.

One of the stumbling blocks in this path to the truth were the myths surrounding the early Soviet space programme, and which, with most of the participants deceased, remain challenging to fully unmask without access to the often restricted archives and official reports.

The value of this book lies in its analysis of the relationship between a cultural identity with space achievements and the ordinary citizen outside the space community, while demonstrating the importance of establishing a connection to the driven purpose of the state machinery, in reality an example every bit as fitting in the West as in the East.

David Shayler