LAWRENCE E. “LARRY” JENKINS

1933–1996

BY ROBERT A. FUHRMAN

LAWRENCE E. “LARRY” JENKINS, retired vice-president and general manager of Lockheed Corporation's Austin division, died at his home in Austin, Texas, on April 5, 1996.

Larry was born on March 12, 1933, in Salt Lake City, Utah, the son of Lawrence Eugene Jenkins, Sr., and Grace Edith Crabbe. Larry had a great interest in science and mathematics, and he entered the University of Utah as a prospective electrical engineer. He graduated “with honors” in 1955 and received a bachelor of science degree in electrical engineering.

Larry proceeded directly into graduate work at Utah, receiving a master's degree in electrical engineering in June 1957. His master's thesis probably foretold his future career in space. It was called, “Projectile Deceleration Through Use of Electromagnetic Fields.”

Larry joined a relatively new organization after graduation— the Lockheed Missiles & Space Company's Space Systems Division which was forming in Palo Alto and Sunnyvale, California, in a partial response to the launch of Sputnik and the start of the “Space Race.” He was assigned to the very critical development of a complex precision, three-axis control system for the Agena satellite. This represented a first-of-a-kind system incorporating innovative techniques for flexible, yet precise attitude control, along with features to enhance reliability and lengthen operational life.
This development satisfied one of the highest-priority national missions of what is now known as the National Reconnaissance Office, or NRO. Larry performed this effort in an exemplary manner, and in 1963, he was named manager of space systems guidance and controls. Here his work formed the foundation for control of increasingly sophisticated military satellites. As these programs developed, Larry's technical contributions broadened to encompass digital communications, command and control, specialized sensors and signal processing.

He also made major contributions to satellite systems operations by developing techniques to enhance the flexibility of one—orbit operations. He subsequently added to his technical and management accomplishments through the direction of tactical data fusion programs and command—and—control systems.

In 1965, in recognition of his technical and management potential, Larry was named a Sloan Fellow at Stanford in executive management. His Sloan research paper was entitled, “From Pillbox to Pillbox, a Study in Interpersonal Communications.”

His subsequent career at Lockheed included assignments as manager of space systems technology and assistant chief engineer for technology, where he was responsible for systems engineering as well as the design of space vehicles and ground systems, and then chief engineer for all of Lockheed's space system activities.

He was later program manager and general manager for the development and deployment of one of the nation's most advanced classified space programs. Larry led this activity through conceptual and detailed design to an outstanding, successful flight demonstration. This accomplishment was considered a quantum advance in military satellite technology and resulted in a special citation from the secretary of the air force for unique personal contributions.

In recognition of his demonstrated technical and engineering management skills, Larry was elected to the National Academy of Engineering in 1984. He received the prestigious U.S. Air Force Significant Achievement Award for his contributions to the U.S. space program.

In 1981 Larry became the first vice-president and general
manager of Lockheed's new Austin, Texas, division. Here he led the companies activities in tactical command, control and communications and remotely piloted vehicles designed to support the command and control functions. He also contributed greatly to his community's cultural, educational and business institutions. He was 1987 chairman of the board of directors for the Austin Chamber of Commerce and also chaired the board of the Creative Rapid Learning Center, a program to help school dropouts. He had several associations with the University of Texas and was executive advisor for Lockheed's Key Schools program at the university.

Larry chaired the Governor's Task Force on Vocational Education in 1987 and in 1988 was named chairman of the Governor's Select Committee on Education to develop a new system of financing Texas' public schools and improving their performance. Among the many other organizations he served were the Austin Private Industry Council, Austin Community College, United Way and Austin Symphony Orchestra. In 1989 he received a Community Service Award presented by the Austin Business Journal as well as an Austin Community College Award.

Larry is survived by his wife, Roberta Muirhead Jenkins, and three children.

An inspiring leader in technology, management, education and community development, Larry Jenkins will be greatly missed by all who knew him.