



DAVID R. HEEBNER

1927–2003

Elected in 1999

“For aerospace systems engineering accomplishments that have substantially improved our national security.”

BY CHARLES A. (BERT) FOWLER

One of the very few really great things I did during my Pentagon years was to lure Dave Heebner from Hughes to work in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. It was great for me; for our boss, Johnny Foster; for the U.S. Department of Defense; and for the country. It was also great for the Fowlers because the couples quickly became fast friends. And over the years we traveled, skied, golfed, and wine and dined together.

We left sitzmarks at ski slopes all over New England, the American West, and the Interlaken region of Switzerland, where in a single week we totally depleted the wine supply of the village of Meiringen—with a great deal of help, I must add, from our skiing mates, Carolyn and Dave Stanford and Robin and Bill Layson.

Those golfing ventures, which also included the Stanfords, raised the pond levels from California to Bermuda. Without fail, one of us would say to the one whose ball was up against a rock or tree, “Would you like to improve your lie?” And the other would dutifully respond, “OK. Give me a par on the last hole.”

We saw many plays, art exhibits, and concerts and partook of food and refreshments at the best restaurants wherever we went.

And so it was among best friends.

Shortly before Dave's death, I said sadly to Bob Hermann, "Our old buddy Dave is not doing well." Bob said, equally sadly, that he had heard. Then he added, "But he's had a great life."

And I have thought a lot about that. Dave really did have a great life. He had a super wife, four wonderful children, and a bevy of marvelous grandchildren. His surviving loved ones are his wife of 52 years, Lynn; his son, Rick Heebner of California; his daughters, Karen Moore of Virginia, Kim Price of Maryland, and Kathy Geiger of Virginia; and his eight grandchildren, all of whom he adored.

He had a very successful career in industry. As a young engineer, his invention made the towed array practical and led to its wide use today as the principal means of detecting submarines. He was awarded the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) Simon Ramo Medal for this extraordinary accomplishment.

He played a major role in the fantastic growth of SAIC (Science Applications International Corporation), starting an effort that changed it from a study house to a systems powerhouse. Dave rose steadily in the ranks of the company to vice chairman of the board. After retirement from SAIC, he became a consultant—an honorable profession, I must note.

In his retirement Dave also had more time to devote to his many hobbies. His winter pastime, in addition to skiing, was working on his stamp collection—a passion he developed as a child. His spring and summer hobby was gardening. He raised flowers and vegetables in abundance, to the delight of his family and friends. His major all-year-round pastime was building and flying radio-controlled model airplanes, everything from gliders to helicopters. He built them, flew them, crashed them, and then rebuilt them to fly again. They traveled with him on trips in a specially fitted travel case, so that he could fly his models in different venues.

His professional peers recognized him by election to the grade of fellow in the IEEE, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics and as a member of the National Academy of Engineering. At the time it was noted that he became just the second alumnus of the New Jersey Institute of Technology to join the ranks of the Academy.

His contributions as an advisor to the U.S. Department of Defense are fabled. He led many major studies and served as chairman or vice chairman of major advisory committees.

These contributions were recognized in 2002 when he received the Eugene G. Fubini Award for giving valuable advice to the Defense Department. In presenting the award, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz noted:

“Dave, you made the world a better place than you found it. You made our country a safer country than you found it. On behalf of Secretary Rumsfeld and Eugene Fubini, who I’m sure is here with us, it is my pleasure to present you with the Eugene Fubini Award.”

Dave also possessed a marvelous perspective plus a great sense of humor. Some years ago, I started collecting one-liners. These Heebner-isms reflect those attributes:

“Hell hath no fury like a military staff officer whose decision memo was changed by his superior.”

“My goal in golf is not to shoot my age but to shoot the temperature. Last week when it was 97 degrees, I shot 106; so I’m closing in on it.”

Dave did indeed have a great life. And with Lynn always by his side, he did it all!

And he did it with style, grace, and humor. And, in so doing, he brought joy and warmth to all of us.