



Daniel A. Lind

DANIEL J. FINK

1926–2012

Elected in 1974

“For contributions to aeronautics and space in government and in private industry.”

BY ROBERT WERTHEIM

DANIEL J. FINK, whose professional lifetime was spent in service to our country, passed away on Friday, June 1, 2012, at the age of 85. Born in Union City, New Jersey, Dan graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) with B.S. and M.S. degrees in aeronautical engineering. He had been afflicted with polio at the age of 13, which in later years required the use of canes and walkers and ultimately a wheelchair but which he never allowed to restrict his ebullient nature, brilliant insights, and leadership skills.

Dan’s services were in management and advisory capacities to the U.S. Department of Defense and many other agencies, both public and private. From 1963 to 1967 he served in the Pentagon in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, first as assistant director for defensive systems and subsequently as deputy director of defense, research and engineering (strategic and space systems). He returned to private industry in 1987, joining General Electric Company where he held the positions of vice president and general manager of the Space Division, vice president and group executive of the Aerospace Group, and senior vice president for corporate planning and Development. In 1982 he retired from GE to form a strategic management consulting firm, D. J. Fink Associates, Inc.

Dan served as a member of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) Scientific Advisory Board, the Army Scientific Advisory Panel, and the Defense Science Board, where he chaired or cochaired many committees. From 1983 to 1988 he served as chairman of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Advisory Council. Dan served as president of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, of which he was an honorary fellow. After election to the National Academy of Engineering, he served as chairman of the Space Applications Board, the Board on Telecommunications/Computer Applications, and the Committee on U.S.-Japan Linkages in Transport Aircraft. He was a member of the NASA/White House Committee on the future of the U.S. Space Program (the Augustine Committee) and of the Vice President's Space Policy Advisory Board, where he chaired a committee on the future of the U.S. space industrial base.

Along with NASA's Dr. John Clark, Dan was awarded the 1974 Collier Trophy, the nation's top aerospace award by the President of the United States for leadership of the NASA/industry team responsible for the Earth Resources Technology Satellite Program, LANDSAT.

Dan was awarded the Department of Defense's highest civilian decoration, the Distinguished Public Service Medal, and NASA's Medal for Outstanding Leadership. In October 2010, he was awarded the prestigious Eugene G. Fubini Award as "an individual who best exemplifies the extended contributions and leadership in advisory activities and personal service to the United States." In supporting this award, former Secretary of Defense Harold Brown characterized Mr. Fink as "someone whose technical skills, ability to manage difficult programs and deal with difficult people, and dedication to U.S. national security were invaluable in formulating and executing the weapons systems component of the deterrent strategy that served the nation during the most dangerous period of the Cold War." Former NASA Administrator Robert Frosch added, "He was always a supportive source of independent information and views, always valuable, not least for being sometimes pungently expressed."

His dedication went so far as to bark out orders for a Defense Science Board summer study while being loaded into an ambulance after being injured in a fall.

In addition to his long and dedicated service to government, industry, and academe, Dan took on many other responsibilities that supported the national defense and space programs and policies. He served on the board of directors of the Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Association, the Board of Governors of the National Space Club, and the National Advisory Council of the Opportunities Industrialization Centers of America. He served on the United Technologies Technical Advisory Committee from 1987 to 1997 and as director of Orbital Science for 25 years, from 1983 to 2008. During this period he was the first lead independent director, and for over 20 years he was the first chairman for the Market and Technology Committee of the board. Dan also served on the Board of the Titan Corporation from 1984 until 2005. He was a member of the MIT Corporate Visiting Committees for the Department of Aeronautics and Astronautics and for the Sloan School of Management. He was also chairman of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute's Departmental Advisory Board (mechanical engineering, aeronautical engineering and mechanics).

While small in stature, Dan Fink was a giant in his lifetime of service to his country. He will be sorely missed by his many friends, colleagues, and family. He is survived by Tobie, his wife of 61 years; three children—his son Kenneth (and wife Paula) and his daughters Betsy (and her husband Jeffrey Lupetin) and Karen Lawrence Perlmutter; and six grandchildren—Stephen and Jeff, Zachary and Lila, and Rachel and Joselyn. In accordance with his wishes, his ashes will be launched into space orbit.