



*W. S. Lewis*

## DAVID S. LEWIS, JR.

1917–2003

Elected in 1971

*“For contributions to aerospace management in conception, development, and production of aircraft and spacecraft.”*

BY ROBERT J. PATTON

**D**AVID S. LEWIS, JR., a major force in the nation’s aerospace industry and former chief executive officer of General Dynamics, died on December 15, 2003, at the age of 86.

David Sloan Lewis, Jr., was born on July 6, 1917, in North Augusta, South Carolina. His father, Dick Lewis, was an executive with Standard Oil of New Jersey and was transferred to Columbia, South Carolina, in 1933. Dave graduated from Columbia High School in 1934. After studying engineering at the University of South Carolina for three years, he transferred to the Georgia Institute of Technology, where he received a B.S. in aeronautical engineering in 1939.

After graduation he joined the Glenn L. Martin Company in Baltimore and during World War II worked on many new aircraft designs in the aerodynamics department. There Dave met his wife, Dorothy, who also worked at the Martin Company, and they were married on December 20, 1941.

In 1946, Lewis joined the McDonnell Aircraft Corporation in St. Louis as chief of aerodynamics. There he worked on the FH-2 Phantom, the U.S. Navy’s first jet aircraft, the F2H, and the F-101 for the U.S. Air Force. McDonnell formed an Advanced Design Department with Lewis as head. They developed the Navy’s F-4 Phantom II. McDonnell delivered more than 5,000 F-4s to the U.S. Navy and U.S. Air Force and to

the armed forces of several allied nations. In 1956, Lewis was promoted to vice president of McDonnell Aircraft. He was instrumental in the company winning the Mercury spacecraft for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. In 1962, Dave was named chief operating officer for all of the company's activities.

As a part of the aerospace industry's consolidation in the early 1960s, McDonnell merged with Douglas Aircraft Corporation. Lewis was named chairman of the Douglas Division and was charged with turning the company around regarding deliveries and its financial problems. With the infusion of McDonnell's money and Lewis's leadership and attention to detail, Douglas became profitable again and Lewis returned to St. Louis. He continued to work on DC-10 sales and was instrumental in winning the federal government's contract to develop the F-15 Eagle.

Lewis became chairman and chief executive officer of General Dynamics in 1970 and had the corporate headquarters moved to St. Louis. By 1974 his leadership had made the company profitable. The biggest opportunity for the aerospace part was the competition for a new lightweight fighter. Dave Lewis took a very personal part to ensure a winning proposal: He flew to Fort Worth (where the F-16 proposal was being prepared) every Saturday to personally review the design, structural details, proposed development plans, and pricing. Their proposal was the winner, and General Dynamics went on to build several thousand F-16s.

During the Persian Gulf War, General Dynamics products were very much in evidence. Lewis was proud of the General Dynamics systems that were used by the U.S. military: Tomahawk Cruise missiles, F-16s, Phalanx ship defense gun systems, and the M1 Abrams main battle tank.

The submarine business at the Electric Boat Division then took much of Lewis's time. The division obtained a contract for many SSN 688 attack submarines. Then Lewis worked hard to get the Trident ballistic missile submarine design and construction (including the building of a large new land-level assembly facility). He retired from General Dynamics in 1985.

As a result of his work in the aerospace field, Lewis received many honors, among them the Robert Collier Trophy for the F-16 in 1975, the Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz Award in 1981, the Daniel Guggenheim Medal in 1982, and the Wright Brothers Memorial Trophy in 1984. He also received an honorary doctor of sciences degree from Clarkson College of Technology in 1971 and an honorary doctor of law degree from St. Louis University in 1977.

Lewis served as a director of Ralston Purina in St. Louis, Bank of America in San Francisco, Cessna Aircraft in Wichita, and the Mead Corporation in Dayton, Ohio. He was also a trustee of Washington University in St. Louis and the Georgia Tech Foundation.

In addition to being a member of the National Academy of Engineering (1971), Lewis was a fellow of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics and a member of the Board of Nominations for the Aviation Hall of Fame, the National Aeronautics Association, the Navy League, and the Air Force Association. He was on the board of the Aerospace Industry Association and the American Ordnance Association. Starting in mid-1986 he served on the National Academy of Engineering's Committee on Aerospace Defense.

Dave Lewis was an active and lifelong member of the Episcopal Church. As a child he was an altar boy at Grace Episcopal in Charleston, South Carolina. While he was in St. Louis, he continued to be active and served on the vestry and as a senior warden at the Church of St. James the Apostle. After retirement he returned to South Carolina and was again active at Grace Episcopal.

In 1982, anticipating retirement, Lewis began developing a plantation near Albany, Georgia, which grew to 8,500 acres of farmland and swampland. There he and Dorothy built a home and produced peanuts, pecans, corn, and quail. In 1996 they sold the plantation and moved to Charleston.

His daughter, Susan Winslow, wrote:

In his retirement era he continued his love for golf, maintaining his affiliation with Augusta National,

and also serving a term as President of the Highlands Country Club in Highlands, North Carolina, where he and Dorothy spent many summers. In 2000 he was inducted into the South Carolina Business Hall of Fame by then-Governor Jim Hodges.

David Lewis had the aura of a well-bred Southern gentleman. Despite all his wealth and skill with high technology, he preferred to drive a Ford Falcon or Dodge Dart.

At the time of his death in 2003, Mr. Lewis was survived by his wife of 62 years, the former Dorothy Sharpe; his daughter, Susan Winslow (of Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina); and his three sons—David III (of Chevy Chase, Maryland), Robert (of Marietta, Georgia), and Andrew (of Gainesville, Georgia).

