



Bill B May

BILL B. MAY

1935–2016

Elected in 1988

“For outstanding accomplishments in pioneering and bringing to practice significant electronic surveillance technologies.”

BY WILLIAM J. PERRY

BILL BRUCE MAY’S life is a prototypical American story. That is, it’s a story that could happen only in America.

He had humble origins. Born September 23, 1935, in Sturgis, South Dakota, to John and Weltha May, he grew up on a ranch outside the small town not far from Mount Rushmore. He attended a one-room grade school with 12 other students and one teacher, and at Sturgis High School he met the love of his life, Marka, who became his wife of 60 years.

After graduating from the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology, he went to Stanford University to get a PhD in electrical engineering. He and Marka took their young son to Los Altos, where they raised their family, which grew to three sons and a daughter.

While working on his PhD Bill joined the Stanford Electronics Lab (SEL). In his 11 years there he authored or coauthored nine significant technical publications. These included his dissertation, “A Wideband Frequency Discriminator Using Open and Shorted Stubs,” and two highly influential papers: “Radar Accuracy and Resolution in a Multiple-Signal Environment” (published in 1964 by the Defense Technical Information Center) and “A Statistical Analysis of Multichannel Systems with Application to Broadband Microwave Frequency Discriminators.”

At SEL Bill demonstrated that he had management talent as well as technical skills, and rose rapidly in the management structure. But during his last few years there the country was going through traumatic protests against the Vietnam War. A consequence of that turbulent era was a student sit-in in 1969 that effectively shut down SEL. This setback only challenged Bill: He led an exodus of seven of the best staff members of the defunct lab to create a new electronic warfare company, ARGOSystems, specializing in signal processing systems.

It was clear in the first year of ARGO that Bill and the gifted engineers he had taken with him would be successful. Indeed, the company achieved steady and profitable growth, and ultimately had more than 1,300 employees. This success was rewarded by a very strong public offering and then, in 1987, Boeing decided to diversify into the electronic warfare field by buying ARGO, keeping Bill as CEO of the newly merged company. At the time ARGOSystems was recognized as one of America's leading electronic warfare companies and known for its integrity, financial stability, and professionalism, all a true reflection of Bill May.

Through those two transactions, Bill created significant value for the loyal employees who had helped develop the enterprise into the great company it had become. Bill stayed on for 5 more years, assisting Boeing in effecting a smooth transition of ARGO into the Boeing management structure.

After retirement he lent his management experience to several other companies by serving on their boards. He was especially dedicated to the Tech Museum of Innovation in San Jose, which he helped found.

In addition to election to the National Academy of Engineering, Bill's honors included membership in Sigma Xi and Eta Kappa Nu, and selection for the Guy E. March Medal, awarded by his alma mater in South Dakota. For the NAE he served on the Program Committee and on the Electronics, Communication and Information Systems Engineering Peer Committee.

His family wrote that

Bill was extremely busy running the company, but he always put his family first. He was active in the Los Altos Hills Little League (back when the fields were dirt, rocks, and weeds) and attended the vast majority of the various basketball, volleyball, baseball, softball, soccer, ice and roller hockey games that his kids and grandkids were playing in! Helping the kids and grandkids with homework became almost a full-time job, but he enjoyed that. Bill was also an avid sports fan, who loved his Stanford teams, the Sharks, Forty-Niners, and Giants (he'd also root for the Raiders and A's in a pinch).

Bill spent his time in retirement serving on several corporate boards, and creating his own news website called *NewsBalance*. Despite the name, the website's political commentary is bent slightly to the conservative side—actually maybe more than slightly. He and Marka were also very involved with the Tech Museum of Innovation in San Jose, Bill serving as a board member for 24 years.

His most cherished hobbies were snow skiing, travelling, hiking, and flying his single-engine Piper Malibu airplane. Marka and Bill travelled to a great many places with Bill as pilot, most often to Lake Tahoe, where they had their vacation home. They saw the world too, taking many, many trips over the years either for business or pleasure. They would take the entire family on a vacation nearly every year as well, to places like the Caribbean, Hawaii, Alaska, or back to their home state of South Dakota. With all of his successes and travels, Bill never forgot his ranching roots and one-room schoolhouse beginning.

Bill died June 6, 2016, at age 80. He is survived by Marka; sons Mike, Bob, and Jim, and daughter Mary Jo Hartshorn; daughters-in-law Romana May and Rosie May; and grandchildren Nick, Danielle, Chris, Thomas, Brooklin, Matt, Kyle, and Kelly.

He was a devoted husband, caring father and grandfather, talented engineer, excellent businessman, outstanding citizen, and man of complete integrity. His family, business colleagues, and friends, of whom he had many, all miss him.