

KEY OFFICIAL RETIRES AFTER NEARLY 42 YEARS OF SERVICE

Press Release

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PETERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Colo. – In 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik 1, the first artificial satellite. The satellite itself wasn't large, about the size of a basketball, but it was gigantic in significance; its launch signaled the start of the United States Soviet Union space race – a race that captured the attention of some of the most brilliant minds of that time. Dr. David Finkleman was one of those brilliant minds.

"I'm a child of Sputnik," said Finkleman, chief technical officer and director of analysis for NORAD, USNORTHCOM, and USSTRATCOM(WEST). "I was entering high school when Sputnik went up and there was a big call around the country for people to get into space and aerospace."

Finkleman answered that call. After 41 years and 8 months of military and civilian service, he was honored recently at a retirement ceremony in the Hartinger Building Auditorium on Peterson Air Force Base.

This isn't the first time he has retired. His official retirement was Nov. 3, 2001, but the Secretary of the Air Force called him back to service on an emergency term appointment due to the September 11 attacks and the standup of United States Northern Command.

As chief technical officer and director of analysis, Finkleman, a Senior Executive Services 4, led an organization of U.S. and Canadian military and civilian personnel responsible for all analytical and technical matters encompassing all U.S. military satellite systems, space surveillance, ballistic missile warning and defense, and all aerospace sovereignty and control capabilities of the United States and Canada.

He prepared for this job most of his life. After attending public schools in Washington D.C., he took a summer job as a cooperative student trainee in the Aerodynamics Department of the Naval Ship Research and Development Center in Carderock, Md.

"I knew I wanted to be in the Air Force, but at the time I started college, you couldn't take Air Force ROTC unless you were qualified to be a pilot or a navigator," Finkleman said.

Although his eyesight kept Finkleman out of Air Force ROTC, it didn't stop him from military service. While earning a Bachelor of Science degree in Aerospace Engineering from Virginia Tech University he also earned Army ROTC distinguished graduate honors and a commission in the U.S. Army.

After graduation, the newly commissioned 2nd Lt. Finkleman served with the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, N.C. It wasn't long after arriving at Fort Bragg that Finkleman was selected to attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology under NASA and General Dynamics Fellowships. He received a master of science degree in aeronautics and astronautics from MIT in 1964.

In 1966 Finkleman realized one of his dreams when he transferred to the U. S. Air Force. Later that year he was assigned to the Air Force Academy as associate professor of aeronautics and as a research associate in the Frank J. Seiler Research Laboratory, Air Force Systems Command. He was among a select group that developed optimal aircraft maneuvers to evade surface-to-air missiles during the Vietnam War.

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In 1970, he was selected to participate in the Air Force High Energy Laser Project. During his tenure at the Air Force Weapons Laboratory, Kirtland AFB, N.M., he contributed to developing the Airborne Laser Laboratory and Advanced Electric Discharge Lasers.

Finkleman came off active duty in 1973 in order to join the Navy High Energy Laser Project in Washington, D.C. He maintained his association with the military as a member of the Air Force Reserve, retiring as a colonel in 1993.

In March of 1983, President Ronald Reagan announced to the public his intent to embark on a Strategic Defense Initiative program to counter the Soviet missile threat.

"I know this is a formidable, technical task, one that may not be accomplished before the end of this century. Yet, current technology has attained a level of sophistication where it is reasonable for us to begin this effort," the president said in his 23 March, 1983 address to the nation.

Finkleman was one of those whose vision and hard work made that current technology possible. It wasn't long before Finkleman was named the first director of kinetic energy weapons in the Strategic Defense Initiative Organization in Washington, D.C.

With the creation of the United States Space Command in 1985, Finkleman could realize another of his dreams. "I went to D.C in 1973 and worked for the next 14 years to try and get back to Colorado Springs," he said.

Of all of his professional and personal accomplishments, Finkleman said the experience that will stay with him longer than anything else is being in Cheyenne Mountain with Gen. Ralph E. Eberhart, Commander in Chief, NORAD and Commander USNORTHCOM, on Sept. 11, 2001. "We were in an exercise so we were there anyway," Finkleman said. "I was in the command post. I was there when everything happened and when General Eberhart came to the mountain, all through getting all the airplanes out of the air and getting the alert interceptors out, I was right there by his side on the battle staff."

Finkleman's job was to advise the commander. "It was like I was born for that day," he said. "Everything I ever learned, everything I ever knew, all the experience I ever had, was brought to bear on that day."

It was because of September 11 that Finkleman's retirement was delayed.

Dr. Finkleman and his wife Edith, will remain in Colorado Springs. He plans to keep working in systems analysis and system engineering, "hopefully for the military," he added. He also hopes to add to the list of mountains he has climbed.

"I've climbed mountains in Scotland, England, Switzerland," he said with excitement. "I've got more than 100 climbs over 14,000 feet, although I haven't climbed all the 14ers in Colorado. There are some that were always too hard or too far away."

With a little more free time on his hands, his list of mountains climbed will more than likely grow.

At his May 9 ceremony, Dr. Finkleman was awarded the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Joint Distinguished Civilian Service Award, the Outstanding Civilian Career Service Award, the NORAD Deputy Commander in Chief Commendation Award, Air Force Certificate of Service, Presidential Certificate of Appreciation from the President of the United States, and letters of appreciation from the Canadian Department of National

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Defence Operational Research Division, Canadian Vice Chief of the Defense Staff, and Commander in Chief, NORAD and Commander USNORTHCOM.

Finkleman referred to himself as a "child of Sputnik." Although Sputnik 1's orbit was momentous, it lasted only three weeks. Dr. David Finkleman's legacy spans more than four decades. Certainly, Sputnik would be proud.