

# History of Rocketry and Astronautics

Marsha Freeman, Editor



**AAS History Series, Volume 46**

*IAA History Symposia, Volume 34*





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**International Academy of Astronautics Symposia**

**Front Cover Illustration:**

Shown in the photo are IAF President Frederick C. Durant, III (31 December 1909 – 21 October 2015) on the left, Frederick I. Ordway, III (4 April 1927 – 1 July 2014) in the center, and Teofilo M. Tabanera (1909–1981) of Buenos Aires, Argentina, on the right. The photo was taken at the 5th IAC in Innsbruck, Austria, 2–7 August 1954. Tabanera was a delegate at the initial Paris meeting in 1950 (the First International Astronautical Congress) and Ordway was an observer of the Paris meeting. All three were in regular attendance at the IAF Congresses. Credit: IAF Archive.

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**Marsha Freeman, Volume Editor**

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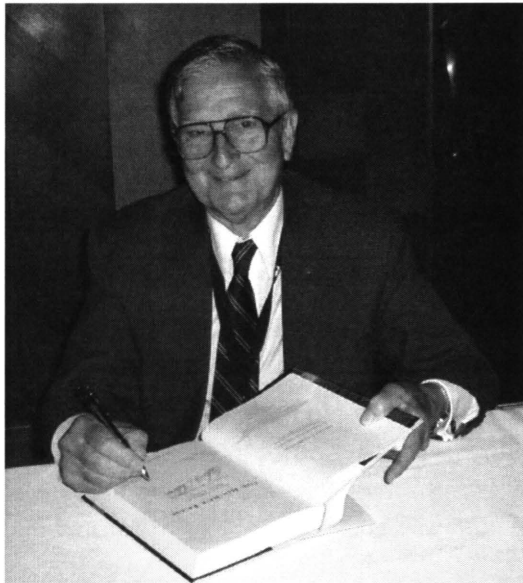
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## **A Remembrance of Frederick I. Ordway III (1927–2014)**



**Frederick Ira Ordway III. Credit: NASM.**

Over the past 60 years, the astronautics community has had the good fortune to have among its fellowship, talented engineers, excellent speakers and educators, imaginative and engaging writers, and far-seeing visionaries. Fred Ordway was all of these. But to simply list his lifetime of impressive accomplishments would be incomplete.

Fred Ordway was a steadfast friend, and a tireless mentor to promising younger talent that would become the next generation of space pioneers. He shared his knowledge and experience without reserve, and meticulously organized the wealth of science fiction and space history material that he accumulated throughout his life, for posterity.

Beyond the community of which he was an integral part, through the pages of books, traveling exhibitions, presentations, and movie film, Fred reached literally millions of people, many of whom came to share his enthusiasm for space exploration. Fred was most fortunate to be present at the dawn of the Space Age and able to fulfill his life's dreams. And we are all fortunate that he was.

As Fred Ordway relates in a number of autobiographical articles, his romance with space began "when I was a lad of 13 or 14 years," when he came across his first *Amazing Stories* magazine. This began a life-long journey through which he created a unique treasure trove of science fiction books and magazines, collected throughout the world, and which he expanded to a love of space science and exploration. Over the years, Fred's extensive collection of science fiction artifacts was made available to the public, through exhibitions and books. In 1998, items from Fred's remarkable collection were put up for public auction. He wrote: "My sadness in leaving these books behind is tempered by the thought that they will help a new generation of collectors find the same satisfaction that I experienced during nearly six decades of search and discovery." By then, Fred had donated books, documents, journals, magazines, photographs, prints, posters, and other items to the U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama; written, co-authored, or edited several dozen books; and published 250 articles about his unique collection. In 2002, he donated more than 900 pulp fiction magazines to the library at Harvard University.

In 1941, at the age of 13, Fred put his interest in space exploration into action, joining the American Rocket Society as a student member. It was to be the first of a number of organizations Fred would join and contribute to, in order to popularize interest and excitement in space exploration. After World War II, Fred continued his education, and then embarked upon some hands-on experience with rocket technology, joining the Engineering Division of Reaction Motors, Inc., in New Jersey. We have the benefit of his experience in rocket engineering, as this year, the American Astronautical Society released Volume 44 in its AAS History Series, titled, *Pioneering American Rocketry: The Reaction Motors, Inc. (RMI) Story, 1941–1972*, authored by Frank Winter and Fred Ordway.

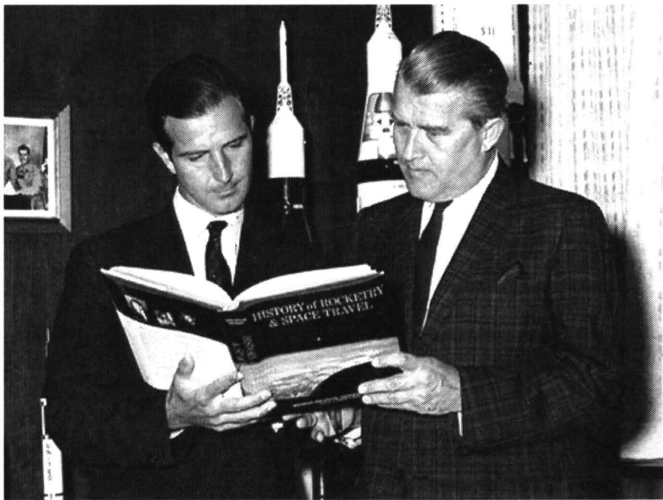
By good fortune, Fred was in Paris in the fall of 1950, and reports that he was the only American to attend the first Congress of the International Astronautical Federation, as an observer. "I decided to take a more active role in the 1953 fourth congress in Zurich," he reported later, starting a decades-long participation in the IAF, presenting papers at congresses, taking a leadership role in the International Academy of Astronautics and its History Committee, and editing IAF publications. Fred participated in and played leading roles in many space organizations, in the U.S. and abroad, including the British Interplanetary Society, the



American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, the National Space Institute, the American Astronautical Society, and the National Space Club, among them.

In 1956, Fred Ordway was invited by Wernher von Braun to join his team in Huntsville, Alabama, as a contractor for the Army Ballistic Missile Agency. Three years later, he transferred to work directly for von Braun. When the German rocket team transferred to NASA in 1960, Fred became the chief of the Space Information Systems Branch.

During the 1950s, a focus of von Braun, members of his team, and a broader circle of space artists and enthusiasts, was to produce attractive and informative material in order to mobilize public support for a civilian space exploration program. It was in this pre-Sputnik period that the Walt Disney television series, featuring Wernher von Braun, reached young minds, and the series of articles by von Braun and co-thinkers reached millions through a series of features in *Collier's* magazine. As the mid-1960s Apollo program brought the U.S. into space, Fred broadened the public's imagination, with writings such as *Life in the Solar System*, and as co-author with von Braun, of *History of Rocketry and Space Travel*.



Frederick Ordway (left) with Dr. Wernher von Braun in 1967.  
Credit: U.S. Space & Rocket Center via NASA.

Then, in 1965, a fantastic opportunity arose to be able to reach millions of citizens worldwide, especially youth, and spark their interest in space exploration. Through his friend and colleague, famed science and science fiction writer, Arthur Clarke, Fred met Stanley Kubrick. The filmmaker enlisted Fred to become a technical adviser to the production of Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Years later, listening to Fred recount the two years he and his family spent in London and his work on the film it was clear how much he enjoyed this unique assignment.

When the Apollo program was nearing its end, Wernher von Braun left Huntsville for Washington, as did Fred. But Fred was never far from Huntsville. In 1979, he and fellow science writer Mitch Sharpe published the first comprehensive and intimate account of the history of the German space pioneers, in the book, *The Rocket Team*. His ties to Huntsville included his contributions to the educational programs of the then-Alabama, and now-U.S. Space & Rocket Center. Throughout the post-Apollo 1970s, when NASA's programs lacked a long-term future perspective, Fred's contributions broadened to include the publication of *Pictorial Guide to Planet Earth*, and *New World: Discoveries From Our Solar System*, along with a heavy schedule of presentations and exhibitions.

But in early 1985, it was made public that friends and colleagues of Fred Ordway were being threatened by the Office of Special Investigations of the U.S. Department of Justice. The previous fall, Saturn V project manager, Arthur Rudolph, had left the United States, under threat of prosecution for war crimes. In his late 70s and in poor health, Rudolph returned to Germany, rather than mount a long, expensive, stressful legal suit to counter the charges. After years of investigations by the German government, Rudolph was absolved of any crimes during World War II.



Fred Ordway (left) and Julio Marial Willote (right), president of the Agrupación Astronáutica Española. August 1953, 4th International Astronautical Congress, Zurich, Switzerland. Credit: Fred Ordway Archives.

Fred Ordway, along with colleagues, including this author, mounted a public effort to counter these specious charges, and those against Wernher von Braun, which, after decades, had resurfaced in the witch hunt being carried out

against the former Peenemünde team. Fred wrote letters to the editor, decrying historic “revisionism,” which he described in 1998 as a “recent pattern of revisionists seeking to denigrate the achievements of famous individuals.” Public presentations by space historians to try to “prove” the Nazi charges against von Braun were also countered by Fred and colleagues.

In 1996, the authoritative biography of von Braun, written by Fred and Dr. Ernst Stuhlinger, a space scientist and original member of the von Braun team, was published. *Wernher von Braun: Crusader for Space* is a comprehensive, two-volume work, and firsthand exposition, consisting of a *Biographical Memoir* and *An Illustrated Memoir*.

Fred Ordway was a restless soul, whose travel schedule over the past few years would have been demanding, for a much younger man. His joy at telling and reliving his role and behind-the-scenes film and photos of the making of the film, *2001*, was just the most recent demonstration of his decades-long crusade for space. His warm and gentlemanly manner was nowhere more manifest than in his 62-year-long love affair, with his wife, Maruja.

At the International Astronautical Congress in Toronto, the Canadian Space Agency presented a tribute to Fred Ordway, with remarks from the Society, Fred’s colleagues, and long-time friends, co-authors, and associates, Randy Liebermann and Robert Godwin. Rob Godwin’s company, Apogee Books, related the history of space film, publishing *2001: The Heritage and Legacy of the Space Odyssey*, written by Godwin and Ordway. Fred Ordway’s colleagues announced in March this year, the creation of the Ordway Award for Sustained Excellence in Spaceflight History, sponsored by the American Astronautical Society, to honor him.

While Fred Ordway’s life’s work and accomplishments will stand on their own and will be his legacy for future generations, those of us who had the good fortune to know and work with him, also were inspired by his energy and drive, his breadth of knowledge, and his help and support in creating the future that he had started to imagine, as a very young man.

**Marsha Freeman**