

Project Pioneer:

Robert M. (Bob) Williams



AEDC Fellow Robert M. (Bob) Williams, was general manager and president of AEDC's first contract operator, Arnold Research Organization (ARO) from 1954-1974 and was truly a pioneer in his own right.

Many of the current operational test facilities were built and made operational during his term.

Mr. Williams was responsible for the operation and maintenance of the center and developing company policies that were consistent with the unique relationship established between the government and the contractor.

He led the effort to organize a staff and train a new workforce that grew from 1,500 in 1954 to 4,100 in 1967.

He managed the evolution of competitive salary and benefit plans that attracted a high technology workforce.

He was one of the chief architects of a collective bargaining agreement between many independent unions to operate corporately as the Air Engineering Metal Trades Council.

Along with his managerial expertise, Mr. Williams also brought his operation and design experience in jet engines and advanced compressors to AEDC.

He took the lead in investigating the first jet engine failure, which allowed him to confirm an internal engine failure as the cause.

His foresight enabled him to use this failure in a positive manner and helped the Air Force understand that failures were typical elements of system development and that failure in a ground test facility is preferable to failure in flight.

He was an advocate of testing rocket motors at altitude conditions even though conventional wisdom said such test were unnecessary.

His support of both facilities and personnel skills from aircraft and jet engines to spacecraft and rocket engines led to AEDC supporting the development of the first U.S. space and missile systems.

Mr. Williams was involved in the first meetings of the establishment of a University of Tennessee graduate school at AEDC and later the UT Space Institute.

Before coming to AEDC, Mr. Williams was chief engineer for Packard Motor Co., Aviation Division in Toledo, Ohio, from 1944-48, where he was responsible for design, construction and operation of its \$3.5 million gas turbine laboratory.

From 1949-54, he was head of the preliminary design section for Sverdrup & Parcel Inc., St. Louis, the parent company of ARO.

Mr. Williams held four U.S. patents for engineering designs, one for a motor now housed in the Smithsonian Institution.

In 1993, Mr. Williams was honored as an AEDC Fellow and characterized as "The guiding light during AEDC's infancy."

The late AEDC Fellow, former AEDC Commander and close friend Maj. Gen. Lee V. Gossick praised Mr. Williams by stating he is a "truly great American."

Mr. Williams passed away in 1995 and is remembered for his many contributions to AEDC and the Tullahoma community.



From left to right: Bob Williams, then AEDC Commander Maj. Gen. William Rogers, AEDC Fellow Dr. Bernhard Goethert, AEDC Fellow Gen. Bernard Shriever and Maj. Gen. Leif Sverdrup look at an early design of what was to become the University of Tennessee Space Institute at AEDC.



From left to right: Bob Williams, then AEDC Vice Commander and AEDC Fellow Maj. Lee V. Gossick and AEDC Commander Maj. Gen. William Rogers in front of J-4