

Larry D. Pinson



Dr. Larry Douglas Pinson (1940 – 2012)

Larry D. Pinson was born December 2, 1940 on Raccoon Creek in Pike County, Kentucky, the youngest of eight children of Earl Lee and Fern Maynard Pinson. He attended the two-room Zebulon Elementary School and Johns Creek High School, graduating in 1957. He began engineering studies at Pikeville College, transferred to the University of Kentucky (UK), received the BSCE in 1961, and the MSCE in 1963. His MS thesis was an investigation of shear properties of sand under various confining pressures. While at UK, he worked part time for the Department of Highways in the campus Bridge Design Office and in summer on highway construction. He was a graduate assistant for UK, teaching structures and surveying courses.

In 1963, Larry began a thirty-two year career with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). He performed and managed research primarily in vibrations and dynamic loads of launch vehicles, spacecraft, and aircraft for twenty-seven years at NASA's Langley Research Center, Hampton, Virginia.

At Langley Larry completed on-site courses from the University of Virginia; then received his PhD at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Engineering Science and Mechanics in 1973. His dissertation topic was prediction of vibration characteristics of pressurized shell structures containing liquids. His work at Langley included contributions to the Apollo-Saturn V, Viking, and Space Shuttle programs, as well as applied structures research. For the Apollo-Saturn V program, his discovery of a vibration mode important for prediction of the pogo phenomenon saved significant schedule for the vehicle vibration test program. His research developed the concept of structural scale models for vibration prediction.

He transferred to the NASA Lewis Research Center, Cleveland, Ohio, in 1990 where he was Chief of the Structures Division, which focuses on aircraft engine structures. He participated in several spacecraft anomaly investigations and served on several project advisory committees.

Larry retired from NASA in 1995 and for ten years contributed to several defense space projects as an employee of MRJ, a northern Virginia firm now General Dynamics Advanced Information Systems Division. During his entire career, Larry increasingly appreciated the quality of the civil engineering education obtained at UK, a training excellent for establishing a system-level view of engineering projects.

Larry was a Fellow of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA), the primary professional society for the aerospace profession with approximately thirty thousand members. He served on both the Structural Dynamics Technical Committee (TC) and the Structures TC, serving as Chairman. Subsequently, he was elected as Director, Structures Design and Test Group, serving on the AIAA Board of Directors. In addition, Larry was selected in 1978 as NASA's participant in the President's Executive Interchange Program, a program for the development of a cadre of executives in both industry and government who were knowledgeable of both sectors. In that program, he worked for a year at the Aerospace Corporation, El Segundo, California. Also, he was assigned for one academic year (1989-90) as a visiting professor at the University of Colorado to provide increased practical instruction in the Aerospace Department's graduate program. Larry was a licensed Professional Engineer in Virginia.

Larry was grateful to his family for completion of his education including his grandmother, mother, all his brothers and sisters, and to all the friends who contributed transportation as he hitchhiked to Pikeville for his initial college education. He was married to the former Sarah Kathryn Spears of Harold, Kentucky for forty-six years. She earned her PhT (putting hubby through), working as a nurse at the St. Joseph Hospital. He is survived by his wife and by three children: Earl, Sharon, and Leigh. All the children are married and there are ten grandchildren. Larry and Sarah Kathryn is extremely proud of their love-filled family.