

HAVING A BALL CELEBRATING PIONEERS

By DJ Montoya
Public Affairs
1st Space Brigade



Previous Army Space Pioneer inductees include retired MG John Medaris, who contributed to the successful launch of America's first satellite; retired BG Robert Stewart, the first Army astronaut; and retired LTG C.J. Le Van, who was a visionary in missile defense.

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. – The theme of “Celebrating Pioneers in Space” along with recent accomplishments of the Wideband Global SATCOM (Satellite Communications) satellite served as the backdrop for this year’s U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command Ball at the Antlers Hilton Hotel in downtown Colorado Springs, Colo.

COL Michael Yowell, commander of the 100th Missile Defense Brigade, Ground-Based Midcourse Defense, welcomed a gathering of close to 500 by saying, “When you think about it we just celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Command last year. This year it has been 50 years since the Army put a satellite into Space on Explorer 1. Nearly a decade after that man walked on the moon. After that we had Army Astronauts in Space. So tonight we have the distinguished guest speaker whose vision and foresight laid the ground work for many of the things we enjoy today throughout the entire Command. So 17, 18, 50, years from now we are going to be reaping the benefits of the work from our Soldiers, civilians and contractors throughout (today’s) Command.”

The highlight of the evening came with the introduction of retired Army COL Ronan I. Ellis. Ellis served as the first commandant of the Army Space Institute at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., from January 1987 through April 1989. He also became the second commander of U.S. Army Space Command in Colorado Springs, Colo., from May 1989 through April 1991.

“His vision of Army Space operations was almost prophetic,” said MAJ Kyle Zablocki, master of ceremonies for the evening’s events. Ellis laid the groundwork for almost all of the Army’s current use and dependence on Space-based capabilities and products, which immeasurably impacted the way today’s Army, and the Army of the future, will shoot, move and communicate.”

At the Army Space Institute, Ellis aggressively pursued providing Space support at the small unit level. Before the creation of the Institute, most military Space systems were dedicated to supporting strategic missions. In 1987 he predicted that advance positioning systems would be available to battalion commanders with continuous information on the location of subordinate units. He also saw that Spaceborne communications would overcome the line-of-sight limitations of ground-based systems and that the battalions would have immediate access to satellite imagery and weather data. All of these capabilities and more are now available and are considered essential to modern ground combat operations.

While commanding ARSPACE, the service component command of U.S. Space Command, Ellis saw much of his Space vision come to fruition during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Even before Iraqi forces rolled into Kuwait, his Soldiers were demonstrating the small lightweight Global Positioning System receiver and then training trainers for deploying units from Fort Bragg, N.C., Fort Campbell, Ky., and Fort Stewart, Ga. ARSPACE eventually provided 800 sluggers to deployed units and orchestrated the urgent purchase of 10,000 commercial GPS receivers.

“The groundwork laid by Ellis’ keen foresight, makes this a truly historic occasion for SMDC/ARSTRAT,” said Zablocki.

Ellis recalled those early days at the Army Space Institute saying, “I suddenly started to realize there were Space things that we could use as Soldiers. Out of that came a concept. The bottom line back then was that we as the Army went back into Space and had to utilize what was already there. By getting receivers and receiving the information that was

coming down (all the assets were pretty much in either the test phase or operation) came a small lightweight GPS receiver called a slugger.”

“That put the revolution of GPS in the tactical arena. And then we said well after receivers we need to do a better job in a few years on processing that data so it is not just raw data, rather its data we can use as Soldiers. The best example of where that went is the Joint Tactical Ground Station. Now we process that information to support theater use. Before all that information was just for strategic use.”

“And then finally, we said back then, in 1987, that the Army then had to be involved in the design of satellites specifically to support what we need them to do.”

SMDC/ARSTRAT has taken Ellis’ advice to heart as the WGS SATCOM system expert. The Command is about to activate the first WGS satellite supporting warfighting operations in the Pacific Theater. Members of SMDC/ARSTRAT have been involved in the WGS program from the very beginning — from the 1997 briefing to a Senior Warfighters Forum, to requirements development, testing and the first launch on Oct. 10, 2007. WGS-1 is the first of six WGS satellites planned, initiating the transformation of Department of Defense’s communications architecture to support future

warfighting technologies.

Ellis concluded by saying, “The message of all of this is you have got to start with an idea. And make sure it is a good idea. And then you have got to press on. You and your predecessors here at SMDC/ARSTRAT have pressed on and we truly are Space users for the Army and for the nation.”

Before the closing of the official portion of the ball, over 25 individuals made up of Soldiers, civilians and Family members were honored.

The lion’s share received the Honorable Order of Saint Barbara — patroness of artillerymen — medallion. Members from both the 100th Missile Defense Brigade (GMD) and the 1st Space Brigade received the award from LTG Kevin T. Campbell, commanding general for SMDC/ARSTRAT. The honor recognizes those individuals who have demonstrated the highest standards of integrity and moral character, displayed an outstanding degree of competence and served the U.S. Army with selflessness.

The Honorable Order of Molly Pitcher was presented to five spouses for their significant contributions to the U.S. Army through their volunteer efforts and their many years of unwavering support to the Army.

BELOW:

Awardees toasted from the grog bowl during the 2008 SMDC/ARSTRAT Ball.

Photo by Michael L. Howard

