



Clarence "Sy" Syvertson

NASA Ames Hall of Fame

Clarence Syvertson is a rarity: one of those unique individuals with the ability to distinguish themselves equally well both as a brilliant and creative scientist and as a dynamic and innovative administrator. His contributions include not only important and lasting scientific work but also the management of critical programs that have ensured Ames' place as a world-class research institution.

Specializing in the study of hypersonic air flow and its implications for aircraft design, Syvertson began his Ames career in 1948. He was soon placed in charge of Ames' 10 x 14 wind tunnel, a position which enabled him not only to test his own theories regarding hypersonics but also to assist others in their own experimental work, and later to help build and design new wind tunnel facilities at Ames. He pioneered work in various advanced aircraft designs, including the XB-70 Valkyrie and the M-2 Lifting Body, and his contributions to the design of reentry vehicles found later application in the Space Shuttle program. In fact, some of Syvertson's work was so advanced that even today it serves as the foundation for the design of the most cutting-edge aircraft and spacecraft, including hypersonic transports and direct-to-orbit vehicles.

Although Syvertson's tenure at Ames would have been distinguished enough with just these accomplishments, he proceeded to move into the management ranks in 1964, creating and leading NASA's Mission Analysis Division. As leader of MAD, Syvertson helped to chart the course of NASA's future exploration of space and to define the direction of technology development. After serving as Director of Astronautics and then Deputy Director of Ames, Syvertson was named Ames Director in 1976, succeeding Hans Mark.

The hallmark of Syvertson's directorship is the strengthening and broadening of some of Ames' most important areas of research. Under Syvertson's guidance, Ames did groundbreaking work in advanced vertical lift and tilt rotor aircraft, flight simulation and testing, human factors research, the search for extraterrestrial intelligence (SETI), and the IRAS telescope, among many other areas. It was a golden period of intensive research, brilliant new ideas, and the energetic consolidation and expansion of Ames' unique specialties.

Sy Syvertson was renowned for his ability to build consensus: to take opposing points of view and find the common ground that would allow compromise to be made. Perhaps it was this ability that enabled him to preside over so many successful projects as a manager. But it was his work as a researcher that laid much of the groundwork for those who followed him in forging Ames' later accomplishments. His contributions to both aeronautical science and building Ames resonate long after his departure.