

44th HISTORY OF ASTRONAUTICS SYMPOSIUM (E4)  
Memoirs and Organisational Histories (2)

Author: Dr. Charles Lundquist  
University of Alabama in Huntsville, United States

ERNST STUHLINGER, AN HISTORIAN

**Abstract**

Ernst Stuhlinger was a member of the von Braun rocket team transplanted from Germany ultimately to Huntsville, Alabama. At the Marshall Space Flight Center, Dr. Stuhlinger was the first director of the Space Sciences Laboratory and the first Associate Director for Science. In 1960, he became a member of the International Academy of Astronautics. He was a multifaceted scholar who demonstrated a keen appreciation of history and its preservation. It is this latter aspect of his life that is the subject here. Ernst Stuhlinger was born December 19, 1913 in Germany and died May 25, 2008 in Huntsville. Dr. Stuhlinger's most widely known historical work is a definitive, two-volume set of books on Wernher von Braun, coauthored with Frederick I. Ordway III. The first volume is an extensively referenced, prose memoir and the second is an illustrated memoir. A lesser known Stuhlinger writing describes harrowing army experiences on the Russian front in 1942-3. Although he already held a doctorate in physics, he had been drafted as a private. His German Army support division was diverted into the futile effort to break the Russian encirclement of a German force trapped in Stalingrad. The division was annihilated and Ernst and a few surviving comrades made the long trek out of Russia on foot. Upon reaching German territory, he received orders to report to Peenemunde for a new assignment of then unknown nature to him. At appropriate times as the space age matured, organizations in Huntsville held public symposia, panel discussions and 'fireside chats' commemorating various space events. Many of Dr. Stuhlinger's remarks at these events, with fascinating historical insight, are preserved on video recordings. One commemorative event in 2000, was the rededication of a building at the University of Alabama Huntsville as 'von Braun Research Hall'. Dr. Stuhlinger was an essential member of the committee that designed more than twenty large framed displays in von Braun Hall that summarize the accomplishments of the organizations directed by von Braun for each year individually from 1950 to 1970. When the Marshall Center Retiree Association compiled an historical volume, "50 Years of Rockets and Spacecraft in the Rocket City", Ernst contributed a piece, 'Skylab, America's First Station in Space'. An augmented second edition of the book, published after Ernst's death, added a reproduction of Ernst's historic letter to Sister Mary Jucunda that explains the value of space activities in the advancement of civilization.