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MIGUEL SÁNCHEZ PEÑA (1925-2009) ORGANIZER OF THE SPACE ACTIVITIES IN ARGENTINA.

Abstract

One of the most important and active pioneers of the space activities in Argentina was Miguel Sánchez Peña, aeronautical engineer and an officer of the Argentine Air Force. Sánchez Peña was the organizer of Argentina's governmental space program in the 70s and part of the 80s, and contributed heavily to the country's sounding rocket program. Born in 1925, in Mendoza, Argentina, Sánchez Peña went to the Military Aviation School (Escuela de Aviación Militar) in Córdoba, and later to the Air Force Engineering School. Graduated as an engineer in 1959 he was sent to the University of Michigan in the United States to complete his graduate studies with a Masters of Science degree in Aerospace Engineering. There he had the chance to study with several future NASA astronauts such as Theodore Freeman and Edward White and James McDivitt. After his return to Argentina in 1961 he was put in charge of the Space Development Group (Grupo de Desarrollos Espaciales) at the Air Force in Córdoba. There he led the development of a family of several sounding rockets for high altitude research. Sánchez Peña was also in charge of the first Argentine rockets launched from Antarctica in 1965, as well as the first tests on an Argentine-made rocket (Orión) from Wallops Island in the United States, in 1966. The Orion was the first operational sounding rocket made in South America. In the middle of the 70s Miguel Sánchez Peña was named president of the National Space Research Commission, CNIE. Starting with just a modest one-desk office at the Argentine Air Force headquarters in only a few years he turned CNIE into a multi-center organization with several hundred employees, three operational launch centers across the country and a family of research rockets open to the international scientific community. He was also active representing Argentina in many IAF congresses, and was a member of the International Academy of Astronautics. After leaving CNIE, he became president of the Asociación Argentina de Ciencias Espaciales (AACE), IAF Member organization, which was the continuation of the space organization created by Teófilo Tabanera in 1951. Miguel Sánchez Peña was, without a doubt, the most active president of CNIE and thanks to his vision and his openness he allowed Argentina to participate in many international space experiments with partners like France, Germany, Perú, United Kingdom and the United States.