

53rd IAA HISTORY OF ASTRONAUTICS SYMPOSIUM (E4)
History of US Contribution to Astronautics Post WWII (2)

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”THE GORGONS: AMERICA’S FIRST FAMILY OF MISSILES, 1943-1953”

Abstract

Several previous IAC history papers have covered aspects of the histories of the developments of U.S. missiles and launch vehicles. However, none so far, until this time, have covered the very earliest U.S. missile program known as the Gorgon Project whose origin goes back to the late 1930s although its technical developments were carried out during 1943-1953. Moreover, the Gorgon “family” entailed a series of experimental air-to-air, air-to-surface, and surface-to-surface missiles that used a wide variety of then, pioneering means of propulsion including liquid-propellant rocket motors, pulsejet power plants, turbojet engines, and ramjet engines. While none of the Gorgons achieved operational service during World War II since their developments were started late in the war, they were extensively used in the post-war development of U.S. guided missile controls and guidance technologies.

Prior to his retirement from the National Air and Space Museum (the NASM) in Washington, D.C. in 2007 as the Museum’s Curator of Rocketry, the principle author of this paper (Winter) recognized the significances of the several rare existing specimens of early Gorgon missiles with the NASM’s collections. For these reasons, he selected examples of Gorgons with different modes of propulsion (rocket-propelled, pulsejet-powered, and a ramjet-powered version) for exhibit in the Museum’s Stephen F. Udvar-Hazy Center at Chantilly, Virginia, near Dulles International Airport, that opened in 2003. Therefore, this paper also offers the opportunity to more closely examine these fully restored specimens and their technology and visitors to the Congress may also see these artifacts at the Udvar-Hazy Center.