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AEROJET ENGINEERING CORPORATION: STIMULATION AND CREATION 1935-1942

Abstract

There are multiple published accounts of the stimulation and creation of the Aerojet Engineering Corporation that are inconsistent, incomplete or erroneous in significant details, describing principals involved, timing, and funding of the creation process. This corrects the record and offers a well-documented and reliable history of the creation of the Aerojet Engineering Corporation.

A small group of academic researchers and technicians, joined by an attorney, working at the California Institute of Technology (Cal Tech), accomplished the formation and creation of the corporation. The group of six men incorporated and served as initial officers of the Aerojet Engineering Corporation – Dr. Theodore von Kármán, Dr. Frank Malina, Dr. Martin Summerfield, Messrs John Parsons, Edward Forman, and Washington, D. C. attorney Andrew Haley.

A government-funded research and development program at Cal Tech generated a proposal to produce a means of providing superior aircraft performance capabilities using rocketry, often referred to as jet propulsion due to engineering disrepute of “rocketry” prior to WWII. Cal Tech successfully conducted flight demonstrations at March Field (Riverside, California) in the summer of 1941, leading Dr.’s von Kármán and Malina to discuss the best method to provide for production of jet-assisted take-off (JATO) rockets with established industrial leaders, as well as industrial alternatives. Von Kármán, Malina, Summerfield, Parsons and Forman continued these discussions until Von Kármán decided, in early 1942, to solicit the legal advice of Andrew Haley on how to proceed. After meetings at von Karman’s home in Pasadena, on Haley’s recommendation and using his volunteered initial corporate funding, it was agreed to incorporate the group. Articles of Incorporation were drawn up by Haley and on March 19, 1942 were formally filed with the Delaware Secretary of State, establishing the Aerojet Engineering Corporation. Many accounts previously published have distorted or misreported many of the details of the process followed by the group that created the company. It is intended that this paper will be regarded as a full and faithfully researched historical account of the creation of the Aerojet Engineering Corporation. Included are the historical environment, the industrial motivations, descriptions of key players, the role of government, and the ultimate confluence of these factors with the motivation of a champion and the availability of the required resources.