

Walter LaBerge -- former U.S. Army official- [Steve Rubenstein, Chronicle Staff Writer](#)

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Walter LaBerge, a former undersecretary of the U.S. Army and a physicist who helped develop the Sidewinder air-to-air missile and the mission control center for NASA in Houston, has died at age 80.

Mr. LaBerge of Aptos (Santa Cruz County) died July 16 of pneumonia in a Santa Cruz hospital.

Mr. LaBerge was a native of Chicago, a 1944 graduate of the University of Notre Dame and a captain on a U.S. Navy minesweeper in the South Pacific during World War II. He received a doctorate from Notre Dame in 1951.

During the 1950s, he was a member of a small team that developed the guidance system for the Sidewinder at the test station in China Lake (San Bernardino County). The Sidewinder, a heat-seeking, short-range weapon missile carried by fighter aircraft, is the most widely used air-to-air missile ever built.

In the early 1960s, he headed a team that designed and installed the mission control instruments for NASA at the Manned Spacecraft Center in Houston. The instruments were used to direct the space missions that culminated in the Apollo moon flights.

After serving as technical director of the Naval Ordnance Test Station at China Lake, Mr. LaBerge was named assistant secretary of the Air Force for Research and Development in 1974.

In 1976, he served as assistant secretary general of NATO for defense support in Brussels. The following year, he was named undersecretary of the Army.

During the 1980s, Mr. LaBerge was an assistant to the president and a vice president for research laboratories and for advanced planning for the Lockheed Corp. in Sunnyvale, retiring in 1989.

He received distinguished civil service awards from the Army and from the Department of Defense, and he received the Navy emeritus service award. He was a member of the National Academy of Engineering and a former chairman of the Army Science Board.

He was a world traveler, a passionate student of military history and a frequent visitor to battlefields of the Revolutionary and Civil wars. His daughter, Jackie, recalled being taken on family tours of Gettysburg by her enraptured father no fewer than six times.

An amateur genealogist, Mr. LaBerge traced his family tree back to Robert de la berge, a Frenchman who settled near Quebec in 1658.

He is survived by nine children: Peter LaBerge of Cochranville, Pa.; Steven LaBerge of Santa Cruz; Jeanne LaBerge of San Francisco; Philip LaBerge of Coppell, Texas; Jacqueline LaBerge Gunn of Yorktown, Va.; Deborah Pharris of Pineville, Ark.; Pamela Alexander of Irvine (Orange County);



Richard Baughman of Lake Forest (Orange County); and Kurt Baughman of San Jose. He is also survived by siblings Helene Holroyd of Columbia, Mo. , Ed LaBerge of Rancho Santa Fe (San Diego County) and Pierre LaBerge of Santa Rosa.

Memorial donations may be sent to the American Cancer Society.

A memorial service will be held on Aug. 14 at 10 a.m. at Holy Cross Church, 126 High St., Santa Cruz.

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