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## **W. LaBerge, had many Cold War military jobs**

**PHYSICIST HELPED DEVELOP MISSILE, BUT ALSO BROUGHT LAUGHTER TO WORK**

By Betty Barnacle  
Mercury News

He was a brilliant aerospace research scientist -- a Cold War Pentagon regular who served at various times as under secretary of the Army, assistant secretary of the Air Force and assistant secretary-general of NATO for defense support in Brussels.

But Walter B. LaBerge was a lot of fun, too, according to Frank Cartwright, a fellow physicist. He worked under Mr. LaBerge in the 1950s developing the Sidewinder missile for the Navy in the desert at California's China Lake Naval Weapons Center.

The air-to-air missile changed warfare and Mr. LaBerge's life. It was after his leadership in creating the missile that three presidents -- Nixon, Ford and Carter -- tapped him for Pentagon posts, his son, Peter LaBerge said.

Cartwright, a member of the small team that worked around the clock to create the Sidewinder, still chuckles when he remembers how Mr. LaBerge entertained his exhausted scientists.

``There was very little you could do out in the boondocks. No television. Nothing. The only village in the area was Inyokern, named after both Inyo and Kern counties," Cartwright said, ``but Walt would write this terrible poetry and get about six of us to sing songs where he changed the words."

In the LaBerge version of ``On The Road to Mandalay," Cartwright said, the line ``Come you back to Mandalay where the flying fishes play," became ``Come you back to Inyokern where the missiles twist and turn."

Mr. LaBerge, a World War II veteran and graduate of Notre Dame, where he earned a doctorate in physics, died at 80 last Friday of pneumonia in Aptos. The twice-widowed man had lived in the beachside community since he started working for Lockheed in Sunnyvale in 1981.

He suffered a stroke two years ago and grew progressively weaker, his son said. Yet his brain kept working. He still was a part-time research consultant for the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey at the time of his death and had an appointment there this past Monday, according to Phil Depoy, an administrator at the school.

``He was an unusual guy. A real renaissance man," Depoy said. ``He was a close friend of William Perry, former secretary of defense under President Clinton. Without the two of them, we wouldn't have the so-called smart weapons."

Mr. LaBerge's son said his father had a way of giving all his attention to the person he was with. He went to a square dance in Pennsylvania just because his son was the caller.

``He never talked about all the honors he had," his son said. ``One of his hobbies was military history and he took us kids to all the Civil War battlefields. We moved around with his assignments. People have said, `That must have been hard for you children.' But we thought it was normal and great for us."

Besides, he pointed out, when the family went to Houston in 1962, where Mr. LaBerge's team set up the instruments for Philco-Ford in the Manned Spacecraft Center, how many other youngsters could say a guest at a family backyard barbecue was Wally Schirra, one of America's first astronauts?

### **Walter B. LaBerge**

Born: March 29, 1924 in Chicago.

Died: July 16, 2004 in Aptos

Survived by: his children, Peter LaBerge of Cochranville, Pa., Stephen LaBerge of Santa Cruz, Jeanne LaBerge of San Francisco, Philip LaBerge of Coppell, Texas, and Jacqueline LaBerge Gunn of Yorktown, Va.; his sister, Helene Holroyd of Columbia, Mo.; his brothers, Ed LaBerge of Rancho Santa Fe, Calif., and Pierre LaBerge of Santa Rosa; and his stepchildren, Deborah Pharris of Pineville, Ark., Pamela Alexander of Irvine, Richard Baughman of Lake Forest, Calif., and Kurt Baughman of San Jose.

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

Memorial: Donations may be made in Mr. LaBerge's name to the American Cancer Society. For directions, call (800) 227-2345.

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