OBITUARIES

David Johnson Dies; Helped Pioneer Weather Satellite Use

David Simonds Johnson, 80, a meteorologist who helped establish the nation's weather satellite program, died Dec. 17 at his home in Annapolis. He had Alzheimer's disease.

Mr. Johnson was born in Portersville, Calif., and studied at the University of California at Berkeley before enlisting in the Army Air Forces in 1943. While in the Air Force, he attended Reed College in Portland, Ore., and Harvard University.

He left the Air Force in 1946 and joined the U.S. Weather Bureau in Boise, Idaho, as a meteorological aide. In 1947, he transferred to the University of California at Los Angeles as an associate meteorologist. At UCLA, he received his undergraduate degree in 1948 and his master's degree in meteorology in 1949.

David Simonds Johnson urged multinational use of satellites.

In 1952, Mr. Johnson moved to Honolulu, where he was an associate meteorologist at the Pineapple Research Institute. In 1956, he moved to the U.S. Weather Bureau in Suitland. He was one of four founding members of the National Weather Satellite Center, and for the next 26 years was director of the center and its successors, the National Environmental Satellite Service and the National Environmental Satellite, Data and Information Service, part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. In 1976, he became NOAA's first assistant administrator for satellites and data.

During his tenure, the agency launched two series of weather satellites. They provided observations of the entire earth twice daily to weather services around the world, as well as minute-by-minute time-lapse motion photography to weather specialists in the western hemisphere.

Mr. Johnson also pressed for the development of geostationary weather satellites that could be used by nations around the world. Geostationary satellites are now built, launched and operated by a total of six nations or organizations.

As president of the American Meteorological Society, he led an early-1960s delegation that opened a dialogue with the State Meteorological Administration of the People's Republic of China. The bilateral agreement worked out by the delegation remains in effect today. He also helped establish a "weather hotline" for the exchange of weather data between the U.S. Weather Bureau and its counterpart in Russia.

After his retirement in 1982, Mr. Johnson served as chairman of a National Academy of Sciences committee that reviewed plans to modernize the National Weather Service. He also served as a consultant to the World Meteorological Organization and wrote a number of papers used in assessing and coordinating the world's weather satellite programs.

Mr. Johnson was a sailor and connoisseur of fine wines.

His first wife, Betty Jeanne Reed, died in 1973. Peg McFarland, his second wife, died in 1988.

Survivors include three stepdaughters from his second marriage, Margaret McFarland German of Edgewater, Martha McFarland Tyler of Frederick and Molly McFarland Burke of Gaithersburg; five step-grandchildren; and three step-great-grandchildren.