

Project Pioneer: Wind Tunnel expert and research scientist William Robert “Bill” Wimbrow



William Robert “Bill” Wimbrow, an aeronautical research scientist and wind tunnel expert at AEDC, died Feb. 9. He was 86 years old.

Upon graduation from Eastville High School in Northampton County, Va., Mr. Wimbrow enrolled in the engineering department at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. While attending, he was a part-time research assistant and student instructor. He was deferred from the military service in World War II until he graduated in 1943.

After graduation from the university, Mr. Wimbrow served in the Navy as an engineering officer on a Landing Craft Infantry ship until 1946. Then he

taught for a year at the University of Virginia before accepting a job at the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (now NASA), Moffett Field, Calif., as an aeronautical research scientist in the 1x3 supersonic high-speed research tunnel.

In 1954, Mr. Wimbrow was hired by the Arnold Research Organization, then the AEDC operating contractor, as an aeronautical engineer. He worked in the transonic branch of PWT and then as a supervisor in the aerodynamic test projects section, transonic branch, PWT, becoming manager in 1959.

In 1962, he became manager of the LoRho branch where he was engaged in analytical and experimental work to develop detailed design criteria for two advanced hypersonic facilities. LoRho was a pilot test facility where the power generator was used to research a more efficient method of extracting electrical energy from burning fuels.

Plans for the transonic branch were used as a guide for the planners of the European wind tunnel. Their objective was to construct, operate, maintain and further develop a high Reynolds Number transonic wind tunnel facility located in Cologne, Germany. The construction began in early 1990. Under the auspices of the NATO Advisory Group for Aerospace Research & Development (AGARD), Mr. Wimbrow served as a consultant to the National Luchtvaarlaboratorium of the Netherlands on transonic wind tunnel techniques in July and August of 1960.

In 1970 he began a three-year term as president of the International Supersonic Tunnel Association, which met during this period in Sweden and various facilities in the United States. He retired from Sverdrup in 1986.

Survivors include Mary Anne Boss Wimbrow, his wife of 61 years; two sons, Robert “Bob” (Linda) Wimbrow and Chris (Pamela) Wimbrow; two granddaughters, Debora and Rebecca; grandson, Andrew, and three great-grandchildren.