

George Todd (DLR) turns 90 - One Space-Life and two others.

The Photographer

Inspired by the photographic arrangements and darkroom technique of American photographer Ansel Adams - George E. Todd created photographs of landscapes combining composition and gray scales to highest perfection in the 1980s / 90s. Following to the credo of his academy drawing teacher, to pay attention to the central perspective, Todd's focus is always concentrated on the background in his photographs. In his architecture, as well as landscape photography, perspective plays a decisive role and almost magically draws the viewer into the picture.

Already in the mid-50s George exploited color in his images and with growing experience, he perfected his skills. In his photographs the "sounds of color" heighten objects to harmonic, almost abstract images and encourage unfamiliar ways of looking at everyday objects. His photographic compositions achieve an almost tactile quality. The structures and lines, both vertical and horizontal, often determine the construction of the image. This awareness for composition and rhythm creates impressive atmospheric images.

The Biker

During his many trips George Todd portrayed people who met him, "Gentlemen" cowboys in New Mexico, farmers in Bavaria as well as Harley bikers from British Columbia. In the 50s, George Todd was himself a successful racing driver / designer and tuner. In 1966 he was invited by the – at that time - world's largest motorcycle manufacturer BSA, to assume responsibility for design and development. Also, together with his wife Patricia he ran a motorcycle tuning shop in Bristol. In November 2011, an unknown Facebook friend asked, "if he was the George Todd of BSA motorcycles?" His positive response triggered a tsunami of requests and stories about his life as the motorcycle "tuning guru".

The Space Engineer

In 1960 BAC became prime contractor for the Skylark rocket program (first British sounding rocket program) with George as one of four founding members. In 1973 he joined DFVLR (now DLR – German space agency) at the German "space village" Oberpfaffenhofen, Bavaria, close to Munich. He initially worked at the MORABA (mobile rocket base), and later moved to the GSOC (German Space Operations Center). One of his first tasks (1981 – 1986) was to become the science ground operations team leader for the Metric Camera experiment in the ESA-NASA Spacelab 1 (D1) project. A modified aerial camera had a 7-lens, especially distortion-free objective for use in photogrammetric mapping from space or for earth resources - it was therefore known as the "Metric Camera". One could consider the idea of mapping the Earth from a geostationary orbit as the initiation of "Google Earth" – the private company which took the idea to perfection. The results were to be suitable for maps from a scale of about 1:50 000.

The camera system used two interchangeable film magazines each containing 150 m film for about 550 exposures; one with black and white, the other with "false-color" infrared film. This task suited George's inclinations and professional pride very well. The planned color exposures performed trouble free, but soon after the Spacelab Payload Specialists changed the magazine, the dreaded warning "film motor stop" told George and his science leader that the camera had failed. The film take-up spool was too large and jammed, stopping the film transport after each exposure. 21 hours later and with a tested workaround, they unplinked a procedure to open the cassette, unjam the film in a makeshift darkroom (one of the crew bunks) and continue the camera experiment with manual assistance from the Payload specialists.

It should not go unnoticed that George's invaluable contributions to the first tender relations of the German Space Operations Center (GSOC) with NASA-Houston folks in the - for Germany - very new field of human spaceflight, where everything relies on trust and understanding, were established by his competent and forthcoming way of doing business, thus establishing lasting professional relations and personal friendships between the two control centers. The fruits of this very first merging of operations cultures are still being harvested as of today by the excellent relations with the partners in Houston, jointly operating the ISS and the Columbus module day-in, day-out together.



Prime Minister of Bavaria F.J. Strauss, Ulf Merbold, Dieter Wyborny and George Todd (background) in the D-1 Mission Control Room at GSOC Oberpfaffenhofen (Oct 1985)

After his retirement, Todd renewed his love for photography, which became his passion and still is. His extensive photographic work has been recognized in numerous solo exhibitions in the US and Europe.

I salute you on behalf of our DLR colleagues!