

OSU/NASA Education Projects: Aerospace Education Services Program (AESP) Archive

Oklahoma State University-Stillwater, Oklahoma

Interview with Everett E. Collin, Session 1

Session 1
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R This is the first segment of our discussion about your role with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the development of the Aerospace Education Services Program (AESP), going back to the beginning with the Spacemobile Program 31 years ago. What years were you with NASA and what were the positions you held?

E Well, I joined NASA in March of 1961. Bernardo, Jim Bernardo, was the first person brought aboard to organize an educational programs division. And he came from the FAA, the Federal Aviation Administration. He'd been Education Director over there. And after he came, he brought in John Sims, who was our Civil Air Patrol (CAP) Education Director for the Southeast region of the United States, which included Alabama, Florida and that area down there and in Puerto Rico, St. Thomas and so on. He brought him in, I'm thinking it was in March, then they invited me to join them in the Educational Programs Division.

R Who were you working for when they invited you to join them?

E I was working for Bernardo and John Sims. John Sims was the Deputy Director at that time and Bernardo was the Director. And I became the Assistant Deputy Director. So there were only three of us originally by May 1, 1961.

R What was it called at that time?

E We called it the EPD -- Educational Programs Division.

R For NASA?

E For NASA. It was under Public Affairs, which was headed by a gentleman named Shelby Thompson. And from there the three of us working together developed concepts and ideas for what the Educational Programs Division should be doing. And a lot of it John Sims and I brought from our experience

as regional directors for the Air Force's Educational Program, which was originally developed by Dr. Mervin Strickler way back in the early '50s. I worked with him in my role as Regional Director for the Midwest United States and later as Deputy Director for the National Educational Program for the Air Force Civil Air Patrol, which Charles Webb headed. We organized and conducted educational programs and workshops for schools, colleges and universities, concentrating a lot on workshops. We developed the educational programs and bulletins for teachers and students throughout the United States. In fact, we had the first national workshops in '52, '53 and '54 at the University of Colorado on the ... well, it's the Air Force Civil Air Patrol now. That brought teachers in from all over the United States, all 48 states at that time, and Alaska, Hawaii and Puerto Rico.

R That was a new idea to bring teachers in for a workshop like that?

E Yes, right. For aerospace education. Aviation education we called it in those days, but it later became aerospace education. As the '50s developed, in other words '56, '57, '58, it became known as the Aerospace Education Program.

R As far as you know, that was the first time that had been done?

E That's right. That was the first time. Later, we had a national program at Montana State University in Missoula and even had a staff college there. I developed the curriculum and the program for that, which focused on training teachers and Civil Air Patrol leaders in each of our states. The program also revised what had been an original Civil Air Patrol manual on meteorology, weather and concepts of aviation science that could be brought into the classroom and coordinated with the science programs.

R So how did you get involved with NASA? Who came knocking on your door and where were you at when you answered the call?

E I was contacted because I was involved in the national Civil Air Patrol program, with the regional and later national Civil Air Patrol's Aerospace Education Program. We were the only ones who had conducted any programs of that type.

R On a national scale?

E That's right. Even on a regional scale. The FAA, which Bernardo had been with, developed some teacher education materials. And during that period of the '50s, the National Aviation Education Council (NAEC) was organized. I think it was 1953-54 and Evan Evans was made head of that. It was designed to bring together the FAA, the CAP programs and industry, in order to coordinate all these segments that were developing materials for teachers and students. George Gardner was the Director of Educational Programs for Pan American and Ray Mertes was the same for United Airlines. They were the two leaders. They mainly were concerned with developing materials, which industry is doing even today, in coordination with the CAP, NASA and other organizations, such as the Air and Space Museum and the Smithsonian.

R Again, how did you get involved with NASA, what happened there?

E I was at the Air Force Civil Air Patrol Headquarters, which had been

moved from Bolling Air Force Base in Washington, D.C. to Ellington Air Force Base in Houston. That was the national headquarters at that time for the Air Force Civil Air Patrol aerospace educational program. Charlie Webb was the Director and I was Deputy Director, as I mentioned earlier. Then John Sims and Bernardo brought me in because I was at the national headquarters of the Air Force Civil Air Patrol and had been involved in the national program for several years. So that was why I was brought into NASA's national headquarters, to help develop the educational program concept for NASA. We were a core of people who had a lot of experience in aerospace education programs.

R And you started work for NASA then in March of 1961?

E Right.

R A little background on Bernardo and Sims. What experience did they bring into this?

E Well, as I mentioned, Bernardo had been with the FAA, involved with their aviation education program, primarily developing materials. They didn't have any organized programs as such. He had a gentleman working with him by the name of Hal Mehrens, Sr., who had written many publications for aviation education programs for teachers. Incidentally, later on, after John Sims and Bernardo and I got the NASA program organized, we brought in Hal Mehrens as one of our writers for our publications. Anyway, Bernardo made use of these publications that had been developed and had written a book, which was part of the reason that he was considered by Thompson and Jim Webb, who was the NASA Administrator at that time, to be brought in to organize the NASA education program. And, of course, from there he brought in John Sims, because Sims and Bernardo had been colleagues and worked together on programs in previous years. Sims had worked in the East and Southeast with the FAA and in his position as Regional Director for the Air Force Civil Air Patrol. And John Sims and I had worked together for several years as regional directors in the CAP. There were six of us. We had the Pacific Region, the Rocky Mountain Region, the Central Northeast Region, the Southeast Region, which was Sims, and the Northeast Region, which was run by another fellow who wasn't quite as effective. In other words, John and I were the most effective ones and drew national attention.

R So how many years had you known Sims by the time you started with NASA in '61?

E I'd known Sims since 1952.

R How about Bernardo?

E Bernardo I'd known since 1954, when NAEC started.

R How long were Bernardo and Sims with NASA? When did they leave?

E Bernardo retired, I just have to kind of guess now, about 1966, '67, in that period of time. I can't place it exactly (Ed. note: It was June 1970). We had a lot of problems with changing contracts and concerns by the Public Affairs people about how the educational program wasn't being conducted quite the way they thought it should. They really should have left us more to ourselves and they did later. But there were some politics involved there. And when Bernardo retired, they brought in a fellow who had been Systems Director,

Dr. Aaron Seamster. He succeeded Bernado as the Director for awhile and then he retired. Then Dr. Frederick Tuttle, who had been Dean of Education at the State University of New York at Plattsburgh, was brought in to succeed Seamster as Director. During this period of time, we were completely reorganizing from time to time. The philosophy was to develop and produce programs for the teacher orientation programs and to carry the programs out on a national basis in the schools, colleges and universities. And that is how the Spacemobile concept developed. The program actually was presented to Bernardo around the first part of 1961, I would say January or February, by Dr. I. M. Levitt, who was the head of the Fels Planetarium at Temple University. He developed this concept of lecturers, traveling with NASA artifacts, who would give space science education programs to students and teachers throughout the area. He developed the first Spacemobile, brought it into Headquarters and we used that as a demonstration. John Sims and I organized the presentation and how it should be used. Two of the lecturers were originally provided by Fels Planetarium and then we added one of our own, whose name was Jack Callow.

R Was he a NASA employee?

E No, he was a contract employee. At that time, we had a contract with Fels Planetarium. That was our first contract for the NASA Spacemobile Program.