Joseph Percival Allen IV

DePauw ’59

Oxford Cup Roll Nº 002

Most men gladly would accept even one of the traits which set Astronaut Joe Allen virtually in a class by himself. Modest as he is, there is one trait he proudly will acknowledge: he alone has had the honor of standing with Seth Brooks as a recipient of the first Oxford Cups, August 16, 1984, at the 145th General Convention at Lake of the Ozarks.

Others are unique, or nearly so. One gives him special pride, because it’s shared by his brother, Dr. David T. Allen, DePauw ’61, physician, president of the Kentucky Center for Health Education. In college, each was a good varsity wrestler who made Phi Beta Kappa and showed leadership.

Add to that their membership in a four-generation DePauw Beta family: their grandfather, Joseph P. Allen, Jr. 1897; a great-uncle, Dr. Percy Hypes Swahlen 1899; their father, J. P. (Perk) Allen III ’30; themselves, of course, and Timothy J. Allen ’92, Kentucky artist, son of David.

For good measure, Joe was vice president of Delta chapter and floor manager of the 1956 Beta General Convention.

Consider these along with Joe’s Fulbright Fellowship in Germany, his fluency in German, his Yale doctorate in nuclear physics, his extraordinary fluency in delighting an audience with precise yet casual discussion of the role of space travel in today’s world and tomorrow.

And realize that as Washington-based president and CEO of Space Industries International, he has the exciting responsibility for coordinating that company’s effort to assist commercial business in taking advantage of space, partly through development of an Industrial Space Facility. He has been called “an astronaut-turned-executive who is chief salesman for building and launching the ISF.”

Joe Allen was an instructor and research associate in the nuclear physics laboratory of the Unviersity of Washington on a post-doctoral fellowship when he was selected for the astronaut program in 1967. He served in a wide variety of positions for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration over the next four years and achieved a certain amount of fame as the capsule communicator in Mission Control who talked directly to the astronauts during the Apollo 15 moon mission in 1971. He knew their problems, he shared their hopes and he spoke their language.

By the time he made his first space flight in 1982 as a member of the crew of *Columbia,* he had been designated and trained as one of the first of a new breed of astronauts called “mission specialists.” As a physicist, he was the fifth scientist to fly in space. The mission was the first commercial flight, with Joe given the assignment of launching one of the two communication satellites which were put into orbit.

There was one disappointment for him. He had been scheduled to be one of the first astronauts to walk in space since 1975, but faulty space suits nullified that.

He did get to go space-walking, to *rescue* a communications satellite, in two *Discovery* flights in Nov. 1984. These went into the records as “first satellite retrieval and repair,” thrilling millions of tense TV viewers. And this was a scant three months after the Beta Convention when he received the Oxford Cup.

In 1984 and 1986, with Russell Martin, author of *Cowboy: The Enduring Myth of the Wild West,* Joe Allen produced successive editions of *Exploring Space: An Astronaut’s Odyssey.* This is a magnificent volume which in itself would have rated an Oxford Cup if earlier exploits had not already made that absolute. Some remarkable photographs by Allen and his crewmates have made this memorable. An autographed copy of the first edition is in the John Reily Knox Memorial Library.

“For more than two decades, the essential work of space travel focused on the technological refinement of the vehicles and support systems that could take us to space and back again, and on the study of the human response to those journeys,” says Allen in *Exploring Space.*

“Still in that era of experimentation, the first four missions of the shuttle orbiter *Columbia* were test flights designed to gauge the Space Transportation System’s capabilities. It was the flight of STS-5, launched on November 11, 1982, that marked a fundamental shift in the goals of manned space flight from exploration to operation — from testing the means of getting into space to using the resources found there.

“When the crew members of the fifth shuttle mission — Vance Brand, Bob Overmyer, Bill Lenoir and Joe Allen, who dubbeed themselves the *Ace Moving Company: Fast and Courteous Service* — deployed two communications satellites that had been carried to space in the orbiter’s cargo bay, they initiated a new era in which the business of space flight became business itself. Today each shuttle mission is devoted to a wide variety of operations — from satellite deployment and repair to the manufacture of pharmaceutical compounds that are difficult to create on earth. A recent survey indicates that more than 80 companies around the world are interested in using the shuttle for a total of more than 200 commercial and experimental projects. By 1990 a fleet of five or more orbiters may be flying 20 missions a year to fulfill this need.

“The astronauts aboard each shuttle mission are no longer simply space explorers but, rather, a collection of skilled space workers — men and women whose jobs are to maneuver the craft in space, to unload new satellites being delivered to orbit, to pick up and repair or bring home satellites that have developed problems, to work outside the cabin in life-supporting pressure suits or to perform experiments in a large laboratory carried aloft by the orbiter. The pilot-astronauts of the first decades of space flight have been joined by engineers, scientists and technicians — known as mission and pay load specialists — charged simply with getting the jobs done, with carrying out the crucial and often creative work of space.”

Robert T. Howard, DePauw ’37, Historian