



Falling Back To Earth: A First Hand Account Of The Great Space Race And The End Of The Cold War

Mark Albrecht

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Even as President Barack Obama calls on NASA to develop “game-changing” technologies, the space agency is undeniably in decline. In 2010, the country continues to shrink its space ambition as it has since the early 1990s. The American era of human space flight is essentially over. How did this happen? *Falling Back to Earth* shows that it was triggered by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the precipitous end of the Cold War that effectively ended large-scale government science initiatives and sped the decline of the aerospace and defense industries. The story is told by Mark Albrecht, President George H.W. Bush’s principal adviser for space, who held key positions during the inflection point, 1989 to 1992, when NASA’s national centrality began slipping. Albrecht’s firsthand story charts the end of the great Cold War space race— USA vs. USSR—and the demise of the aerospace and technology enterprises that fueled it. He journeys through the techno-empires created by the two superpowers, the largest most advanced and secretive collection of technologies in the history of mankind. Told from the perspective of the White House and from industry—both in America and Russia—in the immediate post-Cold War environment, it’s the story of the rise and fall of two space industries after rival governments failed to segue to a new reality and rationale once the animating force for their existence was eliminated. The story is told in personal terms and provides a unique view into the inner workings of the Bush White House and especially the space efforts of Vice President Dan Quayle. It offers a unique and candid view, from the ground in Moscow and from the inner sanctum of the White House, of the elite Russian space enterprise before and after the end of the Cold War. It paints colorful portraits of the early days of Soviet-era privatization and “the new Russia.” It’s the story of suddenly unemployed Russian scientists forced to make hard decisions and ethical compromises when the Soviet style ‘command economy’ collapsed. The shotgun collaborations between Russia and American aerospace industries, encouraged and supported by the two governments to shore up flagging national support for independent initiatives, to monitor and prevent the proliferation of ballistic missile technology to dangerous and uncontrolled non-state actors and to address a growing commercial space industry is a story of a wild ride of unprecedented action, improbable intrusions into previously impenetrable institutions and fox hole friendships between recent fierce adversaries. Once, Americans believed innovation was ingrained in their genes. Fortunately, the technology revolution fueled by the Cold War has a long tail. Twenty years later we are still feasting on the fruits of its seeds. But the engine of invention has slowly been ground to a halt since November, 1989 and President Obama’s effective cancellation of the human space program may be the final stroke. Soon we will be eating seed corn for survival rather than tending the fields of grain it has bountifully provided.

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