BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

David Gold was born to Russian immigrant parents in New York City on August 9, 1917. His interest in aviation and the parachute began in 1927 when his imagination was captured by Charles Lindbergh's historic Trans-Atlantic flight. By the age of 13 he had begun making frequent visits to North Beach Airport in Queens (now La Guardia Airport), where he would watch as professional exhibition parachute jumpers thrilled spectators with their "death defying" leaps through the air. From that time on, the love of parachuting was the fundamental force in David Gold's life.

He became friendly with the exhibition jumpers and soon progressed from passing the hat for them, to learning how to pack parachutes himself. He began to make his own parachutes, moving quickly from paper napkins to cloth inventions, which he learned to sew expertly on his mother's sewing machine. He began following the jumpers around as they performed at various airfields in the area. He also visited the parachute factories of Switlik, Pioneer and other early parachute manufacturers. He got to know some of the early pioneers in U.S. parachuting, such as Col. Edward Hoffman and Floyd Smith, and more importantly, he began to collect every scrap of information on parachutes he could, as he established correspondence all over the world with individuals involved in parachuting. This provided the foundation for his extensive collection of technical and historical materials relating to parachutes.

At age 15, while in junior high school, the combination of a bout of rheumatic fever and a football injury left him with severe arthritis in his hips and other joints. The next several years were spent in and out of the hospital. When well enough, he attended Haaren Aviation High School in New York, where he formed the first high school parachute club in the U.S. Finally, his doctors decided that his arthritis necessitated a move to the warmer and drier climate of Arizona.

David arrived in Tucson, Arizona in 1937. He finished high school, and, in 1938, entered the University of Arizona as journalism major. His interest in writing resulted in his authorship of seven articles on various aspects of parachute technology, which were published in popular magazines. He also obtained his parachute rigger's license and during World War II made a living, mainly by traveling all over the state servicing parachutes. Several of the individuals he packed chutes for became members of the Caterpillar Club, a fact of which he was tremendously proud. From 1941 to 1943, as the Chief Parachute Rigger for Southwest Airways at Thunderbird Field in Phoenix, he was responsible for three civilian pilot training programs in parachute servicing. During this period he also got married and began raising a family that eventually grew to include six children.

Over the next ten years, he developed his own parachute business where he sold and serviced parachutes, as well as designing and fabricating specialized parachute equipment. At the time, his parachute business was the only major parachute repair loft in the southwestern U.S. to be licensed by the F.A.A. He always kept his eyes open for unique or historically important parachute equipment and often traded parachute servicing for items to add to his growing parachute hardware collection. He also worked for two years as a Technical Supervisor for the Phoenix Parachute Company, a firm that mass-produced parachutes under government contract.

It was during these 16 years in Arizona that he accomplished his 19 parachute descents. Unfortunately, his jumping career was quickly curtailed by debilitating arthritis. To compensate for his

limited mobility, and painful arthritic joints, David wore a padded helmet with a specially padded suit and shoes that he designed himself. After a jump, friends helped him to his feet. He even did a number of "specialty" jumps (Santa Claus jumps, cut-aways, and delayed opening jumps for fairs, etc.), including some stunt work for movies being shot in the area. He also opened a skydiving school where he taught sport jumpers the rudiments of parachuting. However, because of his painful arthritic joints, David realized that he could best make a contribution to the area of parachutes by applying his enthusiasm and creativity to the technical and design aspects of parachuting. Despite the pain he felt in his joints, he felt that each jump he made was necessary since it taught him things about parachutes, which he could learn in no other way.

In 1953, after obtaining an A.A. degree in engineering from Phoenix College, he joined the 6511th Parachute Test Group (USAF) at El Centro, California, which was at that time the world's leading test facility for parachute systems. As a parachute development and test engineer, he helped develop both personnel and missile recovery systems and worked on ejection seats with Joseph Kittinger. He also was granted patents on a steerable parachute, a novel riser arrangement ("slip risers"), and a bi-area canopy. The steerable chute and riser design were incorporated into the "Tojo" parachute, which became the mainstay chute for the Army's special forces for a number of years. In 1957 he began work for the Irvin Air Chute Company in Glendale, California, where, as head of the engineering department, he supervised numerous parachute system development programs, including a DC-8 aircraft deceleration system and the original mid-air recovery system for the first successful satellite recovery from earth orbit (the "Discoverer" program). During this time, he also was granted two patents as a result of work on a divestible harness project.

From 1962 to 1965, as a project engineer and recovery systems advisor for Space-General Corporation in El Monte, California, he designed parachute recovery systems for a family of sounding rockets, including the Aerobee, the Nike-Kagon, and the French Veronique. Next, he joined the Northrop-Ventura Corporation in Newbury Park, California, where his most notable achievement was his conception and design of the deployment bag, deployment bag retention system, and novel multiple reefing system for the three main parachutes of the Apollo spacecraft earth landing system.

In 1970, David fell victim to the massive aerospace industry layoffs, which occurred after the successful Apollo moon-landings, and did not resume his professional career until 1977 when he rejoined Irvin Industries. As a senior project engineer, he designed the crew recovery system for the WASP II flying platform, designed spin recovery and braking parachutes for the F-16 and the Norwegian F-16 aircraft, and assisted with the design of a recovery system for the Boeing/USAF Air Launched Cruise Missile (ALCM).

From 1980 until his death in 1985, David worked as the Chief Designer in Aerodynamic Decelerator Systems at the Naval Weapons Center, China Lake, California. Besides working on numerous missile recovery systems, he spent a great deal of time developing novel solutions to some old parachuting problems. This work resulted in patents (pending) for a lowered opening shock personnel parachute canopy, a gliding circular ram-air parachute, a self-adjusting parachute canopy with both low and high speed capabilities, and a reliable, low-cost, simple rectangular parachute design (the SquareX") which permits the canopy to be made from a single square blank of fabric. In addition, he designed an emergency escape parachute for the crew of the space shuttle. In the spring of 1984, David was awarded

the highest civilian honor given at the Naval Weapons Center, the William B. McLean Award, for "his contributions and technical excellence over his forty year career."

David Gold felt very strongly that the parachute played an important and somewhat unappreciated role in aviation history. Throughout his life he sustained a keen interest in the history of parachuting thus becoming a leading parachute historian. He wrote numerous articles on the development of parachute technology, including papers for the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (A.I.A.A.) and the Survival and Flight Equipment (SAFE) Association, and acted as advisor on related parachute matters to the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, the San Diego Aerospace Museum, as well as other museums and organizations. He also held the post of chairman of the Historical Subcommittee with the A.I.A.A. Technical Committee on Aerodynamic Decelerator and Balloon Technology.

On Feb 4, 1985, David Gold died of cancer in Los Angles, California at the age of 67.

David Gold
1917 - 1985