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WALTER B. LABERGE, 80

Ex-undersecretary of Army, scientist

Los Angeles Times
Published July 22, 2004

Walter B. LaBerge, an aerospace research scientist and former undersecretary of the Army, assistant secretary of the Air Force and assistant secretary general of NATO, has died. He was 80.

Mr. LaBerge died of complications from pneumonia Friday in Aptos, Calif., near Santa Cruz.

His first presidential appointment came in 1974 as assistant secretary of the Air Force for research and development. In 1976, he served in Brussels as assistant secretary general of NATO. Returning to the Pentagon in 1977, he became undersecretary of the Army. His last government appointment was as acting undersecretary of defense for research and engineering in 1980.

Born in Chicago, Mr. LaBerge graduated from the University of Notre Dame in 1944 with a degree in naval science. He served aboard a U.S. minesweeper in the Palau Islands, east of the Philippines, and was promoted to captain in 1946.

After receiving his doctorate in physics in 1950, Mr. LaBerge became a member of the original Sidewinder air-to-air missile development team at the Naval Ordnance Test Station in China Lake, Calif. In 1962, with Philco-Ford Corp., he headed the team that designed and installed the instrumentation at the Manned Spacecraft Center in Houston. He returned to government service in 1971 as technical director of the China Lake test station.

Joining Lockheed Corp. in 1981, he retired as vice president for advanced planning in 1989.

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