

## Dr. Jerome Lederer — An Esteemed System Safety Pioneer

The word “esteemed” — “to be highly regarded with respect” — certainly describes Jerry Lederer, a friend and colleague that I had the privilege of spending many hours with during his retirement years prior to his passing in 2004 at the age of 102. He was extremely modest about his accomplishments, which are legendary in the fields of flight and aerospace safety.

To be considered a pioneer, one needs to be present very early in a situation.

Jerry was certainly early into the Aviation Safety field. His birth in 1902 predated the Kitty Hawk adventures of the Wright Brothers and he became enamored with aviation. In 1924, Jerry was one of the initial engineering graduates of newly instituted aviation curriculums at New York University. He continued at NYU to earn a Masters of Mechanical Engineering and was responsible for designing, building and operating NYU’s wind tunnel. He was later awarded an honorary Doctorate from Embry-Riddle University.

By 1926, he was the “safety” expert for the U.S. Airmail Service, and a colleague of Charles Lindbergh, who requested that Jerry check out the Spirit of St. Louis before departing on his epic flight. One of his functions with the Air Mail Service was to examine aircraft-related accidents. His boss was primarily interested in knowing if they could salvage any parts. But, from this, Jerry became alert to the connection between design deficiencies and flight control problems. This insight led to his lifelong crusade for applying the system safety concept in complex avionics and space systems. C. O. Miller credited Jerry’s papers as being a key inspiration in developing the System Safety Con-



*Dr. Jerome Lederer*

cept and Management curriculum at USC. Jerry was an early member and life-long supporter of our Society.

Jerry held numerous key positions in the aviation safety field, including serving as Director of the Bureau of Flight Safety, where he was responsible for all civil aviation safety rule-making and accident investigations. Mandatory flight safety recorders and blinking anti-collision lights are just a few of his contributions to aviation safety. After serving as safety advisor for the U.S. Air Force during World War II, Jerry initiated and directed an aviation safety information service which

became known as the Flight Safety Foundation, and also served as director of the Guggenheim Aviation Safety Center.

When preparing to retire, Jerry’s illustrious 40-year career in the aviation safety field was redirected in 1967 following the tragic Apollo capsule fire at Cape Kennedy. He was asked to establish and direct an office for the safety of manned space flight for NASA. He later became Director of Safety for all NASA activities. Jerry was a driving force in institutionalizing System Safety within NASA. Jerry finally was able to retire in 1972 and moved with his wife to Southern California where, among other activities, he taught at USC’s Institute of System Safety Management.

A full account of all the awards and honors given to Jerry over the years would fill many pages, and can be reviewed by an Internet search. Jerry’s pioneering contributions to system safety has been recently noted by vote of our Executive Council designating him a *Pathfinder of System Safety*. ●

## Mark Your Calendar

### International Air Safety Summit (IASS) 2017

October 23-25, 2017  
Clayton Hotel Burlington Road  
Dublin, Ireland  
<https://flightsafety.org/event/iass2017/>

### 64<sup>th</sup> Annual Reliability and Maintainability Symposium (RAMS) Conference

January 22-25, 2018  
Reno, Nevada  
<http://rams.org/>

### Safety-Critical Systems Symposium 2018

February 6-8, 2018  
The Principal Hotel  
York, U.K.  
<http://scsc.org.uk/e503>