



Edward Howard Reitan, an electrical engineer, computer scientist and SMPTE Life Member died on 5 January 2015 at the UCLA Medical Center in Los Angeles, CA, where he was being treated for complications from acute myeloid leukemia. He was 71.

Although Reitan's career track involved the development of computer-based air traffic control radar systems and display technology for these systems, he was also a television historian who focused on the development of color imaging. His work in this area ultimately led to the sharing of a Technical Emmy Award in 1989 in connection with the restoration of one of the earliest surviving color videotape recordings, the 1958 NBC presentation of "An Evening With Fred Astaire."

Reitan was a native of Omaha, Nebraska, and as a child witnessed RCA/NBC's first coast-to-coast demonstration of NTSC color television. The event was the 1 January 1954 Tournament of Roses Parade, which originated in Pasadena, CA. Omaha's NBC affiliate, WOW-TV, was one of few stations carrying the broadcast in color and as part of the promotional effort for the new color system (it had received official FCC blessing less than two weeks earlier), the network had arranged for a number of pre-production color receivers to be made available for viewing the miracle of "compatible color television." Reitan's family journeyed to Omaha's Paxton Hotel where several of the 12-inch color receivers were set up alongside larger black and white sets. The impression this seminal colorcast made on young Reitan was lasting and he devoted a great deal of his life to researching and otherwise collecting information about color television's history. Much of this is available at his website, www.edreitan.com.

Reitan also collected and restored early color television artifacts, including a CBS field-sequential color camera and receivers designed for the 405-line/144-field color video it produced.

His research into early color television led him to the discovery of the earliest surviving color videotape recordings from 1958. These were recorded in a proprietary "direct color" system developed by RCA not long after Ampex introduced the video recorder in 1956. With the later industry standardization of an NTSC color recording and recovery system, RCA's "house" standard was all but forgotten. In order to recover the color content of the 1958 NBC programs, Reitan played the part of detective, finally tracking down needed information about the RCA color technology and subsequently engineering modifications to an Ampex AVR-1 recorder to properly recover the color content of the RCA recordings. In the effort to restore the Astaire tape, Reitan collaborated with KTLA's Don Kent and UCLA's Dan Einstein. The trio was awarded the 1989 Technical Emmy for "Outstanding Achievement in Engineering Development" for the restoration of the earliest color videotapes. (In addition to restoring the 17 October 1958 Fred Astaire color special,



Reitan also tracked down and made playable the oldest surviving color videotape recording, the 22 May 1958 dedication of NBC's WRC-TV/AM/FM facility in Washington, D.C., which featured U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower and RCA's David Sarnoff.

In addition to his work in color videotape restoration, Reitan is remembered for his involvement in computer-based radar systems for air traffic control. He was an advocate for well-designed display systems and incorporated early plasma displays in his ATC displays. Some of the radar display systems Reitan helped engineer are still in production after more than 40 years.

Reitan received BS and MS degrees from the University of California, Los Angeles, and was also a PhD candidate in engineering and computer science at that school. He began his career in ATC display systems in 1963 with what is now ITT Gilfillan, retiring in 2005 after some 42 years with that company.

Reitan is survived by his wife, Margaret, and a brother, Bill Reitan. In addition to SMPTE, he was also a member of the Association of Computing Machinery and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers. He was also active in the Early Television Foundation (ETF), authoring and presenting papers at that organization's conferences. His most recent presentation was in 2014 on the manufacturing aspects of RCA's first production color television set, the CT-100, which was introduced in the late spring of 1954. He also collaborated with the ETF's founder, Steve McVoy, in establishing and maintaining a database of surviving early color television receivers. —James, E. O'Neal