

**With a move to a newly appointed position, we take this opportunity to look back at the career of...**

# George



NASA JSC S67-50555  
George W. S. Abbey in 1967.

NASA JSC S79-34039  
Chief of Payload Operations, Charles Harlan and Director of Flight Operations, George Abbey in 1979.



## 1964

Abbey, a United States Air Force Captain, was assigned to the Manned Spacecraft Center on the Apollo Program.

## 1967

He left the Air Force to become a civilian employee of NASA, and was appointed Technical Assistant to the Apollo Spacecraft Program Manager, George Low. He served as the Secretary of the Apollo Configuration Control Board and was also responsible for all the Government Furnished Equipment, such as the space suits and crew equipment used by the astronauts. Two years later, Apollo 11 landed on the moon.

## 1970

During the Apollo 13 mission, Abbey was Technical Assistant to the Center Director. He was seated in the viewing room with Thomas K. "Ken" Mattingly when James "Jim" Lovell Jr.'s famous words—"Hey Houston, we've had a problem here"—came over the radio. Upon determining the seriousness of the situation, Abbey called Center Director Robert R. Gilruth and Director of Flight Operations Christopher C. Kraft, Jr., and advised them of the situation.

## 1973

On May 4, Skylab lost its thermal protection shield - an accident that nearly ended the program. Abbey worked to help devise a way to protect the orbital workshop from direct sunlight. His technical skill and management helped in the development of the parasol-type shield that helped control temperatures onboard Skylab.

## 1976

As Director of Flight Operations until 1985, Abbey established and chaired Astronaut Selection Boards. In 1978, the board selected 35 Astronaut Candidates from a group of 8,000 applicants, among whom were the first six women and first four members of minority groups to be astronauts.

## 1981

Abbey was Director of Flight Operations for the first Shuttle flight, STS-1, on April 12.

## 1985-1987

As Director of the newly formed Flight Crew Operations Directorate, he was a key player in agency response and the return to flight after the Challenger accident.

## 1988

While in the role of Deputy Associate Administrator for Space Flight at NASA Headquarters, Abbey resolved a critical problem for the future of the Shuttle Program. An explosion at a Nevada plant destroyed NASA's only source of ammonium perchlorate (a necessary ingredient for the operation of solid rocket boosters). Abbey worked with the Department of Defense to acquire enough of the chemical to support the upcoming Shuttle missions and developed a plan that assured a return to full production within one year.

## 1990

Abbey was appointed to a leadership position in the Synthesis Group chaired by former astronaut

Lt. Gen. Tom Stafford, USAF (ret.). The group was charged with defining alternative architectures for returning to the Moon and landing on Mars, along with the critical technologies and early accomplishments that support the program.

## 1991

Abbey was appointed the Senior Director for Civil Space, National Space Council, Executive Office of the President, serving with the Space Council until April of 1992, when he became Special Assistant to the Administrator of NASA. He played an important role in defining and negotiating Russian participation in the redefined ISS program and the Shuttle-Mir program. As a result of this effort, the Vice President of the United States signed many new cooperative space initiatives between the United States and Russia.

## 1995

As Acting JSC Director, he designated a "stand-down" day for employees and contractors for the purpose of increasing safety awareness. That first Safety Awareness Day has evolved into an annual event.

## 1996

In January, Abbey was named Director of Johnson Space Center.

In February, NASA Administrator Daniel Goldin appointed JSC the "lead center" for station development and shuttle operations.

In November, Abbey continued the tradition and commitment to transferring space technology back to the public by opening its doors to more than 1,500 business and industry leaders for an "up-close" look at the center's capabilities and technologies. The NASA/JSC Inspection showcased space age technologies and expertise on Nov. 13-14 with more than 100 exhibits and programs in 17 buildings across the site.

## 1997

The Rotary National Award for Space Achievement Foundation presented Abbey with the National Space Trophy.

## 1998

Abbey worked with John Wilson, the Superintendent of the Clear Creek Independent School District, to establish an Intermediate School on the Center. Space Center Intermediate is the first of its kind. Its presence on JSC has allowed both the faculty and students to take advantage of the educational outreach activities of the Center.

## 2000

In November, after the work Abbey did solidifying the international partnership, the International Space Station reached one of what would be many milestones in its assembly when its first residents, the Expedition I crew, arrived to begin permanent human presence on the Station.

## 2001

In February, Mr. Abbey was reassigned to become the Senior Assistant for International Issues reporting to the Administrator.



NASA JSC S69-33873  
Dr. Gilruth presents commendation award to George W. S. Abbey in 1969.



## Leaving a legacy

Throughout his time with JSC, Abbey's commitment to safety and excellence has been profound. He launched the Executive Safety committee, the Contractor Safety Forum and the JSC Safety Action Team. Other initiatives include the Senior Manager's Safety Course and Safety Through Everyone's



Participation courses, DuPont training and philosophy, a more vigorous mishap investigation process, the close call system and

metric reporting. JSC was the first NASA center to become both ISO 9000 certified (1998) and receive OSHA's Voluntary Protection Program Star Status (1999). JSC then became the first government facility to be certified to the upgraded ISO 9001:2000 standard in March of this year.

Abbey's enthusiasm for education has been apparent in his commitment to programs such as the KC-135 student campaigns, the Distance Learning Outpost, the Cooperative Education Program, Texas Aerospace Scholars, the SCIAD program and the Longhorn Project.

JSC's community involvement with events such as Open House, Inspection,

the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, as well as work with the Clear Lake Area Economic Development Foundation show the important role that Abbey feels JSC should play in the larger community of Texas, the United States and the world.

Finally, Abbey has left his mark in the way NASA chooses astronauts. The selection process that was established under Abbey's leadership for the 1978 class has been the cornerstone for every astronaut selection program to the present time. Abbey's selection criteria emphasized the selection of individuals with broad, diverse backgrounds, who had demonstrated practical, operationally oriented work skills—skills that relate to the work astronauts do. From the 1978 class to the 2000 class, 34,414 applications have been evaluated, 1,415 individuals have been interviewed, and 237 new Astronaut Candidates (eleven classes) have been selected. The people selected have left their mark not just on NASA, but across the country, many in key roles in government, academia and private industry.

George Abbey's long and distinguished NASA career includes leadership positions during some of the agency's most proud and most trying occasions. From the tragedy of the Apollo 1 fire and the loss of Challenger, to the euphoria of landing an astronaut on the moon and the fulfillment of the International Space Station, Abbey has dedicated his time and technical expertise to NASA's success and the success of the U.S. space program. ■