

George W. S. Abbey announces retirement



George W.S. Abbey recently announced his retirement from NASA, ending a distinguished federal service career that spanned a half-century.

His retirement will be effective Jan. 3, 2003.

Abbey leaves the Agency after a highly decorated aerospace career, which included the Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian award, for his role on the Apollo 13 Mission Operations Team.

In February 2001, Abbey left his post as JSC Center Director when he became the Senior Assistant for International Issues reporting to the NASA Administrator. Subsequently, he was appointed as a Senior Visiting Fellow at the James Baker Institute for Public Policy at Rice University.

"George helped to shape some of NASA's most difficult programs and missions as a true innovator and pioneer," Administrator Sean O'Keefe said. "Throughout his eminent career, George distinguished both himself and the Agency. He leaves behind a legacy of excellence and dedication that the hardworking people of NASA will follow for years to come."

Born in Seattle, Abbey received his bachelor's degree in general science from the U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md., in 1954, and a master's degree in electrical engineering from the U.S. Air Force Institute of Technology, Wright Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, in 1959. A pilot in the U.S. Air Force, Abbey had more than 4,000 hours in various types of aircraft before being detailed to NASA. This year, he was selected as a Distinguished Alumnus of the U.S. Air Force Institute of Technology.

Abbey joined NASA in 1964 as an Air Force Captain assigned to the Apollo Program. In December 1967 he left the Air Force and was named technical assistant to the JSC Center Director. In January 1976, he was named Director of Flight Operations, where he was responsible for operational planning and for the overall direction and management of flight crew and flight control activities for all human spaceflight missions.

In 1983, he became Director of the Flight Crew Operations Directorate, where he continued to be responsible for all space shuttle flight crews and Center aircraft operations.

Abbey was appointed Deputy Associate Administrator for Space Flight at NASA Headquarters in Washington in March 1988. In July 1990, he was selected as Deputy for Operations and senior NASA representative to the Synthesis Group. He was charged with defining strategies for returning to the Moon and landing on Mars.

In July 1991, Abbey was appointed Senior Director for Civil Space Policy for the National Space Council in the Executive Office of the President. In 1992 he was named Special Assistant to the NASA Administrator. Then in 1994 Abbey was named Deputy Director of JSC and was subsequently selected as the JSC Center Director in 1996.

"George Abbey dedicated himself to serving his country," said JSC Director Lt. Gen. Jefferson D. Howell, Jr. "He devoted 44 years to this nation's space program, serving at JSC since 1964, and helped strengthen ties between JSC and the local community. He leaves us with a legacy that spans Apollo to shuttle to the space station. We salute his commitment to duty as we continue to reap the benefits of his vision and hard work."



WHAT REALLY COUNTS!

I think that the holiday season is a great opportunity to reflect on what is really important in our lives. The reasons for having these holidays certainly give us a good starting point for this type of review.

In my own life, I have experienced occasional setbacks, which, at the time, made me feel like a miserable failure. However, these experiences forced me to take stock of my situation and realize all the wonderful blessings I enjoyed even during a time of great personal trauma.

I realized that "fame, fortune and professional success" are very fleeting, and gave me only temporary satisfaction and very little fulfillment. I found out that what really counted for me was having a wonderful wife and two children who loved me dearly. What really counted was having loyal friends who would remain so in bad times as well as good. What really counted was being able to look in the mirror and know that I had given my best effort and had kept my honor clean.

When I think about what really counts in my life I realize how incredibly blessed I am. If you give it the same thought I believe you will draw similar conclusions.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!!

Abbey's numerous honors and awards include the NASA Exceptional Service Medal, the NASA Outstanding Leadership Medal, three NASA Distinguished Service Medals and the 1970 Medal of Freedom, which was presented by President Richard M. Nixon, for his distinguished civilian service in peacetime. In addition, he was the recipient of the Rotary National Award for Space Achievement in 1997.

"George is a demanding leader who rarely accepts compromise," O'Keefe said. "His ability to motivate and inspire his staff to work harder and smarter helped NASA write much of its human spaceflight history. His devotion to the success of America's space program is unquestionable and I wish him the best." ❖

FROM THE DESK OF LT. GEN. JEFFERSON D. HOWELL JR.



NASA JSC S-69-33873

George Abbey receives an award from then-Center Director Robert Gilruth in 1969.

NASA JSC S84-26245

George Abbey prepares to fly a T-38 in 1984.



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