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Aaron Cohen

Pioneering NASA Program Manager

1931-2010

USA



Aaron Cohen, a former director of NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston and a former NASA program manager, died 25 February 2010, after a lengthy illness. He was 79.

Cohen had a 33-year career with NASA. He was a steady hand at the helm of Johnson as NASA recovered from the shuttle Challenger tragedy and returned the space shuttle to flight. Cohen left the agency in 1993 to accept an appointment as a professor at his alma mater, Texas A&M University. At the time, he was serving as acting deputy administrator at NASA Headquarters in Washington.

"Aaron Cohen was one of my early mentors here in NASA and he was instrumental in the success of numerous pivotal achievements in human space flight." said NASA Administrator **Charles F. Bolden** from Headquarters in Washington. "His engineering expertise and rigor were tremendous assets to our nation and NASA. Aaron provided the critical and calm guidance needed at the Johnson Space Center to successfully recover from the Challenger accident and return the space shuttle to flight. We will miss him as a colleague, mentor, and a friend. Our hearts go out to his wife, Ruth, and the rest of his family."

Cohen joined NASA in 1962 and served in key leadership roles critical to the success of the flights and lunar landings of the Apollo Program. From 1969 to 1972, Cohen was the manager for the Apollo Command and Service Modules. He oversaw the design, development, production and test flights of the space shuttles as manager of NASA's Space Shuttle Orbiter Project Office from 1972 to 1982. After serving as Director of Engineering at Johnson for several years, he was named director of the center in 1986, serving in that post until 1993.

"Aaron's expertise was critical to NASA's greatest achievements, and his integrity, talent and passion made it a privilege to work with him," said **Mike Coats**, Director of the Johnson Space Center. "He will be missed and long remembered by his many friends here at JSC."

NASA Administrator **Daniel Goldin** said Cohen brought technical excellence, integrity, dedication, and leadership to the agency. "He was all of the finest you could hope for in a government servant," he said.

At the time of his retirement in 1993, Mr. Cohen said, "I have had the privilege of working with the giants of our profession, and I have had the good fortune to see future giants in the making. I am confident our nation's future space endeavors will be in good hands."

Aaron Cohen's many honors include the highest award given for U.S. federal executives, the Presidential Rank of Distinguished Executive, with which he was received in 1982 and 1988. He was presented with NASA's highest honor, the Distinguished Service Medal, three times.

Cohen was a member of the National Academy of Engineering and a fellow of the American Astronautical Society and the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics. He was a distinguished alumnus of Texas A&M University, from which he earned a bachelor's in Mechanical Engineering in 1952. He earned a master's in Applied Mathematics from Stevens Institute of Technology in 1958. He also was a recipient of honorary doctorates from Stevens Institute and from the University of Houston-Clear Lake in Texas.

Sources: NASA Press release and nasa.gov