

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

**James R. Thompson Jr., Director
Marshall Space Flight Center
Huntsville, Ala. 35812**



James R. (J.R.) Thompson Jr. is director of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Ala.

He assumed that position on Sept 29, 1986, after having served three years as deputy director for technical operations at Princeton University's Plasma Physics Laboratory in Princeton, N.J. From March to June of 1986, he served as the vice-chairman of the NASA task force inquiring into the cause of the Space Shuttle Challenger accident. In that capacity, he headed the day-to-day operations of the 51-L Data and Design Analysis Task Force, which collected and analyzed accident-related information in support of the Presidential Commission on the Space Shuttle Challenger Accident.

Before assuming his position at Princeton University, Mr. Thompson spent 20 years with NASA at the Marshall Space Flight Center in various positions, including associate director for engineering in the Science and Engineering Directorate and as manager of the Space Shuttle Main Engine Project in the Shuttle Projects Office.

Mr. Thompson began his professional career in 1960 as a development engineer with Pratt and Whitney Aircraft in West Palm Beach, Fla.

He joined the research and development team at the Marshall Center in 1963 as a liquid propulsion system engineer responsible for component design and performance analysis associated with the J-2 engine system on the Saturn Launch Vehicle. In 1966 he joined the Space Engine Section in the former Propulsion and Vehicle Engineering Laboratory and became chief of the section in 1968. In that capacity, he was responsible for the design and test evaluation of auxiliary space engine propulsion systems for the Saturn Launch Vehicle and experimental small interplanetary propulsion systems.

In 1969, Mr. Thompson transferred to the former Astronautics Laboratory where he served as chief of the Man/Systems Integration Branch from 1969 to 1974.

In September 1974, he was named manager of the Main Engine Project of the Shuttle Projects Office. In that position he was responsible for the development and operation of the most advanced liquid propulsion rocket engine ever developed. He served in that position almost from the beginning of early development testing on the Shuttle main engine through the initial Shuttle flights.

In February 1982, Mr. Thompson was named associate director for engineering in the Science and Engineering Directorate. In this position, he was responsible for planning and executing the engineering overview, analysis, evaluation and support for all Marshall Center projects that were in the hardware development stage.



Born in Greenville, S.C., Mr. Thompson graduated from Druid Hills High School in Atlanta in 1954. He was awarded a bachelor of science degree in aeronautical engineering from the Georgia Institute of Technology in 1958 and a master of science degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Florida in 1963. He has completed all course work at the University of Alabama toward a Ph.D. in fluid mechanics. He served as a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy from 1958 to 1960 and was stationed at Green Cove Springs, Fla., as an administrative officer in the Atlantic Reserve Fleet.

Mr. Thompson is a member of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, Sigma Nu social fraternity, and Sigma Xi professional society.

He was awarded the NASA Medal for Exceptional Service in 1973 for his work on Skylab, and the NASA Medal for Distinguished Service in 1981 for this work on the Space Shuttle main engine. In 1982, President Reagan conferred on Mr. Thompson the rank of Meritorious Senior Government Executive.

The Marshall Center has a leading role in the space program. During the sixties and early seventies, the Center was best known for developing Saturn launch vehicles and lunar roving vehicles for the Apollo program and for Skylab, the first U.S. space station. The Center also has developed satellite scientific experiments, which have returned a wealth of data in astronomy, astrophysics, and other disciplines.

Currently, the Marshall Center is responsible for a wide variety of NASA projects ranging from development of the Edwin P. Hubble Space Telescope and production of the propulsion elements of the Space Shuttle to management of Spacelab Earth-orbital missions and other payloads for the Space Shuttle. Also, the Marshall Center has been given a substantial role in the development of Space Station, a permanent manned facility proposed by President Reagan to be in orbit by 1994. The station would offer the capabilities of scientific research and technology development by both government and industry; the commercial use of space in such areas as the manufacture of critical materials and pharmaceuticals not available on Earth; the assembly, servicing and repair of satellites and other large structures in space; and research focused on extending a human being's staying time in space as a first step toward even more ambitious manned space programs.

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