

Gene Kranz

A Blast from The Past



Biography

As the leader of the “Tiger Team” of flight directors who brought the Apollo 13 spaceship safely back to Earth on April 17, 1970, Gene Kranz demonstrated extraordinary courage and heroism. The hit film, *Apollo 13*, chronicles Kranz’s struggle to devise the plan that would safely bring the ship and its crew of three astronauts home after its oxygen system failed. Actor Ed Harris portrays Kranz in the film, which was directed by Ron Howard.

Kranz retired from NASA in 1994 after 37 years of federal service, and is currently a consultant and speaker. “Failure is not an option,” the motto that carried him through the Apollo 13 crisis, is a major theme of his motivational message.

After receiving his B.S. degree in aeronautical engineering from Parks College of St. Louis University in 1954, Kranz was commissioned in the

U.S. Air Force, and flew high performance jet fighter aircraft, including the F-80, F-86, and F-100. In 1958, he worked as a flight-test engineer for McDonnell Aircraft, developing the Quail Decoy Missile for B-52 and B-47 aircraft. Kranz joined the NASA Space Task Group at Langley, Virginia, in 1960, and was assigned the position of assistant flight director for Project Mercury. He assumed flight director duties for all Project Gemini Missions, and was branch chief for Flight Control Operations. He was selected as division chief for Flight Control in 1968, and continued his duties as a flight director for the Apollo 11 Lunar Landing before taking over the leadership of the Apollo 13 “Tiger Team.” He was discharged from the Air Force Reserve as a Captain in 1972.

He contributed his expertise to a number of other NASA missions during his career, including the Skylab Program. After the Skylab Program concluded, he was named deputy director of Flight Operations for NASA, which gave him the responsibility for space flight planning, training and mission operations, aircraft operations, and flight crew operations. In 1983, he was assigned the post of director of Mission Operations, and given the responsibility for all aspects of mission design, development, maintenance, and operations of all related mission facilities, as well as the preparation of the Space Shuttle flight software.

Kranz has received many awards and honors, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom, which he received from President Nixon for the Apollo 13 mission, and his designation as a Distinguished Member of the Senior Executive Service by President Reagan.

After retirement Kranz served as a flight engineer on a B-17 “Flying Fortress”, constructed an aerobatic bi-plane and in April 2000 published a memoir about his experiences in the space program, *Failure is Not an Option: Mission Control from Mercury to Apollo 13 and Beyond*. His book, a New York Times Bestseller, has been selected by the History Channel as the basis for a documentary on Mission Control. He and his wife are the parents of six children, and reside in Texas.