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Astronaut Training Ground

While most NPS graduates are still assigned to sea missions, so many are venturing into the “Final Frontier” that NPS is among the top four schools in producing future astronauts. Since moving to Monterey from the Naval Academy in 1951, NPS has already graduated 35 astronauts, some 20 of whom have flown Space Shuttle missions. Three dozen Shuttle missions included former NPS students, who have launched dozens of communication satellites; conducted physics and medical experiments in zero gravity; and helped build the International Space Station. Three graduates flew Apollo moon missions, with alumnus Capt. Eugene Cernan the last man to walk on the moon. Three served aboard America’s first experimental space station, Skylab. Of the 210 Navy selectees for NASA’s Space Shuttle Astronaut Program announced this April, nearly half - 98 - were NPS graduates. Of those 210, fewer than 30 make the final cut in any Astronaut Candidate Class. Last year, five of the eight Naval and Marine aviators selected for the 1998 Astronaut Candidate Class were NPS graduates. Many of these future and past astronauts did their thesis work under the NPS Space Systems Academic Group, which launched PANSAT.

“NPS was essential to my becoming an astronaut,” said Capt. Winston Scott, a former Aeronautical Engineering student who has completed numerous Shuttle missions constructing the International Space Station. “Without the education I received here, I wouldn’t have been prepared for what I do now. I could not have become an astronaut without it.”

In 1986, the relationship between the Naval Postgraduate School and NASA Ames Research Center (ARC) was strengthened and formalized through the formation of the Navy-NASA Joint Institute of Aeronautics, dedicated to inventing and improving future aero and space technologies, under the direction of Distinguished Professor Max Platzer. The Institute fosters communication between NPS, other DoD agencies and ARC; makes NASA’s expertise and research and test facilities available to NPS faculty and students; facilitates bilateral exchanges through courses and seminars; and identifies and creates thesis opportunities for students and research openings for post-doctoral fellows and visiting research scientists, at the NASA facility. NASA Ames’ most recent listing of its own major accomplishments, in its report to the Office of Aero-Space Technology, includes research by NPS Aeronautical Engineering student Lt. Pete Tyson on rotor design options. Four of eight listed “Technical Highlights” were also contributions by NPS officer students.

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