

NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION

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America's dedication to aeronautics and flight research began in 1915 with the creation of the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA). The NACA was created by a rider to the Naval Appropriations Act of 1915, with a budget of \$5,000. In the four decades following the inception of the NACA, advancements in aeronautics, rocketry, and other scientific fields led to the proliferation of societies, panels, and committees dedicated to aeronautics and space research.

On 18 January 1958 the NACA recommended to President Eisenhower that a national space program be implemented through the cooperation of the DoD, NACA, National Academy of Science, National Science Foundation, universities, research institutions, and industrial companies.

The President recognized the pitfalls of a decentralized national space program, and on 6 February 1958 he recommended a different approach to Congress. The President's proposal called for the establishment of a National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) into which the NACA and several other research societies would be absorbed. The Bureau of the Budget approved the creation of NASA and on 29 July 1958 President Eisenhower signed the National Aeronautics and Space Act, which formally created the agency. It took less than 90 days for NASA to be organized and prepared to discharge its duties, and on 1 October 1958 NASA officially took its place as the country's sole agency for civilian space research and development. The primary mission of NASA remains to conduct and coordinate United States nonmilitary research into the problems associated with flight, both within and beyond the earth's atmosphere. Currently NASA employs more than 15,000 personnel, mostly scientists, engineers and technicians.

Until Congress passed the Government Employee Incentive Award Act in 1954, employees of the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics did not have any unique awards to recognize their service or achievements. The sole sources of recognition for members of the NACA were military awards or awards from private foundations and organizations.

The board of directors for the NACA recognized the value of instituting their own system of awards. On 30 November 1954, the NACA established two honor awards, a Distinguished Service Medal and an Exceptional Service Medal. When NASA officially replaced the NACA it inherited these two awards and there was little or no break in the honor awards program.

The final award presentation of the NACA and the first honor award presentation of NASA, both Distinguished Service Medals, were less than one year apart. The NACA presentation was during the Committee's final meeting on 21 August 1958, to its first employee and Executive Secretary, John F. Victory. The NASA presentation to John B. Crowley, Jr., a national leader in aeronautical science and NASA's first Director of Aeronautical and Space Research, occurred on 30 June 1959 on the occasion of his retirement.

NASA initially instituted only three awards: the Distinguished Service Medal (DSM), the Outstanding Service Medal (OSM), and the Exceptional Service Medal (ESM), similar in design and intent to the original two awards of the NACA.

By mid-1961, with only three DSMs awarded and two OSM awards, and with only a draft proposal for criteria for the ESM in existence, NASA, bowing to pressure from the Commission of Fine Arts, decided to enlist the services of the United States Army Institute of Heraldry to assist in developing a new series of awards which better reflected the mission of NASA.

The results of this collaboration initially produced four awards: a redesigned Distinguished Service Medal and three new awards, all of equal rank, to replace the Exceptional Service Medal. The new medals were the Outstanding Leadership Medal, the Exceptional Scientific Achievement Medal, and the Exceptional Bravery Medal. The Outstanding Service Medal was discontinued. Over the years NASA has continued to expand its awards program, which currently includes 11 individual medals which reflect NASA's unique, and often dangerous mission.

Unlike the military services, which have a decentralized awards system, the NASA awards system is administered by a central Incentives Award Board (IAB), which is chaired by the Associate Deputy Administrator. Once each year the IAB calls for nominations from each installation, reviews the nominations, and either approves or disapproves the awards nomination. Currently each installation is limited to a maximum of 25 nominations.

The pyramid of honor for NASA awards also reflects the unique nature of NASA and its mission. Unlike the various branches of the Armed Forces, most NASA awards are considered to be of equal precedence. the order of precedence for NASA awards is:

1. Congressional Space Medal of Honor *
2. Distinguished Service Medal
Distinguished Public Service Medal
3. Outstanding Service Medal (Obsolete)
4. Outstanding Leadership Medal
Exceptional Scientific Achievement Medal
Exceptional Engineering Achievement Medal
Exceptional Bravery Medal
Exceptional Service Medal
Exceptional Achievement Medal
Public Service Medal
Equal Employment Opportunity Medal
Space Flight Medal

* Although not awarded by NASA, the CSMoH is the highest award NASA personnel can earn.

CONGRESSIONAL SPACE MEDAL OF HONOR

The Congressional Space Medal of Honor is not part of NASA's pyramid of honor. However, it represents the highest award an astronaut or other NASA employee may receive. Authorized by Public Law 91-76 on 29 September 1969, the Congressional Space Medal of Honor is awarded in the name of the President of the United States to any astronaut who distinguishes himself or herself by exceptionally meritorious service and contributions to the welfare of the United States and of mankind.

To date, only seven astronauts have received this prestigious award. The first six were presented by President Jimmy Carter on 1 October 1979 to Neil Armstrong, Frank Borman, Charles Conrad, Jr., John Glenn, Alan Shepard, Jr., and Virgil "Guss" Grissom (posthumously). The seventh medal was awarded by President Ronald Regan to John Young in April 1981.

The original government contract called for twelve medals to be produced by the Medallic Art company of New York at a total cost of ten thousand dollars. The diamond in the center of the Congressional Space Medal of Honor is the only gemstone set in an American decoration or medal.

The ribbon of the Congressional Space Medal of Honor is Gold/Dark Blue/Sky-Blue/Blue/Red/Blue/Sky-Blue/Dark Blue/Gold. The medal, its miniature, its ribbon and lapel devices are shown on the cover of this issue.

NASA DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL

The Distinguished Service Medal (DSM) was one of the two awards inherited by NASA when it absorbed the NACA, and is the highest honor that NASA confers. The DSM is intended for award to any individual serving in any capacity with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, or any other Federal agency, who distinguishes himself or herself by service, ability, or courage, and has personally made a significant contribution to the NASA mission or the interests of the United States.

The Distinguished Service Medal exists in two types. The first design, a gold circular planchet bearing the NASA seal, was awarded from 1959 to 1961. See Figure 1) This first design is obsolete and has been superseded by the current design. Only three individuals received the first style NASA DSM. They were: J. W. Crowley, Alan B. Shepherd, and Virgil T. "Guss" Grissom. Its ribbon is Dark Blue/Blue/Sky-Blue/Light Blue/White/Light Blue/Sky-Blue/Blue/Dark Blue.

NASA has been very conservative in awarding the DSM. Between 1958 and 1989 only 364 Distinguished Service Medals were awarded.

The second style Distinguished Service Medal is shown at Figure 2. The ribbon is Sky-Blue/Light Blue/Dark Blue/Light Blue/Sky-Blue.