

Determining atmospheric composition

Commemorating Kitty Hawk

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2023

YEAR-IN-REVIEW



Celebrating 50 years since the launch of Skylab and other anniversaries

BY MICHAEL MACKOWSKI

The **History Committee** works to preserve the record of aerospace advances and recognize their impacts on modern society.

May 14 marked the 50th anniversary of the launch of **Skylab**, the first U.S. space station. Plans had called for the inaugural crew of astronauts to launch 24 hours later, but damage to the spacecraft's micrometeoroid shield and solar arrays shortly after liftoff prompted NASA to delay that launch. After being launched to the station on May 25, the astronauts made a series of on-orbit repairs during their 24-week stay, the first of three long-duration crewed missions to Skylab. This year, commemorative celebrations were held between May and September at **Space Center Houston** in Texas, the **U.S. Space and Rocket Center** in Alabama, the visitor complex at **NASA's Kennedy Space Center** in Florida and the **Museum of Flight** in Seattle. Multiple online events and lectures on the Skylab program were also hosted throughout the year.

Several events recognized other historical moments in space exploration. In May, the **Space Museum and Grissom Center** in Missouri held its annual Show Me Space event. The theme was "Women in Space" and featured several female astronauts and pioneering aerospace engineers. The event highlighted the history of female astronauts and stories from the designers of early crewed spacecraft and included readings from a new children's book, book signings and guest lectures. In July, the **Gus Grissom Boyhood Home** museum in Indiana hosted its Galactic Gathering, honoring the contributions of astronauts from the state. The event was held in Mitchell, the hometown of Apollo 1 astronaut Gus Grissom, and his brother and son attended.

The U.S. National Park Service's National Center for Preservation Technology and Training held the **Preserving the Race for Space Symposium** in June. The conference in Cape Canaveral, Florida, highlighted challenges and accomplishments of the preservation of space exploration facilities and artifacts. Attendees included conservators, curators, cultural resource managers, scientists, engineers and collection owners. Attendees were given tours of NASA Kennedy and Cape Canaveral Space Force Base, which included NASA's Vehicle Assembly Building and original Vanguard launchpad and blockhouse.

In April, **Boeing** opened a new home for the vast Boeing archives. Company historian Michael Lombardi and his team moved to a former 747 assembly

building in Auburn, Washington, which now houses documents and artifacts going back to the earliest days of the company.

June 25 marked the 100th anniversary of the first demonstration of **air-to-air refueling** via a hose and valve system. Flying over Rockwell Field in San Diego, a modified DH-4B pumped gasoline to a second DH-4B flying below. This development enabled an October flight that was the first nonstop north-to-south crossing of the U.S.

June 26 was the 75th anniversary of the start of the **Berlin Airlift**, in which the U.S. and British air forces delivered food and supplies to Allied-controlled west Berlin after the Soviet Union blockaded the roads. In 278,000 flights between June 1948 and September 1949, aircrews delivered 2.3 million tons of coal, food and other supplies, initially with **C-47s** and other aircraft and later with four-engine **C-54s**. To mark the anniversary, the exhibition, "Blocked Victors — Divided Berlin: 75 Years of the Airlift," opened in June at the Tempelhof Airport in Berlin.

In other anniversaries, Aug. 1 marked 100 years since the first test flight of the **DB-1B**. This day bomber was the U.S. Army's first all-metal, thick-wing experimental monoplane, primarily built of duralumin. ★

Contributors: Jonathan Coopersmith, Deborah Douglas, Walter Gordon and Kevin Rusnak

▼ The final crew of NASA's Skylab took this photo of the lab from their command and service module after they departed in November 1973 to return to Earth. The lone solar array at right was manually deployed by the first Skylab crew earlier that year; the other array was torn off shortly after the station was launched in May.

NASA

