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THE FAILURE OF APOLLO: NASA'S MISTAKES - AND OURS

Abstract

The Apollo Program is case study for today. One of the greatest achievements in history spanned a little more than a decade and then, as General MacArthur said of old soldiers, "Just faded away."

Spending on Apollo began in 1960 with 100,000 *fort technical studies. It rose rapidly thirty thousand – fold to a peak in 1966 – and then plummeted. By the time Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walked on the Moon, spending on Apollo*

From the last flight of Apollo there was a six year gap until the first flight of the Space Shuttle, and from the last flight of the Shuttle until today there has been another eight year gap in manned flight by the United States.

How could a program that was as spectacularly successful as Apollo not carry NASA forward to new and even greater accomplishments? Mistakes by NASA and by us, those who both inside and outside the space-related companies who care, understand, and value that a vital space program brings to the nation.

What were NASA's mistakes? Among them was the fact that the Apollo program was marketed to the public that the Apollo program would be deemed a success when man walked on the moon, well before planned program end. Next, NASA sold the Space Shuttle to Congress and the people as being nothing more than a prosaic truck. Third, NASA did not take advantage of what I term the "spiritual," inspirational element of space flight. Fourth, space was and often continues to be discussed and sold through language that appeals to scientists and engineers, not typical citizens.

What were our mistakes? First, we have fallen prey to the "but those were special times" mantra. Then was the height of the Cold War, but today is the height of private investment in space. Next, we believe that the U.S. and U.S.S.R. just dumped money into the programs then, but spending today on space greatly exceeds spending then. Finally, then there were Korolov and von Braun, but today there are two 35 year olds in each organization ready and waiting to be unleashed.

This paper explores the mistakes – and the solutions – surrounding Apollo to allow the United States to build a robust, manned space program to inspire the next generation.