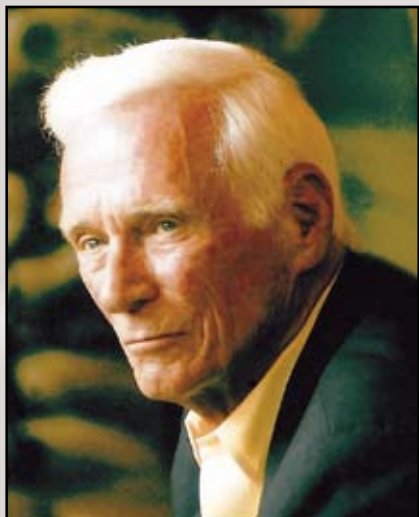




2008 NATIONAL SPACE TROPHY RECIPIENT - Eugene Andrew Cernan

Rotary National Award for Space Achievement



Eugene Andrew Cernan.
(Photo courtesy of The Cernan Corporation)

The Rotary National Award for Space Achievement (RNASA) Foundation recognizes retired Navy Captain Eugene Andrew Cernan with the 2008 National Space Trophy “for outstanding achievements as an astronaut; second American to walk in space; crew member on second flight to the moon; commander of the last landing on the moon; and as an advocate for space exploration and education.”

The 2007 Trophy winner and former Flight Director Gene Kranz said, “I had the privilege of launching Cernan on his first mission into space and again at the beginning of his journey on Apollo 17. Geno, as he was known to the controllers, left nothing to chance. His preparation for a mission was flawless, in-flight performance top-notch, and post-flight parties for the memory books.”

A second-generation American of Czech and Slovak descent, Cernan was born in Chicago, Illinois, on March 14, 1934. After watching WW2 movie news of Navy pilots, he decided, “That’s what I want to do!” (Cernan, *Last Man on the Moon*, [New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999], 21). His father, Andrew Cernan (1904-1967), taught the budding engineer about engines through work on his grandfather’s Model A Ford. Cernan played football, worked as a golf caddy, and graduated 14th out of 762 students from Proviso Township High School in 1952. He headed to Purdue in Indiana.

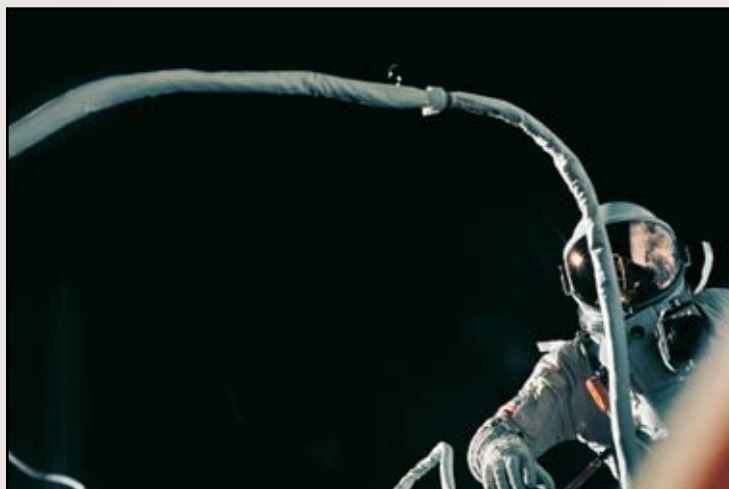
With help from a Navy scholarship, Cernan received his BS in electrical engineering in 1956. He earned his wings in November of 1957, a month after Sputnik launched. But he almost didn’t survive pilot training. During an exercise at the “Top Gun” school in California, he clipped a target pole and “came within six inches of ... a catastrophic explosion.” His squadron buddies gave him a banner saying, “Order of the Bent Pole—Limited to Living, Low-flying Aviators” (ibid, 38).

On leave from aircraft carrier duty in 1959, he met a Continental Airlines stewardess, Barbara Atchley. They were married in 1961 and moved to Monterey, California while he worked on his master’s in aeronautical engineer-

ing at the U.S. Naval Post Graduate School. Their daughter Tracy was born in March 1963. A few months later, he got a call asking if he’d volunteer for the astronaut program. “Well, yes sir!” Cernan responded. “Not only that, sir, but hell, yes! Sir!” (ibid, 53). He finished his degree and reported to Johnson Space Center as one of 14 new astronauts.

Cernan’s first mission, Gemini 9, launched on June 3, 1966. The flight required the launch of a rendezvous target followed by the separate launch of the crew. The crew performed the rendezvous in record time. But docking was not possible because the nose shroud remained attached. Commander Tom Stafford (1930--) radioed Houston, “We have a weird-looking machine up here. It looks like an angry alligator” (ibid, 122). Nevertheless, the crew successfully demonstrated multiple rendezvous techniques.

At an altitude of 161 miles; Cernan became the second American to walk in space. “I grabbed the edges of the hatch and climbed out of my hole until I stood on my seat.” He



Cernan Gemini 9 spacewalk. (NASA)

likened the view to “sitting on God’s front porch” (ibid, 131).

His bliss was unfortunately short-lived. He struggled with “the snake” of his umbilical and his unbendable suit until his visor fogged. He barely squeezed back inside the capsule. His two-hour-and-ten-minute ordeal provided experience critical to the success of future spacewalks.

Cernan’s next flight, Apollo 10, was also commanded by Stafford. This “dress rehearsal” for the moon landing included John Young (1930--) as command module pilot. Launching on May 18, 1969, Apollo 10 became the second human flight to leave Earth orbit.

While Young flew the command module, Stafford and Cernan steered the lunar module to

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Apollo 10 lunar descent, May 1969. (NASA)

for only two more seconds, Tom and I would have crashed” (ibid, 218). The flight returned safely to Earth on May 26, 1969.

Cernan commanded the final flight of Apollo to the Moon. Apollo 17 launched in darkness on December 7, 1972. “There was a brilliant and frightening burst of orange fire below the Saturn when the five huge engines ignited with a fury that shook the land and sea for miles around, and thick columns of white smoke boiled into the spotlights ... [and] rushed away across the low ground. For nine long seconds, the power built and the thunderclap roar spread over the sand dunes and



Apollo 17 night launch, December 7, 1972. (NASA)

marshland, making people in the grandstands three miles away cover their ears and shield their eyes as the deafening, staccato blast shoved against their bodies hard enough for them to feel shirt buttons press against their chests” (ibid, 302).

While Ronald Evans (1933-90) orbited in America, Harrison “Jack”. Schmitt (1935--) and Cernan descended to the surface in Challenger. Upon landing, Cernan was im-

pressed by the silence. “Not the song of a bird, the bark of a dog, not a whisper of wind or any familiar sound from my entire life” (ibid, 319).

They spent three days on the surface, setting records including: longest lunar landing (301 hours 51 minutes); longest lunar extravehicular activities (22 hours 6 minutes); largest sample return (about 249 lbs.); and longest time in lunar orbit (147 hours 48 minutes).

After parking the rover, Cernan knelt and wrote his daughter Tracy’s initials in the lunar dust. The more formal plaque signed by the crew and President Nixon reads, “Here Man completed his first explorations of the moon. December 1972 AD. May the spirit of peace in which we came be reflected in the lives of all mankind.”

At the conclusion of Apollo 17, Cernan had logged

more than 566 hours in space. From 1973 through 1975, he served as a senior negotiator for the Apollo/Soyuz project. He left NASA and retired from the Navy in July 1976.

Cernan served as a vice president of Coral Petroleum, Inc. from 1976 to 1981. In 1981, he founded The Cernan Corporation, an aerospace technology and marketing consulting firm of which he remains President and CEO. He served as a consultant for Digital



Stafford and Cernan (in light coats) with cosmonauts in Moscow, Nov. 1973. (NASA)

Equipment from 1986 to 1992, and as chairman of Johnson Engineering from 1994 until their acquisition by SPACEHAB in 2000.

Cernan has acted as a special technical consultant for television shows including ABC News and ESPN’s documentary, “Earthwinds Hilton.” His autobiography, *The Last Man on the Moon*, was published by St. Martin’s Press in 1999.

Cernan and Barbara divorced in 1981. He married Jan Nanna in 1987. Residents of Houston, they have three daughters and nine grandchildren. His hobbies include a love for horses and all competitive sports activities.

Cernan’s many accomplishments have earned him honors from the Navy, NASA, academia, the U.S. and foreign governments. The RNASA Foundation is privileged to further recognize Gene Cernan with the National Space Trophy.

