

Going out with a **BLAST** - Employees take pride in space shuttle main engine program

Matthew Montgomery | DCMA Public Affairs

History was made recently when Space Shuttle Atlantis launched into the 135th and final mission of the Space Shuttle Program from Kennedy Space Center, Fla. An estimated one million people were on hand for the momentous occasion, including Defense Contract Management Agency employees close to the program.

“It was quite an experience,” said Beverly Compton, DCMA NASA Product Operations Pratt & Whitney Rocketdyne technical group manager. “Standing with a swelling crowd of nearly one million people and watching for the final time as the three space shuttle main engines ignited and boosted the shuttle into orbit was awesome – the experience of a lifetime.”

Compton and three other employees from the Canoga Park office made the trip to Florida as part of a scheduled program meeting. As part of the trip, they were able to witness the final launch.

When Atlantis landed at the Kennedy Space Center, the program officially ended. For more than 30 years, shuttles were powered by the Space Shuttle Main Engines, produced by Pratt & Whitney Rocketdyne with oversight by DCMA NPO PWR personnel. To commemorate the event, Pratt & Whitney Rocketdyne held a dedication ceremony to recognize those employees who had contributed to the program’s overall success.

“It was truly rewarding to be honored at the ceremony, among the many colleagues, contractors, customers and subcontractors I’ve worked with over the last 20 years,”



Lucio Salvador, Defense Contract Management Agency NASA Product Operations Pratt & Whitney Rocketdyne quality assurance technical lead, (front second from right) poses for a picture with colleagues working on the Space Shuttle Main Engine Program. (Contributed Photos)

said Compton, who has worked with the SSME program since 1992. “It was a moment of mixed emotions, both great pride and also sadness as the future at that time was still uncertain in regard to the next phase of space exploration.”

Compton began working with the program as a team supervisor over the procurement quality assurance group. She said during the height of the program, the group had a significant workload managing a minimum of 25 suppliers, many of which had multimillion dollar contract values.

Over the years, DCMA NPO PWR employees had the opportunity to be part of history and help shape the future

of space exploration. Al Pikes, DCMA NPO PWR deputy director, said the employees took great pride in being part of the program.

“The pride our employees have shown here working with the program is truly amazing,” said Pikes. “Every time a shuttle landed it pointed directly to the people working here who were making sure the engines performed as designed.”

“It’s hard to adequately express the sense of national patriotism achieved from working on one of the greatest national achievements of a generation,” said Compton. “I never hesitated to share with friends, family and the community the amazing experience I’ve had to





Lucio Salvador, Defense Contract Management Agency NASA Product Operations Pratt & Whitney Rocketdyne quality assurance technical lead, stands in front of an aircraft he worked on during his time in the Air Force.



Lucio Salvador, shown here in a 1968 photograph, was a member of the Air Force working on high profile programs like the SR-71 Blackbird spy plane prior to starting a career with the Defense Contract Management Agency

personally make an impact on human space exploration.”

Lucio Salvador, DCMA NASA NPO PWR quality assurance technical lead, started working on the program in 1982, one year after the maiden voyage of the Space Shuttle Program. Since then, he has performed the final review on every main engine that has been produced at the plant. He is also the longest tenured SSME employee and remembers vividly his first assignment and day on the job.

“I was assigned to the engine final assembly line where they had four engines being built at the same time,” said Salvador. “I was assigned to one engine and my job was to inspect, witness and verify every part that went into the engine.”

Salvador, 64, has worked for the government his entire adult life. Before DCMA, he was a member of the Air Force working on high profile programs like the SR-71 Blackbird spy plane. Watching the space shuttle launch for the last time was something he’ll never forget.

“I felt very lucky and proud to have been part NASA history and to have worked for the government for so many years,” said Salvador. “It’s all behind me now but I

can share my experiences with my children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. I have NASA, DCMA and God to thank for letting me be part of this major program.”

Now that the program has come to a close, it doesn’t mean work has ended for the DCMA group. Compton said they will move on to other endeavors, but take with them the knowledge they helped make the program successful.

“There is always excitement at the onset of a national endeavor such as the SSME program,” said Compton. “It is no wonder that when the program comes to a conclusion there is a sense of loss. Fortunately, we take with us the confidence that the program performed as designed and often exceeded expectations.”

Many at PWR continue to support other significant programs like the International Space Station. “We look to the future with great expectations for space programs,” concluded Compton. ©



Beverly Compton, Defense Contract Management Agency NASA Product Operations Pratt & Whitney Rocketdyne technical group manager, stands in front of Space Shuttle Atlantis at Kennedy Space Center, Fla.