

June 2014

AEROSPACE

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Armstrong's new footprint

The first man on the moon now has another, more earthly legacy. The center where Neil Armstrong flew as a test pilot now officially bears his name.

"Before he put that footprint down on the moon, he put a footprint down right here," said California Congressman Kevin McCarthy, author of the resolution that designated the name change.

NASA's Dryden Flight Research Center was technically renamed the NASA Neil A. Armstrong Flight Research Center in March, but the change was celebrated with a formal ceremony on May 13. The complex is the primary research site for atmospheric flight, including space exploration and operations as well as aeronautical research and development. Formerly an alternate landing site for the space shuttle, the center is now developing launch abort systems for the Orion Multi-Purpose Crew Vehicle.

So why the name change? Armstrong logged more than 2,400 flight hours over seven years at the center,

taking to the air in 48 different planes — including the B-29, KC-135, X-1B and X-15. He applied his engineering skills as a research test pilot and took the rocket-powered plane to the limits of space, gathering data for future airplanes and spacecraft and testing the reaction control systems that would provide direction for those craft in a vacuum.

The facility was previously named for Hugh Dryden, an aeronautical engineer and NASA's first deputy administrator. Dryden's work contributed to high-speed flight research and the development of X-planes. He also led development of the "Bat," a radar-homing guided missile used in World War II to sink ships.

This isn't the first time the center has changed its name. In the past 70 years, it's been called NACA — the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics, NASA's predecessor — the Muroc Flight Test Unit, the NACA High-Speed Flight Station, the NASA High-Speed Flight Station, as well as

the NASA Hugh L. Dryden Flight Research Center.

But while Dryden is relinquishing a flight center, he's gaining a test range. The Western Aeronautical Test Range, whose radar systems and communications networks support research vehicles, satellites and even the ISS, is now the Hugh L. Dryden Aeronautical Test Range.

Several hundred people attended the May 13 ceremony, including the families of Armstrong, Dryden and others who have served at the center. NASA Administrator Charles Bolden noted that Dryden's leadership and aeronautical prowess helped pave the way for Armstrong's spectacular flight achievements.

"Both Dryden and Armstrong are pioneers whose contributions to NASA and our nation are unequalled," Bolden said. "This renaming is a fitting tribute that honors both their legacies."

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NASA's Neil A. Armstrong Flight Research Center, during May 13 ceremonies marking its renaming. In the foreground is the experimental X-1E, sister of the X-1B aircraft that Armstrong flew at the center.

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