



Robert H. Lawrence

S.S. Robert H. Lawrence

NG-13 Cargo Delivery Mission to the International Space Station

Northrop Grumman is proud to name the NG-13 Cygnus spacecraft after former astronaut Robert Henry Lawrence Jr. It is the company's tradition to name each Cygnus after an individual who has played a pivotal role in human spaceflight. Major Lawrence was selected in honor of his prominent place in history as the first African-American astronaut.

Robert Henry Lawrence Jr. was born in Chicago, Illinois, on October 2, 1935. Lawrence earned a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry from Bradley University before transitioning to the United States Air Force as an officer and pilot. As an accomplished pilot, he went on to accumulate more than 2,500 flight hours, including 2,000 in jets. During this time he also earned a doctorate in physical chemistry from The Ohio University in 1965. His Air Force honors included the Commendation Medal and the Outstanding Unit Citation.

On June 30, 1967, the U.S. Air Force selected Lawrence as a member of the third group of aerospace research pilots, also known as astronauts, for the Manned Orbiting Laboratory (MOL) program. This selection made Lawrence the first African-American to be selected as an astronaut by any national space program. MOL was a joint effort between the U.S. Air Force and the National Reconnaissance Office authorized with a goal to obtain intelligence on the country's cold war adversaries in the form of high-resolution images captured by crewed mini space stations in low Earth orbit.

As a senior pilot, Lawrence spent much of his career with the Air Force training other pilots in cutting edge flight maneuvers and techniques. It was during one such training session that Lawrence met his untimely death just six months after being selected for the MOL program. While practicing landing techniques later used in the space shuttle program, Lawrence perished in a crash of an F-104 Starfighter supersonic jet at Edwards Air Force Base in California.

Lawrence made the ultimate sacrifice in service to the space program, but his legacy lived on through several of his fellow MOL astronauts who joined NASA and flew space shuttle missions following the cancellation of the program. Although his career was cut short, he paved the way for future generations of aerospace pioneers of all races highlighting the need for diversity and inclusion across the industry.