

Brigadier General Joseph D. Mirth
Inducted 2018



Brigadier General Joseph D. Mirth was born on 30 March 1931 in Flint, Michigan. Raised in Chicago, Illinois, Mirth graduated Calumet High School in 1949, then attended Wilson Junior College and the University of Illinois before joining the U.S. Air Force as an Aviation Cadet in 1952. The next year, having earned his pilot wings and a second lieutenant's commission at Greenville AFB, Mississippi, he became an instructor pilot at Vance AFB, Oklahoma. Subsequently, Mirth entered Oklahoma State University, where he earned both Bachelor and Master of Science degrees in mechanical engineering in 1959.

Even before graduating, Mirth was recruited for the first Air Force satellite program, Weapon System (WS) 117L, which included: Corona, Samos, and Midas. He relocated to Sunnyvale, California, where he participated in an industry tour with Lockheed Missiles and Space Company, contractor for production of all three types of satellites. Mirth followed the development of an Agena, the Corona upper-stage vehicle, all the way from subsystem and full system testing through launch. This satellite, known as Discoverer 13, delivered the first capsule successfully recovered from space in August 1960.

In 1960, Mirth was assigned to the early test and launch organization at Vandenberg AFB, California, where he served as project officer for acceptance, processing, and launch of all Samos E1, E2, E5, E6 satellites and Gambit imaging spacecraft. He also became project chief and launch director for the Midas infrared missile detection satellite, and for Snapshot (Systems for Nuclear Auxiliary Power) 10A, a nuclear reactor launched on an Atlas/Agena vehicle in April 1965. Later, Mirth was named chief of the Satellite Control Section Engineering Division for the Gambit-cubed program in the Secretary of the Air Force Special Projects Office at Los Angeles; he also served as launch operations coordinator for every Gambit-cubed launch until 1970. During this period, Mirth also advised on the Manned Orbiting Laboratory (MOL) payload.

Mirth volunteered for Vietnam service in 1970. During this deployment, he managed electronic ground sensors throughout Southeast Asia for 7th Air Force. Returning to the United States in 1971, Mirth attended the Industrial College of the Air Force and graduated in 1972. He then became chief of the F-15 division at Air Force Systems Command headquarters, before rejoining his space colleagues, in 1976, as Space and Missile Test Center vice commander at Vandenberg AFB.

General Mirth's last active-duty assignment took him to Space Division (SD) in Los Angeles, California, in 1978, where he served as the SD deputy for Space Launch and Control Systems and as the Air Force Space Shuttle Program Director. In the latter capacity, he was responsible for the management, development and activation of numerous shuttle-related facilities: Space Launch Complex 6 and seven other new facilities at Vandenberg AFB; the Consolidated Space Operations Center near Colorado Springs; the Air Force "Controlled Mode" Firing Room at Johnson Space Center; and the Shuttle Payload Integration Facility at Kennedy Space Center (KSC). He was also responsible for the Inertial Upper Stage (IUS) and Titan 34D rocket developments. General Mirth retired from active duty in June 1982.

He worked, during 1982–1994, for United Technologies Corporation (UTC), where he initially managed the Joint Stars radar program for UTC's Norden Systems Division. Later, as UTC's Space Flight Systems Division vice president, Mirth developed the Cargo Shuttle (Shuttle C) concept and did concept studies for the Air Force Advanced Launch System. He later became Pratt & Whitney's USBI Senior Vice President for Advanced Engineering and Technology. As vice president and director of USBI operations at KSC in the early 1990s, Mirth had responsibility for the fourth largest contracting activity at KSC refurbishing and pre launch processing the Space Shuttle Solid Rocket Booster non-motor components. He also taught "Global Trade" classes in Florida schools, as a volunteer instructor, for a quarter century.