

Alexandria Times

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From Alexandria into space

Alexandria is fortunate to be the hometown of not one, but two astronauts. Guy Gardner and the Hon. Charles F. Bolden, Jr. distinguished themselves as combat pilots and astronauts. They also received honors as administrators after they retired as astronauts.

Both men piloted multiple Space Shuttle flights after piloting more than 100 combat flights each during the Vietnam War. After completing his astronaut career, Gardner went into academic administration. Bolden returned to active duty in the Marine Corps following his time as an astronaut. Later, then-President Obama chose Bolden as the 12th NASA Administrator.

Guy Gardner was born in Altavista, but he grew up in Alexandria, where he graduated from George Washington High School in 1965. Gardner completed his studies at the U.S. Air Force Academy in 1969 and received an M.S. in Astronautics from Purdue University a year later. He saw combat in Southeast Asia as an F-4 pilot based in Ubon, Thailand.

After several other tours in the Air Force, Gardner was selected for the NASA astronaut program in May 1980. He was assigned to pilot the first Space Shuttle flight from Vandenberg Air Force Base, California in 1984, but that flight was can-

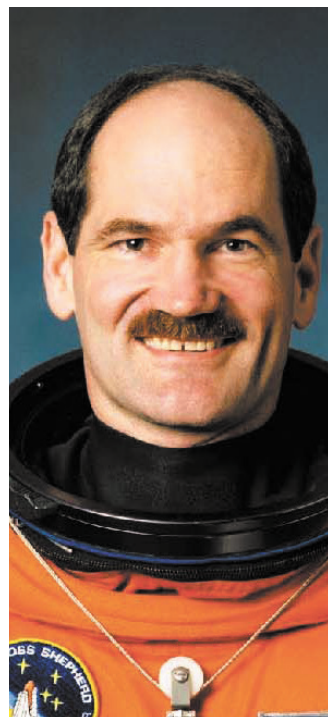
celed. Instead, he piloted the 27th Space Shuttle mission on board Atlantis in 1988.

Atlantis sustained substantial damage during its launch and Gardner and the rest of the crew were fortunate that they survived re-entry through the Earth's atmosphere. Gardner also piloted Columbia in 1990 for the 35th Space Shuttle mission, completing its primary mission of deploying the AS-TRO-1 astronomy laboratory.

After retiring from the astronaut program, Gardner commanded the U.S. Air Force Test Pilot School at Edwards Air Force Base, before returning to NASA to direct the joint U.S. Shuttle-Russian Mir Program. He later managed research programs at one of his alma maters, Purdue University, and served as president of the Williamson College of the Trades for four years.

Charles F. Bolden, Jr. grew up in Columbia, South Carolina but currently lives in Alexandria. Initially, Bolden was denied admission to the U.S. Naval Academy due to his race, thanks to the efforts of then-Sen. Strom Thurmond.

Bolden received his appointment after personally writing to President Lyndon Johnson and receiving an invitation from Illinois Congressman William Dawson. Like Gardner, Bolden was stationed



PHOTO/NASA

Astronaut Guy Gardner.



PHOTO/NASA

Astronaut Charlie Bolden.

in Thailand and saw combat in Southeast Asia as an A-6 pilot. Bolden was selected for the NASA astronaut program in 1980, like Gardner.

Bolden piloted two missions: STS-61C on Columbia in 1986, and STS-31 on Discovery in 1990. Bolden also commanded the 46th Space Shuttle on Atlantis in 1992, and the first U.S./Russian Shuttle-Mir mission on Discovery in 1994. Bolden returned to active duty in the Marine Corps after retiring as an astronaut in 1994.

In 2009, President Obama

nominated him as the 12th NASA administrator. His unanimous confirmation made him the first former astronaut and the first African American to serve in that role, which he held until 2017.

As NASA moves into a new era of manned space flight, Alexandrians can take pride in knowing that two leading astronauts of the Space Shuttle years had strong ties to our city.

Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.