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Musgrave Quits NASA

From: **UFO UpDates - Toronto** <updates@globalserve.net>
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Veteran U.S. astronaut Musgrave quits NASA, 2/10/97

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla (Reuter) - Veteran astronaut Story Musgrave, a six-time space flier who helped mastermind the first Hubble Space Telescope repair, said Monday he was leaving NASA after being told he would never fly in space again.

NASA officials told the astronaut a year ago that a November 1996 space shuttle mission would be his last. The space agency told the 61-year-old astronaut last week the decision was final.

"They told me I will not fly again, so I am leaving NASA," Musgrave said in an interview with Reuters. "It was not my decision. It was not a decision I could make."

His departure from NASA later this year would end a three-decade career with the space agency. Musgrave said although he would have jumped at the chance of flying in space again, he was not unhappy with the decision.

"I'm upbeat about it. I accept it," he said. "I've had one heck of a time of it. I've been able to do this for 30 years."

David Leestma, director of flight crew operations at NASA's Johnson Space Center, said it was time for Musgrave to make way for younger astronauts who need to gain experience for work on the planned international space station.

"I've got 50-plus people in the astronaut office right now who have never flown on the space shuttle," he said. "I've got to get them flight experience."

Musgrave turned down the offer of a desk job helping to train new shuttle crews, saying he wanted to pursue new projects.

"They wanted me to stay and work, but I'm a flier," he said. "I know my calling in space is not complete. It's going to move into a different realm."

Musgrave, who has appeared on NBC's "Tonight Show" and was the subject of a David Letterman "Top 10" list, said he was considering offers to host television programs on science, and wanted to find ways of communicating the romance of space flight to the public.

"There's five lifetimes of work out there that people want

me to do with them," he said. "Space needs to get turned into art, it needs to be communicated, it needs to be expressed."

Musgrave joined NASA in 1967 during the Apollo program, but had to wait until 1983 for his first space mission aboard the shuttle. He later flew on a shuttle flight dedicated to astronomy and two missions for the Department of Defense.

In 1993, Musgrave led a team of spacewalking astronauts who fixed the Hubble Space Telescope's blurred vision.

He made his sixth and last shuttle mission in November last year. The nearly 18-day flight, the longest for the shuttle, earned him an entry in the record books as the oldest person to fly in space and he equaled the record for the most space flights by an individual.

The self-confessed eccentric, instantly recognizable by his shinny bald head, has often talked about his belief in the existence of extra-terrestrials. He has tried to communicate with them during his missions through the power of thought, but so far has reported no success.

"Story doesn't necessarily fit the mold when most people think of the steely-eyed original seven astronauts," said Leestma. "He brings a free spirit philosophy to the whole thing."

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