

NewsRelease



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Mars Viking leader, James S. Martin, Jr., dies

Former NASA Langley manager of the Viking mission to Mars, James S. Martin, Jr., died April 14 after a long battle with cancer. Martin was 81.

"This country has lost one of the major contributors to the U.S. space program," Dr. Jeremiah F. Creedon, director of NASA's Langley Research Center, said of Martin's death. "Jim Martin's strong management of Project Viking ensured that one of NASA's most complex and difficult assignments was also one of the Agency's most successful endeavors."

Viking 1 and Viking 2, twin robot landers launched in 1975, touched down on the Red Planet a year later. Martin led this unprecedented effort and its 750-person nationwide team of NASA, industry and university engineers, scientists and technicians.

Viking management operations manager Angelo "Gus" Guastafarro remembers his mentor this way: "The greatest achievement in his professional life was the way Jim allowed individuals to grow. Many Viking team members dedicated nearly a decade to the formulation, development and operation of the Viking project. Each of us was provided an opportunity to grow as engineers, scientists and leaders."

"Jim Martin was the epitome of leadership," said Tom Young, Viking's mission director and former president of Lockheed Martin, on the occasion of the project's silver anniversary in July. "Jim had the experience. He knew what it took to make a project successful. He had the strength and the integrity to do those things that were necessary to make it work."

Viking found a place in history when it became the first U.S. mission to soft-land a spacecraft safely on the surface of another planet. The Viking project laid the groundwork for more recent NASA successes — like Pathfinder and Mars Global Surveyor — and Mars Odyssey that launched in April 2001.

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Martin joined NASA's Langley Research Center in September 1964 as assistant project manager for Lunar Orbiter. The five successful Lunar Orbiter missions provided significant new information about the Moon's surface and a wealth of photographic detail that stood as the definitive source of lunar surface information for years. In recognition of his contribution to this project, Martin was awarded the NASA Exceptional Service Medal in 1967.

Martin was born in Washington, DC, on June 21, 1920. He earned a bachelor's degree in aeronautical engineering from the University of Michigan in 1942. He later completed the Harvard Graduate School of Business Middle Management Program.

From 1942 to 1964, he worked for Republic Aviation Corporation, assuming greater responsibility first as assistant chief technical engineer, then chief research engineers and, finally, as manager of space systems requirements.

Martin left NASA in 1976 to become vice president of advanced programs and planning, for Martin Marietta Aerospace, Bethesda, MD.

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