

Astronaut Frank Borman, commander of the first Apollo mission to the moon, has died at age 95

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This late 1960s portrait shows U.S. Col. Frank Borman, commander of the Apollo 8 flight. Borman, who commanded Apollo 8's historic Christmas 1968 flight that circled the moon 10 times and paved the way for the lunar landing seven months later, has died. He was 95. Borman died Tuesday, Nov. 7, 2023, in Billings, Mont., according to a NASA statement Thursday, Nov. 9. Credit: AP

Photo/File

Astronaut Frank Borman, who commanded Apollo 8's historic Christmas 1968 flight that circled the moon 10 times and paved the way for the lunar landing the next year, has died. He was 95.

Borman died Tuesday in Billings, Montana, according to NASA.

Borman also led troubled Eastern Airlines in the 1970s and early '80s after leaving the astronaut corps.

But he was best known for his NASA duties. He and his crew, James Lovell and William Anders, were the first Apollo mission to fly to the moon—and to see Earth as a distant sphere in space.

"Today we remember one of NASA's best. Astronaut Frank Borman was a true American hero," NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said in a statement Thursday. "His lifelong love for aviation and exploration was only surpassed by his love for his wife Susan."

Launched from Florida's Cape Canaveral on Dec. 21, 1968, the Apollo 8 trio spent three days traveling to the moon, and slipped into [lunar orbit](#) on Christmas Eve. After they circled 10 times on Dec. 24-25, they headed home on Dec. 27.

On Christmas Eve, the astronauts read from the Book of Genesis in a live telecast from the orbiter: "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep."



Apollo 8 astronauts, suited up and ready to go, walk to a van heading for their Saturn V rocket for their moon orbit mission from Cape Kennedy, Fla., Dec. 21, 1968. Leading the way is Commander Frank Borman, followed by James A. Lovell and William A. Anders. Borman, who commanded Apollo 8's historic Christmas 1968 flight that circled the moon 10 times and paved the way for the lunar landing seven months later, has died. He was 95. Borman died Tuesday, Nov. 7, 2023, in Billings, Mont., according to a NASA statement Thursday, Nov. 9. Credit: AP Photo/File

Borman ended the broadcast with, "And from the crew of Apollo 8, we close with good night, good luck, a Merry Christmas, and God bless all

of you—all of you on the good Earth."

Lovell and Borman had previously flown together during the two-week Gemini 7 mission, which launched on Dec. 4, 1965—and, at only 120 feet apart, completed the first space orbital rendezvous with Gemini 6.

"Gemini was a tough go," Borman told The Associated Press in 1998. "It was smaller than the front seat of a Volkswagen bug. It made Apollo seem like a super-duper, plush touring bus."

In his book, "Countdown: An Autobiography," Borman said Apollo 8 was originally supposed to orbit Earth. The success of Apollo 7's mission in October 1968 to show system reliability on long duration flights made NASA decide it was time to take a shot at flying to the moon.



U.S. Astronaut Frank Borman chats with people on the Moscow subway in Russia, July 9, 1969. Borman, who commanded Apollo 8's historic Christmas 1968 flight that circled the moon 10 times and paved the way for the lunar landing seven months later, has died. He was 95. Borman died Tuesday, Nov. 7, 2023, in Billings, Mont., according to a NASA statement Thursday, Nov. 9. Credit: AP Photo/File

But Borman said there was another reason NASA changed the plan: the agency wanted to beat the Russians. Borman said he thought one orbit would suffice.

"My main concern in this whole flight was to get there ahead of the Russians and get home. That was a significant achievement in my eyes," Borman explained at a Chicago appearance in 2017.

It was on the crew's fourth orbit that Anders snapped the iconic ["Earthrise" photo](#) showing a blue and white Earth rising above the gray lunar landscape.

Borman wrote about how the Earth looked from afar: "We were the first humans to see the world in its majestic totality, an intensely emotional experience for each of us. We said nothing to each other, but I was sure our thoughts were identical—of our families on that spinning globe. And maybe we shared another thought I had, This must be what God sees."



Frank Borman ponders a question at news conference in Miami, June 3, 1986. Borman, who commanded Apollo 8's historic Christmas 1968 flight that circled the moon 10 times and paved the way for the lunar landing seven months later, has died. He was 95. Borman died Tuesday, Nov. 7, 2023, in Billings, Mont., according to a NASA statement Thursday, Nov. 9. Credit: AP Photo/Doug Jennings, File

After NASA, Borman's aviation career ventured into business in 1970 when he joined Eastern Airlines—at that time the nation's fourth-largest airline. He eventually became Eastern's president and CEO and in 1976 also became its chairman of the board.

Borman's tenure at Eastern saw fuel prices increase sharply and the government deregulate the airline industry. The airline became

increasingly unprofitable, debt-ridden and torn by labor tensions. He resigned in 1986 and moved to Las Cruces, New Mexico.

In his autobiography, Borman wrote that his fascination with flying began in his teens when he and his father would assemble model airplanes. At age 15, Borman took flying lessons, using money he had saved working as a bag boy and pumping gas after school. He took his first solo flight after eight hours of dual instruction. He continued flying into his 90s.



Apollo 8 astronauts, from left, James Lovell, command module pilot; William Anders, lunar module pilot; and Frank Borman, commander; stand in front of

mission simulator prior to training in exercise for their scheduled six-day lunar orbital mission at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, Dec. 18, 1968. Borman, who commanded Apollo 8's historic Christmas 1968 flight that circled the moon 10 times and paved the way for the lunar landing seven months later, has died. He was 95. Borman died Tuesday, Nov. 7, 2023, in Billings, Mont., according to a NASA statement Thursday, Nov. 9. Credit: AP Photo/File



Apollo astronaut Frank Borman, 92, pilots his T-34 Mentor in Billings, Mont. Borman, who commanded Apollo 8's historic Christmas 1968 flight that circled the moon 10 times and paved the way for the lunar landing the next year, died, Tuesday, Nov. 7, 2023. He was 95. Credit: Larry Mayer/The Billings Gazette via AP



Apollo 8 Commander Frank Borman poses in Billings, Mont, with a photograph of Earth taken as his spaceship orbited the moon 45 years ago. Borman, who commanded Apollo 8's historic Christmas 1968 flight that circled the moon 10 times and paved the way for the lunar landing the next year, died Tuesday, Nov. 7, 2023. He was 95. Credit: Larry Mayer/The Billings Gazette via AP

Borman was born in Gary, Indiana, but was raised in Tucson, Arizona. He attended the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, where he earned a bachelor of science degree in 1950. That same year, Borman married

his high school sweetheart, Susan Bugbee. She died in 2021.

Borman worked as a U.S. Air Force fighter pilot, operational pilot and instructor at West Point after graduation. In 1956, Borman moved his family to Pasadena, California, where he earned a master of science degree in aeronautical engineering from California Institute of Technology. In 1962, he was one of nine test pilots chosen by NASA for the astronaut program.

He received the Congressional Space Medal of Honor from President Jimmy Carter.

In 1998, Borman started a cattle ranch in Bighorn, Montana, with his son, Fred. In addition to Fred, he survived by another son, Edwin, and their families.

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