

NASA Legend Dale Myers Dies at 93; Helped Save Apollo 13

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Dale Myers, a famed NASA administrator who helped save the ill-fated Apollo 13 mission and resurrect the space shuttle program after the 1986 Challenger disaster, has died at his retirement home in La Costa.



Dale Myers wore a patch after losing an eye in an automobile accident before the mid-1950s. Image via Wikimedia Commons. His passing was announced in an 1,100-word death notice Sunday in The San Diego Union-Tribune.

Myers was 93 when he died May 19 at La Costa Glen, his home for 10 years. But he had lived intermittently in Leucadia since 1962, where he had a vacation home, said Janet Westling of San Marcos, one of his two daughters.

“He loved being independent,” Westling told Times of San Diego. “He didn’t stop driving, and was very happy and alive to the day he died. Friends of his say, ‘We all want to go that way.’”

A celebration of life was set for Sunday, Aug. 23, at the Village Church, 6225 Paseo Delicias, in Rancho Santa Fe.

Westling said her father appeared to have gotten up in the middle of the night to fetch a heating pad for a stomachache.

“He was alone,” she said. “I think he wanted it that way. He was laying on the floor where he could reach the plug for the heating pad on his belly.”

Myers was NASA associate administrator for manned space flight for four years, with his first launch being Apollo 13, which he later recalled as a “very educational experience.”

The near-disaster was made into a 1995 movie by Ron Howard.

In a [NASA oral history](#), Myers recalled how at launch in April 1970 “everything looked great down at the Cape. I got on an airplane to go back to Mission Control ... during the flight, and when I got off the airplane, my exec was there to meet me.”

Myers said, “How are things going?”

His colleague said, “Well, we seem to be having a little problem with the fuel cell.”

“I said, “Ah-oh. Let’s get over to Mission Control.”

Myers soon learned it was “a great big problem.”

“I set up a committee with — let’s see. I got Sam Phillips (previous director of the Apollo program) off of vacation,” he said in 1998. “He had left NASA by that time. I got him back. He was in the Bahamas someplace and I got him back to Houston.”

“I can’t remember who else was on that committee, but we had about five guys that met every eight hours through the flight and just kept in touch. We were in the position to be able to talk to the congressmen and the outside people.

“Still tried to keep it all within Mission Control as far as the activities are concerned, but we just wanted to stay up to date and bring in any ideas that we could think of that would help in the invention that had to go on during that [flight].”

Myers recalled the incident as a “very hairy deal.”

“It was almost a death experience,” he said. “This balancing of all this stuff, and then taking the chance on having not enough battery power to take care of the separation, but it worked.”

Glory Curtis of Pasadena, one of Myers’ five grandchildren, recalled how he was honored on the 45th anniversary of Apollo 13.

Family members sat with Myers at a VIP table March 21 at the San Diego Air and Space Museum.

“As the event started, astronauts and NASA administrators came up to Dale and greeted him, hugged him, told him how much they appreciated him,” she said.

The event went long into the night, she said, and Myers and his friends moved to leave.

“He stood up, and the moderator said something like, ‘Dale, wait, where are you going?’ His friend said, ‘He’s tired! It’s time to go,’ and the moderator said, ‘Ladies and gentlemen, Dale Myers is going to bed.’

“At that point the entire room burst into applause and gave him a standing ovation.”

She said the late Wally Schirra was a great pal of Myers — “they both had a sense of humor and we were often forwarded fun/witty/clever puns from Wally Schirra.”

In October 1986, 11 months after the Challenger shuttle exploded shortly after takeoff, Myers became deputy administrator of NASA. “Dale was initially unwilling to accept the position, but a telephone call from the ‘persuasive’ President Ronald Reagan proved convincing,” the U-T death notice said.

“Dale was tasked with helping the agency recoup and continue the space shuttle program; in a Senate hearing, Dale argued that the agency had lost its ‘hands-on, loving care’ and that the checks and balances system had ‘gone soft.’”

He stayed until May 13, 1989, and NASA historian Roger Launius credited Myers with returning a sense of optimism to the agency following the disaster, the notice said.

After Apollo 13, Myers’ teams sent four more missions to the moon and launched Skylab, America’s first space station. He also helped orchestrate the meeting of U.S. and Russian astronauts in space with the Apollo-Soyuz mission.

“During this time, he earned three NASA Distinguished Service Medals, one in 1971 for his work on the Apollo program, one in 1974 for his work on Skylab and the shuttle, and the third in 1974 for his work towards manned spaceflight.”

Dale Dehaven Myers was born Jan. 8, 1922, in Kansas City, Missouri, with a physician father who wanted his son to become a doctor.

In 1927, Myers met the legendary aviator Charles Lindbergh, whose historic solo flight across the Atlantic came that year.

“(My father) pushed me through the crowd, and he wasn’t a pushy guy,” Myers told the U-T’s Bruce Lieberman in 2008. “I don’t even know why he did it, but he pushed me through the crowd and I shook hands with Lindbergh.

“I was 5 years old, and that did it. That did it.”

His life’s course was set. At the University of Washington, where he would earn a 1943 bachelor’s degree in aeronautical engineering, Myers met Marjorie Baker Williams. They were married in 1943 and moved to Southern California. They were wed 66 years until her death.

In 1963, Myers worked for what later became Rockwell International, and soon began doing contract work for NASA’s space program.

“From 1964, he was the program manager of the Apollo program’s Command/Service Module Program. After a fire destroyed Apollo 1 in 1967, much of the program’s management was discharged; Dale, however, was retained.”

The death notice called him “a key member of the team that successfully landed Apollo 11 on the moon.”

He and Marge also lived in Fullerton, Pasadena and Arlington, Virginia.

“He was very involved with the business his father-in-law started, which was a bank called Continental,” Westling said. “Marge was on the board, then his daughter, me and also his grand-daughter.

In 2000, it became HomeStreet Bank and is now traded publicly on Nasdaq, she said.

“He was happy to see it spreading from the Northwest to the Southwest,” Westling said. “He’s always loved SoCal.”

Dale and Marge Myers were active in many San Diego groups, including Achievement Rewards for College Scientists, the exclusive group [QED](#) and Scripps, she said.

He doted on his grandchildren and great-grandchildren and eagerly took part in family reunions as he “quietly dispensed sound advice to his family and friends,” the notice said.

He traveled and stayed active at [La Costa Glen](#) until his passing.

Besides Janet and her husband, Mike, Myers is survived by a daughter Barbara of Fallbrook; five grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

In lieu of flowers, his family asked that donations be sent to the Dale and Marjorie Myers Scholarship in Aeronautics & Astronautics at the University of Washington Foundation, Box 359505, Seattle, WA 98195 or at [www.uw.edu/giving](http://www.uw.edu/giving) or the San Diego Air and Space Museum, 2001 Pan American Plaza, San Diego 92101, or [www.sandiegoairandspace.org](http://www.sandiegoairandspace.org).



Myers (with patch at center right) met with a NASA team to decide on landing for Apollo 16 in 1972. NASA photo

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