

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF REMARKS
IN A TELEPHONE CALL
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT
AND

JAMES C. FLETCHER
NASA ADMINISTRATOR

AND

JAMES MARTIN
PROJECT COORDINATOR
JET PROPULSION LABORATORY
PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

THE OVAL OFFICE

9:21 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Dr. Fletcher?

MR. FLETCHER: Hello, Mr. President. Jim Martin and myself are on the line.

THE PRESIDENT: It is nice to talk to you, Jim Martin.

Let me congratulate Dr. Jim Fletcher, the Administrator of NASA, and you, the Viking Project Coordinator, for the just wonderful and most remarkable success in this historic mission.

I also think it appropriate to thank the thousands and thousands of dedicated scientists, technicians and other NASA personnel involved across the country, as well as those from universities and private industry who gave such invaluable assistance over the long period of development and production.

I think it is amazing to think that in the span of a single lifetime, the exploration of air and space has grown from the dreams of a very, very few individuals to such a massive cooperative reality. We have gone from a flight of a few seconds and a few hundred feet for a year-long journey to Mars, crossing some 440 million miles.

Unfortunately, your search for a safe landing forced you to delay the Viking's landing beyond the scheduled July 4th date, but by an extraordinary coincidence, today is another historic anniversary. Seven years ago, July 20, 1969, we received a transmission from the moon telling us, "The Eagle has landed."

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Today's landing, like that one, represents the realization of a dream that is many, many centuries old. In a sense, it is even more significant for today we are touching another planet, one that has long excited mankind's imagination and this mission offers the possibility of a momentous discovery in the history of mankind -- the existence of life elsewhere in the universe.

If the experiments of Vikings I and II do not reveal living organisms, they will learn other secrets of the universe. They will tell us a good many things about our own planet, opening up new possibilities for exploration and should produce knowledge that will improve the quality of life right here on earth.

Our achievements in space represent not only the height of technological skill, they also reflect the best in our country -- our character, the capacity for creativity and sacrifice and a willingness to reach into the unknown.

To both of you Jims, and your associates, I have designated today, July 20, 1976, as Space Exploration Day and I strongly encourage all Americans to follow the progress of our Viking missions and to reflect on our journey into the unknown.

Now, either one of you two Jims, could I ask a few questions?

MR. FLETCHER: Carry on, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: As far as I can tell, what kind of shape is the spacecraft in?

MR. MARTIN: This is Jim Martin.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, Jim.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. President, the spacecraft seems to be extremely healthy. All the telemetry indications we have tell us it landed softly and safely. It is just taking beautiful pictures.

THE PRESIDENT: Just a few moments ago, before I came on the line, I saw some of the pictures and it is almost impossible to visualize that that quality of photography could be transmitted from 400-some million miles back to the United States and have such a clear resolution.

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What kind of movement, if any, do we anticipate and, if there is any movement on Mars, how will it appear?

MR. MARTIN: Well, Mr. President, if there is real fast movement, like an animal, I am afraid it will appear as a blur. If there is slow movement, like a rock rolling along, or a slow cloud moving by in the distance, we will probably see that go by.

Right now, all we are seeing is the landscape with what may be blue sky in the distance. We have only black and white at the moment, and we can't quite see what is on the landscape at the moment but, if anything moves slowly along on the landscape, we would see it.

THE PRESIDENT: Will you have other pictures which will be more definitive in a more localized area?

MR. MARTIN: Yes, we plan to take, over the next two or three days, a series that will be right out in front of the lander where we hope to dig a sample about eight days from now. We will look for a safe place to dig dirt that we will then put into the biology experiments and into the organic analysis experiments.

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THE PRESIDENT: Is there any time limit on how long you can take pictures of this quality?

MR. MARTIN: No, we believe from all of our testing that we should be able to take pictures through the primary mission, which extends to about the middle of November. There is nothing really to wear out. This is a line scan camera, facsimile camera. It takes a line at a time, that is why it takes quite a while to take a picture.

We will only get about three or four pictures a day, but they should all continue to be of good quality.

THE PRESIDENT: How long does it take, once the picture is taken, to get the necessary resolution back to us here on earth?

MR. MARTIN: The first picture you saw, which included the footpad, took about five minutes to take on Mars, and then it is transmitted by a relay radio up to the orbiter flying overhead. Then the orbiter sends the picture to earth and it takes about four times as long. So, it took 20 minutes to send back the first picture from the orbiter and then this bigger picture that is coming in now with the panorama will take about 40 minutes, with some factor.

THE PRESIDENT: Apparently everything is going extremely well, your spectrometers, your so-called cookers, as they are called, everything is going A Okay.

MR. MARTIN: Everything is really fine. We, of course, haven't and won't operate some of the instruments for a few days. We did measure the constituent composition of the atmosphere as we came down through it and all indications are that the instruments worked just fine. We don't know yet what the atmosphere is, but we will know in a few hours.

THE PRESIDENT: When do you anticipate that Viking II will go through a same process?

MR. MARTIN: Viking II arrives at the planet on August 7, and we will put it into orbit on that day. Right now our plan is to land it on September 4.

THE PRESIDENT: Have you picked the place where it will land or not?

MR. MARTIN: Not yet, Mr. President.

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MR. FLETCHER: No, Mr. President, we are still looking for two choices, one south of the Equator and one up closer to the polar cap, about 45 degrees north latitude.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, the two of them then will be there simultaneously and operating from different locations?

MR. MARTIN: Yes, that is one of our hopes because we have a seismometer on board, and if we can measure a Mars quake with both landers, then we can locate quite precisely where it is on the surface of the planet.

THE PRESIDENT: Do we have any plans for Viking III, et cetera?

MR. FLETCHER: Mr. President, we are thinking very hard about that right now. I just got a big bunch of applause on that question.

THE PRESIDENT: I suspected there might be approval among all of you for such a landing and such a project.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. President, the time is ready for Vikings III, IV, V and VI.

THE PRESIDENT: Give everybody my very best, Jim Fletcher and Jim Martin, and thank all of those there with you and transmit to all of the others, whether they were in our colleges, universities, and NASA, wherever else they were, for a job well done, and let me express to each of you and all of the group my very best wishes for a great job. We are all very proud of you.

MR. MARTIN: We appreciate those kind words, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Good luck.

END (AT 9:32 A.M. EDT)