

1940s: Foundations of Rocket Science

- 1945 (May)** WWII ends. Both the U.S. and USSR scramble to seize German rocket technology and scientists. U.S. captures Wernher von Braun and ~1,600 engineers under Operation Paperclip.
- USSR takes German engineers and equipment from Peenemünde and Mittelwerk.
- 1946 (Oct 24)** First U.S. high-altitude rocket launch using a captured V-2 from White Sands, New Mexico.
- 1947** First U.S. animals (fruit flies) sent into space aboard a V-2 rocket to study radiation.
- 1948** The Soviet Union begins R-1 rocket program (a near-copy of the German V-2).
- 1949** U.S. launches first monkey (Albert II) into space aboard a V-2; dies on impact.
- 1949 (Aug 29)** USSR detonates its first atomic bomb → Cold War competition intensifies, laying groundwork for linking rocketry with nuclear weapons.

1950s: Satellites and Early Spacecraft

- 1950 (Jul 24)** First launch from Cape Canaveral, Florida (Bumper 8 rocket).
- 1952** International Geophysical Year (IGY) planned for 1957–58; nations announce plans for satellites.
- 1955 (Jul 29)** President Eisenhower formally approves U.S. satellite project.
- 1955 (Aug 2)** USSR announces its own satellite project in response.

1950s: Satellites and Early Spacecraft (cont)

- 1956** U.S. begins Vanguard project (civilian satellite program).
- 1957 (Aug 21)** USSR successfully tests R-7 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM).
- 1957 (Oct 4)** Sputnik 1 launched by USSR: first artificial satellite. Sends radio pulses, shocks the West.
- 1957 (Nov 3)** Sputnik 2 carries Laika (dog), first living creature in orbit. Dies in orbit due to overheating.
- 1958 (Jan 31)** U.S. launches Explorer 1, first U.S. satellite; discovers Van Allen radiation belts.
- 1958 (Mar 17)** U.S. Vanguard 1 launched; still the oldest human-made satellite in orbit today.
- 1958 (Jul 29)** NASA founded from NACA and military research groups.
- 1959 (Jan 2)** USSR launches Luna 1 (first spacecraft to escape Earth's gravity, flies past the Moon).
- 1959 (Sep 12)** USSR's Luna 2 impacts the Moon → first human object to touch another celestial body.
- 1959 (Oct 4)** Luna 3 photographs far side of the Moon.

1960s: Humans Enter Space

- 1960 (Aug 19)** USSR's Sputnik 5 carries dogs Belka and Strelka into orbit and returns them alive.
- 1961 (Apr 12)** Yuri Gagarin, Vostok 1: first human in space, completes one orbit.
- 1961 (May 5)** U.S. astronaut Alan Shepard, Freedom 7: first American in space (suborbital).

1960s: Humans Enter Space (cont)

- 1961 (May 25)** JFK delivers speech to Congress, commits U.S. to a Moon landing before 1970.
- 1962 (Feb 20)** John Glenn, Friendship 7: first American to orbit Earth (3 orbits).
- 1963 (Jun 16)** Valentina Tereshkova, Vostok 6: first woman in space.
- 1964 (Oct 12)** USSR launches Voskhod 1: first multi-person crew (3 cosmonauts).
- 1965 (Mar 18)** Voskhod 2: Alexei Leonov performs first spacewalk (EVA), nearly dies during re-entry.
- 1965–66** (Gemini program, U.S.) – Series of crewed flights test docking, EVA, long-duration missions.
- 1966 (Feb 3)** USSR's Luna 9 achieves first soft landing on Moon.
- 1966 (Jun 2)** U.S. Surveyor 1 achieves first successful U.S. lunar landing.
- 1967 (Jan 27)** Apollo 1 tragedy: fire during ground test kills astronauts Gus Grissom, Ed White, Roger Chaffee.
- 1968 (Sep 15)** USSR's Zond 5 carries turtles and other lifeforms around the Moon and returns.
- 1968 (Dec 21–27)** Apollo 8: first crewed mission to orbit the Moon; "Earthrise" photo taken.
- 1969 (Jul 16–24)** Apollo 11: Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin land on the Moon (Jul 20); Michael Collins pilots command module.



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Not published yet.

Last updated 19th August, 2025.

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1970s: After the First Moon Landing

1970 USSR's Luna 16 brings first robotic
(Sept lunar soil samples to Earth.
12)

1971 USSR launches Salyut 1, the first
(Apr space station.
19)

1971 Soyuz 11 crew spends 23 days
(Jun aboard Salyut 1 (world record).
6– Tragically, all three cosmonauts die
30) on re-entry due to cabin depressurisation.

1971 U.S. launches Mariner 9, first
(Nov spacecraft to orbit another planet
13) (Mars).

1972 Apollo 17: last crewed Moon
(Dec landing; astronauts Gene Cernan
7– and Harrison Schmitt explore
19) Taurus-Littrow Valley.

1973 U.S. launches Skylab, its first space
(May station. Crewed missions continue
14)* until 1974.

1975 Apollo–Soyuz Test Project (ASTP):
(Jul U.S. Apollo and Soviet Soyuz dock
15– in orbit, crews conduct joint experi-
24) ments. Symbolic end of Space
Race and beginning of U.S.–Soviet
cooperation.



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