

Triumph of Mariner 4

Though all its findings are not yet in, it is already clear that Mariner 4's historic journey to Mars is the most successful and most important experiment man has yet conducted in space, as well as one of the most brilliant engineering and scientific achievements of all time.

An entire order of magnitude has been added to man's capabilities in the exploration of the solar system. Mariner 4 has now shown beyond doubt that an instrument capsule can be sent on a controlled flight for almost eight months over a distance of hundreds of millions of miles to a planetary destination at which it takes pictures and makes key scientific measurements that are sent back intelligibly and on schedule to researchers on earth.

The triumph scored by Mariner 4 in this first successful attempt at the exploration of Mars emphasizes a point suggested by the earlier achievements of instrumented probes, notably the Ranger photographic voyages to the moon. That point is that a great deal of scientific information about earth's nearest neighbors in the solar system can be obtained relatively cheaply and without risk to human life by utilizing fully the potentialities of existing instruments. Cameras and other research devices can undoubtedly be placed in orbit about or landed softly on the surfaces of the moon and nearby planets. And intensive exploitation of the capabilities of unmanned rockets can make far safer the ultimate dispatch of man into far distant space.

Unfortunately the decision was made four years ago to place the major emphasis of this country's space program on the attempt to land a man on the moon and return him safely by 1970. The enormous cost of this effort now in progress has inevitably meant that instrumented exploration of the solar system has become a matter of only secondary priority.

President Johnson remarked yesterday to Dr. W. H. Pickering, head of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory which is responsible for this latest success, that he hoped the National Aeronautics and Space Administration would use any money saved from other projects for financing similar ventures. The wisdom implicit in this remark has been late in coming. But now that it has arrived, there may be hope that the nation's

space planners will make a better-balanced allocation of their resources. If they do, both the needs of science and American prestige will be the gainers.