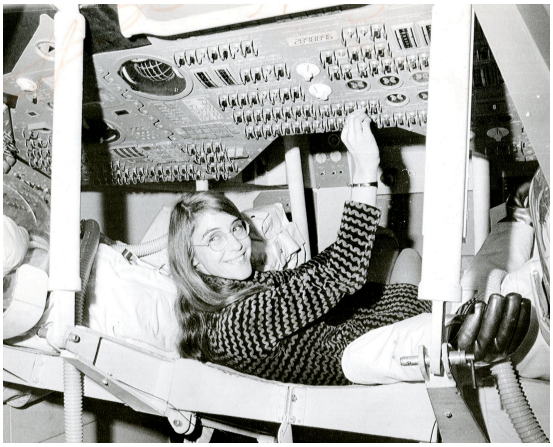
HOW DID MARGARET HAMILTON HELP APOLLO 11 REACH THE MOON?



WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Margaret Hamilton, the computer scientist whose software helped guide Apollo 11 to the Moon, has died aged 90. In the 1960s, she led the team that wrote the computer programs for NASA's Apollo missions. Computers were much less powerful than they are today, so the software had to be carefully designed to deal with problems during flight. During the Apollo 11 landing in July 1969, the spacecraft's computer became overloaded with information. Hamilton's software was able to keep the most important tasks running, helping the astronauts continue their descent. Hamilton later helped make the term "software engineering" widely known. At the time, some people treated software as less important than the physical machinery of a spacecraft. Her work showed that computer instructions could be just as vital as engines, rockets and metal equipment.

WHY IS THIS INTERESTING?

The Moon landing is often remembered through photographs of astronauts and rockets, but it also depended on invisible work done by programmers. Hamilton's story shows how technology changed during the Cold War and how women made important contributions to science even when they did not always receive equal recognition.

THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN

"Why was computer software as important as rockets during the Moon landing?"

Source: Smithsonian Magazine

https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/margaret-hamilton-a-pioneering-software-engineer-who-made-the-first-human-moon-landing-possible-dies-at-90-180