

Rolf Mamen – Director General of Space Operations at the Canadian Space Agency

A Life for Space down to Earth

Dr. Rolf Mamen's professional career began with a short consultancy with RCA-Limited relating to the HERMES communication satellite. He then joined the Canadian Department of Communications (DOC) as a research scientist at the Communications Research Center (CRC). His professional activities within CRC dealt predominantly with satellite orbit- and attitude determination/prediction and with inertial navigation. He gained experience in space program management at DOC Headquarters and then at the R&D branch of the Department of National Defense.

He returned to the CRC where in January 1982 he assumed responsibility for the management of the David Florida Laboratory (DFL), a Canadian facility for the integration and environmental test of spacecraft. Since that appointment DFL has successfully supported the projects ANIK-D, BrazilSat, Olympus, ANIK-E and M-Sat satellites. DFL also provided test support to the Mobile Services System (MMS), Canada's contribution to the International Space Station (ISS), and prepared Radarsat-2. Upon creation of the Canadian Space Agency the DFL was transferred to this new agency.

Rolf Mamen earned a B.Eng. (Hons) in electrical engineering at McGill University, Montreal, in 1966 and a Ph.D. in electrical engineering from Imperial College, University of London, U.K. in 1970. He retired from the Canadian Space Agency as Director General of Space Operations in 2007.

Rolf was born in Sudbury, Ontario, to Chris and Mabel (Hatcher) Mamen as the second of their six children, and moved from mining camp to mining camp until settling in St-Anne-de-Bellevue where he attended Macdonald High School.

Rolf was very proud of his ancestor Bjarne Mamen who joined the ill-fated Canadian Arctic Expedition in 1913-1916 (last voyage of the Karluk) under Captain Robert Bartlett, sadly enough Bjarne was not among the survivors but is mentioned as exceptional help for the survival struggle of his comrades.

The more Rolf Mamen was excited to join the initial mapping campaign of the Antarctic Mapping Mission NASA-JPL/CSA Radarsat mission in 1997. For this mission, the Canadian Space Agency's RADARSAT-1 satellite trained its imaging radar on the outer half of the continent twice during each of three consecutive 24-day periods, ending Nov. 14, 1997. "The mission was a challenge for us because we had to accurately navigate the satellite to within a few hundred meters of its nominal track on each orbit," said Rolf Mamen after completion of the first mission.

In 2002 Rolf Mamen was invited by the Steering Committee on Space Applications and Commercialization, National Research Council for the initiative "Toward New partnerships in Remote Sensing: Government, the Private Sector, and Earth Science Research" as distinguished panelist.

Rolf Mamen joined the international SpaceOps Organization as Executive Member in 2000 representing the Canadian Space Agency. From 2002 to 2006 he was one of the two SpaceOps co-chairs leading the preparation of the 8th International SpaceOps conference which was hosted by the Canadian Space Agency in Montreal in 2004.

He actively supported the creation of the SpaceOps Awards and was instrumental for the success of negotiating a conference service and custodian contract with the AIAA Organization for the SpaceOps Organization. He also initiated the restructuring of the SpaceOps committee meetings by introducing several working groups with focus on specific topics.

The Montreal SpaceOps conference in 2004 featured 312 papers and presentations. At that time the conference set a new standard for SpaceOps with the high quality of the selected papers and an impressive accompanying program, establishing the format of the conference as it is today. The Montreal conference will remain a highlight in the memory of all participants.

We were saddened to learn of the passing of Rolf Mamen on July 3, 2021. He was a valued member of our community, and friend to many of us.

“I remember the first time I met Rolf in the year 2000. Very level headed and helpful. SpaceOps benefited tremendously by having him on the Executive Committee.” (Andy Downen, NASA/JPL, Pasadena, USA)

“I will remember a gentleman who was always on the positive side of the discussion.” (Jean-Marc Soula, CNES, Toulouse, France)

“I have many happy memories of Rolf and our SpaceOps conferences and events. He was very professional and a great contributor to our organization.” (Trevor Sorensen, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, USA)

“Rolf was a very special person, a role model for my career, and we are so glad we were able to make his acquaintance and share precious time.” (Thomas Kuch, DLR/GSOC, Munich, Germany)

“I met Rolf in 2002, when I joined Satellite Operations organization at the CSA. He impressed me with the breadth and depth of his knowledge, his contagious smile, and athletic prowess (he was an elite cross-country skier, cyclist, soccer player, kayaker and loved other outdoor activities). I feel blessed to stay in-touch with him even after his retirement from the Agency and continuing to benefit from his wisdom.” (Guennadi Kroupnik, CSA, Montreal, Canada)



Rolf Mamen (left) and Claudio Canu (Italian Space Agency), SpaceOps co-chairs in 2006, present together with Trevor Sorensen the first SpaceOps Award in Rome 2006 to Joachim Kehr (DLR).