nical problems. Many of the RTG people, especially those assigned to facilities away from headquarters, did not experience the "changed climate" that Carpenter recalled. They remained relatively insulated from the changes in the parent organizations of the RTG program. At least on Viking, they were caught up in the excitement of teams of professionals who were realizing life-long dreams.

Viking to Mars

No space missions after Apollo recaptured the dynamism and public interest generated by the race to put a man on the Moon. However, Viking unmanned missions to Mars had a special fascination of their own. A select audience found Mars an exciting frontier for human exploration; some of this excitement carried over to a larger public that, even as it turned away from the space program, had become caught up in the Space Age. Audiences captured by "Star Trek" and "2001, a Space Odyssey" were among those enchanted by close human examination of the mysterious red planet.[19]

Mars was considered a prime candidate for hosting life in some form. The Viking missions to Mars would put down unmanned "Lander" probes from orbiting vehicles. These Landers would carry experiments whose primary purpose was to search for evidence of life. For a long time, mission planners had argued that the Landers could not rely on solar power and would require isotope power systems in order to perform in the extreme temperatures, winds and nights of Mars. Jerry Soffen, NASA Viking project scientist, contributed to early planning of biological experiments to search for evidence of life on Mars. When NASA's Langley facility became involved in the soft Mars landing, Soffen left the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in Pasadena, California, and went to Langley as project scientist. Langley, with Jim Martin as project manager and Tom Young as mission director, assumed responsibilities for the total Viking mission and for the Lander, while JPL retained responsibility for the Orbiter subsystem. "Viking was pretty big," Soffen said. "Of course nothing came close to the magnitude of Apollo—which absorbed almost everyone at NASA. But in its day, I would say Viking had some 20,000 people across the country working on it."[20]

The original Viking mission was scheduled to fly in 1973, but budget cuts caused a slippage to 1975. The creation of instrumentation and software were