



Astronaut Steven Nagel, who flew on four space shuttle missions in the 1980s and 90s, including two as mission commander, has died after a long battle with cancer, NASA confirms.

Nagel, an Air Force pilot who had logged many hours in fighter jets and as a test pilot, joined the NASA astronaut corps in 1978 in the first crop of trainees selected for the space shuttle program.

Although trained as a shuttle pilot, Nagel's first mission, aboard (Discovery) in June 1985, was as a mission specialist.

"I really wanted to fly as a pilot, so at the time — because there was no explanation that went with it — I wondered, 'Are they telling me I'm not good enough to fly as a pilot?'" Nagel told a NASA interviewer about his 1985 assignment to the shuttle Discovery's STS-51G crew, according to . "Nothing against mission specialists. I would trade my pilot's slot to go be a mission specialist and do a [spacewalk], certainly, but it's just that 'What are they trying to tell me here?'"

"But I think what it really was, our class was very large, and they're getting down to the point where I think [they] probably wanted to get us all flown, and this was a way to do it a little quicker," Nagel recalled.

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