

Neil Gehrels

Lead climber

in space gamma-ray astronomy

Jacques Paul

SVOM Scientific Advisor

17 May
2018

Third SVOM Science Workshop
Tribute to Neil Gehrels

École des
Houches

Neil Gehrels (1952-2017)

Neil Gehrels, died on the morning of 6 February 2017 after having fighting a pancreatic cancer.



In addition to being a pioneering astronomer, Neil was also an avid mountain climber.



In 2015, he performed for the second time a solo ascent of the El Capitan peak in the Yosemite Rockies via the hard *Nose Route*.

Pioneer of multi-wavelength astronomy

As Project Scientist of the *Compton Gamma-Ray Observatory* and then as Mission Scientist of the European *INTEGRAL* mission, Neil Gehrels has reinforced his conviction that the multi-wavelength approach is an absolute necessity for gamma astronomy.



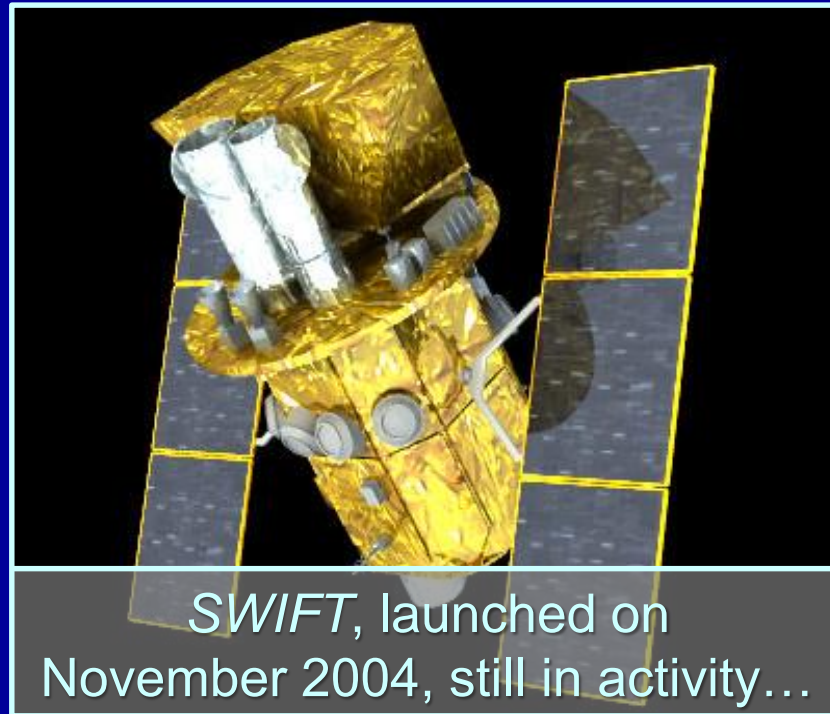
CGRO, in activity
from 1991 to 2000



INTEGRAL, launched
in 2002, still in activity...

Initiator of a mission dedicated to GRBs

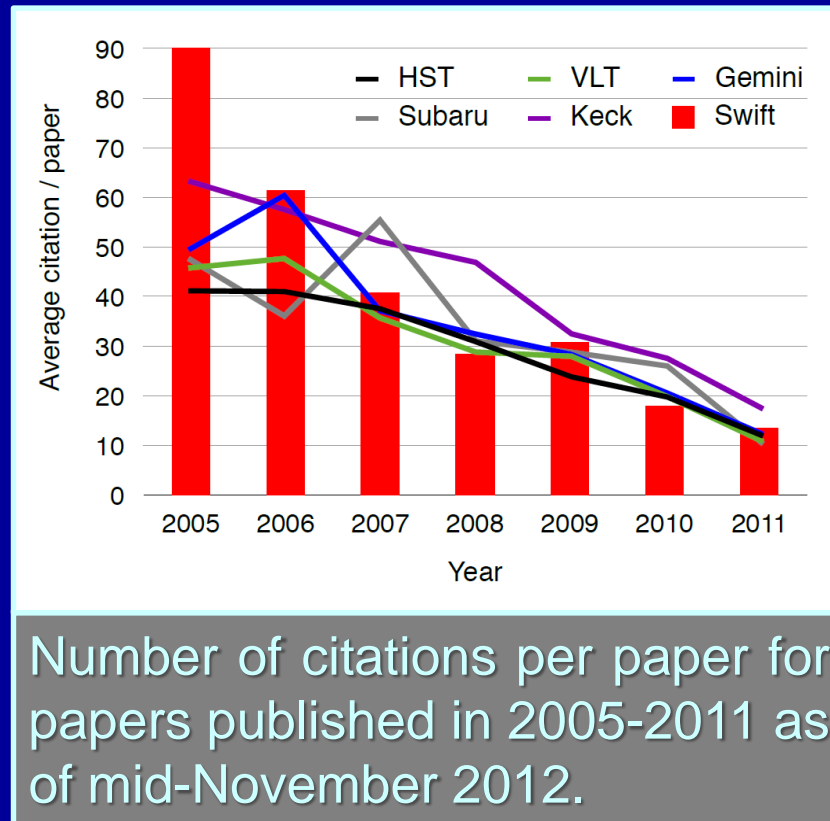
In 1998, inspired by the breakthrough initiated by *Beppo-SAX*, Neil proposed to NASA the *SWIFT* mission dedicated to GRBs.



Thanks to Neil's remarkable skill in navigating the bureaucratic labyrinths through which large space missions must be shepherded, the *SWIFT* mission was selected in the framework of the NASA Explorer Program.

Leader of a remarkable scientific success

Neil had a superb organizational ability, coupled with perceptiveness and good interpersonal skills, so many qualities that allowed him to become a successful leader of a challenging space mission, involving large numbers of people of different nationalities, temperament and expertise.

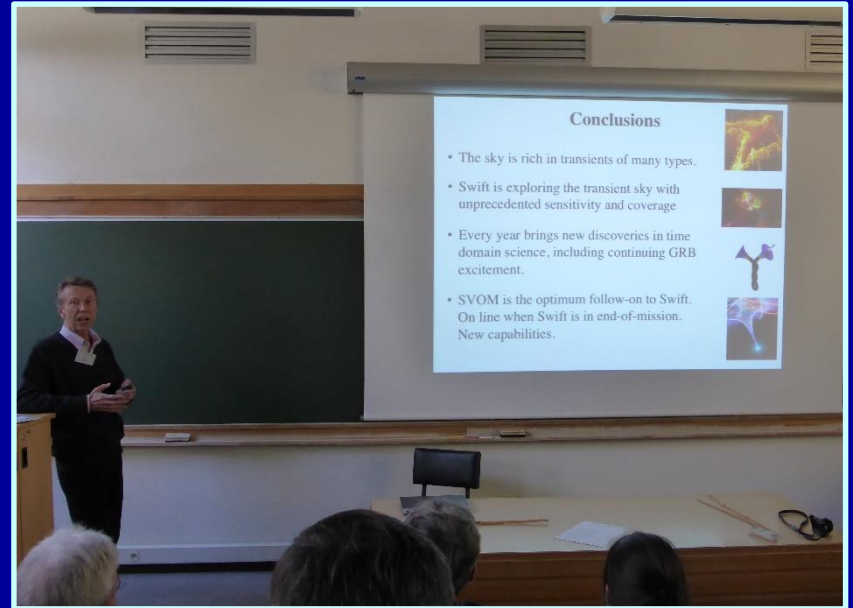


Neil's unwavering support to *SVOM*

Neil has been a staunch supporter of the Sino-French *SVOM* space mission he considered a worthy successor to *Swift*.



SVOM mission



Neil lecture in Les Houches

In April of 2016, he contributed to the first SVOM Science Workshop "*The Deep and Transient Universe in the SVOM Era: New Challenges and Opportunities*", held already in the framework of the *École des Houches*.

Last meeting with his *SVOM* colleagues

For many astrophysicists of the *SVOM* collaboration, the 2016 workshop in *Les Houches* was the last opportunity for fruitful discussions with Neil.



Neil among the participants



On top of l'Aiguille du Midi

The astronomical community as a whole, and in particular all members of the *SVOM* collaboration, will miss him greatly...