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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

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Oral history interview with Col. John A. Powers
[full name of interviewee]

about Public information reporting, Astronauts
[main focus of interview]
and the media

Title: 1962- Chief, Public Affairs Office
[interviewee's current and/or former title and affiliation]

Interview conducted by Robert B. Merrifield - Staff
[interviewer's name/position]

Historian at NSC
[location of interview]

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Masters 2

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Biographical - [date/place of birth; family background] _____

Education - _____

Career Path - AF Ballistic Missile Div., Los Angeles; 1958
~~transferred to NASA~~; ^{April} 1959 - NASA Hqrs
 Public Info Officer

Topics - 1961 - decision to establish separate Center;
Site Criteria; top 3: McDill AFB, Florida;
Houston, Benicia Ordnance Plant; Kudos for
Houston Chamber of Commerce; promoting Houston
to Langley crowd; move + concurrent Mercury
Program; 1961-1963 14 buildings in SE Houston;
facilities design battle + budget battle; Air Force
Man in Space Soonest (MISS) program dropped; legislation
Creating NASA stipulates NAS must report activities;
Astronaut Contract w/ Life Magazine (Ralph Morris +
Don Schanche perseverance); ~~first astronaut news~~ ^{announcement press}
Conference in Wash DC; PAO ground rules; Wehrner
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pressure
public. ~~interest~~ & intrusion; effect on family life;
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Cipello fire; Control Center reporting;
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by Webb (NASA Headquarters); problem
of under staffing in PAO; documentary
film program;

October 15, 1968

Lanada Inn
Rm 300 10:00
(Call from Aug-1558)

BN

Col. John A. Powers
Powerhouse, Incorporated
P. O. Box 58126
Houston, Texas 77058

Aug 1558

Dear Col. Powers:

At the request of Dr. Eugene M. Emme, the NASA Historian, this Center has agreed to assume responsibility for the preparation of an MSC history. This effort will place primary emphasis on the Center as an institution, that is, its general management philosophy, the evolution of its major organizational elements, growth and modification of its staff, management of its financial resources and contracts, acquisition of its facilities, and its impact on the economy, culture, and society of the community in which it exists.

This project is what can be termed a "contemporary history" since many of the people who played key roles in the establishment and evolution of the Center are able to give credible witness to the events and decisions occurring in this period. It is vital that these participants be consulted. This pleasant duty is mine as I have been commissioned to prepare this history. I am a professionally trained historian with considerable experience in research of this type.

I would very much appreciate the privilege of spending an hour or so with you in an interview for the purpose of recording your personal recollection of significant details that have a bearing on the Center's past. If you have no objection I would like to use a tape recorder while I am with you as it is a convenient way of obtaining a lot of information quickly and economically.

I recognize your time is valuable and limited and will leave to your discretion what you will want to comment on. I am interested in any information you consider to have been important to the development and growth of the Center. Please feel at liberty to go into whatever depth of detail you feel advisable and within the limits of your available time.

If you have no objection, I will call your office in a day or two for an appointment.

Sincerely,

Robert B. Merrifield

Interview with Col John A. Powers
11/9/68

In the fall of 1960 it seemed quite clear that the physical facilities we were occupying at Langley Field were grossly inadequate. It was about that time that there was a real serious effort initiated to try to find a new home. Technically we belonged to Goddard at that time. We hadn't flown our first manned Mercury. We were still flying Little Joe at Wallops and the chimpanze flights. At the same time we were pressing down the road on Gemini, and letting the Apollo contract.

One day I walked into Max Faget's office at Langley and Bill Bland and Aleck Bond were there. I had Dick Witkin of the New York Times with me. There were models of Apollo setting on the table. I'd never seen them before and certainly Witkin hadn't seen them before. I remember them as being startlingly similar to the actual hardware we are flying right now. If we were going to take on a job like Apollo, it was obvious that we couldn't be a part of some other organization with some other mission. The task was just too big.

In '61 we got tangled up in the flight with Shepard and Grissom, but while that was going on, we were actively seeking a location. I don't know when the decision was made that we wouldn't be a part of Goddard ~~and that~~ we would actively seek a new location for a separate Center, but it must have been around the first of the year 1961. Politics reared its ugly head and there was pushing and tugging and all kinds of maneuvering going on inside and outside of NASA, and from the civic side and community segments.

118 We laid down a fairly firm criteria for a new site. We said it had to be adjacent to a large metropolitan area so we would have access to its services and facilities. It had to be in a temperate climate so we could work outside all year long, and it had to be on water (Clear Lake is water). We wanted an academic environment and good transportation to be available. Although the official record may show differently, we ended up with 3 possible sites - one was McDill AFB, Tampa, Fla., which SAC had announced it was going to close; Houston was second, and the third was the Benecia Ordnance Depot in the San Francisco Bay Area. McDill was eliminated because SAC decided not to close the base and it was therefore not available. Except for the fact it would have offered us an opportunity to move into a readymade station, hangars, offices, buildings, shops, houses, in other words, if it had not been for the fact the complete base was there, I don't think Tampa would have really been in the running. The question came up as to the cost to modify the Benecia ordnance plant as opposed to starting from scratch. Then the maneuvering really began. All of a sudden Rice University came through with an offer of 1600 acres which had been the gift of Humble Oil. That pretty well tipped the scales. Albert Thomas was very active in supporting the idea of a move to Houston.

I made the first trip down here with Bob Gilruth, Wes Hjernevik, Marty Byrnes, Walt Williams and a fellow from NASA Hqs. Bob Gilruth didn't want to move really. He had personal reasons--he had his home out on the York River and he was afraid of politics, etc. The site had been selected and announced about Sep 6, 1961, I believe, several days after Hurricane Carla. The first night we stayed at the Carousel Motel.

The following morning we drove out to the site over a 2-lane Farm to Market 528. I was carrying a movie camera and a still camera and it was hot. We went to where the Center now is but then was nothing but a pasture. There is a famous picture that shows a windmill, watering trough and there were cows out there. Then we went to the old West Mansion and originally they were talking about making that the interim headquarters. We went through it. I was carrying the cameras, and Gilruth was shaking his head as he is prone to do. Williams was huffing and puffing because it was hot. I ruined a suit. We crawled through weeds and the mud on the West property and I was carrying the camera gear trying to get pictures.

We stayed overnight at some apartments near the Veterans Administration Hospital. The announcement had been made we were coming down and there were all kinds of wild rumors flying around as to how big MSC was going to be, how much money we were going to spend, etc. Everybody was trying to get on the bandwagon. Automobile dealers even offered us automobiles. Those apartments we stayed in were at no cost to us. The owner is the guy who built extensively north of the site.

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The day the announcement was made of the selection of this site, I was sitting in my office at Langley, a wooden barracks building which had been condemned some time before by the Air Force. My phone rang and it was Marvin Hurley, the Executive V-Pres of the Houston Chamber of Commerce. He introduced himself, indicated he had heard about the site selection, and asked what they could do for us. The Houston Chamber of Commerce really demonstrated some outstanding community leadership in helping us make this move. It made the move a little more palatable to

people such as Gilruth. And it should be remembered that Gilruth was not the only one who didn't want to move. There were a lot of people who felt the same way. At one point it looked like we would have a very serious morale problem, and that we might even lose a good many of our key people. Chris Craft for example, also didn't want to move.

152 We ran a campaign with the complete cooperation and support of the Houston Chamber of Commerce. I had signs posted all over STG at Langley, saying Houston is a good place to live. They sent us pictures, slides, and brochures. We established a relocation center in that wooden barracks. Burney Goodwin in Personnel and I collaborated in the promotion of the move. Banks, real estate people sent literature up, Ben Gillespie came up from Houston and showed a movie of the City, and we held open meetings in the cafeteria at Langley. We ran a campaign to convince people that this was a good place to come. Thereafter we ran airplane loads of husband and wife combinations to come to look at Houston first hand.

1 On that first trip I made to Houston, we came right on the tail of Carla, and the road was strewn with debris, there were telephone trucks by the hundreds on the roads attempting to get all the telephone lines repaired and in service. Beyond the West mansion - along Rt 146, which was a considerably smaller road then, there were boats up on the road, pieces of houses and buildings laying around--it was very depressing first look.

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166 On that trip I became aware of another problem. This was the eagerness of the people down here to be helpful. It had the concurrent hazard that some of our people would innocently become involved or obligated to the local real estate interests, the automobile dealers, etc., and we

159 had to watch very very carefully. Our reception at Rice University was a big factor in changing the view we had gotten. Dr. Croneis and his people were most hospitable. We took a tour of their campus and in particular the engineering and physics labs and talked with some of the faculty. Gilruth and Williams were both impressed with the competence of the people we talked with.

152 After that trip, I had to go back and talk up the area in glowing terms. Everybody was worrying that it was a place that had a hurricane every year and there were stories about hundreds of snakes crawling around the streets. We had to shoot all those stories down.

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132 Shortly after this we formed the initial cadre to go to Houston which included Gene Horton from my shop, Burney Goodwin from Personnel, Parker from Procurement. After they had been there a few days, Marty Byrnes met the manager of Gulfgate Shopping Center and they offered us that store which was to house our first offices down here. We got GSA furniture in it and set up business. There is a dress shop there now. That's when we started being very very careful about people accepting things: housing, cars, club cards, etc. I worked in collaboration with the Houston Chamber of Commerce in trying to make sure that word of the actions we were taking in the procurement of temporary facilities, hiring of people, buying equipment, etc., was released promptly and accurately because the rumors were really flying.

159 All the while this was going on, we were getting ready for John Blenn's flight and trying to do business at 2 locations. More and more people were moving out of Langley and disrupting the function of administration and operations. We had the dual problem of trying to keep the flight program

moving and trying to keep the growth of the Gemini program on schedule. By that time the President had announced the Apollo program as a National goal, and we had to move out on it.

From September 1961 through September 1963, we were operating out of 14 buildings and this was an extremely difficult way to do business. Looking back, I am really amazed that we were able to keep the program rolling as well as we did. The program had to keep moving despite the fact we had families arriving right in the middle of the move. A guy would come to Houston long enough to see the moving van roll up to the door and he would kiss his wife goodbye and say he had to go to the Cape, to St Louis, Huntsville, tc. About February 1962, we moved in the Farnsworth Bldg. I went with Marty or Williams and looked at that building and we marked off offices and then we grabbed our suitcases and rushed off on the Glenn operation.

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Then began the facilities design battle and once we got through with the design effort, we got into the budget battle. In my own case, we tried to design the theater on the basis of the State Department Auditorium in Washington which was then being used extensively by the President for his Press Conferences. Their facilities and equipment were ideal. The only place I lost a battle was in the size of Bldg 1. That was supposed to be a 3-story building and the ground floor would have been used for the news services, radio and TV networks, etc., covering flights. We ran into a budget squeeze and Hjernevik talked me out of that one. I don't really know who got the hunk of buildings I was supposed to get. It was ironic too, because after they lopped off the top 2 floors of Building 1, they ended up spending \$90,000 a year to lease the building

across the street because the Center didn't have facilities, room, etc., to do anything. We should have gone ahead and built it in the first place. Unfortunately for me after all of the struggle and hassle, I never got to work in any office at the new site.

When NASA was formed, October 1958, I was at the Air Force Ballistic Missile Division in Los Angeles. One of the first projects the new Space Agency picked up was one we had ongoing at the time-- Pioneer, the lunar probe. The Air Force had launched one in August 1958 unsuccessfully and was getting ready to launch another when the Space Agency was formed. The whole program--the hardware, people, contracts, etc., was shifted from Air Force jurisdiction to the Space Agency. I was sent by General Schriver from the Ballistic Missile Division to NASA to help in the transfer. The old NACA had never had any undertaking of this magnitude. The guy I reported to was Walter T. Bonney. Walt had operated the old NACA public information business with about 4 people. When we met his offices were in the old Dolly Madison house. I carried with me the original information plans that I had developed at BMD to handle the lunar probe operation and that same plan with modifications is the basic plan that is still used today. When we finished up that lunar probe exercise, I went back to what I presumed would be normal duty with the Air Force. I also knew the Air Force had a man-in-space program (MISS, Man In Space *SOONEST*) -- ongoing and I knew that in the new NASA there was a discussion as to whether they would pick that program up or whether the Air Force would be permitted to press on with its work. The decision was that it should be a NASA civilian undertaking. There were

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rumors I had heard through the Air Force sources that there was an astronaut screening program going on. We were living in California at the time and a morning paper leaked a story from some Air Force type in Alaska who made some statement offhand that he was being considered as an astronaut. I commented at the time that I thought it would be the most important kind of program anybody could get hooked up with in our time, not knowing there were discussions already underway between Walt Bonney at NASA and Gen Ben Lebailly, Director of Information of the Air Force, and a good personal friend of mine which would soon involve me. I had heard that there had been a position established in the White House and that the man in space program would be conducted in total secrecy. On the Air Force side, the position was that it would be a classified undertaking and would be conducted in secrecy. Then when the man in space program was shifted to the space agency, I was given more flexibility and I took the position and drove it as hard as possible that it was physically impossible to conduct this kind of undertaking in secrecy. It was inconsistent with the American approach to the problem (i.e., the difference between the American free society and the Communist closed society) and we thought we could not only do the job better than the Russians, but we could also do it under the full glare of public attention. I don't think any of us recognized that it would be perhaps the grandest adventure in the history of mankind. I did not sense accurately how great the public attention would be. We won that battle and the third point was to be included in the basic law that organized NASA (and it's the only Agency of its kind in the Federal system) which stipulates that NASA must report its activities -

thought it doesn't define how. This became my problem.

Walt and General LeBailly called me on a conference call and asked if I wanted a new job. I said if you two guys are the ones recommending me, of course I do, but I will have to ask my boss, Ben Shriver. They told me they wanted me to be the public information officer for the man-in-space program. I went to Shriver and he initially said no because we had some important things underway in the Air Force and then he backed off and said - well, I think it's going to be important and if you really want to go - OK. The next day I was on my way to Washington. I reported to NASA Hqs about April 4-5, 1959. I next went to Langley Field and by that time the astronauts had been selected, and I knew it. When I met Walt Bonney in Washington, he confirmed they had been selected, and that we were to meet with them the next day or two. Bonney had a much better sensing of how much public interest there was going to be than I did. I had seen the interest while working on the lunar probe. I had built a news center on the West Coast and in collaboration with Roy Neal of NBC arranged the first live telecast of a launch from Cape Canaveral. At the same time we arranged for the first live tie-in to the control point which was the West Coast, and which people today take for granted in the Surveyor, Lunar Orbiter, etc. I had to fight like crazy to get money, people, facilities, etc. I had a sensing somewhat, but Walt realized it more than I did, and Walt had a better feel for the situation in terms of the men themselves than I did - the astronauts and the problem with their stories. Walt had had discussions with other government officials, lawyers, etc., and came to the conclusion that there was going to be a scramble to

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get exclusives, inside personal stories, etc., out of these guys. When I met him in April, he had already made preliminary decisions to recommend that they be allowed to sell personal stories. We collaborated with the psychologist, in addition to recognizing the clamor and hazards involved, as we wanted to eliminate personal profit as a motivator. Walt knew Leo D'Orsey a prominent lawyer in Washington, and Walt talked with him and he agreed to represent the 7 guys with no charge. He never made a dime though he got a lot of exposure and publicity out of it. We got approval within NASA and talked with Leo about it and got the agreement of the guys. Our recommendation to the guys was they should combine, should join collectively with their wives, sell the rights to their personal stories, let Leo handle the negotiations on their behalf subject to our concurrence and share the money equally among themselves. Leo talked to Saturday Evening Post, Look, AP, UP, and a couple of the syndicates. He finally took a bid from Time Inc., (Life Magazine). We established several ground rules. One was that the stories specifically had to be personal, and that no new technical fact relating to a flight could be revealed in a Life story for which the men were paid. In that regard, I was the man who was on the spot because it was my task to get the copy from the Life magazine people, make sure the man himself approved it, and then to make sure it did not inadvertently release some new technical fact. There were only two occasions where I discovered new technical facts, and all I did then was promptly release them in advance of the Life Magazine story so Life never got any exclusives on technical facts. They only got the emotional side and the by-line stories.

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This subject was very controversial - Life Magazine assigned Ralph Morris as the photographer on the story and Ralph is a genius with a camer. Life also initially assigned Don Schanche as the writer.

The two literally moved in with us. There was a lot of controversy because Life Magazine had access in and out of the front door of the houses where the people lived, a privilege which no other newsman had, and the rest of the news guys felt Life was getting an unfair break on news and forthcoming events. At one time I sat down with the astronauts and explained that we were having this problem. They knew about it because of the flak they had gotten at press conferences, etc. They decided that we would play games with Schanche and Morris. We were supposed to go to Stead AFB, Reno, Nevada, to go through desert survival training and the astronauts all agreed that nobody would tell Schanche or Morris. If they found it out, they would have to find it out on their own. The only thing we forgot was that little children have a tendency to talk. Don Schanche is no dummy and what he did was to get buddy-buddy with Scotty Carpenter's boy. He suggested that he and the boy and Scott do something day after tomorrow and the kid piped up and said - "Daddy isn't going to be here - he's going to Reno." When we landed in Reno, and went to the Hotel, Schanche and Morris were sitting in the lobby. Then we decided to really play the game, because we could go behind the security of the Air Force fence at Stead AFB. I told the PIO and Base Commander what the problem was and what we were doing and he agreed to cooperate. At the survival school the first day was spent in classroom type training and the next day we were to get in helicopters to go to a remote site in the desert. I

68 felt that here is where we would lose Morris and Schanche. Again I hadn't recognized Schanche's capabilities, because as he told me much later that they found a Staff Sergeant who was involved in the classroom briefings and training program and found out what the training plan involved -- 1 day of classroom and 1 day on the desert. The Sergeant wouldn't tell where the location in the desert was, other than it was a remote location. He did admit it would be a base camp made up of beautiful international red and white parachute tents. Schanche and Morris rented an airplane, ran a standard Air Force search pattern and found the base camp. Then they landed near a little town and bought a bunch of 1pound bags of flour. They flew back, found the base camp, flew up the road and bombed the intersection of that road with a country road, went down the country road to the state road and bombed that intersection, went down the state road and bombed the intersection leading out to the airport and then rented a jeep and drove back up their trail which they had so marked. I was in the lead helicopter going to the remote site and there was Ralph Morris and Don Schanche standing down there taking pictures and making notes.

68 As far as I am concerned the contract was an appropriate thing to do, it did the things we wanted it to do, and it protected the men themselves from harrassment, which was important. It satisfied the desire to avoid individual profit as a motivation in the space flight program and finally, it helped tremendously in humanizing the men and their families to the whole world.

47 Our Headquarters was in an old building on Langley Air Force Base across the field from LRC. That particular building was built in 1914. I met the 7 guys and in many respects, it was like meeting the parents of the bride to be. They had been told they couldn't say anything and here all of a sudden was this whipper snapper Air Force type who was a PIO, and as everyone knows in the military, the public relations function is not always the most respected. They were leary of me and I was scared to death of them. I had been a military combat aviator for years, had been to Edwards, had seen flight tests, but these guys just plain scared me.

47 Walt Bonney and I had the initial conference in Washington on April 9 in a large room in the basement of the Dolly Madison House. Evidently it used to be a ballroom. It had creaky old wooden floors and no ventilation. Before we went to Washington, Walt and I both had begun to sense the pressure that was building up as to the identity of the astronauts. It seemed that everybody in the world was guessing who they were. We had pressure from the military as they wanted to identify their guys and the policy had been laid down very firmly that we would admit they were members of the military establishment, but we would emphasize that they would be cast in non-military roles. On the morning of April 9, we left Langley Field on a NASA DC-3; there were the 7 guys, myself, Dr. Bob Voss, Gilruth, and Donlan. Somehow or other the news leaked out of Langley that we were on the airplane and on our way to Washington. NASA had announced they would have a press conference and enterprising reporters had tracked it down and discovered we were on the airplane headed for Washington. We had an agreement that the first

47 identified exposure of the astronauts would be at the press conference at the Dolly Madison House on April 9. We landed at Washington National Airport and I admit that I wasn't thinking. I looked out the window as we taxied up to the Butler Aviation Hangar and when I looked out the window there were the newsreel crews up on the ramp. I can't remember who it was we pushed out the door, but we never shut the engines off. We turned right around, taxied away and took off. We flew down the river until we were sure we were out of sight, then turned around and flew back up the river and landed at Bolling. We called ahead and tried to get Bolling to give us a couple of cars. By this time, some of the news guys were racing from National Airport across the bridge trying to catch us at Bolling. We barely got away from them.

The day before when I met the astronauts and we briefed them on what we were going to do, that was when I met Bob Gilruth. I had been accustomed to going in and reporting to Generals sitting behind a desk. I honestly did not know what to make of this guy. He didn't have any stars on, he was mild mannered and almost meek, and that confused me a little bit.

47 In my first meeting with the astronauts, I told them that they should immediately call their wives, their mothers and fathers, and any other close relatives any place in the world to inform them that they had been selected as an astronaut as the following day they were to be identified publicly. I told them they could expect to be deluged with newsmen. I remember that Wally Schirra's family was in Hawaii at this time and he couldn't believe I wanted him to call his family in Hawaii as he couldn't believe I was serious about the degree that news people

really would be interested in his family. It is worth noting that the Honolulu Advertiser had a staffer on the doorstep within 20-30 minutes of the instant he walked onto the platform in Washington.

51 I had some very serious discussions about that time with Walt Bonney and Gilruth over what my basic groundrules would be. We agreed that we had to recognize that there was a law requiring that we report our activities and it was obvious that there was tremendous worldwide interest in the man in space program. Finally, I had to conduct the business of reporting our activities in such a manner as to never interfere with an operational mission.

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57-1 In the early days, there was a considerable amount of friction between the STG and what is now the MSFC, and Wehrner Von Braun specifically over who would do what at the Cape. Von Braun thought he should have the whole mission and of course he already had facilities at the Cape and whether he gave specific directions or not, I don't know, but I do know there was a great deal of foot dragging on the part of the Huntsville people there. I must confess there also was foot dragging on the part of some Air Force people at the Cape for they thought they should have had the mission. During the Redstone missions we stood as spectators in the blockhouse. It was not just Gilruth as an individual who was involved in the STG Redstone dispute. He was concerned because his people were concerned - Bob has always operated that way.

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The Carpenter landing was probably the longest 26 minutes in my life. At that point in the Control Center, there was indeed uncertainty as to Carpenter's condition. Although many people said afterwards - Hell, we had the information indicating he was safe, if they did, they didn't pass it to us. We later found a Navy airplane in the area. We were calling in the blind and receiving no responses, and the Navy airplane in the area heard both sides of the conversation and could have confirmed to all of us that yes, he was receiving transmissions, which would have told us yes, the guy is all right and yes, he is down. But the people in the airplane later reported to us they thought we were hearing it too and just didn't report it. Admittedly there were many misunderstandings. Wall Schirra blamed me, I think. I was the guy sitting on the microphone and I felt it wasn't proper for me to guess or speculate. This was a gospel with me--that I wouldn't guess and speculate on what was happening or what was going to happen other than to project the flight plan. Walt Williams at one point turned to me and said, "we've lost him." He didn't mean just that we couldn't talk to him. He thought that we had in fact lost him. I was thumbing through my paperwork for my contingency plan to figure how I would report a lost astronaut.

In regard to the petty jealousy and bickering engendered after John Glenn's flight, let me say this: It was a tempest in a teapot and arose when Wally, without any consultation with me, went for a ride in a convertible automobile with some CBS people who thoughtfully took along a camera and tape recorder. He made some offhand comments about Glenn.

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It was very clear by this time that there was internal bickering, I don't care who denied it. There were petty jealousies that I think were perfectly normal. Shepard had made the first flight and we had all gone to the White House. There had been parades, etc., and then the public reaction to the Glenn flight was so tremendous and there was so much hero worship that developed out of it that I think it was a perfectly normal thing for some individual jealousies to develop. I am sure every one of the guys will deny it today, but it was there.

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The tension between the astronauts and the public affairs office was a continuous problem. I think all 7 guys really enjoyed the exposure---they are human and they didn't mind seeing their names in the papers. Yet as test pilots (and remember that was one of the criteria for selection of the original 7), they instinctively rebelled at having to spend time talking to the news media. The story that comes out of an interview does not always suit the man who gave the interview and they didn't understand that. They resented me because I represented the news media. I've got pictures in my file of Shepard who one day rebelled and played chimpanzee while we were trying to take his picture. On the Cooper flight after much much arguing both with the doctors and with the astronauts, I was finally successful in selling the idea that we had to document the astronaut activities in detail, photographically. This is fairly easy to do in many areas up to flight time. At flight time, there is a concern over the physical exposure of astronauts to strange people. Wally's cold is an example. The doctors were concerned about that.

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Psychologically we were concerned over the effect of flashing cameras on a guy who is trying to do a very serious job. This also involved my original ground rule that said I could not interfere with the mission. I finally persuaded MSC Management that I should be allowed one movie man and one still man and that the three of us should be given access to all facilities, including the astronaut suit-up room in old Hangar S. This is not a very big room. It usually had 2-3 suit technicians, the astronaut, and a doctor. But it's a semi-clean room - as we had to protect the suits and the equipment. I persuaded MSC Management to let me put some lights in the room. I also had to agree we would install switches so if the doctors, or the suit technicians, or astronauts decided the lights were too hot, half of them or all of them could be cut off if it was decided I was interfering with the mission. We would then just have to scramble. Or they could throw the photographers out if they felt they were getting in the way.

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Now it was my standard practice on the Mercury flights to go out to the weather briefing at midnight with Williams, which was a quick mission review as well as a weather briefing and observe him making his decision, and write a fast release and phone it back to the news center at the Beach so all the news guys would know whether we were in business. Then I would go to Hangar S because the wakeup time is 2 a.m. and I wanted to be there physically when Dr. Douglas went in to wake them up. I would then be able to accurately report the time, who did the waking up, and what they did from that point forward. At 2 in the morning of Cooper's flight I went into Hangar S and my two cameramen were sitting on

the stairway leading upstairs to the crew quarters with their heads in their hands. Larry Summers was the RCA movie man and Bill Taub, NASA Hqs, was the still man. I asked what's with you guys, and they said - no lights. I told them to check the circuit breaker in the hangar while I went upstairs, and after they had checked the circuit breaker, they should come on upstairs and we'll figure what was wrong. It took me about 7-8 minutes and by this time the astronauts were up and Shepard was standing around with a grin that I have since learned is typical of him when he has a mouse under his hat. I discovered someone had gone in and pulled the wires out of the switches, cut the wires, and then stuck them back in the top of the two switches, but with no wire in them. On top of that they had opened the circuit breakers in the hangar. The boys turned the circuit breakers on and I quickly stripped the wires down and stuck them back in the switches and wired them back up again and we had lights. As you may recall, Cooper's flight was scrubbed after he was inserted in the spacecraft. That's the day we couldn't move the gantry and he had to come back and 48 hours later we were right back in the same cycle. At 2 in the morning that day, I walked out to the hangar and there were my two boys again sitting on the stairway. No lights. I sent them again to check the circuit breakers while I went upstairs. This time, someone had not only cut the wires and stuck them back in the box to make it look like the wires were still there, but they had gone into every one of the light sockets and put friction tape in the base of the socket and put the bulbs back in. This was half in jest, as it was a tension reliever, but it was half serious too. I think that's the best illustration I can give of the relationship between the 7 guys and myself.

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Newsweek once carried a picture of me in a story, and the picture showed me sitting between Shepard and Glenn, I've got a glum look on my face. The reason for it was that the newspeople had been demanding again and again to have a press conference with astronauts. I talked it over with Williams, Gilruth, and with the astronauts and our decision was that there just wasn't time in the schedule because at that time we had to drive clear down to Patrick to hold a press conference, and then drive all the way back to the Cape. The astronauts insisted they simply didn't have the time. I accepted their decision and defended it and kept telling the news guys we couldn't hold a press conference. They appealed my decision to the White House and Pierre Salinger called me and discussed it. He said he accepted our position but strongly suggested that we hold a press conference. I had to overrule my own people and hold that press conference and that's why the glum look. They were unhappy with me for they thought I had rigged it.

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In regard to the original 7 and their investment in the Cape Colony, this matter goes back to Leo D'Orsay's involvement with the astronauts. Leo was handling all of their investments. He did the negotiating on the reimbursement for their personal stories and also provided legal and financial advice free of charge. These seven astronauts had never seen that kind of money in their lives. When the Cape Colony was being built, Leo decided it would be a good investment and it was. The controversy arose over the fact that at that time NASA was leasing facilities on the beach from motels for news center purposes and the Cape Colony had one of the best facilities on the beach. With my concurrence, Jack King, the NASA Headquarters Public Affairs Officer at the Cape decided to lease the Cape

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Colony ballroom and adjacent rooms as a news center. When Bill Hines, then of the Washington Star, and some of the other news guys heard of the arrangement, they decided that it would be fun and games to raise the conflict of interest issue. The astronauts didn't have a thing to do with who selected the news center or where it was put. They could have cared less except obviously for the fact that they were pleased like any investor would be that their business was making money. But the conflict of interest issue was raised and as a result, Mr. Webb urged the 7 to divest themselves of their interest, and they did.

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At about the same time, Frank Sharp in Sharpstown had offered each astronaut a house. I had checked it out with the General Counsel at NASA, and talked to Leo about it, had talked to the astronauts about it, and everyone agreed it would be OK as long as there were no strings attached. Unfortunately, Mr. Sharp's people leaked the story and when it hit the papers we had to turn down the offer. As far as the motel was concerned, I think the conflict of interest issue was phony. However, insofar as the houses were concerned in Sharpstown, I think I exercised poor judgment, and never should have gone for it. Nobody gives you anything for nothing and it was obvious Mr. Sharp certainly had plans for exploiting the fact that the 7 astronauts lived in his development. It also created a large unpleasant flap at the time. It is interesting to note in passing when a press conference was held over the deal on the 7 houses, NASA Headquarters called me up there and no Headquarters man would sit with me on the platform. They made me and Leo D'Orsay sit and explain to the press conference what we had done. Perhaps there was some justification.

After we had the initial press conference in April 1959, and the

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astronaut's pictures (and the next week their 7 wives) appeared on the cover of Life magazine, everybody in the world knew who they were and nothing was sacred. You could be in the head and someone would come up and start talking to you. The astronaut's homes were invaded, their kids were followed to school and back, the kid's teachers were questioned about how the kids were doing and if they were as smart as their daddies, etc. When we got into the flight schedule, pictures began to appear of the people in the control center, the suit technicians, ^{the doctor,} /and others, and they too began to feel pressure from the press. We moved to Houston and we were instant heroes. We had a parade through downtown Houston, a big barbeque given by the Chamber of Commerce and the City of Houston and everybody in town knew who the astronauts were and by association they quickly learned who the rest of the people were. People react to this kind of pressure in different ways. I think one of the reasons Dr. Bill Douglas left the program was because of this pressure. He kept arguing with me and saying he didn't want to have a newspaper interview, and he didn't want to talk with the networks. He didn't think it was appropriate, he didn't have time to do it, and he didn't want his wife bugged about it either. One of the classic comments that several of the guys made during the early flight program and since then in the Gemini Program was in reply to a question from the news guys as to what the toughest part of the flight was, the astronaut's reply was the press conference. Gus Grissom's house has no windows on the side facing the street and it was built that way purposely. He simply did not want people peering in his windows. John Glenn's house in Arlington, Va., at the time of his flight was overrun. We finally got the county and state police to guard the house. I think it was the Junior Chamber of Commerce

174 or Lions Club or another organization came in after the flight and resodded John's lawn for him because the public had stomped it right in the mud. This is an extremely difficult thing to live with. It happened to me. I will never be allowed to forget my infamous 3 a.m. remark. I lived in government quarters at Langley and had what I called a Dr. Pepper telephone because it rang at 10, 2, and 4 day and night. One night, I had a couple of late night calls because there were rumors circulating that the Russians were about to launch a man in space. I thought I had everything put to bed, including myself. I was tired as we put in some long days. The phone rang after I had gone to sleep. I rolled over and the luminous dial on the clock indicated 3 a.m. A young chap from UP in Washington was on the line, and he asked if I knew the Russians had just launched a man into space. I said I didn't. He said that they had and that he wanted a comment from me, Dr. Gilruth, and one from each of the astronauts, and he needed it in 20 minutes. I'm afraid I was a little short tempered. I was known to be very mild mannered, even meek, but I said - "don't you know it's 3 o'clock in the morning, you jerk? If you want something from us, tell them we are all asleep!" And he printed it word for word. This illustrates the infringement on our home and family life. I was ordered to write an apology to that newsman. In my answer I specifically refused to apologize and asked him for an apology. I never got it, but it turned out to be the best thing I could have done because the program was lagging. The Russian accomplishment served as a shot in the arm.

161 This public pressure was terrible. My wife has gotten adjusted to it now. She is a newspaper gal and understands better than most wives. I travel around the country all the time and I know what it is like to walk through an airline terminal, into a restaurant, or to the beach. Even when a person is with his wife and kids and he can sense people looking at him and whispering behind their hands and pointing. It is indeed a difficult thing. I think at MSC we have been very fortunate, and probably it is a tribute to the quality of people we have aboard that we haven't had more divorces and more family problem disruptions. When this kind of pressure is combined with the killing work schedules the men keep--and not just the astronauts--it is difficult to maintain a normal outlook on life. [Kenny Kleinknecht's wife for example was very impatient for a long time, She couldn't understand why Kenny had to be away from home 8 days a week and why when he was at the Center, he couldn't come home from work before 11 p.m.] We were just getting in gear with the flight program. The move, combined with the gross public identification of all of the people in the program in this particular area, and the ability to absorb this technical task is a commentary on the quality of people we have.

There is no way one can explain what it is like to be constantly in the public eye. Just as recently as the first week in October 1968, about six years after leaving MSC, I had another taste of it. I had been out on the road for 6 weeks and I was physically tired and I arranged to meet my wife in northern Michigan where we could be in a protected and private environment for 3-4 days. I like to do most of the things that anybody else does. We have good friends up there, and we like to walk up the beach with them to a restaurant. The first night we were there immediately I could sense it, and then physically I could hear and see it. People whispering and pointing.

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It is extremely difficult if not impossible to relax and enjoy oneself. A person is afraid people will hear and maybe report anything he says or does. At the same time in an organization as big as this one, there are people who feel perhaps they've been slighted; perhaps the glory is going to somebody else and they are not being recognized. I think they don't know how well off they are.

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In the early days, I arranged and handled travel for the astronauts both with regard to scheduling into certain facilities and places-- arranging for accommodations, working with the people at the destination, and in preparing the astronauts for the work they were to do. On one occasion while we were at the centrifuge at Johnsville, Pennsylvania the question of the personal contact came up, and some reporter wanted to know how much money they were making on the deal. I had an unwritten agreement with the guys that any question like that that they felt they didn't want to answer I would handle. This didn't always make me popular with the news media, but if I had to do it over again, I would do it the same way. As I say the question came up about how much the astronauts were making on the deal. The guys looked at me and I said as far as the government is concerned, their personal finances are their own personal business and I don't think it's an appropriate subject at a press conference supposedly concerned with astronauts riding a centrifuge. Boy some of the news guys really took offense that we would not give a direct answer. The story came out that I was protecting them and I would not tell what these government employees made. What they didn't print was the follow-on comment that I made that the pay scales of military officers is a matter of public record.

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On the travel circuit in the training program, we ran into about three problems. One involved my basic groundrule that I must not interfere with the mission, that I couldn't sacrifice time or prejudice the performance of an astronaut simply to have a press conference. If there was something to be reported then I reported it. This is how I ended up the man in the middle. This is how the Voice of Mercury Control was born. The information had to be reported. There was no question about it, and I fought like a tiger to make sure we did report it. But it had to be done in such a way as to never never interfere with the mission in the broad sense. Then there was the conflict with the people at the local installation, whether it happened to be a military installation or a civilian industrial facility. They all wanted recognition. We found people at Johnsville for example who were leaking information to the press. Every time we would think of sending an astronaut up there, automatically I would get a query from a Philadelphia paper as someone was leaking the story to them.

Industry people also wanted identification. If we were visiting one of their facilities, they wanted to be sure the company was identified. Then there is the insatiable curiosity of people at large looking at someone who is doing something that nobody has ever done before.

There is an old blue school of journalism which says that the news media in the democratic process is the watchdog and the guardian of the people's rights. Over the years that has been corrupted to reflect the sentiment that there is no such thing as an honest government official or government employee. A corollary to that sentiment is the belief that

51 if something can't be torn apart there is no story. And third, never report a positive story if one can develop a negative story. This is to a great measure what happened to us in the space business. On the one hand, there was an abysmal ignorance on the part of the news reporters. There were mighty few reporters who really understood what we were talking about in the space business. In part their antagonism came out of frustration. Then there was another group who thought they knew and who became self-appointed experts. This group consisted of Earl Yubell and Stewart Leery with the New York Herald Tribune, Dick Witkin and John Finney of the New York Times, Simmons of Newsweek, and Jules Bergman of ABC.

81 I always ended up in a box because of the 3-cornered conflict. On the one hand there was a law that said the Agency had to report its activities, but the law didn't specify how. There also was my groundrule that said we would try to report but without interfering with the mission. There was this almost insatiable curiosity on the part of the reading and viewing public, there were NASA management people who either did not understand the problem or were afraid they might embarrass themselves. Finally there was a desire on all our parts to present the story in a dignified manner because after all the prestige and posture of the whole nation rested on it. We had to cope with newsmen who depended on flamboyance and spectaculars. This is really how the voice reporting process developed. It goes back to the original Mercury days and my dealings with Walt Williams. Walt was the boss in the Control Center and he took the position, and I think justifiably, that it was unfair to put people in the Control Center in the position of having to make instant

realtime decisions and under the glare of instant public exposure.

He was concerned about mission safety, and that battle is still going on. On Apollo 7 for the first time we had live TV inside the control center during the mission and it had never been done before.

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At the Cape today there are people who are either Government employees or employees of industry who are paid regularly by newspeople. This can be called a tip service, a leak service or whatever. I know it exists, and it existed way back in the mid-50's when I first started working at the Cape in the Air Force missile program. This is how some of the controversy developed after the fire in January 1967, because some of the tipsters were telling stories that were different from the official position. The thing that happened to me, and in a sense I am throwing rocks at Gilruth, Williams and others (but not so much Walt Williams, because Walt really understood the problem), was that very often I would come in with an estimate of what a situation was going to be like when we got into it and with a recommendation as to what we ought to do about it. I would be told that it's really not my affair and if the press needed anything, it was up to me to figure out something to give them. A lot of people blamed me for some of the negative press we had, and I had no choice but to accept the responsibility as it was my job. As the man in the middle I couldn't win. If I responded to the requests my boss or the administration were mad because we impinged on their time and resources and perhaps they were sometimes placed in an embarrassing position. If I didn't respond, then the media was mad at me and they would take me apart on the front pages, which they did regularly and frequently. In that regard, there was a lot of speculation that I was trying to create images

in the Hollywood-Madison Ave concept and I really feel strongly about this charge. If in the process I created an image, it never was my conscious doing. My effort was to present the program as factually, as directly, and as responsibly as I could, and to present it always with an awareness that we were involved in the grandest adventure in the history of mankind. Also combined with this attitude was the realization that we were staking our national prestige among all the people of the world on this one program.

Walt Williams, Chris Kraft, and his people agreed that there should be voice reporting from the Control Center with me behind the mike. But Chris, purportedly without my knowledge, installed on his console a cutoff switch on my output. I think he was concerned over whether I would remain stable in case of an accident. I've never talked with him about it, but I think he was concerned that I might lose my head in case of an accident. At the time of the fire there were people who shut things off. For example I was snowbound in Chicago, Illinois, the day of the fire and I knew within 30 minutes of the fire not only that there had been an accident but that all 3 men were dead. I also knew that the families had already been notified because the NASA cars were already out in front of the houses. And yet the story that came out of NASA was first that there had been a fire and there had been injuries. Then there was a twist of words. Jack King gave out a statement and it said something about the fact there has been an astronaut fatality. It was interpreted by the newsmen to mean one. Finally there was the belated admission that all 3 of the astronauts were dead. As far as I am concerned the only ground rule that should have been observed is that the next of kin be notified; as soon as they are notified,

it's got to be released, and the quicker the better. Here again the negative reporting comes out, and it is no wonder that they tear us apart, because we apparently try to hide. This is one of the news media roles in the democratic process--to expose the Government guy who is trying to hide something.

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I was also accused by the American Society of Newspaper Editors of being partial to the electronic media, TV in particular. They conducted "an investigation" of me. I'll never forget a meeting we had with Bill Stephens who used to be here with the Houston Chronicle and is now with the Chicago Daily News. He was a member of the ASNE board and he and Gene Patterson of the Atlantic Constitution, and several others came in as the investigating group. We had a meeting in my office at the Farnsworth-Chambers Bldg. Their accusation was that we were conducting the whole man in space program for the benefit of the TV media and that we were giving preferential treatment to the TV fellows. I rolled out a handcart with all the print copy I had released on all previous flights including transcripts, press conferences, brochures, fact sheets, etc., and it finally boiled down that their real complaint was that Mercury Control was giving the radio-TV pool 30 second advance notice on my Mercury Control reports.

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On Apollo 7, the news media was interviewing Glen Lunney at the shift change and they pushed him and pushed him for detail. The flight was going well and they couldn't really find much that was negative except Wally's cold and his seeming churlish answers. They finally forced Glen to admit that he had an anomaly list and that there were 37 items on it. In an achievement of the magnitude of this one--flying 3 guys in an Apollo spaceship, the first of its type, on its maiden flight, and to have nothing better to do

than to force him to admit he had 37 anomalies out of 87 million parts is pretty sad. They picked out 2 or three of the anomalies and spent all their time writing about those rather than writing at length about the fact that out of millions of individual components and pieces, etc., there were only 37 anomalies. That in itself is a tremendous positive story.

260 Despite these lapses we did get some good positive press releases. I was at the hearings in Washington when Mr. Webb either on his own initiative or under direction from the White House used very poor judgment. They caught him in two traps, one of which was the infamous Phillips report which Bill Hines latched on to. The fact that report had been written was known to newspeople. It was a year old. It should have been acknowledged candidly and quickly. There was no reason to withhold copies of it. The other area where Webb boxed himself in was when he indicated that North American was the first and unanimous choice of the source selection board on the Apollo contract, which it was not.

20 I had a similar problem earlier in the program with the McDonnell Co. The McDonnell Co. was the 5th from the lowest bid on the Mercury Program and apparently some of the other contractors had leaked their lower bids to the news media and some people in NASA did not want to acknowledge that McDonnell was the 5th lowest. I had to fight to make them admit it and let me announce it. This shows that the 4th estate does play a role. The problem is the degree the manner in which it is carried out. There has been a great great deal of negative and in some cases almost vicious reporting. Interestingly enough, in later years Bill Hines, one of my most strident critics discovered one day that he and I were both writing for the same syndicator--Field Enterprises. I'm sure that must have been

a shock to him.

One of the things a lot of people overlooked was the lack of specific knowledge on the part of the news media in general over just what we were talking about. Everybody was "Gee Whiz" and Buck Rogers", and even among many of the so-called scientists in our country-there was great fear and trepidation in that we were going to kill many people. It was a beautiful opportunity for what I call blue journalism, and flamboyant writing.

51 I think in retrospect if I made a mistake I think it was in not being more aggressive initially in asking for the organizational resources that it eventually took to handle the news reporting job. I've got copies of some of my original memos in which I very nonchalantly thought I could take care of the public affair function with about three or four people.

51-1 I brought the concept of the documentary film program to NASA. I developed it at the Air Force Ballistic Missile Division and brought the idea into NASA. We started out with Andy Sea, a one man organization I stole from Langley. I had to hide him because obviously the business of documenting this sort of thing on color motion picture and still pictures was a very expensive undertaking and one strange to the NASA guys. I found original reels of color film of some of the wind tunnel tests of the shapes that were studied for the Mercury spacecraft taken before there was a NASA. Engineers had run this original film through a veiwer and stuck them in their desk drawers. Andy's first office was in the projection booth underneath the platform in the auditorium upstairs in the old STG Headquarters at Langley. Andy had grown up in NACA environment and didn't really understand

initially what was required. At the time, I don't think he believed me when I told him that we were going to document every step of the way. He has turned out to be one of the outstanding people in the documentary film field.