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Spacemen's Contracts Stir Row

Blastoff Due On Memoirs?

By WILLIAM HINES

WASHINGTON—A crisis in the financial affairs of America's astronauts may be shaping up as the result of a battle being waged behind the scenes in the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Principals in the dispute are Julian Scheer, NASA's assistant administrator for public affairs (chief press agent) and Paul Haney, who holds the corresponding job at NASA's big manned spacecraft center in Houston, Tex.

If Scheer prevails, a Jericho wall of "exclusivity" built around the astronauts by Life magazine and NASA over the last seven years may come tumbling down. And if this happens, it is quite likely that the spacemen's juicy "Personal-story" contract will not be renewed when option time rolls round in 1967.

The astronauts enjoy a financial arrangement—unique in the annals of government—with Life magazine and the Marshall Field publishing empire. These two giants of the news world tied up the astronauts in 1963 to a contract that has been worth \$500,000 a year.

This superseded a contract negotiated by Life alone in April 1959 when the Mercury Seven were announced as America's first astronauts. The 1959 agreement paid out \$500,000 over its four-year lifetime, considerably more than the government paid the group in the same period.

The 1963 contract—along with other wheeling-dealing engaged in by some of the astronauts—drew adverse comment from many quarters. The reaction was so bad, in fact, that NASA decided there would be no more life-type contracts after Project Mercury ended.

This decision was overruled personally by the late President Kennedy, over the protests of NASA, the Space Council and his own press secretary, Pierre Salinger. Kennedy acted after a pleasant week-end at Hyannis Port in 1962 during which astronaut John Glenn and his wife were house guests of the Robert Kennedys.

What emerged was a four-year agreement with Life and Field that pays each man about \$16,500 a year, or roughly as much as he makes for being an astronaut.

The contract gives the publishers exclusive access to the astronauts and their families for personal stories, and understandably the publishers want the most substantial copy their ghost writers can extract from the spacemen. NASA's policy is that personal stories may be sold, but official activities must be reported to all media impartially.

Astronauts are not dunces and some have been quite clever in saving morsels of official and semi-official data to sell rather than give away. Many are tactful in en-

NEW HAIRDOS for astronauts' wives at Houston, Tex., Space Center. Mrs. James Lovell (left) and Mrs. Frank Borman. (AP)

cial picture coverage of each news media—particularly television—to go whole hog. If he succeeds in relaxing the Magazine's control over astronaut activities to any great degree, the value to Life and Field of their exclusive arrangement would be diminished.

The two publishers are bound for about 21 months more by the existing contract. This represents an outlay of about \$875,000. After that, the contract comes up for renewal, which would be a decision involving a cool two million dollars.

It is possible that the option will not be picked up by the publishers. It is also possible that NASA will take another look at the memoir-peddling question and—with a new occupant in the White House—succeed in calling a halt to the whole questionable business.

Either way, adverse action at option time would be a financial disaster for the astronauts.

All Clear for Space Chase

CAPE KENNEDY (UPI)—Astronauts Walter Schirra and Thomas Stafford, fit and ready for a Sunday blastoff, got the all-clear from weathermen today and tackled paperwork and practice for their chase in space after Gemini 7.

Everything was rolling smoothly toward the 9:54 a.m. EST, liftoff Sunday. The Gemini 6 pursuit ship emerged from the first round of final launch preparations Thursday night with a steady "go" for flight.

Spaceflight weather forecasters predicted perfect weather for the launch site. The outlook for all the ocean landing areas also was good.

Schirra and Stafford, who came within 42 minutes of launching seven weeks ago, attended a routine review of testing on their powerful rocket during the morning.

Meanwhile astronauts Frank Borman and James Lovell aboard Gemini 7 unshowered, unwashed and undanted in their goal of 14 days aloft, kidded with ground station friends and plunged into a schedule that officials said "should be one of their busiest." A series of picture-taking and communications experiments were on tap, weather permitting.

They were given an unusually early go-ahead for at least 103 orbits, carrying them another day toward a goal of rewriting the world's book of space records.

Mission controllers said pilot Lovell "sounded a little hoarse," and Borman told them "I feel like I was born up here."

The Gemini 6 pilots passed their final major prelaunch physical examination Thursday and were declared "fit and ready and looking forward to their mission" by Dr. Duane Catterson.

Their 109-foot space machine was put through a four-hour series of radar, guidance and life support equipment checks by engineers and technicians whose record work made the Sunday launch date possible.

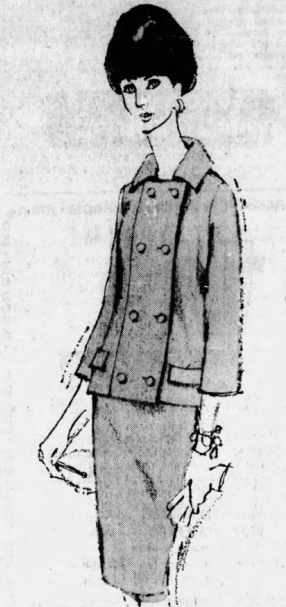
Today was a general work day with spacecraft technicians filling the capsule's water supply, hooking up flight articles and preparing for the second portion of the preliminary countdown Saturday.

"Things are in real good shape," said G. Merritt Preston, launch director. "I think probably we are in as good shape to launch Sunday as we have been for any launches."

The 7000-pound Gemini 6 spacecraft will be rocketed into an egg-shaped orbit ranging from 100 to 169 miles high. Then, during the next five hours and 40 minutes, it will shoot from one path to another to match the 185-mile-high circular path of Gemini 7.

Astronauts Frank Borman and James Lovell, with two quick bursts of their maneuvering rockets, kicked the

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