

Nation

Fuel tank insulation cracks

Key problems delay flight

WASHINGTON — Space agency engineers have been warning for months that problems during the crucial final eight weeks of tests could force new delays in the postponed initial flight of the space shuttle Columbia.

Such a problem surfaced last week from an unexpected source — the big piggyback tank the Columbia will haul into space to supply the hydrogen and oxygen for the re-usable rocket plane's three main engines.

National Aeronautics and Space Administration officials announced Monday that insulation troubles with the tank will delay Columbia's maiden launch from March 17 to the week beginning April 5. Unofficial work schedules established April 7 as the new target date.

Although the 54½-hour orbital flight is more than two years behind schedule, the new postponement was the first substantial delay since last July.

The last testing milestone, now scheduled for Feb. 16, is a dress rehearsal countdown that will lead to the firing of the Columbia's three main engines while the ship remains locked to the Cape Canaveral launch pad.

The insulation problem was discovered following

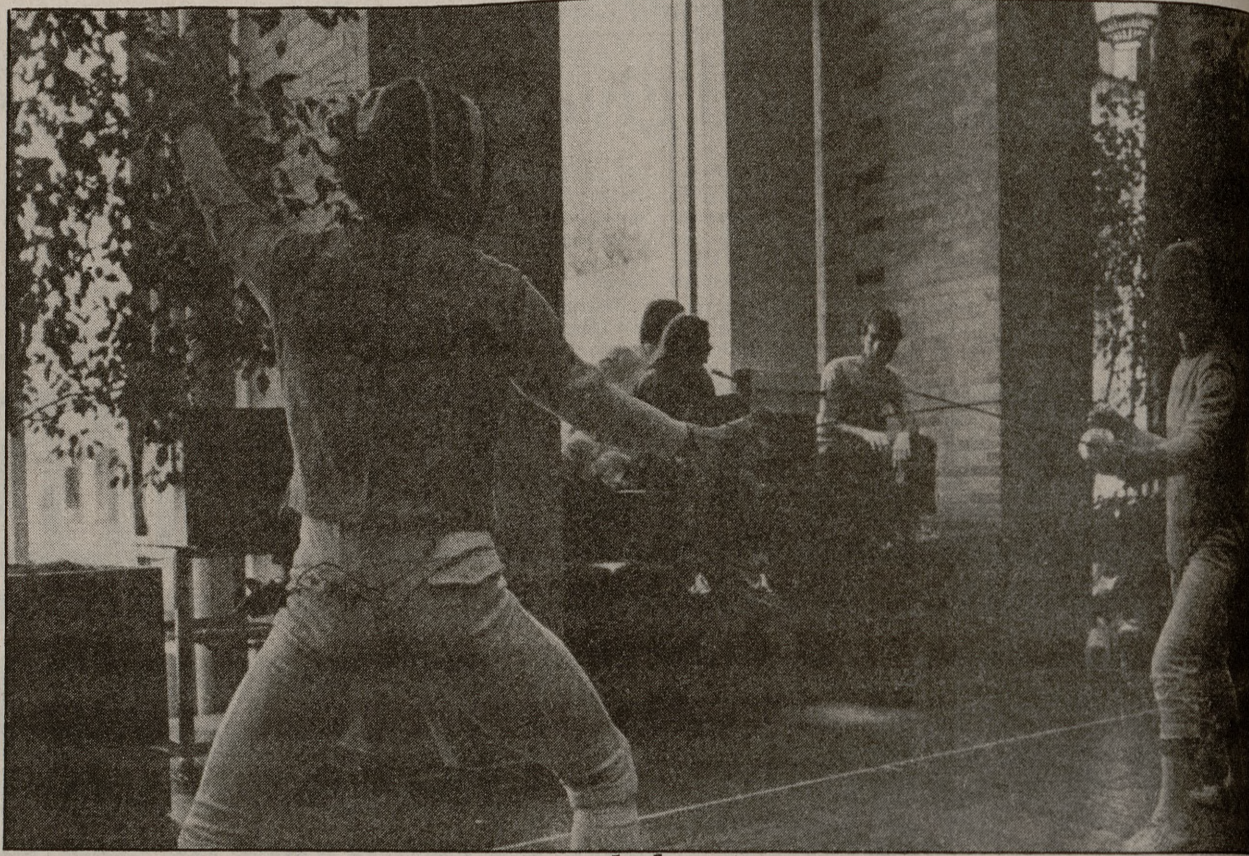
tests Jan. 22 and 24 in which more than a half million gallons of supercold liquid hydrogen and liquid oxygen were pumped into the external tank for the first time.

Cracks in three sections of polyurethane foam that had been sprayed on the tank tipped engineers off to the problem. Jack Wild, deputy director of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's expendable equipment office, said test borings showed that a hard, high-temperature insulator beneath the foam had separated from the tank's aluminum skin.

Wild said it appears workers may have waited too long between applying the glue and the insulator. The operation must be completed within 60 minutes for proper bonding.

The insulation problem occurred on the side of the tank facing the shuttle. This is a difficult area to reach, and technicians plan to erect special scaffolding to make repairs after completion of the test firing.

The external tank, shaped like a silo 154 feet tall and 27½ feet in diameter, is new to the space program. Unlike one-use only rockets of the past that carried their fuel internally, the propellants for the shuttle's three main engines are stored in the outside tank so it can be jettisoned after the fuel is burned up.



Foiled again

Mark Pearcy, left, an environmental design senior, and senior biology major Kenneth Peck, representing the Texas A&M Fencing Team, square off in a foil fencing demonstration held Tuesday in the MSC Student Lounge. The fencing team is hosting a tournament this weekend in east Kyle Field.

Man claims bankruptcy for more than \$6 billion in mine futures collapse

SALT LAKE CITY — Uncle Sam still holds the record for having the largest debt in America — but E. Sterling Hunsaker of Kearns, Utah, is closing in fast. Hunsaker, 59, who has started

over 50 companies in his 40 years in business, has filed for bankruptcy claiming \$613.4 billion in debts. The national debt is expected shortly to reach \$935 billion. It's the largest bankruptcy anyone in the Utah federal court can remem-

ber. "We're not quite sure how to handle it," said bankruptcy clerk Mike Shepherd. "It's very complicated." How can one man owe two-thirds of the national debt? The answer, says Hunsaker, lies in gold and oil

certificates sold by a Panamanian trust company using 15 million claims he owns to attract investors. None of the claims has been paid. The gold is still in the ground.

It all started when Hunsaker set up with a plan to build a coal plant near Redding, Utah. He would use tar sand as fuel. Hunsaker said he has developed a method of recovering natural gas and gold from tar-sand deposits. The plan major oil companies rejected as too costly.

But Hunsaker said he thought the process will work, and he set out to raise money.

He said he made a deal with people who operated Kingbridge International Fiduciary Trust, a Panamanian-based trust company. In exchange for 40 percent of the company, Kingbridge agreed to help raise \$200 million for the plant.

The trust company began selling gold certificates and gold bonds against Hunsaker's claims. The bonds weren't supposed to be redeemed for 20 years, Hunsaker said, but the investors suddenly began demanding payment and suing.

"I wasn't supposed to have anything unless I got funds to develop my properties," he said. "I waited for the funding, but it didn't happen."

"I got taken for a long ride and only way I could stop was to file for bankruptcy and kill the whole project."

Hunsaker said he doesn't know how many certificates actually were sold or how much money trust investors made and kept for themselves. But he had to list all the assets, issues of certificates and letters of credit in his bankruptcy petition. They total a staggering \$613,406,718,185.53.

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On-Campus Interviews Friday, February 20

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