

Opinion

Despite shuttle disaster, America wants space

At the Air and Space Museum yesterday it was decided that this particular shuttle launch would be shown on the television monitor in Space Hall. The launches had become so routine that even in this palace to rocketry they had ceased to take much notice. But this one was different. The first teacher was going into space and so the monitor was on. Beside it, like a marquee, were posted the relevant names. Sometime around noon, it became clear that the names of the crew were the names of the dead.

Richard Cohen

People came and stood before the monitor. Looming behind them were the immense rockets of the past, huge things that go clear to the high ceiling, with all those familiar, Walter Cronkite-era names and you could almost hear him say them — JU-piter. These were the Conestoga wagons of our generation, the Pony Express of the American Space Age — names that fired the American imagination and convinced us that space was ours. Look at the flag that waves from the moon.

The monitor showed the tape of the catastrophic blast-off. A kid in a Superman cape looked into it, uncomprehending. A woman slowly brought her hand up to her face as if to ward off the coming blast and, at the moment, a man's mouth just dropped open. No one said anything — not to relatives, not to strangers. It was as if a president had died and once again where we were so proud, we were just so sad.

Up in a gallery, the voice of John F. Kennedy recited his summons to the moon. He spoke on a constantly-repeating videotape. It was May 25, 1961, and he was appearing before a joint session of Congress. There was Lyndon Johnson, the Senate majority leader. And there was Sam Rayburn, the speaker of the House. The young president said we were going to send an American to the moon and back. Amazingly, there was no applause. Maybe no one believed him. The moon! It once seemed a silly dream.

But we have been there and back. We have been to space like no other nation. We have made it our frontier, the American frontier, and we have done it in a characteristic way. We centered it around man himself, the individual, and then we mythologized it with stories and movies and the speeches of politicians. We made the astronauts into senators and corporate executives and even took one who wasn't one, Chuck Yeager, and made him the biggest hero of them all. He had the Right Stuff.

Almost instantly, reporters and commentators on television were questioning the worth of the program and whether we always needed to send people into space. Other nations send machines. Still others do nothing. Wasn't this some characteristic American silliness, one that has backfired? NASA publicists had put Christa McAuliffe, perky Christa McAuliffe, in each of our families. Now, because of that, we would mourn her all the more.

But while the commentators were commenting and the reporters were questioning, the revolving doors to the museum kept turning. The people kept coming as they do everyday. There is no more popular museum in the world and even on this tragic day the revolving doors seemed to churn them in and out.

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MARGULIES
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Most of them already knew the news, some did not. But even those, once they were told, went on with their tour. They were drawn to this place because space is where America has placed the banner of manifest destiny. They moved quickly to the rockets, the satellites, hardly pausing at the original Wright Brothers plane that hangs near the doorway. It is space they want. It is space they will continue to get.

At 12:59, Bob Stephens, a volunteer

guide, started his walk across the main floor of the museum. Stephens is retired Air Force, a space buff like so many of the volunteers. Earlier, he had said to a colleague, "I don't feel like giving the tour." but now he was standing where the tour begins, waiting. One by one the people approached. A family from New York. A man with a denim jacket. Another family and another man until, finally, there were about 20 of them.

Stephens spoke up. "Well, good afternoon, ladies, gentleman," he said.



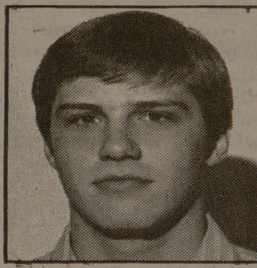
"Now I suppose that you all know the tragedy. As far as we know there are survivors." He paused. "This must feel very somber, but I'll do the can." He scanned the faces looking at him. "Any questions?" he asked. Okay. Let's walk out and look at the first machine-powered aircraft. There was an appropriate pause. The tour resumed.

So will the space program.

Richard Cohen is a columnist for the Washington Post Writers Group.

The future of groundhogs depends on the weather

In a controversial decision Sunday, Punxatawny Phil, the world's only official weather forecasting rodent, predicted an early spring. The early spring verdict has been rendered only seven times in the last 99 years.



Loren Steffy

Some members of the onlooking crowd were speechless, others even questioned the decision of the world's shortest and most accurate weather wizard.

Despite fierce competition from my fellow reporters, I managed to get an exclusive interview with Phil in his burrow after the earth-shattering event.

Phil's humble abode far exceeds the wildest fantasies of most other ground-dwelling animals. Although it was a little cramped for me, this underground chalet provides ample living space for

Phil. The burrow is electrically heated in the winter and cooled by central air conditioning in the summer. An indoor pool and jacuzzi help Phil get through the summer months when his meteorological talents aren't needed.

Phil fixed himself a dry martini and put on some music — "Me and My Shadow." He sat back in his recliner.

"So, whatcha wanna know?" he asked.

I suddenly felt overwhelmed. Here I was sitting in the burrow of the leading pioneer in the field of shadowseasonology — the study of seasonal change through the use of one's shadow.

"Well," I said, "why the decision of an early spring? Usually you predict six more weeks of winter."

"I just go with what the shadow says. If it ain't there, it ain't there."

"I see. Well, that's only happened seven times in the last 99 years."

"I wouldn't know about that," Phil replied. "I haven't been at it that long. I did give the early spring call in 1983, though."

"Well, your record so far has been infallible, you must have some secret."

"Not really. It's in my blood. I was always good at foreseeing lows in barometric pressure and things like that."

"So how did you get started in this business?"

"I was just in the right place at the right time. One day I was digging up some juicy roots, and this farmer grabs me and brings me here. Now I got this nice place, no rent, free food, fans who love me and a job that only takes up one day a year."

"Have you ever thought of moving on?"

"I kicked it around for a while, but I like it here. I turned down a job with the National Weather Service, you know. Predicting hurricanes just isn't my style. Seasonal changes are my specialty."

"I noticed you looked pretty comfortable in front of the cameras earlier, have you ever thought about going into television?"

"Sure. I'm certainly qualified, but I

hate to wear ties. I keep tripping over them."

"The tradition of Groundhog Day..."

"Woodchuck Day, please. 'Groundhog' is such a derogatory term."

"Sorry. Woodchuck Day got started under more... natural conditions. Do you feel all this modernization has affected your ability to accurately predict the seasonal transition?"

"Nah. My predecessors had it rough, but so did yours. You've come a long way from transcribing everything by hand. I don't feel my modern comforts hurt my work — they help it, just like word processors have helped yours."

"What do you see in the future for ground... uh... woodchucks?"

"Well, I'm going to stay right here until it's time to retire. I've got a nice pension coming, and I plan to enjoy it."

"But I think times are changing for woodchucks as a whole. People are starting to realize their forecasting abilities. Many are getting snatched up by big

businesses that need accurate predictions in a hurry. Others are running their own companies. I think NWS soon will have some stiff competition.

"I think in the next 20 to 30 years you'll see woodchucks recognized worldwide as superior meteorologists. The possibilities will be tremendous, of course, some still will choose the life — digging up roots, getting nibbled by farmers, chased by dogs — but society has its throwbacks."

"One final question, Phil, how would a wood chuck chuck wood?"

"Everyone always asks me that, really don't know the answer. I'm smart, he doesn't chuck wood, he works like mine where he just has a hole out of a hole once a year and let the bounce off him."

Loren Steffy is a junior journalist for the Opinion Page Editor of The Battalion.

Mail Call

Hit and run
EDITOR:

This letter is addressed to the person who hit my bicycle with their car Tuesday night and wrapped it around a tree in the MSC parking lot. I am a 30-year-old mother who has returned to college and am doing my best to make ends meet.

It's not easy but I didn't expect it would be. My bicycle helped in some small way to make my life on campus easier for me. Unfortunately it was damaged so badly that there is no way to repair it. I am sure that whoever hit it thought that it was no big deal, but the least they could have done was exhibit the true spirit of this school and offer to help.

Anyway, I hope the guilty party reads this letter indeed feels a little remorse for their action.

Lisa A. Palmer
Civil Engineering '88

Thanks for the reference
EDITOR:

Thank you for printing the letter from Brian Sterling in last Wednesday's Battalion. KAMU-FM has no advertising budget, and the reference to our NEW AGE MUSIC program (Fridays at 7 p.m.) was great publicity.

Speaking of publicity, we invite all University students and staff to stop by the KAMU-FM table in the

Memorial Student Center this Wednesday. Our personnel will be anxious to meet you, give you a schedule and bumpersticker, and introduce you to the world of public radio.

KAMU-FM features jazz and classical music, but there are also programs that regularly present reggae, bluegrass, folk and contemporary Christian music. And the news programs from National Public Radio are without equal. So take a few moments and stop by our table in the MSC, and "plug into the world" with KAMU-FM 90.9.

Larry Jackson
KAMU-FM 90.9

Classic double-standard

EDITOR:

In Friday's Battalion, there appeared two articles concerning alcohol on campus. The first article, "Faculty Senate Seeking Place For Proposed Club" by Mona L. Palmer, discussed a Faculty Senate subcommittee that was dealing with a proposed club in Rudder Tower that would serve alcohol to members of the faculty.

The second article, "Alcohol at A&M May Be On the Rocks" by Sonia Lopez, reported about a "special University committee" considering ideas to deal with the new drinking law — and it said that some members of the committee are in favor of a dry campus (i.e. no alcohol in dorms).

In the first article, Dr. Brad Johnson, the faculty club subcommittee chairman, was quoted as saying "The availability of alcoholic beverages is an important issue. Faculty members are old enough to decide if they want a drink or not and should have a choice."

These two articles have the making of a classic double-standard. Texas law states that if you are 21 you are old enough to make the decision that Dr. Johnson feels so strongly about — deciding to have a drink with alcohol in it.

If a club that serves alcohol to faculty members in Rudder Tower is allowed, then the campus should not be dry to students. A campus should be completely dry or not dry at all.

I can understand how it would be hard to ensure that students under 21 will not drink if other dorm residents are drinking drinking in front of them. A possible solution that would appease the dipsomaniacs of both faculty and student status would be to have both a faculty club and an over 21 student club (perhaps Rumour's) and prohibit alcohol in the dorms.

Stan Wysocki '87

EDITOR'S NOTE: Under Texas a law, a person must be 19 or older to drink. The drinking age will be raised to 21 in September of this year.

Letters to the Editor should not exceed 300 words in length. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each letter must be signed and must include the address and telephone number of the writer.

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The Battalion also serves as a laboratory for students in reporting, editing and photography within the Department of Communication.

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