

Wednesday, April 26, 1989

Shuttle flight marks new wave in U.S. planetary exploration

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — The countdown began Tuesday for Friday's launch of space shuttle Atlantis and five astronauts on a mission to send a payload to Venus and revitalize a U.S. planetary exploration program.

The \$550 million Magellan-Venus project will mark the end of a decade-long dry spell for U.S. planet flights and signal the beginning of a science-rich three years when four major probes will be rocketed into deep space.

Liftoff is scheduled for 2:24 p.m. Friday in a rare afternoon launch.

Only five of the 28 earlier shuttle flights took off after noon.

The countdown clock began ticking on time at 8 a.m., when electrical power surged into the spaceship.

Test director Terry Willingham reported there were no problems as the count began. He said work Tuesday included checking computer software, the main engines and communications systems and closing out the engine compartment.

He said the forecast was for clear skies Friday afternoon, but officials were expressing some concern about the possibility of strong crosswinds

that could interfere with Atlantis if it had to make an emergency landing on a runway near the launch pad.

Six hours after Atlantis lifts off, commander Dave Walker and his astronaut crew will release the 7,600-pound Magellan payload, propelling it on a 468-day journey to Venus. The other crew members are pilot Ron Grabe and mission specialists Mary Cleave, Mark Lee and Norman Thagaard.

Magellan is to slip into orbit around the cloud-shrouded planet in August 1990 and map up to 90 percent of its surface during the following 243 days with a high resolution radar system.

The images, relayed to Earth and enhanced by computer, could help scientists understand how Venus was formed and evolved. They are expected to show features as small as 120 yards across, 10 times sharper than any previous pictures of the planet.

Stephen Saunders, Magellan project scientist at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, said it is hoped the expedition will answer "a major question of why Earth and Venus evolved so differently even though at the beginning of the solar system they were almost identical."

White House proposes cutbacks for futuristic weapons systems

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Bush administration will slow or cancel several futuristic weapons programs, including Star Wars and the stealth bomber, to build more of the arms already in the nation's arsenal, Defense Secretary Dick Cheney said Tuesday.

To further cope with fiscal 1990 budget reductions mandated by a new White House-congressional compromise, the Army, Navy and Air Force will reduce their active-duty strength of more than 2.1 million by 16,800 men and women, Cheney added.

But Crowe, who testified along with the other members of the Joint Chiefs, said the moves were not justified by any changes in the threat posed by the Soviet Union or in American commitments around the world.

Cheney, the former Wyoming representative who testified for the first time since becoming defense secretary last month, said the cuts could not come "without offending somebody, without breaking some china, stepping on some toes."

Cheney said the focus will shift from deployment sometime in the 1990s to research on "Brilliant Pebbles," a more advanced system consisting of thousands of orbiting satellites.

- The B-2 stealth bomber will have its production pushed back a year to 1993. Almost \$4.1 billion is being cut from the fiscal 1990 and 1991 budgets for the radar-evading plane. Recent estimates of \$500 million per plane make it the most expensive in history.
- The Marine Corps' V-22 Osprey, a battlefield aircraft designed to take off like a helicopter but fly like an airplane, will be dropped.

The surface temperature of Earth's sultry twin is 900 degrees Fahrenheit and the atmospheric pressure is 90 times greater than that on Earth.

Magellan is the first new American planetary spacecraft since Pioneer 13 was launched in 1978, also to Venus. It also is the first planetary payload to be carried by a shuttle.

In October, another Atlantis crew will start the Galileo spacecraft on the way to Jupiter; in October 1990, the Ulysses probe will be launched, also from Atlantis, to study the sun, and in 1992, the Mars Observer craft will be on its way aboard an unmanned rocket.

Government attempts to end student protests

BEIJING (AP) — The government moved Tuesday to halt a 9-day-old student protest for democracy and a free press, urging them to go back to class and disband their fledgling unions, and warning workers to stay on the job.

In a harsh editorial, read on the televised nightly news and hourly on the radio, the Communist Party called for a swift end to the student movement, the biggest since the revolution of 1949.

"This is a grave political struggle facing the whole party and Chinese citizens," the editorial said. "This is a planned conspiracy that ... aims at negating the leadership of the party and the socialist system."

It called the student unions illegal and said new demonstrations would be suppressed. The unions were set up this week to replace the state-run student organizations.

"This is their first step," said a Beijing University student as the editorial was played repeatedly over loudspeakers on campus. "We can expect arrests to come soon."

Students and student leaders said they would defy the editorial.

"It makes me sick to hear this," said one student at Beijing Normal University, speaking on condition of anonymity. "This is just the kind of propaganda and lies we are fighting."

Among the reductions in "programs which offered potential, but which we could not afford at this time:"

- "Star Wars," the program pushed by Ronald Reagan to develop lasers and other exotic weapons to shoot down enemy nuclear missiles, will lose \$1 billion from its proposal 1990 budget, giving it a new total of \$4.6 billion.
- Cheney said the focus will shift from deployment sometime in the 1990s to research on "Brilliant Pebbles," a more advanced system consisting of thousands of orbiting satellites.
- The B-2 stealth bomber will

Agency says two drugs hindered heart patients

WASHINGTON (AP) — Two drugs used for years to treat mild heartbeat irregularities have been withdrawn from that use after studies showed that more patients taking them died than did patients who took only sugar pills, a federal agency announced Tuesday.

The drugs, identified as Tambocor and Enkaid, were used in a clinical study of patients who had suffered heart attacks and then experienced mild arrhythmias, or irregular heartbeats.

The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute said that the study showed that patients on the medication were dying more than twice as fast of heart attacks than patients who were taking a placebo, or sugar pill.

Food and Drug Administration chief Frank Young emphasized that though the agency is recommending that these drugs not be used for mild arrhythmias, patients should go to their doctors before changing medication.

The drugs are the only members of a pharmaceutical class called IC. Drugs in this group work to slow electrical conduction in the heart fiber. Young said these two drugs may continue to be used to treat patients in emergency situations where the heart has slipped into a life-threatening rhythm.

Tambocor is manufactured by 3M Riker Laboratories. Its generic name is flecainide. Enkaid, whose generic name is encainide, is manufactured by Bristol-Myers.

Representatives of both the drug companies said they were working with the FDA to change the instructions on how their drugs could be used. A Bristol-Myers official said that patients with unused drugs could be reimbursed but a representative of Riker Laboratories said no decision had been made by his company on that issue.

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