

als

Interview with Arnold W. Frutkin, Assistant Administrator, NASA,
(for International Affairs) 11 July 1972. With RS.

Possibly the most interesting part of this one-hour interview -- less a ten minute conversation on the telephone -- was not taped. It concerned the famous trip of the Gemini 4 astronauts (McDivitt and White) to the Paris Air Show in June, 1965. Dispatched after midnight by LBJ, along with the astronauts and their wives, were Hubert Humphrey, James Webb, Chief of Protocol Lloyd Hand and Frutkin, among others.

Apparently there was a lot of backbiting ("blood on the floor"), said Frutkin. Humphrey, Webb and Hand, plus Ambassador Charles Bohlen, were all striving for the upper hand. "Seeing who could be front and center?" I asked, and Frutkin said yes. Webb was the loser, and he went off by himself. Contrary to what E. J. Stecker of Holec Inc. wrote Congressman Talcott (see files), Webb did not emerge a hero. "He just went off by himself," says Frutkin, who thinks the whole trip was unnecessary: "People forget about those things in a day or two."

My appointment had been scheduled for 1000 but his secretary, Mrs. Gowers, said he wasn't feeling well and would be in this afternoon. When I saw him at 1400 Frutkin said he wasn't sick; he had only been up late listening to the Democratic Convention, which lasted until 0500. When I told him Hubert Humphrey had withdrawn from the race this morning, Frutkin said Humphrey was extremely nice, "but not terribly smart." He saw Humphrey now and then when HHH was v.p. (and Chairman of the Space Council).

There is a touch of the pompous about Frutkin. When I asked him, late in the interview, if he remembered the Queen Fredrika incident, he said he did, "She visited von Braun or von Braun visited her or something." I said more than that, she applied to be an astronaut and von Braun neglected to tell her he had nothing to do with the selection of astronauts. "That's all froth," said Frutkin, and allowed that he was only interested in the serious things. It is perhaps an indication of his denigration of froth that he doesn't give his birth date (it actually is 30 November 1918, we found with some difficulty), nor the degrees he earned at Harvard and Columbia (Harvard is listed as where his undergraduate work was done, Columbia as the institution of his graduate work).

After the untaped portion concerning the Paris Air Show of 1965, I asked Frutkin about Webb's "big booster" which he ~~won't~~ was still forecasting for the Russians when he retired in September 1968. Frutkin said the matter was difficult to talk about because of classification, "but one has to assume, and I fully believe, that Mr. Webb was not talking through his hat, he was not inflating any vague Soviet threat. He had good reason for what he was talking about, and the fact that that booster has not materialized in this time frame does not mean that he was wrong, at all.. One should assume that the Russians had difficulty in their program."

What about the ^{NEWS} newspaper reports that the big booster had blown up on the pad?

Frutkin: "I couldn't ... I've seen the newspaper reports, of course."

Concerning the Paine-Blagonravov meeting at the Lotos Club in April 1970 (as reported in my story on Op-Ed page of N. Y. Times of 17 June 1972), Frutkin said, "That was a very casual evening dinner with light talk. No very great, weighty meeting there. It was just that Paine used it as one of many initiatives he was pushing at the time to try to reopen the earlier associations we had had with the Russians in the Dryden-Blagonravov period. It was ~~an~~ that occasion that he first mentioned some kind of docking in space." The meeting had been listed in the chronology issued by NASA two months ago, when Nixon and Brezhnev signed the space agreement, but nowhere else. I said I had seen no mention of it except in Paine's personal papers."

Interviewer: "Did you know in advance about Kennedy's block-buster on 20 September 1963 at the UN?"

Frutkin: "Yeah, a little bit. As I recall, I believe it was McGeorge Bundy called Webb very shortly in advance -- like the day before." In St. Louis, where Webb was making a speech, I said "...and asked Webb if he could see any objection with the President's coming out with that proposal. I believe Webb said he did not see any objection -- I could be wrong about that, but Webb said he went along with it in the end.. Webb got to me just before the speech, and I argued very strongly against it being made that way and said it would be disastrous, because it was no way to approach the Russians. If you are serious about the thing you would have to approach them privately, not expose them this way..I've written a little book which treats of that incident, 'International Cooperation in Space.' The book opens with it. There was this violent reaction in the Congress against it. And NASA got its first significant cut. as I think as a direct consequence of that. It figured largely in it .

"If he meant is seriously it was no way to go about it. If it was a trivial cosmetic effort, then the cost in terms of liaison with the Congress and all the rest of it was serious...I think that was a bad mistake, frankly; well intentioned but the approach was wrong .. There was never even any kind of courtesy of a response to that."

I mentioned that Albert Thomas had said the quarter billion budget cut bore no relation to the speech. ^{half?}

Frutkin: "I remember the press coverage on that at the time linked the two very, very closely and people like Teague and others were very explicit in their attitude toward the thing. Teague made a remark to me personally, 'If this is the way the guy is going to act with us, then the hell with him.' I have a lot of footnotes from the

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the counter

press in that book. Some of them may be useful to you."

Q: "This book of mine is essentially about the Apollo program, and I'm not going deeply into international affairs, but you can't ignore them since it was the international aspects of the space program that got us really into it in the first place." Sure, sure, said Frutkin.

Q: "A lot of people look back now on the space race as a figment of the imagination.. A book by three Englishmen that came out a couple of years ago called 'Journey to Tranquility' is one of the best accounts of the moon landing that I've read. It's certainly better written than the others. It's more cynical than most things published over here. They say there really wasn't a space race after all." Frutkin said he hadn't read the book.

Frutkin: "In those days we all said well there's a competition, but there isn't a race and we always said we weren't engaged in a crash program. In terms of the criteria we used for a crash program, that was absolutely true. We weren't on three shifts; we weren't pursuing multiple approaches to the same goal in the event that one didn't work; we weren't saying 'the hell with money.' None of those indicia of a crash program in the sense of the Manhattan project were present. In that sense it really wasn't a crash program. In the absence of a crash program you weren't in an all-out race.

general

"At the same time the explanation given by people like Webb and Seamans and others has been that the President wanted something that would reestablish our primacy in this highly visible activity and something was deliberately selected that would carry a good number of program objectives in terms of advancing the technology and ~~ix~~ all the rest of it, but also an objective in which we could beat the Russians. (WHAT A SENTENCE). I understand things were considered that were more ~~immediate~~ immediate, like just orbiting the moon. But it was felt that the Russians might beat us to all those things. So something was picked in which we might beat them. That would suggest that some of the attributes of a race were present.

"My own guess today would be yes, there was a race but it was not a mad race, it was not a frenzied race. It was not a crash program to support the race. It was a matter of world politics, in a sense, whereby we bootstrap ourselves in technology by doing something that would serve as an international image of some significance. I think it did the country an enormous amount of good."

(29 Mar. 71)

Q: "In the Congressional Record of a little over a year ago/ there was inserted a long piece by Julius Epstein of the Hoover Institution of War, Peace and Something other at Stanford -- a long article concerning Soviet failures/-- how many cosmonauts they had killed. Do you remember that?"

Frutkin: "No. I really don't waste time with that kind of nonsense. There is just no basis kind of..."

157 Q: "What he has done is to put together things from the Record,

plus some very dubious sources. An article in True Magazine is one of his chief sources and a column written by Allen and Scott -- Bob Allen and Paul Scott .."

Frutkin: "And probably stuff from a German Observatory at Bokum.. There are a few observatories that specialize in ^{reports of} voices from Soviet astronauts and astronautiq@ttes lost in space. I think B-o-c-h-u-m. In any case, all of that stuff is just arrant nonsense, total nonsense, as far as I know." Note: Bochum is not one of Epstein's sources -- an Itlian newspaper is7.

Q: "One of his reports, as I remember, is that another cosmonaut was sent up a day or two before Gagarin, but he was hastily killed, so they sent Gagarin up on April 12, 1961."

Frutkin: "Well, I would have no information whatsoever on any of that, and most everything I know would argue in the opposite direction. We know of all the accidents affecting astronauts in space. There may be others, many others, on the ground that we know nothing about. If you read Charlie Sheldon he's the most authorative guy writing in the open literature about that kind of stuff. There is plenty there to suggest that the Soviets have had lots of difficulties in their programs, and I think it is safe to assume that there are plenty of additional things that he doesn't say or can't say."

Q: "It's safe to say that they still haven't obtained liquid hydrogen, isn't it?"

Frutkin: "So far as anyone knows, they haven't used the high-energy fuels."

Q: "Which means they can't go to the moon very well unless they do have a tremendous booster, doesn't it?"

F.: "Or some very elaborate staging program, which hasn't shown up yet. It would require an awful lots of rehearsal, I would guess."

QE "Well, it took them a lot longer to rendezvous and dock than it did us, but they finally have mastered the thing. I suppose they ... you can't keep anything exclusively indefinitely, can you?"

F: "Oh, no, no."

Q: "Mr. Frutkin, I was reading this morning some things in your folder, and I came across a press conference that you had the 29th of October, 1970. You said then that the Soviets had not yet accepted our offer of lunar samples. They did later, of course."

F: "Yeah. That October '70 conference came after the October meeting where we negotiated the rendezvous and docking thing."

Q: "You had just come back from Moscow, hadn't you?"

F: "Yes, and we had not the January '71 meeting, at which the

subject of lunar samples was brought forward and agreed. We were distributing to the Soviets our announcements of flight opportunities -- these things that regularly go out to domestic experimenters and foreign experimenters, announcing future programs and inviting their proposals for experiments, which are then reviewed and selected on the basis of merit. Some time before that..."

(Phone call interrupts).

include "The point is that some time during that Paine period -- Paine was looking for many ways to approach the Soviets. One thing we suggested here was to keep them on the list for flight opportunities, and open the thing up to them. Now, they have never responded in any way to any announcement of flight opportunities."

Q: "What do you mean by 'flight opportunities'?"

to orbit, Frutkin: "Well, these are formalized issuances from NASA, which announce that we plan a certain mission, or series of missions, describe its characteristics and objectives, and invite proposals for experiments that would be incorporated in the mission. For example, you can have an observatory satellite; you explain where it would go, what its general purposes ~~mean~~ would be. You would invite experiments, and you'd get maybe fifty proposals and Naugle's people, with outside advice, would review them and select maybe eight or twelve to go on it. Now, we've always included foreign sources in those invitations. We've flown a couple of dozen; those experiments usually cost the foreigners half a million to five or six million dollars apiece. They'd get them to the point of flight readiness at their own expense; we incorporate them in the satellite and we both get the data.

"Now, we began to extend those opportunities to the Soviets. Never got a response."

Q: "These were strictly on unmanned..."

F.: "No, because, for example, that Swiss experiment that was put on the moon was a response to a flight opportunity announcement. Geiss, experiment. We also invited ~~proposals~~ proposals for analysis of lunar samples that might be brought back. The Soviets got that announcement of proposals for analysis of lunar samples and they never responded; we knew they wouldn't until such time as they could acquire them also and swap them even steven. By January, you see, they had their first lunar samples in hand. And when we went over there we visited -- we were the first to see their lunar samples. We did then negotiate an exchange. An exchange hadn't been proposed earlier, just their access to our samples.

Q: "I knew of these experiments, of course. The phrase 'flight opportunities' was new to me. "

F: "It's a Capitalized Phrase, a term of art (?). We call them A.F.O.'s."

Q: "Paine was very interested in this cooperation with the Soviets, I know. Did he have to make a hard sell at the White House?"

F. : "No, as you know in all these areas, there is some internal policy directive, guidelines that apply. And those date back a long, long time. In fact, I personally wrote those. They were processed through Government, White House and State and approved, and they have been the guidelines we have followed. Generally, they are positive about seeking Soviet cooperation. Every president since Eisenhower has said, 'Yeah, it would be a wonderful thing if we could get these people to cooperate with us.' So it has been a legitimate objective for us, sometimes pushed a little more than at other times. Kennedy was very much for it, Johnson was very much for it, and so is Nixon. So, we had no problems with the White House at all. I think the approach we have taken has always been sensible, so nobody could accuse us of being foolish about it."

Q: "Of course, it is much easier to get the public, and especially the politicians, to accept cooperation once we had beaten the Russians to the moon. It would have been much harder around the time of Apollo 9 or 10 to sell cooperation in this country, wouldn't it?"

F: "No, it wasn't at all. I think the problem that came about when Kennedy made the UN statement had nothing to do with the proposal for cooperation. I think it had to do with the poor liaison between the White House and the Congress. In my mind it was entirely that kind of thing. We had done other things in 1962 and 1964 with no problem from some of these same people on the Hill, because we went up and talked to them and explained to ~~them~~ what we wanted to do, and why, and what our guidelines were. They were all for it. It was just that something as big as that was sprung without any consultation with the Space Committees and the people on it, and their own sense of prerogative and judgment and so on. That's my feeling. It's highly political difficulty rather than ~~rather than~~ the substance of cooperation."

C — "Now, it's true that we in NASA are a little freer in terms of what we can think of doing realistically with the Russians, having now gotten a man to the moon. We ^{were} ~~were~~ preoccupied with that program and no one would have tolerated a proposal that would have complicated our lives in getting to the moon, and would subject us to some kind of burdensome coordination with Soviets. In the absence of any demonstration that you would work effectively with them -- we had lots of trivial programs with them that suggested that you couldn't work well with them. Now we've moved into another period where what we are talking about with them doesn't burden us in any way. It offers many advantages to us, and we are beginning to get -- since October, 1970 -- we've gotten much better indication of their readiness to work with us in that particular field than we have had before."

Q: "How many times have you ~~been~~ ~~to~~ to the Soviet Union now?"

F.: "Five or six, I think." "I've been on every visit that has been made."

Q: "Gilruth has been twice, and Low went once."

F.: "Low has been twice. January '71, and this April '72 that Low, Lunney and I made to prepare the way for the President's agreement."

Q: "I remember the one in January because I told Low how awful the weather was going to be because I had spent January six years ago. When he went, of course, it was spring-like all the time."

F.: "It was very pleasant, very mild. Moscow is not a very pleasant place, but -- that's a picture I took out of my hotel window up there on the wall."

Q.: "You must have been at the National."

F.: "No, that's the Russiya. It's been built since you were there. It's only three or four years old."

Q.: "Did you go after Borman and Armstrong had gone?"

F.: "Yes."

Q: "What did the Russians say about their visits? You remember anything?"

A.: "I think these people have an enormous interest in and affection for astronauts. Both sides seem dearly to love the other sides' astronauts. The Russians enjoyed the visits, and admired those guys and really welcomed them and find them interesting. But this doesn't extend into anything very substantive, you know, into perfecting or changing the way the world moves or anything like that."

Q.: "I've talked to both Armstrong and Borman and they were apparently very hospitably received, to say the least."

F.: "We all have been always. No question about that."

Q.: "Have you learned Russian yet?" "Are you one of those taking lessons?"

F.: "No, I'd be very much interested in doing it, but I'm working with about fifty countries and there is no point in my ~~starting~~ ~~to~~ starting to learn one language. And, besides, it's really not necessary. You never negotiate in the other guy's language, anyway. You always negotiate in your own."

(Long telephone call interrupts here).

Lewis

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Q.: "How is Glynn Lunney as an international dealer, or.."

F.: "He's excellent. Glynn Lunney is an extremely able, personable, well-organized, competent young man. I think he is as good as you could find. Couldn't be better."

Q.: "Of course, he was the greatest of all the flight directors."

F.: "I never really observed him down there. He had not been selected as project director when we first went out there. He was just one of the small team that Gilruth and I took along. Gilruth brought him forward and designated him in this role, I think, after watching him perform. There is no question; he is just superb."

Q.: "Well, he deals as an engineer with the chief Russian engineer?"

F.: "Yes, that's right, but he has a broad responsibility for organizing, planning scheduling, conducting a mission. And it's a very broad management problem, which he addresses very, very well, I think."

Q.: "He hasn't learned Russian, has he?"

F.: "I think he and his ~~the~~ working group have -- ~~any~~ of them -- taken brief courses down there. He knows some words. He can say 'good morning' and 'how are you' and so on. He's quick and he makes a good impression on what he is picking up, and I'm sure he'll learn more."

Q.: "I know when I was down for Apollo 16 Deke Slayton had started taking lessons in Russian. I can't imagine Deke as a linguist of any kind, including English."

F.: "Very few of the Americans are. Extremely limited. Strange."

Q.: "By the way, concerning Americans in international dealings, you have seen that they are disciplining this Apollo 15 flight crew for giving the covers to that German...?"

F.: "Are they disciplining them? I didn't know that."

Q.: "Well, it just came out today. I heard it on the radio and then I went into the press room and asked what they had on it. But, gee, these guys had set up a trust fund for their children. Apparently all three of them. That's an incredible thing. How in the first place they thought they could get away with it.."

F.: "With a tape recorder on I would not want to comment ~~on~~ that." Laughter.

Q.: "That's one of the biggest surprises I've had since I came here."

F.: "People just get funny, distorted perspectives when they occupy a different point of view, which an astronaut necessarily does."

Q.: "How did they get in touch with the German who has made a fortune off the stamps?"

F.: "I know nothing about it."

Q.: "They didn't come through the International Affairs Office?"

F.: "NO, they did not." [Laughter]

Q: "Tell me what happened to your ATS satellite that was going to broadcast to all the Indian villages. It never went through, did it?"

F.: "Oh, yes. It hasn't been launched yet but it is under development. It has just undergone nearly a year's delay. Difficulties in the spacecraft. But that program is going ahead absolutely as agreed and as it ever was intended to, except that it is well behind schedule. I think there is a date set for launch but it hasn't been announced. You could get that, you know. I think the delay takes the launch into '74."

Q: "I notice that you mention the 5,000 villages that the satellite will reach. The most incredible figure I know about India is the number of villages."

F.: "It's about 550,000, and those are villages of some size. That was the figure used in our discussions."

Q.: "How many trips have you made to India on this project?"

F.: "Oh, two or three."

Q.: "How much did you get involved in the strange episode of Queen Fredrika back in 1965."

F.: "Oh, very little. That was Queen Fredrika visiting von Braun, et cetera? Queen Fredrika of Greece?"

Q.: "She applied to be an astronaut."

F.: "She was a recurrent matter. ~~She~~ There was that, and she visited von Braun or he visited her."

Q.: "Yes, he met her in Athens on a trip over there, and she misunderstood what he said, and he neglected to tell her he had nothing to do with the selection of astronauts. If you look through the correspondence on that, the whole thing was a farce."

Through Hart Eiermann a naturalized American who lives in Stuttgart, whom they knew when he worked for the NASA contractor at Cocoa Beach NY, 7/12/72
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F.: "Well, I did know about it at the time, but I must say -- I'm really interested in quite substantive programs in international cooperation. The strictly P.R. aspects are the things I try to avoid if possible."

Q.: "Well, the only thing about these lighter elements is that they do keep the reader a bit interested, anyway."

F.: "Yeah, I suppose they are fun to do, but they are very misleading, by their very mention. They are just froth and it doesn't mean anything. There are always a few people in an organization with a penchant for that kind of involvement. Susceptibility. Thirst."
/Laughs/.

Q.: "You are completely right."

Q.: "On the matter of the Soyuz 11, when the three cosmonauts died on re-entry apparently or shortly before reentry, do you recall offhand -- I can look this up, of course -- but I don't remember any precise reason or any precise accounting given of the reason for the death of the three."

F.: "No, it was a generic accounting that, in effect, they were asphyxiated. They lost their oxygen. But no reason was ever given by the Soviets, no precise reason was ever given for ~~the~~ what caused the loss of atmosphere -- whether it was a rupture or an imperfect seal, or whatever. That was never made public by the Soviets."

Q.: "Don't you find as a rule that such things leak out after a long time. That is, they will give an account of what actually happened that you wondered about for a year or two years?"

F.: "Well, maybe some day they will give the reason, but I think they like to talk as little about their failures as possible. They would never have told you anything about it if they could have concealed the deaths. But ~~that's not the case~~ the deaths were impossible to conceal because people would have been looking for those astronauts, and they would never appear, so it was inevitable that they would have to admit the deaths.. I don't think ~~it~~ they believe it serves any useful purpose, according to their rationale, to disclose to their public particularly, as well as the word public, a failure. They'll take it seriously and try to prevent it in the future, according to their rationale. If it's conceivable, they'll conceal it. No doubt about it. Then it follows that they do have to come out with it, and they'll say as little as possible. I can just tell you for your personal information, we'll know quite a bit about it from them."

Phone rings again.

F.: "I'm due down in Shapley's office unfortunately. There will be more on this that we'll have from them, through proper channels, not on the precise cause but on the effects of the accident."

Q.: "Probably in connection with cooperation on rendezvous and docking?"

F.: "No, in connection with the January 1971 agreement in the exchange of information on astronaut experiences. Physiological."

Q.: "Was that agreement yielded anything yet?"

F.: "Yes, that's what I am talking about, but it's a little premature at the moment to -- you know, we have a confirmation procedure and all sorts of stuff on exchange. But very detailed information is being exchanged. That's one of the more rewarding areas."

Q.: "Well, thank you very much..."

F.: "If there is anything I can help you with at any time..."

Q.: "Thank you very much. Now that we've got a start..."

(Here the interview ended and Frutkin walked from the extreme/ eastern end of the seventh floor to the western end for his meeting with Willis Shapley).

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