

Nixon Gambled on Moon Publicity

By Drew Pearson
and Jack Anderson

Members of President Nixon's staff are congratulating themselves that a very great public relations gamble paid off. They now admit that there was some doubt inside the White House as to whether the moon mission might have a mishap at the last minute and leave the President red-faced in the mid-Pacific, presented with the alternative of abandoning his trip around the world or continuing it under very embarrassing circumstances.

The men who led the argument that Nixon take the trip were Bob Haldeman, the former J. Walter Thompson advertising expert who likes to wrap policies up in Madison Avenue packages. He was supported by press secretary Ron Ziegler and aide Dwight Chapin, two other hotshots from J. Walter Thompson.

But the more cautious White House advisers checked with NASA. There they got the optimistic opinion that the moon project would succeed, that the President would not be left red-faced in mid-Pacific. NASA officials further advised that the most crucial part of the whole trip would be when Armstrong and Aldrin set their lunar module down on the moon and that, if at the last minute they did not make it, President Nixon would have time to change his

plans before he started for the Pacific.

NASA officials, however, did not go along with some of the other PR ideas of the ad men around Nixon. In fact there was a definite and rather unpleasant series of clashes between them.

Hassle Over Publicity

The first came when space agency officials planned to recognize the late President Kennedy's part in fixing the American policy of reaching the moon, by having the astronauts read Kennedy's vigorous statement made on May 25, 1961. It was to be read immediately after they stepped out on the moon's surface.

But President Nixon said No. He also vetoed a NASA plan to name the lunar capsule "John F. Kennedy." Instead, he proposed the names "Eagle" and "Columbia" for the two space craft.

Both of these orders were transmitted to space officials by Bob Haldeman. He also conceived the plaque which was signed by Nixon and the three astronauts and placed on the moon. NASA officials at first resisted the idea of this plaque. Finally Haldeman brusquely advised them that the plaque was the President's wish. That was that.

It was Frank Shakespeare, the new chief of the U.S. Information Agency, who concocted the idea of having Nixon put a phone call

through to the two astronauts immediately after they landed on the moon.

NASA officials grumbled privately about this, complained that it identified Nixon with the lunar landing despite the fact that he had never supported it, either in the election campaign or at any time before he became President. However, Nixon not only liked the idea but wanted to go further and narrate the moon walk. He wanted to have the astronauts give him the first description of the moon by telephone. He then would accept this on behalf of the American people.

However, space officials finally talked the President into limiting his telephone call to only two-and-one-half minutes.

This part of the ceremony, incidentally, left a bad impression overseas, even though trimmed down. Many foreigners got the impression that the President was trying to horn in on the astronauts' glory.

It has already been reported that Nixon also wanted to dine with the astronauts on the eve of their departure. Despite resistance from NASA, Nixon seriously considered going ahead with the dinner anyway, and was only dissuaded at the last minute after a firm statement by the NASA physician.

Nixon Loves Publicity

The final hassle between the White House and the space agency occurred regarding the

President's proposal to fly to the Pacific to welcome the astronauts after they splashed down. Space agency officials didn't like this either. Though they had given their frank advice that the moon launch would be successful they later suggested tactfully that it would be better if the President did not fly to the carrier Hornet.

Nixon simply ignored the suggestion. He sent word that he intended to be present.

In Indonesia, diplomats are not unaccustomed to President Nixon's love of publicity.

When he came through Djakarta as Vice President, the American embassy staged a reception for him. It is normally hot in Djakarta, and this day was especially hot. And a small army of TV technicians which came out to the American embassy to set up their klieg lights to interview Nixon made it even hotter.

Mrs. Hugh Cumming, wife of the American ambassador was concerned for the comfort of her honored guest and told the TV technicians they could not operate in the embassy.

When Vice President Nixon arrived she apologized for the heat, but added that it could have been worse.

"There were a lot of television cameras here," she said. "However, I sent them away."

The Vice President looked most unhappy. He rushed to the telephone and invited the TV men back to the embassy.

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