

would have had to be an employee of NASA or one of its vendors, to have a real idea of how America's space program operated two decades ago. Watching a space launch on TV, with updates on the progress of the mission sandwiched between "Gunsmoke" and "Bonanza," simply cannot compare with the wealth of information Collins provides.

As he characterizes the news media (which wanted only to know "How did it feel?" and "Weren't you scared?"): "It didn't seem right somehow for the press to have this morbid, unhealthy, persistent, prodding, probing preoccupation with the frills, when the silly bastards didn't even understand how the machines operated or what they accomplished."

It was definitely not as smooth as Walter Cronkite made it sound. After describing the extraordinary contingency planning, Collins quotes Jerry Lederer, safety chief of NASA at the time of Apollo 8 in 1968: A manned space flight involves "risks of great magnitude and probably risks that have not been foreseen. Apollo 8 has 5,600,000 parts and one and one half million systems, subsystems, and assemblies. Even if all functioned with 99.9% reliability, we could expect 5,600 defects" during a flight.

The key sentence in *Carrying the Fire* is: "One nice thing about Apollo was that no one ever told us that we were running the price up too high." Collins and the entire NASA team received the level of national support that they needed, and deserved. Would that the same could be said of America's space program today: Six astronauts and our first teacher in space lost their lives because politicians and cost-accounting bureaucrats forced NASA, over the years, to skimp and save, and make any number of trade-offs between safety, reliability, and cost. The result is that today, America has lost its incontestable lead in space of 20 years ago to the Soviets.

Collins hits at one of the major perpetrators of the cost-accounting mentality that has produced this disaster: the malthusian fanatic Robert S. McNamara, Kennedy's defense secretary. "The Air Force should be able to keep a stable prototype aircraft flying, winnowing, and pruning, and finally selecting only the best for production, but given the McNamaras of this world, the system is not allowed to work that way. McNamara decreed that the F-111 would be a great success before the test program began; in fact, he decreed that it would be everyplane for every purpose, sort of like building a car to drive Daddy to work, or to handle Mom's groceries, and to mix concrete on weekends, except in May when it would be busy practicing for the Indianapolis 500."

This fine sense of irony Collins is able to retain throughout; the only disagreeable part of his book comes near the end, where he feels compelled to acknowledge the "new consciousness" of the counterculture, and speculate about how nice it would be if the world's leaders could view earth's fragile orb from 100,000 miles away. Other than this tedious ending, Collins's narrative moves right along, as it unfolds for us the marvels of man's technology, as applied to space exploration.

Books Received

Mayday, The U-2 Affair, The Untold Story of the Greatest U.S.-U.S.S.R. Spy Scandal, by Michael R. Beschloss. Harper and Row, New York, 1986, 494 pages, \$8.95 paperback.

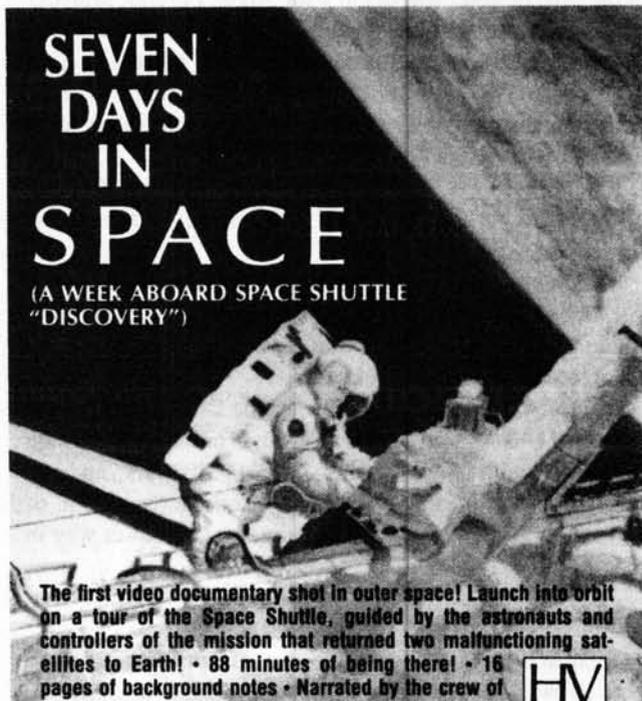
Armed Truce, The Beginnings of the Cold War 1945-1946, by Hugh Thomas. Atheneum Publishers, New York, 1987, 667 pages, \$27.50 hardcover.

Federalism, The Founders' Design, by Raoul Berger, University of Oklahoma Press, Normand and London, 1987, 223 pages, \$16.95.

Commander in Chief, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, His Lieutenants and Their War, by Eric Larrabee, Harper and Row, New York, 1987, 723 pages, \$25.00 hardcover.

Mortal Splendor, the American Empire in Transition, by Walter Russell Mead, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1987, 381 pages, \$19.95 hardcover.

The Saudis, Inside the Desert Kingdom, by Sandra Mackey, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1987, 433 pages, \$19.95 hardcover.



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