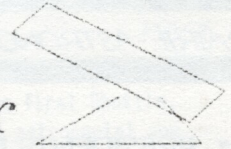


The Prairie Astronomer



Lincoln No.

Volume 25 Number 3 March 27th 1984

MX Delayed, Dangerously---

The US House earlier this month stated the Air Force will be delayed in the deployment of the first MX missiles. So what you ask? These things happen all the time in the military. Yes but as not only our space program heads down the high tech road and its related problems, so does our military. And the consequences are much greater.

Not only will the Air Force miss the projected date of completion, but they will have to hurry like Hades to make the updated target date of 1986.

The side effect of this headlong rush to meet the deadline will be this...

The cables used to lower the missiles into the silos will not have been tested to see if they can support the weight of the missile.

The silos themselves will be evaluated at the SAME TIME the actual missiles will be lowered into them.

The testing and checkout procedures used on the missiles will not be ready by the time they are lowered into the silo.

So here we have it. Granted, things could change but as it appears now there is some concern that...

We will have a MX that is not fully tested lowered into a silo that has not been fully tested by cables that no one would stake their Pentagon pension on holding the missiles as they are lowered.

How does all this pertain to us. Since we are astronomers we are also committed to the space program. In the future considering the creeping light pollution problem. Increasingly dirty skies. The space program and related space bound optics will be the saviour of future astronomers.

It does seem though that when the Space Shuttle had its problems of cost overruns, long time delays, and much written about the fact it was not tested before it flew with humans aboard the media ran with it for months. I'm sure we all remember the on going jokes of the protective tiles. This did little to help the organization who had quality high tech scientist's but woefully poor marketing, public relations, and lobby experts wage their war for adequate funding.

***** PRESIDENTS MESSAGE *****

It seems that most of this winter I've practiced "arm-chair" astronomy more than I ever have before during the cold season. I'm not really sure why since the winter sky has always been my favorite, but I have done some interesting mythology. Now I know that most of you were surveyed a few months ago and put mythology as a low priority topic, but I've found that knowing something about how the heavens were viewed in ancient times helps many young astronomers learn and remember the constellation in a fun way. Stories and myths also add a touch of mystery and intrigue that can pull kids into the fun of looking at the night sky.

I know that many of you who do volunteer work at Hyde often get school groups and the chance to do some constellation teaching, and therefore you're well aware of how fast a kids interest can drift off. I worked for two summers as a YMCA counsellor and I found that intertwining mythology with the stars and constellations made the learning process alot more fun for the kids, and alot more interesting for me. In most cases it kept everyones attention for an entire evening.

What I'm saying may be old-hat to many of you already, but for those who haven't tried mythology in teaching, I hope you will. I think you'll see the kids interest level go up, as well as maybe your own! See you at the meeting.

John Lortz

The Prairie Astronomer is published monthly by the Prairie Astronomy Club.

Membership structure--

1. Newsletter subscriber only, \$6.00 per year. Over 21 years of age no club voting privileges (Newsletter only)
 2. Junior Member, \$6.00 21 years of age and less. Receives newsletter, voting privileges. No magazine subscription discount through club.
 3. Regular Member \$19.00, receives newsletter, voting privileges, Sky and Telescope subscription with dues through club. No age restriction.
 4. Family members \$21.00, same as regular member, but receives 2 votes in elections etc.
- Numbers 2,3,4 of above also can receive as an elective, Astronomy magazine through the club at \$12.00 per year. Address membership renewals to: Prairie Astronomy Club, Inc. PO box 80553, Lincoln Ne. 68501 Address all articles for inclusion in the Newsletter to Russ Genzmer 5301 So. 30th Lincoln Ne. 68516. All articles should be received 10 days before club meeting date.

And what about the related risks. Even in the worst case instance. Say the first Shuttle, which granted was untested, malfunctioned. We would have lost only two lives (the astronauts) and one heck of a chunk of machinery. The machinery replacement was waiting in the wings. And as witnessed by the Apollo 1 disaster we would have gotten over the loss of life.

And we are surely not without our triumphs and bravery. Apollo 11, and Apollo 13 and the ongoing miracle's of the Space Shuttle itself.

And what of the effects of just one missile problem?...

Newsworthy Notes

Be sure and read the enclosed insert. The Omaha Astronomical Society in conjunction with Behlen Observatory in Mead Ne. will be hosting a star party. Complete with dinner, contest's, talks and viewing. Not to mention the stunning personalities of selected Prairie Astronomy Club members who will attend.

Ken Ringlein of KZUM, a noncommercial radio station in Lincoln presented a short talk. He presented the idea of a short program on astronomy to air each day on the station. The program would be produced and presented by the club. They would provide the studio and equipment at no charge. At the present time our club president John Lortz decided to appoint a committee to explore this idea.

The club telescope is still waiting for the mirror to be completed by Summit instruments of Florida. Suggestions were made by Russ Genzmer to start on the mount now so we would be ready to construct the tube assembly and then slip it in the waiting mount.

Normal Coufal is busy working on updating and organizing the club library, which like the Twilight Zone has floated between a number of different dimensions.

Astronomy day is targeted for May the 12th. The location is Gateway Mall. We are looking at displaying the Solar telescope, computers, telescopes, movies, astrophotography, and handouts. Again our appointment happy President John Lortz has appointed a Astronomy day committee to handle things.

The Computer Corner by Russ Genzmer

10 Print
20 F#-Focal
30 Call-875

With a personal computer and information that is available from NASA you can now track the orbit of the Shuttle from your home.

As early as three years ago space enthusiasts have been following the Shuttles orbits using microcomputers. Terry White of NASA's public affairs office in Houston says many requests for orbit information are received each launch.

As the number of micro's in the amateur astronomical and space area's grow so do these types of

requests, states White. During one of the Shuttles mission's NASA provided a number the public could call to monitor Shuttle communications. Because of the 600,000 calls received for this project NASA is now considering publishing the orbit data for tracking. This software by the way is commissioned by the government and is not subject to copyright protection.

There are some things to consider. The program has to be adapted and modified for each launch. This is because the inclination from the Cape may be different for various launch's. This effect can be seen as less steep bell shaped curves on the trajectory map we always see on TV. Also the orbiters path will at times encompass less and less of the earth's northern and southern regions.

The orbiter will also be making as many as ten major random maneuvers during the course of its mission. These maneuvers cannot be plotted into existing computer timings.

Allowing for daily vector updates, it should be possible to track the missions with a suitable micro. You can use this programs output to Shuttle watchers local sighting events. The best times generally are just before sunrise and right after sunset.

If anyone has more information on if, when, and where this information will be given out please contact me.

The Prairie Astronomer
c/o PRAIRIE ASTRONOMY CLUB, INC.
P.O. Box 80553
Lincoln Ne. 68501



FIRST CLASS

EARL MOSER 9/84
HICKMAN NE 68372