

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Tuesday, March 24, 1964 *WHD*

This was a great day! Three or four days all rolled into one, with an exposure to learning, excitement, and the warm and simple pleasures of seeing kinfolks and old friends. Chronologically, it went like this.

Julia
I got up at 6 and was airborne at 7, with Liz and about 25 or 30 members of the press. We arrived at Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama, a little past nine and walked down the ramp of the plane, to meet Jim Webb, *who* had helped us plan the whole thing, and Mrs. Webb, Handsome Dr. Werner Von Braun, *the* "papacita" of the space center, and his beautiful young wife, the mayor, Congressman Bob Jones, and an outstanding employee of the flight center, Mrs. Mary Berriberri, age 70. Ivo Sparkman, *and* her daughter *Julia* Ann, *had* come down with me on the plane, as had Dorothy *Uredenburg* Redinburg Bush, Christine Jones and Mrs. Owens, the National Committeewoman. So I was well flanked by Alabamians.

The first, the inevitable event, was the greeting ceremonies. There were about 300 people down in front of the platform. VIP's from Huntsville, civic and community leaders and industrial and business representatives. Jim Webb welcomed me, and then I set the tone of the day, I hoped, by giving the reasons I had come, really. One reason was because Lyndon had authorized the space act back in 1958 and then ever since then it has been his white hot interest and naturally, by osmosis, a lot of that's come through to me.

Second, I am really proud of the vital role that women are playing in space. About 20% of the payroll here at this Space Flight Center consists

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of women, ranging all the way from clerks and typists, to aerospace engineers; and then the really most important part is because this space program is one thing that's taking the south that's taking Alabama into the future. The south, so long mired in its troubles of the past, has taken a long step towards catching up with the rest of the United States, in its attachment to the space program. . . Used the line, "The south has hitched its wagon to the stars." and that's one the papers picked up a lot.

In any of my trips to the South, I want to accent its future and not its past. What better springboard than space?

When that was over, I rode with Jim Webb and Dr. von Braun, and we began a long morning of seeing the care, feeding and development of Saturns, so to speak. . . Rockets, that before this decade is over, will take man to the moon, or so we both hopefully hope.

We stopped first, at the engineering division hangar and Dr. von Braun tried to describe to me, what I was going to be seeing. At each stop along the way I would meet a new escort officer, almost always a woman. First there was the wind tunnel models, to show what effects wind currents have on rockets. Then on to see a "gyro in a suitcase," that's the machine that keeps the rocket on its proper course; and then a part of the so called "rocket brain." And then a flexible tube consisting of thousands of pieces of glass with a lens at each end that can take pictures inside the rocket during flight.

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In most comparisons, the most interesting thing to me, however, was not the machinery but the people. I kept on asking them where are you from and over and over I would get the names of little towns in Alabama. *ch* *d. Birmingham* Vina, ~~Wedowee~~, Cullman... Or frequently from Mississippi, Tennessee, or Georgia. And when I would ask where they got their education, very satisfactorily *to me that is* it was frequently Auburn, the University of Alabama, Vanderbilt. Of course there had to be a sprinkling of MIT in there, and always *in the background* you were conscious because of their accent *and their* and they're really quite different look of the German scientists we brought virtually kidnapped *and* picked up and ~~brought~~ back from the *Piedmont* ~~Piedmont~~ experiments and set down in Alabama to do our own work at the end of the last world war.

not correct was ch tape Then we saw the evolution of the Saturn. There were about six Saturns lined up on the base, just like little dominoes on big dominoes, which showed just how much the saturn has grown in its brief five years of life... Far more than that really, because its predecessors certainly go back to *Piedmont* ~~Piedmont~~.

We ~~saw~~ saw the mechanism which holds the rocket down until it is ready to fly from its launch pad, which is called appropriately enough *the* the umbilical tower. And then we saw the astronaut's suit, all shiny silver, and the small craft, rather like a big frog on high legs, that will some day, *land* the two astronauts on the moon, the one that I had seen pictures of in the National

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Geographic.

Presently, we came to what is called the "hard hat" area, and here was the ceremony that the press delighted in, because Dr. Von Braun, whom I suddenly noticed was wearing a Texas stetson, I think he had it behind his back the most of the morning, presented me with a "hard hat" with the Marshall Space Flight insignia on the front, and my name, and at the same time told the tale of how he happened to have the Texas stetson. Lyndon had given it to him when he was at the ranch for Chancellor Adenauer's visit, at Christmas. a

This picture was the delight of the press.

We went through a lot of laboratories where they were spinning the polyester that will line the rocket, in fact test laboratories are a very large part of this installation. The whole thing is really a vast testing center to produce every single item that will go into the rocket, and then once it is produced, and tested, and passed it on and the scientists thinks it is just the thing that will work, then they dish out the contracts to individual business firms all over the country.

Finally at noon, gorged with knowledge, or rather unassimilated highly exciting facts, and foot sore, we arrived back at the tenth floor, where I was going to have lunch with all my kinfolks.

This was ^{an} interlude of about an hour and fifteen minutes of real delight. Lunch was buffet and I wound up by having fifty-eight-or-nine kinfolks

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present, with of course, Elaine, Edwina was with her, and also Gus, and Bernice. And the first person that I had met when I had gotten off the plane, I mean among the kinfolks, was Lucille Patillo Thomas, and her beautiful daughter, Jean. Lucille had been my special playmate of the years between about six and fourteen, and so I was happiest of all to see her.

Aunt Ellen, veteran of 50 years of school teaching in the public schools, was there, bless her heart. She's one of those people who always keeps the family together by writing and telling what each one of us is doing.

Even Dewey Taylor with his wooden leg, had managed to make it for the occasion. Patsy Derby had flown down in the plane with me because it was her spring vacation time, and she too, like Jean Thomas, is a darling example of the younger generations.

Of course one of the ones I was most glad to see, was Uncle John Will Patillo, 87, ruddy of cheek, a little slow of walk, who predicted that Lyndon will beat the other fellow, whoever he is, and make him like it. This goes back to the time of all the estate problems that once we had, in which Lyndon did a good deal of the persuasion or arguing, and we all wound up very amicably, a great deal of the credit going to Lyndon.

There were any number of Bishop descendants there, whom I didn't know too well. Small wonder because since grandmother had 13 children

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daddy had not kept up with all his half brothers and sisters after he left Alabama and came to Texas, although he still remained close to all his full brothers and sisters.

The one I miss most was Carolyn Johnson's ~~Q~~ cousins. Elaine and I talked a mile a minute, lickety-split, and the years have done little to dull her sprightly spirit, although I am sad to say ~~to say~~, both she and Edwina did look older.

At any rate, it was a delightful hour and a quarter of fun with them. Woody, bless his heart, had sort of been there host and tender when I was not around - and he was just the man for the job.

After lunch, Dr. Webb and Dr. von Braun took me to the static testing center, where we entered a bunker and watched the test firing of an eight engine cluster, of Saturn I. Never have I seen such a sight! There's those breathless moments when they counted down to zero and then a noise that shook the world, the bunker trembled all around me, flame erupted from the bottom of the rocket, in great billowing, sheets of red fire. It lasted more than two minutes, and actually it seemed an eternity. This Saturn I will be used to send an unmanned Apollo space craft into orbit, in fact, one's on the pad down at Cape Kennedy now, for launching later this spring.

Jim Webb was just beside me in the bunker and we looked out together, through the narrow slit, about a foot wide. When it first went off, he put

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his arm around me, and the resulting picture was really amusing. The caption under it read, or so Liz opined, "Lady Bird, after this is over, let's you and me go out and have a drink."

There was a second and somewhat less dramatic firing and then we all returned to the auditorium to the Administration building for an award ceremony with NASA employees. There were about 500 employees in the auditorium and it was my happy opportunity to present awards, a 30 year service award, a 20 year service award; some invention awards, four in fact, one of them was a self-latching handle; a group achievement award; then a sustained superior performance award, which I am glad to say, was won by a woman in the Purchasing Offices.

Then I made a small talk and for once felt that I actually did rather well, got the most out of the delivery that there was in it, probably because I had been so thrilled by the whole course of the day, and everything that I had seen.

Finally, and last on the program, there was a reception, at which Mrs. Webb and Mrs. von Braun were the hostesses, for Alabama officials and organization leaders.

We had begun by inviting Mrs. Wallace, the wife of the Governor, who incidentally had sent me a nice wire welcoming me, and gone down the list of State officials of women prominent in PTA, business and professional women, *League of Women Voters* leading women voters. . . All sorts of church, civic, and cultural groups, making the best effort we could with all the advice we could get, to have a

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cross section of outstanding women in the state, with a special emphasis on Huntsville, of course. And not forgetting the good stout Democratic workers! And being careful also to include some of the negro women leaders.

I had been told the auditorium would hold about 300, but I am ^{quite} sure there were closer to 600 there! There were all so dressed up and looked so nice, I bemoaned the fact that I had't brought along a change of clothes, and really risen to the occasion with my utmost best.

The tea gave me a chance for real nostalgia, and for talking about what Alabama had really meant to me.,., Long summertime visits, watermelon cuttings, picnicks at the creek, and lots of kinfolks every Sunday!

When that was over, I said goodbye to Jim and Mrs. Webb, on the front steps, and to Dr. von Braun and Mrs. von Braun, whose two daughters, by the way, are just as handsome as their parents, and all the other officials that I had met, and then in the car, with the Mayor, Mr. ^{Searcy} ~~Searcy~~ and his wife, the Municipal Airport of I drove to the city of Huntsville.

name Searcy?

There was a platform, a long line of Democratic women workers, lined up to meet me, a band in bright blue regalia, out in front, a sizeable bunch of the citizens of Huntsville, and then when we mounted the platform, greetings by Congressman Bob Jones, a welcome by Mayor Searcy, and I just must say

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Alabama men are eloquent.

Then Ivo introduced me, and it was a splendid introduction. She had enough poise to hold her own against the departure of an airplane, which is something. There was a presentation to me by Mrs. Sylvia Armstrong, one of the good Democratic workers, of a charming watercolor of an old Alabama farmhouse, with the dinner bell out in the front yard. And then I said my farewells, really just a salute to the day, and a salute to the city.

This was my only contact with the public really, on that day, because I am well aware that everything before had taken place on Federal property, within the confines of the Marshall Space Center. But though it was small, it couldn't have been warmer ^{for} more fun, and after I finished ^I walked down the line and shook hands with about two city blocks of folks, not making it to the end of the line ^{because} the Secret Service kept on saying, "It's time for the plane to leave. It's time for you to leave."

So I boarded, waving goodbye from the top step of the plane, and oh how welcome was that seat, ^{and} ~~in~~ a sense of having finished the day!

And now it was time for a drink and some relaxation, and talking with the press people, with Frances Lew ^{and} ~~and~~ Helen Thomas, whom I had named Gemini, the twins, as we were coming down. Nan Robinson ^{and} ~~and~~ Jean (somebody) from Time; the Life man, who's ^{having} a difficult time doing a story on Lynda and Luci, who successfully keep their private life to themselves.

And I had an opportunity to say thank you to Dorothy ^{Vredenburg} ~~Redinburg~~ Busch, and Ivo and Julia Ann.

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It was 8:30 when we reached Washington, and the car that met me had the message that Lyndon was having dinner with the Marshall ^{MacNeill} MacNeills and would I please come and join him there. I'd already had my dinner but feeling reluctant about not joining Lyndon, for at least a little bit of the day, I went on.

Marshall MacNeill has remarried. I did not know it, it's an odd feeling to walk in and suddenly where I had known Blanch for years, find a new wife, young and very nice really. And the Walker Stones were there for dinner. But I was so tired I was rather numb and I did everything I could to hurry the evening, and get us home, and to bed by eleven.

The next day or two, in reading the coverage in the papers, I found that it had been really quite amazing. . . A good picture story, pretty much all over the south, Huntsville, Birmingham, New Orleans, Gulfport, Nashville, Chattanooga, besides Washington, New York, Chicago. There's one lesson I ought to learn out of it - keep my mouth shut. I never saw so many pictures with mouth wide open, ⁱⁿ ~~and~~ laughter or greeting, or surprise.

All in all, its been a great day for me, worth several days of a life.