

RECOVERY REVISITED

JULY 19, 1989

NOT SO MANY YEARS AGO a small group of individuals came together at Langley Field, Virginia to form the Space Task Group, the instrument for bringing Project Mercury into being. While the concept of flight in space excited the imagination of each of those involved, certain of the group concerned themselves more with the reality of return to Earth and set about to deal with the many contingencies involved.



In 1959, as the Mercury organization began to gel, a recovery plan began to emerge, devoted to various activities in support of manned space flight. Slowly, as the program gained momentum, the recovery team grew and in 1962 planning activities moved to Houston as part of the Manned Spacecraft Center. Investigations of location and recovery techniques ranged from dye markers to SOFAR, from SARAH to HF, and took place in concert with the development of sophisticated landing systems, flotation devices and retrieval mechanisms. The recovery operation began to mature and achieve a high order of visibility. Soon, the landing and recovery division was created as the NASA focal organization responsible for working closely with mission planners, flight controllers, NASA medical, PAO, and technical services, in the development of plans that were translated into the recovery operation by the various DOD commands. Organizations such as DDMS, CTF 130 and 140, and ARRS were dedicated to the safe and efficient recovery of not only NASA's flight crews, but the vehicles in which the early space flights were made.

At times it was, and still is difficult to believe that such a diversified group could blend into a cohesive team just at the moment of need. There grew a sense of unity . . . a dedication that brought together a group of individuals with a single purpose. That purpose lives on in the friendships that were established. Friendships that might never have come about in lesser circumstance.

All told, the record has been impressive. Worldwide recovery support for over 50 flights including projects Mercury, Gemini, Apollo, Skylab and Apollo-Soyuz. A roll call of historical events, some harrowing, but all successful. Over 600 ships, 1500 aircraft, 400,000 people dispersed to parts of the globe only a few know exist. A monumental effort involving extraordinary people, that's what it was. In a sense, the landing and recovery venture symbolizes the Manned Spaceflight Program itself; a safe return to Earth providing the confidence for subsequent thrusts into space. Confidence is the operative term; confidence to constantly reach beyond the grasp. Confidence culminating in the "Giant leap for mankind" . . . Apollo 11 . . . which we soon will have an opportunity to celebrate. Who amongst us would not say that it was the experience of a lifetime, and a lifetime of experiences? As they say, "Lord, its hard to be humble" . . . when you've been part of recovery operations.

LANDING AND RECOVERY ACTIVITIES

