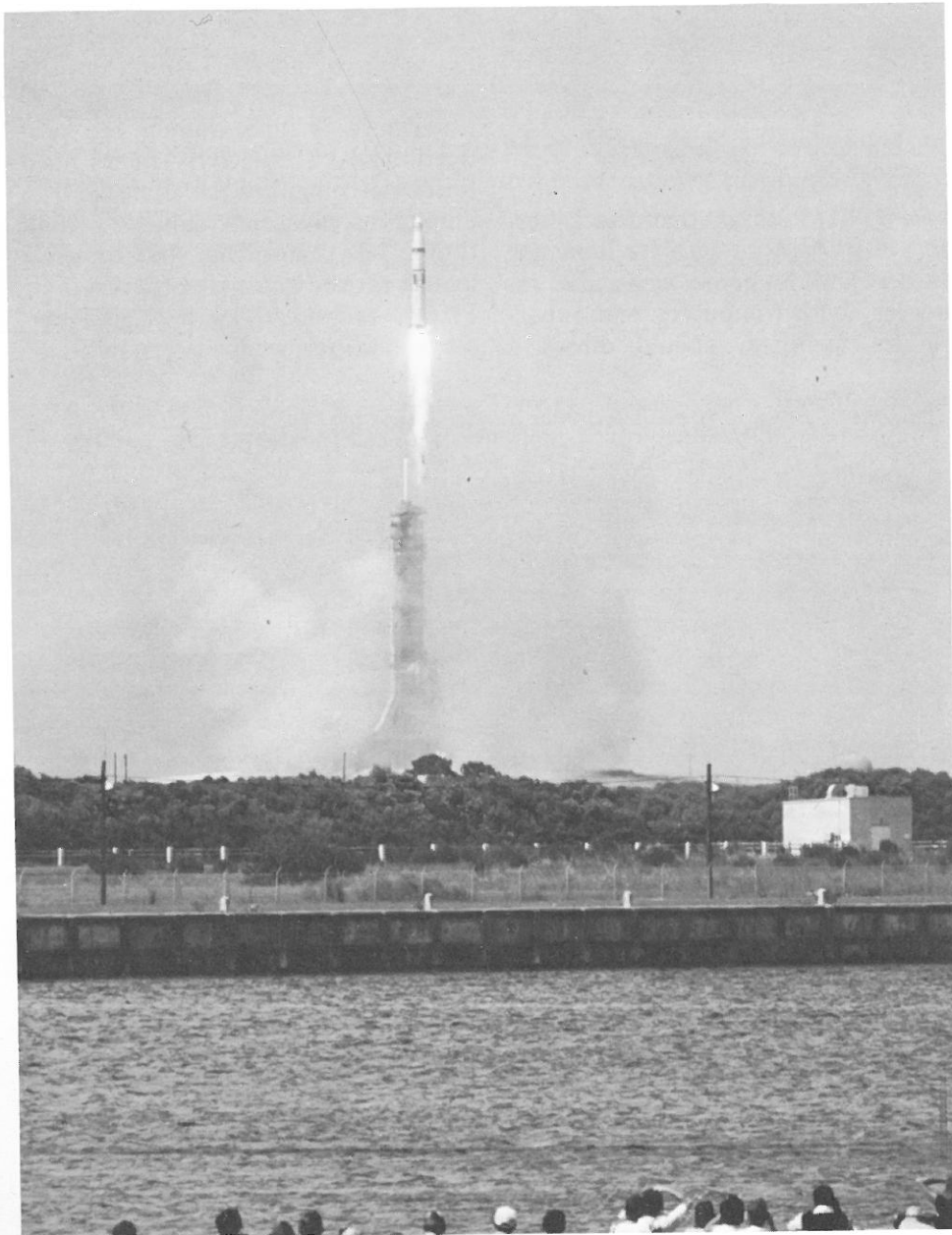


Good Bye Apollo

A personal view of the Apollo-Soyuz space mission and the Apollo series in general.

By D. V. Griffiths

Apollo lifts off to meet Soyuz July 15, 1975. (Photo courtesy of Michiel Schwarz/Spaceview)



Last July I joined the hundreds of press representatives from all over the world at Cape Canaveral and the Johnson Space Center in Houston. This was the first time I had ever been present at a launch and I was greatly impressed by the efficiency and freedom of the press centers at both locations. Information can be obtained on anything from what the astronauts had for breakfast 3 days ago to the space shuttle missions 5 years hence. NASA really is an efficient organization.

The majority of the press at both the launch site and Houston had apparently been through the launch procedure before and one couldn't help but detect an atmosphere of anti-climax. ASTP (Apollo-Soyuz Test Project) is a thin diet for men and women raised in the days of moon landings; the first amazingly over 6 years ago.

What did ASTP achieve? We were constantly reminded that one of the main objectives was to test out a compatible docking system to be fitted on spacecraft developed and launched under different technologies in different parts of the world for purposes of future space rescue. It seems ironic to me that they should select the very last project of the Apollo series for this purpose, knowing fully that manned space flight as we know it is over, at least in this country. The next manned flights in the USA will be in 1979-80 as part of the so-called Space Shuttle program. The Space Shuttle is a re-useable spacecraft resembling a plane, turning space travel into a routine business and reducing costs. We were told that the successful

docking system will be fitted on the Shuttle, but the Shuttle bears little similarity to an Apollo command module and furthermore is 5 years away; a long time in relation to the frequent manned spaceflights to which we have become accustomed.

"Detente" was the most popular word associated with the mission. A friend of mine who recently returned from Russia told me that the Russian people were extremely enthusiastic about the space link-up, and were optimistic about the effects it would have on relations between the countries. Their enthusiasm is due in part to the fact that the Russian people have never before enjoyed such thorough information as to what their Government was doing in the space program. It is encouraging to hear of this optimism. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the space-saturated Americans whose basic distrust of Russians together with their apathy towards manned space travel combine unfavorably in this mission. The Press worked hard, but not hard enough, because the majority of American people had only a faint idea of what was going on, if any idea at all.



Above: The press at work at the Johnson Space Center, Houston, Texas. Hundreds of reporters came to Houston for the historic Apollo/Soyuz Mission. (Photo courtesy of Michiel Schwarz/Spaceview)



Astronauts Stafford, Brand and Slayton enter van which takes them to the launch pad for the Apollo/Soyuz takeoff. (Photo courtesy of Michiel Schwarz/Spaceview)

The Apollo space program is over, and whether you are saddened or breath a deep sigh of relief at that fact, the successful completion of ASTP gives us all time to reflect on the achievements or otherwise of the Apollo series which commenced with the launch of the unmanned Apollo 4 in November 1967. Certainly the 1,800 people laid off by NASA after ASTP was underway will have much time for reflection.

The Space Shuttle is an attractive improvement on Apollo due to its reusable properties, but as yet no definite missions are planned, so could we imagine the Shuttle being built without any missions to go on? There will be missions, manned missions, but do we really need men any more?

At this time the Americans have two unmanned probes heading for Mars to conduct biological experiments to search for Martian life. Surely this kind of research is much more interesting and of greater value than projects such as ASTP.

It's the old comparison between Man and Machines.

NASA obviously still favors the former.