

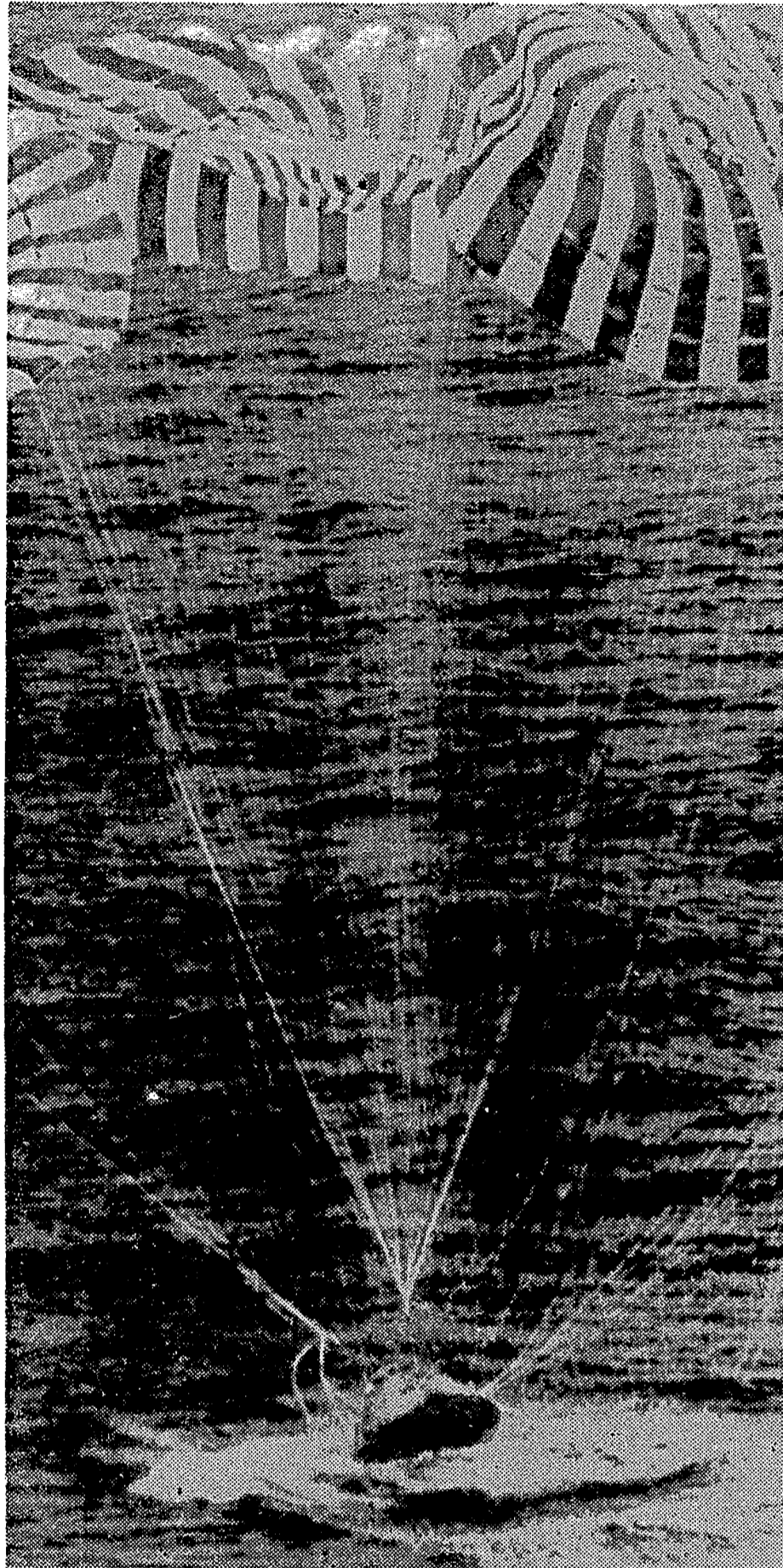
Apollo 9 Splashes Down Accurately; Opens Way for Summer Moon Landing: Smooth, Accurate Apollo Spl...

By JOHN NOBLE WILFORD Special to The New York Times

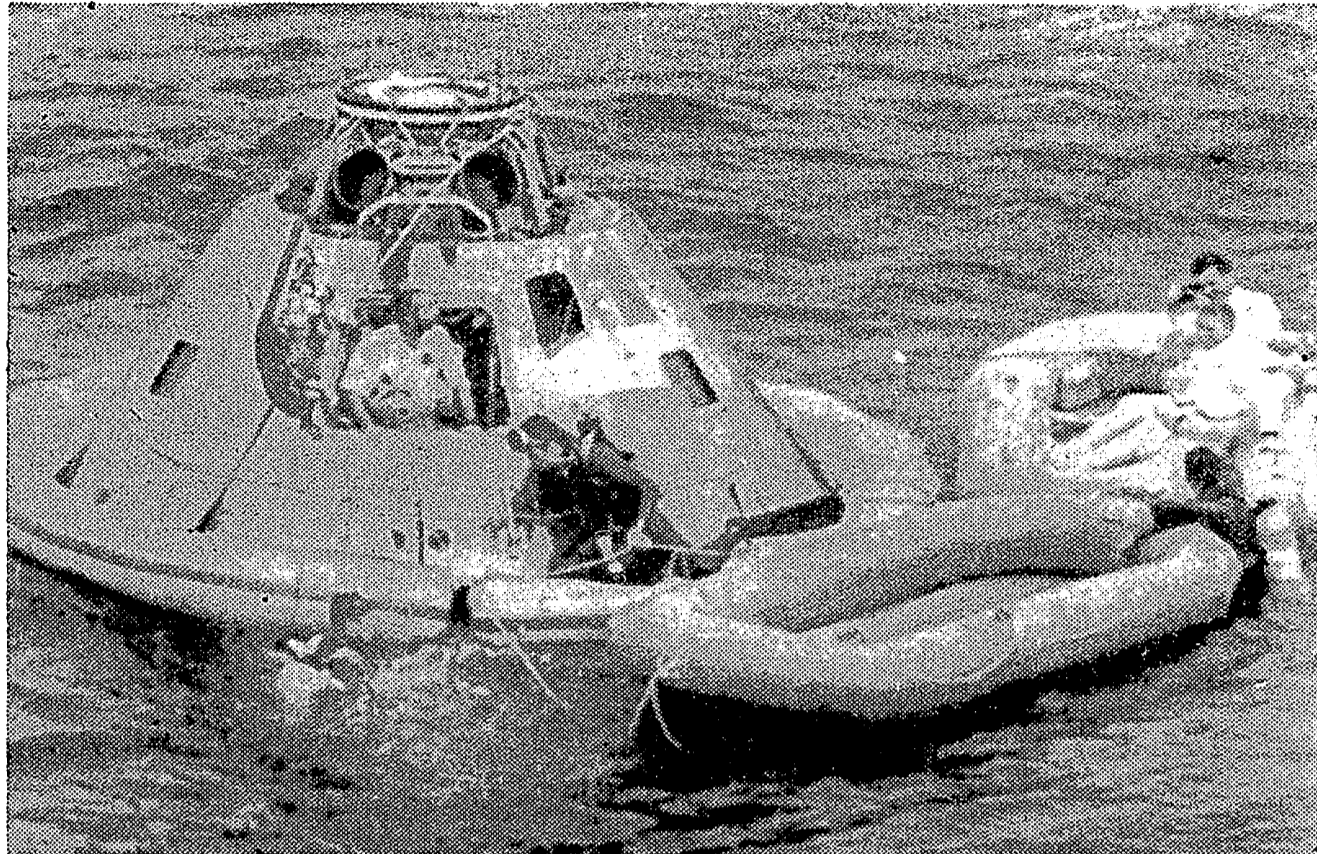
New York Times (1923-Current file); Mar 14, 1969;

ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2008)

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SPLASHDOWN: Apollo 9 coming down 360 miles northwest of San Juan, P. R., three miles north of the Guadalcanal. Craft hit water less than a mile from target exactly on schedule, at 12:01 P.M., Eastern standard time.



RECOVERY: Col. James A. McDivitt, the craft's commander, is the last to leave the capsule. On the raft at right are Col. David R. Scott, who is photographing the scene, and Russell L. Schweickart.



AMONG FRIENDS: Mr. Schweickart, left, Colonels Scott and McDivitt, right, aboard the Guadalcanal

NASA, via Associated Press

Apollo 9 Splashes Down Accurately; Opens Way for Summer Moon Landing

By JOHN NOBLE WILFORD
Special to The New York Times

HOUSTON, March 13 — The nation's space effort took a decided moonward turn today when the Apollo 9 astronauts brought their spacecraft to a smooth and accurate splashdown in the Atlantic Ocean north of Puerto Rico.

This ended the successful 10-day earth-orbital test flight that proved the lunar-landing craft to be spaceworthy and thus cleared the way for astronauts to attempt man's first moon landing next summer after a final pre-landing test in May.

At the mission control center here, project officials, hailed Apollo 9 as a "perfection flight."

Success Is Hailed

Dr. George E. Mueller, the space agency's associated administrator for manned flight, said at a news conference:

"Apollo 9 was as successful a flight as any of us could ever wish for, as well as being as successful as any of us have ever seen."

Col. James A. McDivitt and

Col. David R. Scott of the Air Force and Russell L. Schweickart, a civilian, rode the cone-shaped Apollo spacecraft to a splashdown on the relatively calm ocean at 12:01 P.M. Eastern standard time.

Apollo hit the water less than a mile away from its target point and only three miles north of the waiting recovery ship, the U.S.S. Guadalcanal.

Worldwide Audience

Television cameras on the helicopter carrier were able to show a worldwide audience the last moments of the parachute-aided descent and all of the recovery operations.

Within an hour after splashdown, the three astronauts stepped from the helicopter onto the Guadalcanal's deck, where they were handed a message from President Nixon praising their flight as "10 days that thrilled the world."

A space agency physician on the ship examined the three astronauts and reported that "they look real good."

"It's great to be back," Colonel McDivitt, the com-

mander, said in response to cheers from the Guadalcanal crew.

"Boy," exclaimed Mr. Schweickart, steadying himself after the long orbital journey, "this ship sure rocks."

It would have rocked even more if Apollo 9's splashdown flight had not been shifted yesterday from the rough seas near Bermuda to the calm waters 360 miles northwest of San Juan.

Lieut. Gen. Samuel C. Phillips, the Apollo program director, said that the flight "satisfied" all its objectives. He said it was all but certain that Apollo 10 would be sent around the moon in May as a final pre-landing test.

Next Shot on May 17

A decision on the Apollo 10 flight is expected March 24. The launching date is tentatively set for May 17.

On that mission astronauts would circle the moon for 60 hours to practice flying the bug-like lunar module down to 50,000 feet above the lunar sur-

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Flight Held 'Perfection' In Achieving Objective

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 face and bringing it back to a rendezvous with the Apollo command ship.

This would enable the astronauts to check out the lunar module's landing radar, as well as re-running the rendezvous maneuvers practiced on Apollo 9.

If Apollo 10 is successful, the Apollo 11 crew could head for the moon landing as early as July 15. The Apollo 11 astronauts are Neil A. Armstrong, a civilian; and Lieut. Col. Michael Collins and Lieut. Col. Edwin E. Aldrin, both of the Air Force.

Dr. Mueller said that the National Aeronautics and Space Administration already had the rockets, spacecraft and lunar-exploration instruments for three additional landings on the moon.

Apollo 9 generated this new confidence by flying 151 revolutions of the earth without developing any significant malfunctions. It was the first mission in which all major components for the lunar flight—the Saturn 5 rocket, the Apollo command ship and the lunar module, were flown together.

In its first test with men aboard, the lunar module, called the Spider, was flown more than 100 miles away from the command ship, known as the Gumdrop. Colonel McDivitt and Mr. Schweickart were able to steer Spider back to find and rejoin Gumdrop, piloted by Colonel Scott.

Test of Back Pack

On another day, Mr. Schweickart opened the lunar module's hatch and stepped out on a platform to test the space-suit and oxygen-supplying back pack that astronauts walking on the moon will use.

After that, the lunar module was jettisoned and the astronauts spent the last five days cruising through space, taking pictures and running navigation tests.

For their return to earth today, the astronauts were awakened at about 4 A.M. by the radioed sound of an alarm clock set off in the control room.

During the final orbits, the astronauts used their last film to photograph the lights in the Australian city of Perth, which has served as a sort of beacon to many orbiting spaceships. It is almost midway around the earth from Cape Kennedy, Fla., where Apollo 9 was launched March 3.

The astronauts stowed all the loose gear in the cabin and put on two sets of long underwear each just in case the water was cold in the recovery area. They were later informed it was 75 degrees Fahrenheit.

Colonel McDivitt reported that he had switched to the reserve propellant tanks, the so-called "Volkswagen tanks" of the main spacecraft rocket and that Apollo 9 was ready to blast out of orbit.

Ready to Leave Orbit

The rocket, housed in the rear equipment units called the service module, was fired at 11:31 A.M. over the Pacific near Hawaii. The rocket's nozzle was pointed at the line of fire but tipped slightly toward outer space.

The 11.8-second firing acted to slow down the spacecraft, causing it to drop out of its 240-mile-high orbit. It then started its long curving re-entry path across the Pacific, over the southern United States and out into the Atlantic.

"Burn looks good," Mission Control assured the astronauts. "Roger," replied Colonel McDivitt. "It felt good."

In the next five minutes, the maneuvering thrusters fired on command from the guidance computer to turn the spacecraft and service module sideways. Then explosive bolts fired to separate the service module.

The six-ton command ship was now on its own. Its maneuvering rockets fired briefly to point the heavily shielded blunt end toward the descending line of flight.

All this time, Apollo's plastic coating was charring to dissipate the estimated heat of 2,700 degrees on the vehicle's outer surface. Inside, the capsule was never more than 80 degrees.

At 11:51, 10 minutes before

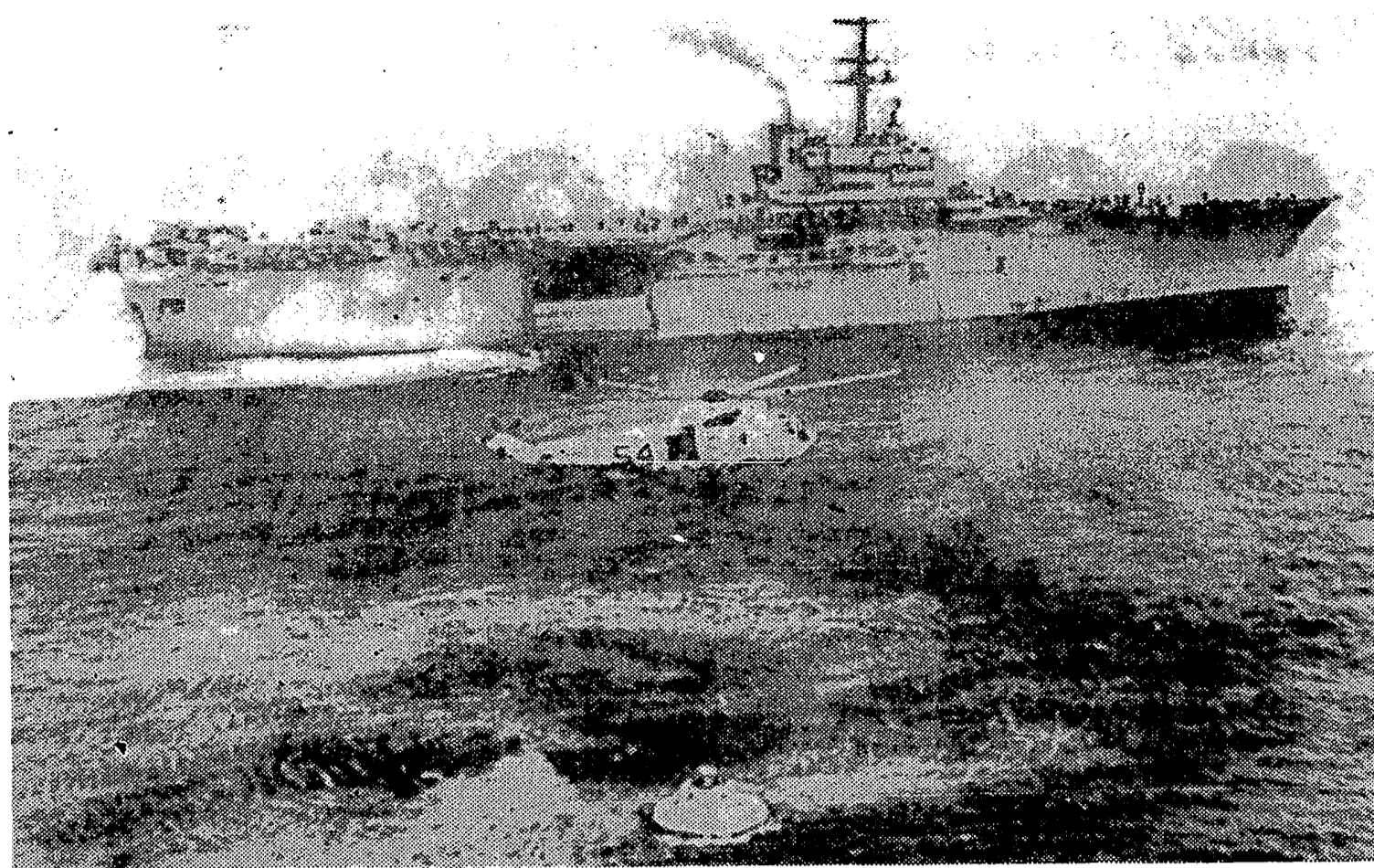
splashdown, an Air Force patrol plane established radar contact with the spacecraft. Mission Control could tell from tracking data that Apollo 9 was no more than a mile off target.

Consequently, the astronauts were lying in their couches and facing back into space as they swept over the California coast at an altitude of 133 miles.

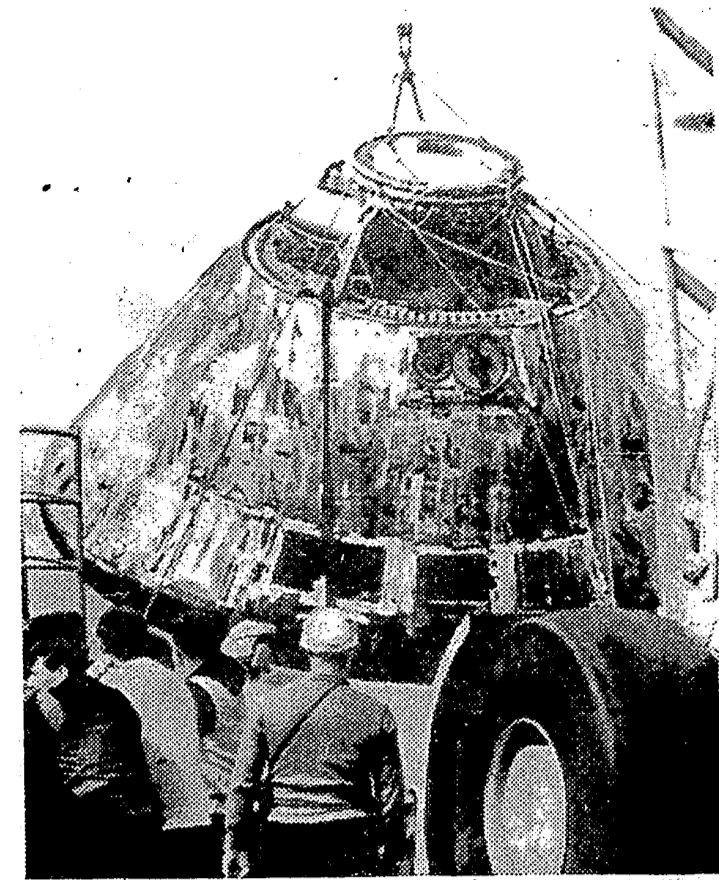
Over Texas, near Dallas, Apollo 9 encountered the first traces of the earth's atmosphere—only nine and a half minutes after the rocket firing.

The spacecraft slammed through the atmosphere like a ship cutting through water. The denser the atmosphere got, the more it served as a brake to slow the approach down from its initial re-entry speed of 17,500 miles an hour.

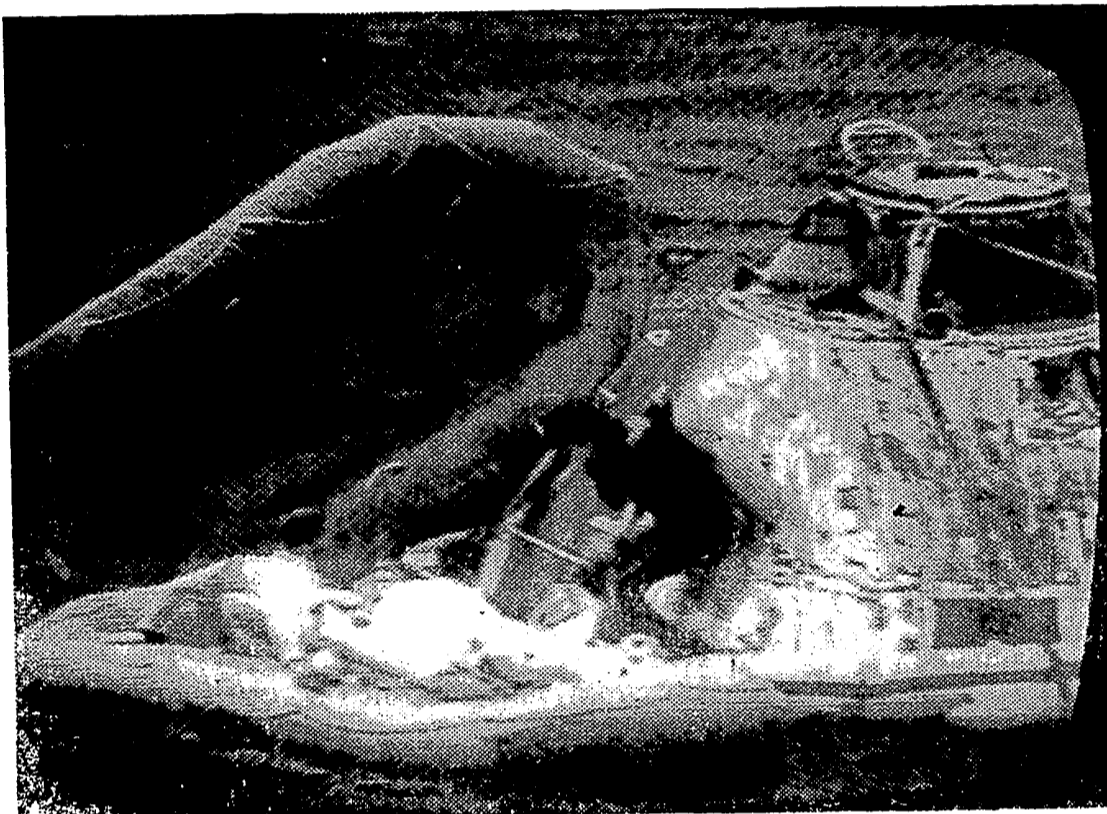
The friction of air rushing by formed an envelope of intense heat around the spacecraft, which disrupted communications for more than three minutes. The blackout began northeast of New Orleans and continued until Apollo 9 was off



JOURNEY'S END: With the Guadalcanal a short distance away, helicopter approaches capsule to pick up the men.



NASA, via Associated Press
 SIGNS OF A FIERY FLIGHT: Command module, charred by the heat of re-entry, is lifted onto the Guadalcanal's deck. Module's exterior temperature rose to about 2,700 degrees.



NBC-TV News
 MINOR SETBACK: As Mr. Schweickart left one raft to join Colonel Scott in another, the wind stirred by the helicopter lifted the empty raft and tilted it against the capsule. The frogmen pushed it back on the water. In the photo Mr. Schweickart is seated at left.



Associated Press

'LIKE A MACK SENNETT COMEDY': That was how a flight director in mission control described the recovery. It took several tries for the astronauts to reach the

rescue basket and, when they did catch it, two of them—Colonels McDivitt and Scott—were partially dunked in the ocean. Here, Colonel Scott is hauled skyward.

the east coast of Florida at an altitude of about 35 miles.

Then three small parachutes popped out of the Apollo's nose to slow it down from some 300 to 175 miles an hour and also to orient the craft for its more or less straight drop to the water.

At 10,000 feet, three larger parachutes unfurled as the final braking action, bringing the craft down at a speed of 22 miles an hour at splashdown.

Helicopter rescue crews, who had watched the spacecraft come down and hit the water, reached the bobbing craft and dropped swimmers around it within five minutes.

The black-suited "frogmen" quickly encircled the cone-shaped vehicle with an inflated collar to keep it afloat. They then inflated two yellow rub-

ber rafts and opened the hatch by 12:30.

The three white-suited astronauts emerged from the hatch and climbed out onto the raft. Colonel McDivitt waved to the Guadalcanal, which by then was only a few hundred yards away.

Getting from the raft up to the hovering helicopter was, for a time, as one flight director in mission control observed, "like a Mack Sennett comedy."

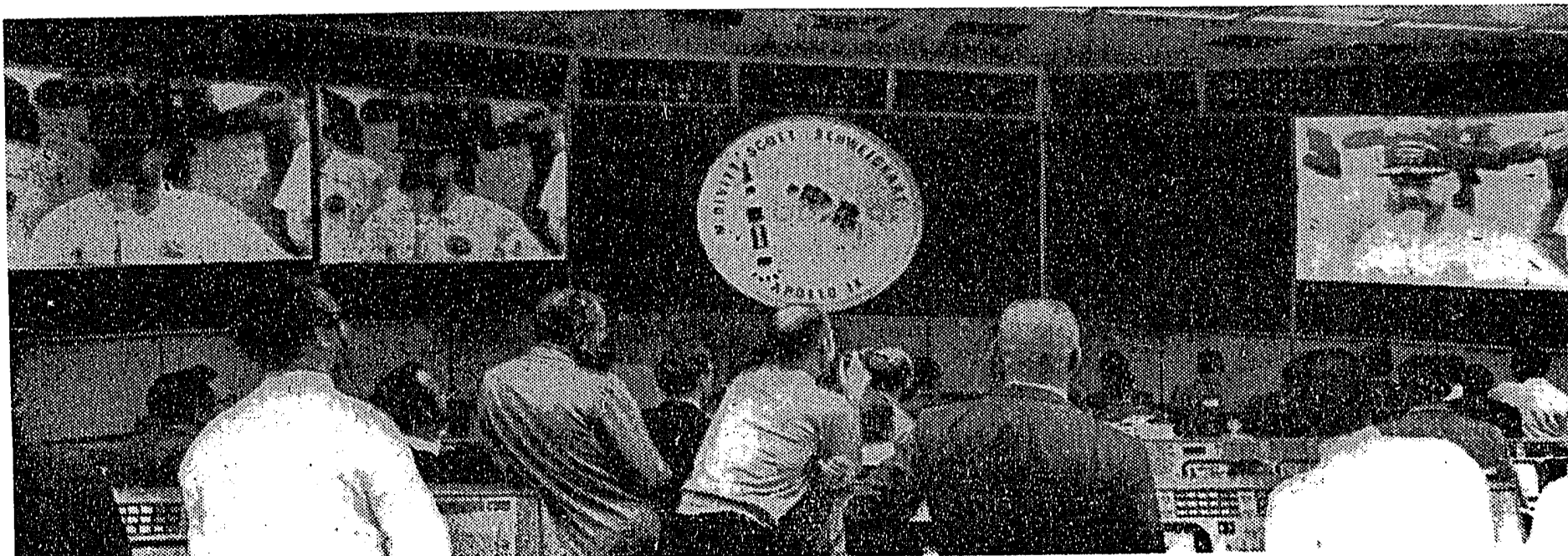
The helicopter lowered a metal wicker-like basket seat suspended on the end of a cable. But the frogmen had trouble catching it so the astronauts could be hauled up into the helicopter.

Wind stirred up by the helicopter's propeller kept churning the sea, causing the spacecraft to bob out of reach of the cable. When they finally caught the basket, the astro-

nauts were raised one by one. Two of them were partially dunked as the basket swung like a pendulum before being raised.

Once on the Guadalcanal, the bearded astronauts underwent a medical examination and shared a 350-pound celebration cake.

They planned to spend the night on the carrier and fly by helicopter tomorrow to the island of Eleuthera in the Bahamas. There they will board a NASA jet aircraft to fly home to Houston, with a brief stop-over at Cape Kennedy.



NASA, via Associated Press
 THEIR MISSION, TOO, IS DONE: Flight operations crew at the Manned Spacecraft Center in Houston listen to Colonel McDivitt's speech from carrier.