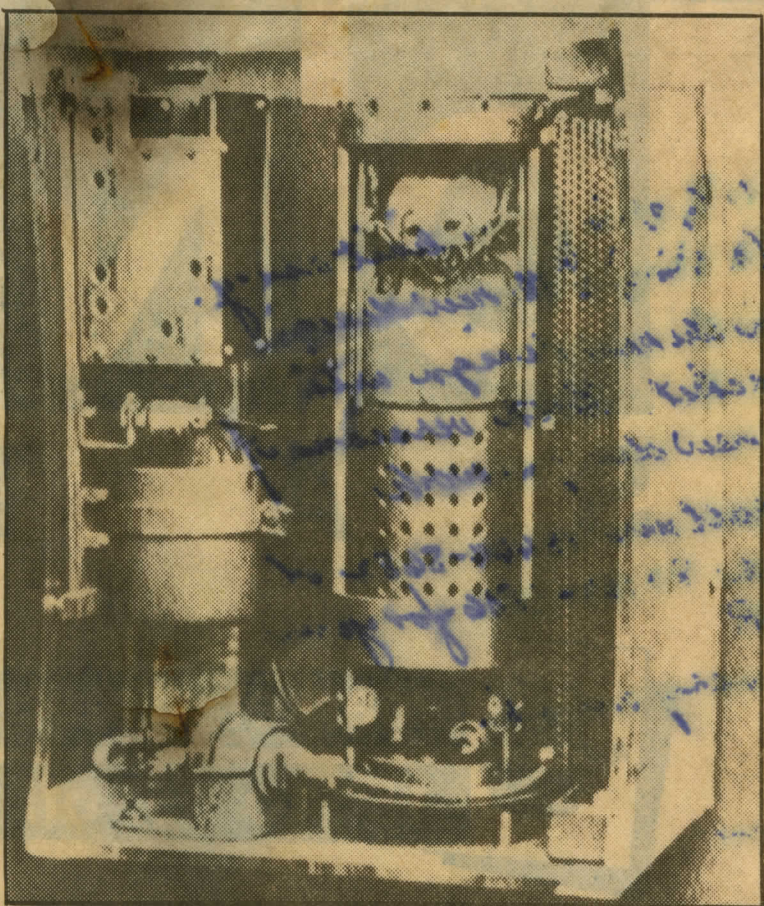




AP photo

Monkey is shown in device used in suborbital flight.

Space ape Miss Baker dies in Ala.

Flew with Able in '59

By JIM ASKER
Post Reporter

Pioneers of the early space program were mourning the death Thursday of Earth's longest surviving veteran of space flight — a 14-ounce brown squirrel monkey named Miss Baker.

The tiny creature, who rode with a 7-pound rhesus monkey named Able in a suborbital flight May 28, 1959, succumbed to complications following kidney failure attributed to old age, her handlers said.

She had been living at the Alabama Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville, where she was a popular tourist attraction for the last 13 years.

Miss Baker, a native of the jungles of Peru, was believed to be 27 years old — well beyond the species' life expectancy.

"It brings tears to my eyes," said onetime NASA spokesman Paul Haney. "I was the voice of the monkeys."

Haney, who was better known as "the voice of Mission Control" on the manned missions that followed, said the monkeys' flight was "a great event in the space business." Haney retired from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration shortly after the first moon landing and now runs a monthly newspaper in El Paso.

"It's not a good occasion for us here," said a saddened Scott Osborne, the deputy director of the Alabama space exhibits. He said Miss Baker was one spunky

monkey. "She would be very quick to bite an ear or a hand ... She was on her third husband and she gave him a pretty hard time," Osborne said.

Children who read about Miss Baker in textbooks sent her an average of 50 letters a week, Osborne said.

No animal had survived a space flight when Miss Baker was given a little helmet and strapped into the contoured rubber pad in her minuscule compartment. Her companion Able, also female, went into another capsule.

The pair of primate "pilots" zoomed 300 miles high at speeds reaching 10,000 mph and endured gravitational forces 30 to 40 times their weight — far more than space travellers now face. They were catapulted by a Jupiter missile beyond Earth's atmosphere in a "up 'n' down" ballistic shot and retrieved in the Caribbean Sea near Antigua.

The names Able and Baker, taken from military code for the first two letters of the alphabet, were deliberately chosen to minimize sentimental attachment to — and protests about — the rocket's biological cargo, which also included sea urchin eggs and sperm, molds and spores, human blood and corned beef.

Able died several days after the flight of complications from a dose of anesthetic. But veterans like Miss Baker and Ham, the male chimpanzee who flew last, lived for years and became "minor folk heroes," Haney said.

The Russians had earlier sent up a dog named Laika, who died on the voyage. But the Soviets did not intend to recover their first live space flyers, Haney said, "They just monitored 'em till they died."

"Ham — he got a soft, cushy job in Washington, like some other astronauts," Haney said. But he died about a year ago at the zoo in the capital.



MISS BAKER:
High rider