

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

# Memorandum

TO : All Astronauts

FROM : CB/Chief, Astronaut Office

SUBJECT: Personal Stories Contract

DATE: April 19, 1968

Your committee recently met in New York with our representative and legal advisor. In attendance were Nizer, Sawyer, Conrad, Gordon, Mitchell, Garriott, and Shepard. Many of our mutual problems were discussed. There was general agreement that:

a. Nizer should continue to be alert for possible new contracts since the resumption of manned flight on the lunar program will generate renewed interest in the personal stories of astronauts.

b. The tenuous situation surrounding the contract precludes the use of an entertainers agent since no inference of huckstering on our part is desired. Nizer agrees that the soft-sell approach for the immediate future is the better method.

c. Nizer will make an attempt to clarify Glenn's status as a Field correspondent with Mr. Webb.

d. In the interest of maintaining our fine relationships with Time, Inc., and, perhaps more importantly, increasing the attractiveness of our stories to future contractors, certain steps should be taken by all. These are discussed in detail in the paragraphs that follow.

There are two basic ways to proceed in the interest of increasing exclusivity of the contract; first, to ask NASA to help us by supporting our position, or second, to do it ourselves. It is our feeling that dealing through NASA will only create problems with the organization which we don't want. It is also inherently unfair to ask them to decide for us, as individuals, what is "personal" and what is "public" in connection with the story of the space program. In the final analysis, therefore, it is the best decision to continually assure that we ourselves guard against diluting what we have to sell. And we are sure that most of you will enjoy the insulation from the press and public which the contract provides and which the constitution protects.

What is personal and what is public? Unfortunately, in most cases, there is no clear-cut definition. It is obvious that one's home is clearly private and personal, yet one's appearances at NASA or social



functions are clearly public. A public statement about re-entry saying "cabin temperature reached 103 degrees" is fine, but private thoughts about "perspiration running down my neck" are certainly not required by anyone's rules. If wives want to say "the boy is five and the girl is three", nothing wrong--but no reason to enlarge to "John is wild about airplanes and Sally misses her Daddy during training." These are a few basic examples but the safest technique is always a polite "no comment" or a quiet "I don't care to discuss that subject." This won't work all the time because none of us wants to appear completely negative during interviews or contact with the press. Nonetheless, it can be used frequently without creating the impression of withholding public information.

Perhaps a few guidelines will help:

- a. Answer legitimate questions directly and succinctly. Any enlargement tends to project one's personality and to include personal opinion. The contractors have had some complaints in the past about our being too enthusiastic during regular interviews or press conferences.
- b. Be extremely careful in social or personal contacts with known writers or reporters. A few are always anxious to describe their "exclusive" interviews with astronauts and families."
- c. Participation in church or civic activities is fine but any public discussion of this should always be confined to the specific charity or function.
- d. No outside business activities should create the image of endorsement or the use of one's public position purely for personal gain.
- e. Participation by astronauts and wives on radio, television, newspapers, movies, magazines and books should only be as follows:
  - (1) As directed by NASA with Nizer's concurrence.
  - (2) On technical papers for publication, including textbooks and articles through normal NASA approval channels.
  - (3) Wives should participate using pseudonyms or maiden names.
  - (4) Legitimate stage or other artistic participation such as painting are considered to be exceptions.
  - (5) Astronaut public and press appearances routinely scheduled by the Astronaut Office.
- f. Prime and backup crews should be particularly careful during scheduled pre-flight press contacts to be extremely businesslike and

avoid anecdotes and jokes at all times--let's save this good material for the contractor. A personal filmed interview is pretty close to a by-lined story, which is definitely outside the contract.

In addition to these guidelines, there appears to be several specific actions which will improve future relations:

a. Notify Shepard when stories are being cleared by NASA so that he may expedite process and attempt to reduce some of their "chopping" activity.

b. Prime and backup crews should find time prior to the flight, perhaps on weekends at the Cape, to spend time with the contractor's writers getting story put together. This will enable them to fill in the blanks and add the anecdotes for a better deadline after the flight. We expect a good cutoff on this activity to be about three weeks before flight.

c. Lifting the post-flight crew blackout only in favor of the contractor would cause legitimate complaints from other media, so it is not recommended. However, we believe that the action in paragraph b above, plus allowing the contractor exclusive time immediately following the post-flight press conference, will alleviate most contractor complaints.

The preceding comments have been approved by your committee.

*Alan Shepard*

Alan B. Shepard, Jr.

cc:

Louis Nizer  
Paul Sawyer