

NASA JOHNSON SPACE CENTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

JOHN E. "JACK" RILEY
INTERVIEWED BY SANDRA JOHNSON
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JOHNSON: Today is October 9, 2002. This oral history with Jack Riley is being conducted in the offices of Signal Corporation in Houston, Texas, for the Johnson Space Center Oral History Project. The interviewer is Sandra Johnson, assisted by Rebecca Wright and Jennifer Ross-Nazzal.

I want to thank you again for joining us today to share your history and experiences during your tenure of almost thirty years with NASA and the JSC Public Affairs Office. I want to begin today by mentioning that after World War II you went to college and graduated with a journalism degree in 1950, and began working in the journalism field as a reporter, then an editor, before moving on into public relations. Then in April 1963 you started your career with NASA in the Manned Spacecraft Center in Downey, California, as a public information specialist at the West Coast Public Affairs Office. How did that opportunity to work with NASA come about?

RILEY: Well, I had been working for General Dynamics Astronautics for a couple of years—well, a little over two years. I had been their representative at a couple of Atlas bases they were installing in Kansas at Forbes Air Force Base in Topeka and primarily at Schilling Air Force Base in Salina. Then after we sold off the base at Schilling to—it was when an Atlas F base, silos—I was transferred to San Diego, [California,] to the headquarters.

I was there about fourteen months, I guess, and I had gotten to know Ben [W.] James, who was in the NASA Public Affairs Office in Downey. We'd had business dealings back and forth. He asked me if I would be interested in going with NASA, and I said, yes, I thought I would. So I got the job offer and started out there in April. Then I was transferred to the Manned Spacecraft Center here in Houston in July. So that's how that happened.

I was already working for an aerospace company, and at that time, even in the public affairs area, one of the requirements was you had to have aerospace experience. So they were looking for people either from one of the services or who are from an aerospace company. So that's how I got in with NASA.

JOHNSON: What were your duties when you were in California?

RILEY: Primarily we reviewed all of the contractors' news releases and things like that, instead of them having to send everything here to Houston. At the outset of—and it was North American [Aviation, Inc.] then—the Apollo Program, there was a fairly large contingent of NASA people in Downey who were engineers and a lot of procurement people, and Ben James and I were the two public affairs people.

But at the outset of North American starting to build the command and service module, there was a lot of media interest, and there was a lot of media on the West Coast, in addition to the contractor and subcontractor liaison, and a good part of it was on the West Coast. So that was the idea.

Later on, well, in fact, it was several months after I came to Houston, Ben came to Houston, too, and they kind of dissolved that office out there.

JOHNSON: Why did they move you to Houston, or why did you move to Houston?

RILEY: Well, I guess they felt they had a greater need at that time here than they did there. It was just starting to build up here. Nobody had moved into the Center yet. We were scattered in offices all over the southeastern part of Houston, and the Public Affairs Office was in a building over on Griggs Road. So it was just the start of the buildup, and they wanted to get people here and ready to move into the new Center.

JOHNSON: What were your impressions when you first moved to Houston from California?

RILEY: Well, of course, during my three or four months in California with NASA, I had been here several times. In fact, I went to MA-9 [Mercury Atlas 9] the last Mercury mission down at the Cape [Canaveral, Florida], and I had been here several other times. So I knew what to expect. My wife was a little bit different. About the time we were getting ready to move, *Time* magazine published an article about Houston and made the point that the British Foreign Service paid hardship pay for people who were stationed here, which gave her a little pause.

But, no, we've enjoyed it. It was not near as a transient area as California was, and people were friendly. The biggest drawback, of course, was the humidity and the heat, but that's been thirty-nine years ago, I guess. So we've withstood it.

JOHNSON: When you came to Houston, it was the end of Mercury, the beginning of Gemini?

RILEY: Yes.

JOHNSON: And during the Gemini Project and the Apollo Program, you served as a public information specialist to the Gemini Program Office, the Apollo Spacecraft Program Office, the Flight Crew Operations, and Flight Operations Directorates. Can you tell us about some of your specific duties when you first started here?

RILEY: Well, the duties were about the same no matter what office you were assigned to. It varied a little, particularly the program offices, but primarily the person assigned to those offices wrote news releases concerning whatever was going on. They reviewed the contractors' news releases. They arranged interviews for the program manager or other people that media wanted to interview and got involved in news conferences that pertained to something that was going on in the program at that time. That was pretty much it for Gemini and Apollo.

The Flight Crew Operations Office, primarily you got involved in a lot of astronaut interviews, because there weren't too many astronauts at that time. In fact, as I recall, we selected the second group just about the time I got here from California. So there was an inordinate demand for astronaut interviews. In fact, in those days they set aside one day a week to do interviews, and they had to be restricted in time, to thirty minutes or so. So there was a lot of involvement in that.

Then later, well, by the mid-sixties we were pretty heavily involved in geology training for astronauts because the U.S. Geological Survey plus NASA had several Ph.D. geologists on the staff. So they started a lot of geology field trips, and I accompanied the astronauts on a

number of those, both in this country and abroad, because there was, again, a great deal of media interest in that sort of thing.

We went to Iceland a couple of times and Mexico and Hawaii and Oregon a couple of times, and New Mexico, a lot of different places. I didn't go on all of them, but I went on a lot of them. The travel got to be such that I didn't want to go on all of them. Then, too, by that time I was pretty heavily involved in covering the Astronaut Office, and I would get involved in other—like the tropic survival training. We went to Panama for a week or so in the jungle, and they had a Press Day after that, so that we knew there was a lot of press interest in that. I guess I went with them to the Navy Underwater Swimmers School in Key West, [Florida,] for their training down there. They had a lot of strange training they were going through.

So there was a lot going on. In addition, I guess, in the Gemini days I covered all of the Gemini launches at the Cape. So I remember one year I think I was at the Cape several months of the year, a good three to four months, just doing that. So there was a lot of work to do.

JOHNSON: How did you train specifically to cover these things, as far as the scientific knowledge or the Gemini and Apollo systems and about their missions? Did they train you ahead of time, or did you have any specific training?

RILEY: Well, I went to a number of the briefings, not the ones that they had here on geology, but in the field. I would sit in on the briefings. Normally in the area that we were in, wherever it might be, they had a professor from a nearby university, a geology professor, who was well versed in that area, and he would give lectures, and I'd sit in on those.

Uel Clanton, Dr. Clanton was a geologist working for NASA and one of the people in charge of the program, gave me a big book on geology that I studied. Fortunately, I'd had a five-hour course in geology in college. That kind of gave me the basics. I knew the basic forms of rocks and minerals and that sort of thing. Then I just mainly by observation and walking around, because whenever I wasn't involved with the press, I just kind of hung around and kept my eyes and ears open, and you learn a lot that way.

JOHNSON: The press conferences, did you facilitate them for the astronauts? You mentioned that they had their press conferences.

RILEY: When we were on field trips and things?

JOHNSON: Well, before that you mentioned that they started the press conferences once a week.

RILEY: Oh, those were interviews.

JOHNSON: Interviews. Excuse me, yes. Did you facilitate those, or did you help the astronauts, or did you coach them any on what they could or couldn't say?

RILEY: No, we didn't coach them. They pretty much knew what to say and what not to say. In fact, a lot of them could have said more than they did. A lot of them didn't understand the press or didn't trust the press, and so they were kind of reticent to do things. But initially, well, I wasn't the only one that got involved, because initially, and this is when the astronauts—their

offices were out at Ellington [Field, Houston, Texas,], and that's where we did the interviews. But the demand was so great and we had so many, that probably two or three of us out of the office got involved.

Initially we were required to sit in on the interviews and, in effect, monitor them, but after a year or so, we convinced management and the astronauts that the press didn't really like that, and it was to the advantage of the agency and to them to—and by that time they were pretty well used to dealing with the press. So we were able to discontinue monitoring all of them, which freed you up to do other things.

The news conferences mainly started when—well, we had news conferences when we had new groups of astronauts. Then when we started selecting crews, each crew would have an interview day, which started with a news conference and then individual interviews afterwards with the crew members. That occupied a full day every time. So that's generally how it went.

JOHNSON: On the geology field trips and the survival school, you mentioned that you were there. Did you field questions from the press, or were they followed wherever they traveled? Was there a lot of press interest everywhere?

RILEY: For instance, in Iceland we had pretty good interest from European press. We had, I guess, half a dozen British and French and others, and we had one or two American, wire services mainly. At times the networks would accompany us on some of the field trips. But depending on where you were in Iceland, they followed us around in the field.

They didn't do that in Panama. I don't think they wanted to get out in the jungle so much. But the last day, they brought several in, kind of like a pool, press pool. They spent the

last day with us and then hiked out with us. Then we had a news conference after we got back to the Albrook Air Force Base, [Panama Canal Zone,] there.

But in general, there was a fair amount of press interest, and you always had at least usually wire services or networks with you in a lot of places.

JOHNSON: Back here, did you have a lot of interaction with the flight controllers or flight directors?

RILEY: Well, I did after I started commentary, because the only way you can do commentary halfway decently is just to really go to as many simulations as you can, which gets hard to do when the flight schedule is such that you're flying fairly often. But by that time most of us that were doing commentary then had been doing it long enough that we could miss a simulation or two. Initially we had a lot of books on systems and stuff we studied. Then at least I always tried to go to as many simulations as I could. They were by far the most helpful of anything that you could do to get proficient on the mission.

The lead flight director for a mission briefed the networks before every mission, and we sat in on those, mainly for our own education, because some of the network producers asked a lot of different kind of questions.

But I didn't get involved too much prior to that time with flight controllers. I did in some instances get involved with flight directors, [Eugene F.] Kranz and some of those people, but not to the degree that I did after I started commentary. But then I started commentary fairly early in the Gemini. So I had a fair amount of contact with them, yes.

JOHNSON: Did you ever brief them or prepare them for news conferences?

RILEY: Just in general, yes. Particularly flight controllers were not used to dealing with the press. You can prepare them just in general by telling them the kinds of things they were likely to be asked and generally pertaining to their area of expertise. The flight directors, the same, but they were much more used to dealing with the press.

During missions we had change-of-shift briefings, and the commentator for that shift would bring the flight director over to the news center and then preside at his news conference. You always tried to get an idea from somebody at the news center, before you brought him over, what the major questions were [at the query desk] during that eight-hour period or so, so that you could kind of alert the flight director, "Well, they're really interested in this," or something that had gone on during that shift, that they're more interested in this.

So to that amount you did get involved in sort of briefing them or helping them. But we never tried to get to the point where we'd try to tell them what to say or anything. We were proud of the fact that we ran a fairly open program as often as we could, which was a little bit harder during ASTP [Apollo-Soyuz Test Project].

JOHNSON: You mentioned the Gemini news center. You worked at the news center part of the time, or how did that work?

RILEY: Well, I worked at the news center at the Cape mainly during Gemini, because I went to most of the launches down there, the Gemini launches, until when I started doing commentary, I didn't go to the Cape as often, but when I did work in the news center here, it was generally on

the query desk, or several times I'd worked at the interview desk and that sort of thing. We had several desks set up, an interview desk, a query desk, and a desk for the contractors and things like that.

JOHNSON: Was it one large room?

RILEY: Yes, it was one large room. Well, in those days we were across the street from the Center in Building 6, is what we called it, one of those buildings in Nassau Bay, [Texas]. But it was a large open area, yes. It was like a bullpen, like a newsroom in a newspaper, that sort of thing.

JOHNSON: From reading, I saw that Paul Haney opposed housing it offsite. He wanted it closer or onsite. Is that correct, or do you have any memories of that?

RILEY: Housing for what?

JOHNSON: The news center.

RILEY: Initially when we moved to the Center, we were onsite. Then I guess we kind of ran out of space, or the space wasn't apportioned correctly. I think Building 2 at that time was made up mainly of individual offices, which didn't work too well for a news center. We had an auditorium, but it was fairly small. We could get much more space across the street there. We had the whole building.

But it was inconvenient in that you had to have transportation back and forth if you're bringing people over for interviews or that sort of thing, or even just covering a beat. You couldn't just walk to the next building. It was considerably more inconvenient than being onsite. I don't recall how long we were over there, but it was probably a year or so.

Then eventually they reconfigured Building 2 to more like a newsroom configuration, and we moved back. We were across the street during the [Apollo] 204 fire, and I think it was not too long after that we moved back over here, as I recall.

JOHNSON: You mentioned being there during the simulations to get the information you needed to do your commentary. Did you actually practice your commentary during those simulations?

RILEY: I didn't, usually. I would make a lot of notes. Well, on some occasions I guess we did practice, particularly as we got down closer to the mission, because the sound room in the building would record and give us the tapes and we could listen to those and study those, too. So, yes, we did. But initially when you're first starting just to learn the mission, no, just mainly familiarized ourselves with terms and things that were going to happen during the mission, and who was whom in the MOCR [Mission Operations Control Room], who were the people that you really had to know and get to, to get the kind of information you needed. But later, yes, we did do commentary as we got closer to the mission.

JOHNSON: Were you given any instructions on how to do the commentary, or was that comfortable for you to start out doing that?

RILEY: I wouldn't say it was comfortable. I had never really done anything like that before. As I recall, we took some very basic training in speech, and they preferred you not to have some very obvious accent and that sort of thing.

But I guess the most nervous part of commentary is always the launch, and commentators don't usually start with the launch phase. You usually start out working the overnight, which is good because you learn a lot about the things that go on.

The whole point of commentary was not to tell the public what was going on directly. So although I knew I was, I never felt like I was talking to thousands or millions of people. The idea of the commentary was to provide good information and explanations to the media, to the news media that was at the news center, so that they could disseminate correct information. Then, of course, the networks picked it up and put it on the air, so it became a little more than that. But I can't say I was never uncomfortable doing some phases, but I always just tried to imagine that I was just talking to one or two people, not a lot of people. So I was never really discombobulated too much, I don't think.

JOHNSON: Was [John A.] "Shorty" Powers still there when you started?

RILEY: Yes, "Shorty" was the one that hired me, he and Ben James, and "Shorty", he was still there, yes.

JOHNSON: He was known as "The Voice of Mercury."

RILEY: Yes.

JOHNSON: Was his commentary different than what it was when you started doing it? Did it change somewhat?

RILEY: Yes, I think it did change. “Shorty” had a very personal kind of commentary, and I think eventually we got to the point where we tried to make it more impersonal. But “Shorty” was pretty flamboyant, and he liked to invent phrases like “A-okay,” which nobody understood what it really meant, and he had a knack for doing it. I mean, he was a wonderful commentator, particularly for the initial program, the Mercury Program. He got people really interested in what was going on, and he could portray a sense of drama and all that kind of stuff. But that kind of changed, I think.

I think Haney was probably the second commentator. He started commentary on—well, it was MA-9, because it was a, what, thirty-six-hour flight? I don’t remember exactly. But it was several days, and one commentator couldn’t do it all. So that’s when Paul started. He was at [NASA] Headquarters, [Washington, D.C.] at that time, and he started doing commentary. Then he came to Houston as the public affairs officer.

But I think as the rest of us got into it, Terry [Robert T.] White and [John E.] McLeaish and Doug [Douglas K.] Ward, we tried to make it more impersonal and stress more the information and explanatory part of it. At least I did. I think they did, too.

JOHNSON: You started in the mid-sixties with your commentary and went all the way through Shuttle with that position?

RILEY: Well, I did the early part of the Shuttle, and I didn't do a commentary on ASTP because I was too involved in the program itself.

JOHNSON: Are there any missions, beginning with Gemini, that stick out in your mind while you were working and doing the commentary that you'd like to share? You mentioned that you were in the news center, or you were during Apollo 1, the fire.

RILEY: The fire. Well, that was on a Saturday, of course, and we were—was it a Saturday or Friday? It was Friday, I think. It was a Friday, as I recall. We had left work, and there was going to be a party that night out at that old mansion in Morgan's Point that looks like the White House. I think Paul Barkley owned it at that time, and he was having a PAO [Public Affairs Office] party or something.

But I know I had just barely gotten home from the office when the phone rang and they said, "Come back to the office right away." So everybody assembled in Building 6. It was like six o'clock, six-thirty or something like that. Then we learned what had happened, and as soon as the next-of-kin had been notified and everything, we released the information.

By that time, the media knew that something had happened. So there were a lot of people there. So this was not during a mission or anything, of course. It was a test, yes. But it was a hectic time and a traumatic time.

JOHNSON: What sort of preparations did PAO have already in place for dealing with a tragedy?

RILEY: Well, we had a contingency plan that covered how we should release the information. By that time, we had already lost several astronauts in aircraft accidents and stuff, and we had had some experience there. We sent a public affairs person out to the house on each one of those occasions, and they intercepted any media that might—and there were always press that tried to get to the house and talk to people around there. So NASA always, they sent a security officer and a public affairs officer out to the house every time.

But we had a contingency plan that spelled out how we should operate. As I recall, on 204, by the following Monday it was pretty well in effect, and the program office also set up a center over in Building 1 in the program office area, where I know I spent an awful lot of time over there and Jack [W.] Kroehnke from the Public Affairs Office did, too. We switched back and forth.

But by that time we were getting a tremendous amount of queries from all over the country. The news center would write those out, and then we'd take them over there. The program office had assigned a person to work with us, and he would take whatever the question was to whatever area in the program office that he thought was best suited to answer the question, and we'd get an answer. The program office impressed on the people that "You're busy doing these other things, but this is also important. We've got to maintain some credibility here with the press and the media, so we need to get these answers as swiftly as we can." It worked very well.

We did not do that on the *Challenger* Program. In fact, we had a contingency plan, and it seems to me we did not follow the plan, not because the Public Affairs Office didn't want to, but there were some people in management that had the wrong idea as to how they wanted to do things. It was more of a struggle to do things after the *Challenger* than it was during the fire.

But we've always had contingency plans covering each mission and a general one that covers the catastrophes that occur, like 204 and that sort of thing.

JOHNSON: So after the 204 fire, did the fact that the contingency plan worked well—were there any other changes that were made after that, as far as handling something like that in the future?

RILEY: Well, it was always updated, but I don't remember any big changes, because it worked very well for that particular—now, on Apollo 13, of course, we didn't have loss of life, but that's when we were able to open up the control center, the MOCR, for press to come in and actually observe what was going on.

There'd been a big effort to try to do that earlier, but, again, it was resisted by, well, people like—and this is no reflection on “Deke”, but “Deke” [Donald K.] Slayton, who was always very jealous of—he didn't want anybody saying anything that would reflect on his astronauts. We understood that. But the good thing about “Deke” is that if you proposed something to him, initially he might say, “No, no, we can't do that.” But he'd let you argue with him, and if you could convince him that it was a good thing, he was not above changing his mind, and he would say, “Okay.”

But for a long period of time, there were a lot of people that didn't think that that should occur. But it worked so well on [Apollo] 13 and we gained so much credence as an agency by doing that, that it was really a good thing. Initially, too, we had back in Gemini, and Mercury, too, but—I don't think we did this throughout the Gemini Program, but the initial Gemini missions, there was a—I think it was a five-second delay on the air to ground, so that you had a

chance to know what was going to be said before it was released to the media or the public. But Haney finally convinced people that we should do away with that delay, which was good, too.

But I remember it was back in Apollo, and I guess “Deke” still thought we were having delays, I don’t know, but on one of the missions, there was a brief burst of profanity. I was on the console, and “Deke” ran over and said, “Don’t let that go out.”

I said, “Too late, Deke. It’s already gone. It went out at the moment it was said.” Well, I’m sure he knew that we were not having delay, but it had slipped his mind, I guess.

JOHNSON: Was that with Gene [Eugene A.] Cernan on Apollo 10 when he—

RILEY: Well, it was on Apollo 10, but I think it was Tom [Thomas P.] Stafford describing one of the craters coming up. “Here comes Sensorinus. It’s bigger than—,” so-and-so, he said, which was funny.

Gene’s exclamation when the LM [Lunar Module] did that funny maneuver, it went out, too.

But we eventually got everybody agreed, and even in the written transcripts, we edited them only for style and spelling and that sort of thing. If somebody said something, it was in the transcript, and we didn’t delete anything or censor anything. That caused some very interesting transcripts on the conversation between John [W.] Young and Charlie [Charles M.] Duke [Jr.] when they didn’t know that their mikes were hot. [Laughs] I think John was complaining about that stuff they had in the orange juice, calcium or something like that. I forget. They enriched the orange juice with something.

JOHNSON: Was it potassium?

RILEY: Yes, potassium, that's right, and it was giving him gastric problems, but he was very graphic about it. But that came out in the transcript.

And there were several instances of hot mikes or that the crew wasn't aware, but normally if that happened, somebody from the control center would alert them right away. He would say, "You know, your mike is hot," or something like that, and they would cut it off, because that was conversation that was just between the two of them. It should have been just an intercom thing, but it wasn't an air-to-ground type of thing.

But in general, as the program progressed, senior management officials became more understanding of the need to be as forthright as possible, and particularly the Apollo 13 really brought that point home. That's why it was somewhat of a disappointment that we couldn't operate exactly in the way we were supposed to on the *Challenger* thing, but not that we hid any kind of secrets or that sort of thing, but it just didn't move as smoothly as the other incidents had. You had to work a lot harder to get things done.

JOHNSON: Do you think the fact that it was televised and everybody knew about it instantaneously as opposed to Apollo 1 or Apollo 13 where you informed the press what was going on, but with the *Challenger* everyone knew?

RILEY: Yes, everyone knew immediately that it was disastrous. Well, I don't know. I know there was great sensitivity in Flight Crew Operations. George [W. S.] Abbey was the director at that time of Flight Crew Operations, and George was very sensitive to information about

deceased crew members or about it took a while to recover the wreckage and that sort of thing. Of course, the media always wanted immediate access to anything we knew, and sometimes it took a day or two before—George did not want to just immediately go out and say, “We did this today,” or “found this today.” So it was a different type thing.

Of course, the fact that the teacher [S.] Christa McAuliffe was aboard was very sensitive. They were very sensitive about that.

We had gone through a series of Assistant Administrators for Public Affairs at Headquarters. Some of them were good and some of them just kind of filled the position. But initially when the program first started, Julian Scheer had held that position for a number of years, and he was very good at it and was very good at being able to influence and explain to the Administrator and other Deputy Administrators at Headquarters the importance of doing this and that.

I think in general, we accomplished the things we needed to do, but in some instances it just took a little bit longer than others and a little bit more effort. But there was never a time when anybody said we were going to shut down access to public information or anything like that. That never occurred.

JOHNSON: Going back a little bit to Gemini again, Gemini IV, of course, had the first space walk, and the reporters weren't given that information until a few days before. Do you have any specific memories about that? Were you commentating during that mission?

RILEY: I don't remember whether I was. If you asked me to make a list of every mission I was commentary, I couldn't do it.

JOHNSON: You don't remember? That's fine.

RILEY: And I don't think I was, because that was just, like, the second Gemini mission, manned Gemini mission, I think, Gemini IV.

JOHNSON: Yes, it was the first one that was actually mission control and Houston.

RILEY: Yes, that was in '65, and the first one was John Young and—

JOHNSON: And [Virgil I. "Gus"] Grissom.

RILEY: And Grissom. We were still operating at the Cape at that time, and that was Gemini III, I think. So, no, I didn't give commentary on IV, I don't think, and I'm sure I went to the Cape for the launch and then came back after launch.

JOHNSON: How many launches did you go to the Cape for? Was that all through Apollo also?

RILEY: I went to the Cape for some of the unmanned Apollo launches, but for most of the Apollo launches I did commentary, I think. I didn't go to Apollo 8. I think I worked the query desk here. But for most of the others I did commentary. So I never did get to the Cape for a manned Apollo launch. I was there for the first Saturn V launch, but that was unmanned, and I

was there for one of the early Saturn launches, and it was a night launch, Saturn I. It wasn't a V, was it? No, I didn't go to the Cape for any Apollo launches.

The only Shuttle launch I ever went to the Cape for was several years ago after I retired, and NASA retirees had a big reunion at the Cape during one of the launches, and we all saw the launch from the press site. But because I was always busy, I was either doing commentary in the initial part or after I became the branch chief, I was tied up with management kind of stuff in the news center, and I didn't do commentary then either.

I was there for the last Mercury launch and for most of the Gemini launches, but after Gemini I didn't go, other than, I'd say, a couple of the unmanned Apollo type.

JOHNSON: Apollo 7, of course, Wally [Walter M.] Schirra [Jr.] was labeled "grumpy" by the press, and I believe there were some issues during that flight. Did you have to deal with any of that or deal with the press during any of that?

RILEY: No. Of course, we [had] queries and things about that, and when we'd have the change-of-shift news conferences, people like Chris [Christopher C.] Kraft would get questions about it. But he handled those. The press was much more interested in hearing what Chris had to say than what we had to say. So I never really got involved in that particular thing.

JOHNSON: Apollo 11, of course, had a lot of press coverage, I'm sure, before and after and during. Maybe if you have any memories about that flight you'd like to share?

RILEY: Well, of course, it was the culmination of what we'd all been working for for a number of years. It was a very exciting mission. I did liftoff on Apollo 11, and then I did the lunar surface EVA [Extravehicular Activity], the commentary on 11. I think Doug Ward did the lunar landing phase, and I sat in with him on that.

Well, the whole mission was pretty outstanding from our standpoint, and we had thousands of, well, several thousand—I don't remember the total, but it was like two or three thousand or more news media here. A lot of Japanese. The Japanese just went crazy on Apollo missions. They were here for all of them, and in greater numbers the earlier ones than the latter ones. But there was tremendous media interest in most of the Apollo flights.

After 11, it started falling off a little bit as far as numbers. But 13 brought them out again, and after that, I think the interest stayed. It wasn't as high as for 11, of course, but it kind of leveled off and stayed fairly good, because by that time all the media was afraid that something like a 13 could happen again and they wouldn't be here. So they wanted to be here.

All of the Apollo missions were busy times, and each one was different enough or had new elements introduced, like the lunar rover or those sort of things, and you went, of course, to different areas of the Moon. But each mission was different enough that it maintained a lot of interest. But I don't think anything will ever—we would go up to the level of interest or excitement of Apollo 11.

JOHNSON: Did that level of interest change any of the ways that your office handled the press?

RILEY: No, not really. I think we learned a lot just from the sheer volume of the media, but by that time we had quite a bit of experience on missions and handling. So I don't recall any kind of drastic or unusual changes involved.

JOHNSON: You said you were doing the commentary during the first Moon walk, when Neil [A.] Armstrong stepped on the Moon.

RILEY: Yes, yes.

JOHNSON: Were you so busy doing what you were doing, or how did it affect you when that happened?

RILEY: Well, I was fairly awe-struck, I guess. But as I recall, we had made arrangements to have one of the geologists sit with us. I can't remember whether we started that on 11 or maybe a little bit later. But, anyway, on several of the Apollo missions we had some of the NASA geologists sit with us so that we could use their expertise when the crew was picking up rocks and soil and that sort of thing, and that was very helpful.

Of course, the Apollo 11 EVA, it wasn't as extensive as the later ones, but, yes, I would have to say I was very impressed. The pictures were kind of fuzzy. They weren't as good as they were later on when we had better cameras and better places to put them, but it was by far the most exciting pictures from space that we had seen since—of course, Apollo 8 was the low-level surface of the Moon. TV pictures were great, you know. Everybody liked those. But to actually see somebody out on the surface, it was the culmination of what everybody had been

looking forward to for so long, and they didn't fall through the surface or the dust like some people thought they might. But we didn't think they would anyway.

JOHNSON: Apollo 12, unfortunately, had the problem with the camera. How did that affect what your office was doing?

RILEY: Well, of course, it required more verbal descriptions because you didn't have the pictures, because a lot of times you didn't have to do a lot of commentary, the pictures just were so good. But, yes, 12, as I recall, it burned out fairly rapidly, too, after they landed. It was a big disappointment to everybody, and it did require more verbalization, but other than that, I thought it was a fun mission, almost. Of course, they'd had the problem on liftoff with the lightning strike, which was very confusing for a while. Then I thought it was exciting that they had landed so close to the Surveyor and were able to describe. You walk over and say, "We see the Surveyor," and this sort of thing, get down and take a piece of it to bring back.

And I always got a kick out of Pete [Charles] Conrad [Jr.] anyway. Pete was so bouncy, and his air-to-ground was he sang and he whistled, and you could tell he was really having a ball. That type of thing helped a lot to alleviate the fact you didn't have the TV, because I think everybody got a kick out of Pete's descriptions of what he was seeing and all this kind of thing. But it definitely leaves a gap in the historical part of it, because you don't have the—well, you've got still photos, but you don't have the TV, the video, which is a shame, yes. But things like that happen.

JOHNSON: You mention Pete Conrad, and I believe on that flight was the one where he was a little concerned because there wasn't going to be that five-second delay, and he was afraid he would say something that might embarrass NASA.

RILEY: Of course, we hadn't had the delay for a long time before that.

JOHNSON: Right, right.

RILEY: I don't recall Pete—at least I never heard him say anything, that he was—but, no, I'm not aware of any fears he might have had along that line. He may have said that to somebody else, but I didn't hear about it.

JOHNSON: You mentioned Apollo 13 before, and the fact that you had the press in the MOCR, the press pool. That was established actually before the mission, right? I mean, it didn't happen as a result of 13, did it?

RILEY: Yes.

JOHNSON: Oh, it did?

RILEY: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: They weren't in there before the actual accident?

RILEY: No. No, they were not. I'm trying to think who the public affairs officer was at that time.

JOHNSON: Was it Brian Duff?

RILEY: Yes, it was Brian Duff, yes. I think Brian and some of the Headquarters people were able to quickly establish the fact that we need to have a pool over there. Fortunately, there was this little booth that was available. It was normally used by Headquarters people, but it was quickly configured so that it would handle a radio-TV pool member and a writer pool member, plus a public affairs officer who was with them.

We had to quickly establish ground rules. Like, to get into it you had to go into the viewing room, and, of course, on many occasions you've got families in the viewing room or you have program officials and Headquarters official. Well, we established right off the fact that the pool members were not going to be able to go in and just, off the cuff, interview people in there. You can come in and do your stint here, and that's it.

I can't remember. I know the first radio-TV guy in there was Roy Neal from NBC. They got that up and running just within hours after the accident. I know it was an exhausting time for commentators because each of the commentators—now, there were about either three or four of us on that mission, basically three, though, for each shift, one for each shift. Things were so busy in the news center because when the accident happened, boy, people just flocked in from all over the world, actually. Things were so busy there that the commentators would do their—well,

it's eight hours nominally, but by the time you get through it's nine to ten, by the time you do the change-of-shift briefing and that sort of thing.

But then the commentator would have to go back and do another eight hours in the booth with the pool. So the commentators worked like sixteen-hour shifts or seventeen from the time of accident up till the end of the mission. But I don't think anybody really complained about it, because there was so much going on that everybody was interested in. The PAO escort was just as interested in what was going on as the pool people were. So nobody really complained about it. But that's how it operated.

JOHNSON: So the PAO escort that was in there with the two pool, what was the role?

RILEY: Much of the press was not—see, they had access in there to the flight director's loop, which is not put out publicly on the air or fed into the news center. So they could hear the flight director and the flight controllers battering back and forth and talking, explaining things or questions that the flight director had for the different controllers. A lot of the media was not used to the terms that they were using and didn't really understand what they were talking about. So the escort was there to explain to them if they had any questions. “What does that mean, what Kranz just said to FIDO [Flight Dynamics Officer]?” you know. So you were there to explain things to them and try to help them in their coverage.

JOHNSON: Could they also hear the astronauts and CapCom [Capsule Communicator]?

RILEY: Oh, yes, yes. They could hear. They could switch between—they could hear the release line, the commentary line, the public affairs commentary, the air-to-ground, and they could hear the flight director's loop. I think those were the three that they had. Then the radio-TV correspondent had an open line back to the pool position in the news center. The writer pool guy had a ring-down phone that he could pick up and it would ring back to the rewrite desk in the pool area, the writer pool area at the news center, and he would dictate whatever he had. So it worked very well.

We continued to use it in subsequent missions, not around the clock like we did on 13, but, as I recall, we had pool in there on liftoff and landing and on very active kind of things going on in the mission, like the lunar landing and the EVAs and that sort, the active parts. Yes, I think even on some of the maneuvers and things like that, we would have them in there just for those periods. But we didn't have them in there for twenty-four hours a day. We just didn't have the manpower to do that.

JOHNSON: And you mentioned early, of course, the interest in Apollo 13, the interest had waned quite a bit in the public, and they didn't even carry the live TV feed that happened right before the accident. Then immediately, I'm sure, the interest surged.

RILEY: Oh, yes, it just mushroomed, yes.

JOHNSON: Was there any problem handling the amount of press or the interest?

RILEY: No, I don't recall any big problem, because we already had the facilities that we'd had there before. So it was JUST putting up with the hectic thing of trying to get everybody registered and signed in as they came flooding in and assigned to work positions over in the press working area and that sort of thing. So it kept everybody busy in the news center, but it was not any really big problem.

JOHNSON: The subsequent missions, of course, had more geology, and you had been going on the field trips and studying the geology. On these missions you also had geologists sitting with you?

RILEY: We didn't on all of them, but there were several that we did, a couple at least, and I can't remember now which ones those might have been. I don't know whether 14 was one or not, but 15 I think we may have. Fifteen was when we first had the Rover. Fourteen, they just had that little cart they pulled, a kind of a surrey or something.

I don't think we had them there for every subsequent mission, but we did on at least two or three more. I can't remember exactly which one.

JOHNSON: Before we get into the further missions past Apollo, do you want to go ahead and take a break just for a second and stretch your legs? We've been going a little over an hour.

RILEY: Okay. All right.

[Tape recorder turned off.]

JOHNSON: Okay, we're back again with Mr. Riley, and we've just talked about Apollo. I think I'd like to go on to Skylab now and talk to you a little bit about Skylab. Considering that Skylab was the first truly long-duration flight, after the initial glitch at the beginning, how did that change the role of PAO and the commentary?

RILEY: Well, I don't remember whether it was Skylab or later in Shuttle, where we got to the point we didn't provide somebody on the console during the sleep period, but I don't think that happened as early as Skylab. Again, that's so long ago, my memory is faulty there.

But I do know that we did have a lot of difficulty, as we did later when on the long-duration Shuttle missions and stuff, where we had a lot of difficulty staffing positions. We didn't have that many people that we could assign from our office. We brought in, and I don't know whether we started this in Skylab or not, but I know there was a period on the long-duration stuff that was just kind over where we had people that would, like, work a month without a day off or three weeks without a day off. People were piling up comp time like crazy and there was no time to take the comp time.

We started bringing in selected people from other Centers and from Headquarters, [who] primarily took over positions in the news center and freed up some people that we could use in commentary. We started training a few more people in commentary. But there were several periods, and I think Skylab was probably one of them, but I know there were periods later in the Shuttle where we were just overwhelmed with tasks and not enough workers to accomplish them, which always made it tough.

We struggled through, but it was, like I say, people were piling up comp time and it was hard for them to take a lot of it. But the flight controllers had the same problem. They had to really stretch out and try to augment the people that they were using.

I know later on we were able to start training a considerable number of people, but this was during the early Shuttle era, and we started being able to use women from the office as commentators. Several of them just were wonderful commentators, Billie [A.] Deason and Barbara [L.] Schwartz, which always made me feel good, because I was involved in several of them, in training them, not necessarily in commentary.

But there was a period when we couldn't hire anybody from the outside because of budgetary problems. This was probably around 1980, '81, '81-'82. Personnel finally said, "Well, you can select people from the Center," and they were all women. They gave us four slots, and I think they—I don't remember whether they started, if they were selected, they could start as a GS [General Schedule]-7 or GS-9. I don't remember. Initially they gave us three slots and we selected three women.

I know it was '81, I think, because I think it was shortly after I went back down to Public Information, or Media Services, it was called then, from the administrative assistant's job, which was never my cup of tea. I didn't like that kind of stuff. I drafted a training plan for this program, and we selected, let's see, Billie Deason and Janet [K.] Ross and Betty Johnson, I think her name was. But Betty left. Her husband got a job out of town or something. She wasn't in the program very long, maybe a month, if that long. We were able to fill that third slot again. That's when Barbara Schwartz came aboard.

Then Janet Ross left after, she went through the training program, which was a year long, but then she had an opportunity to go to work for the Customs Service in Atlanta, [Georgia,] or something, and so she left.

But we still had Barbara and Billie, and later when we were able to hire, and this is quite a bit later, we were able to hire from the outside, and we had some young ladies like Pam Alloway [phonetic], that we used for commentary.

But I was always very glad that both Billie and Barbara—and I was proud of them, too, because, well, by the time I retired they were both GS-13s. So they did very well, and for a program that initially people thought “Well, we’ve got to do it because we can’t get anybody else,” they developed into a really good public information specialists and contributed heavily to the benefit of the Center and the agency. I think they’re both retired now. I know Barbara’s retired. I think Billie is now, too.

JOHNSON: And they were the first women that did that?

RILEY: Yes, and Janet Ross. But, yes, they were the first to do commentary, I think. I can’t think of any woman we had on the commentary team prior to them. But they worked out real well. In fact, that was probably one of the most satisfying parts of my NASA career, was being able to draft that training program and oversee it and kind of make sure that they did well and got promoted and that sort of thing.

JOHNSON: Were you given a list of names to choose from, and were you able to choose them?

RILEY: Yes, as I recall, we were able to choose them. I think John McLeaish and I interviewed. I don't remember how many initially were on the list, but the ones we wound up with were ones that we were able to select from a list of applicants. They were NASA employees, mainly secretaries or administrative assistants, that sort of thing, who applied through the Personnel Office when they sent out an announcement that these positions are open. So we were able to select them, yes.

JOHNSON: That's interesting.

RILEY: But I think that all happened, like I say, it was around '81, '82. I think it was probably '82 by the time they finished their training, as I recall. We had gone [through] what you were talking about earlier, the period of long-duration kind of things that was mainly just a big pain for everybody in the office, but you had to do it because there was no alternative.

JOHNSON: Some of the other issues during Skylab, I believe there was some tension or some discussion between PAO and the Office of Manned Space Flight on whether or not to broadcast the medical discussions. Do you have any recollections of that?

RILEY: I don't recall that it was ever proposed that we broadcast the medical discussions themselves, but we did think that we had to provide information on what they were about, and we eventually came up with that we were allowed to put out a summary of what was discussed and why, to satisfy the media, primarily, that somebody wasn't deathly ill or that sort of thing.

I don't recall, and this could have happened at Headquarters, this discussion, but I don't recall any discussion here about or anybody pushing that we should release the entire conversation between the crew and the doctor, no. After the discussion was over, why, somebody would get with the flight surgeon and put together a summary, and then that was released.

JOHNSON: After Skylab, then let's talk about ASTP and your role in drafting the public information plan for that project. How did you become involved in that aspect of it?

RILEY: Well, I guess I was kind of a natural, because by that time I had been covering the Astronaut Office for a number of years, ten years or more. I spent a lot of years with Al [Alan B.] Shepard [Jr.] and then Tom Stafford and John Young, plus I was also covering the Apollo Program Office, or I had been. I had worked closely with Glynn [S.] Lunney when he was a flight director, and Glynn was sort of the Apollo spacecraft manager at that time, and that's how he got involved in ASTP.

So I was involved in both ends of it, the crew and the program office. So we needed an information plan, because we knew we were going to have really a problem with trying to deal with the Soviets. They were not used to disseminating public information. So we decided it would be a lot easier if we did it in two parts. Part one would be the pre-mission stuff and the training, and then part two would cover the mission itself. We figured we could learn a lot during the pre-mission part that we could try to use in part two.

I got involved in part one, and, well, I don't remember who, either somebody at Headquarters or the Public Affairs Office here asked me to give a part-one draft, which I did. As

I recall, most of it survived into part one. There were some changes because we tried to make it as liberal as possible for the media to gain access, and the Soviets resisted a lot of that. So there had to be some compromises to get anything done at all. But, in general, we were able to come up with a part one of the plan and get it signed off before the mission started. But it took a while to get it.

See, we were well into the training. Because of the fact that I had covered the Astronaut Office so long and knew all of the crew pretty well, and the backup crews, and had been going on a lot of field trips with astronauts for many years, they decided that I should be the public affairs officer that accompanied them to the Soviet Union for their training period, so that's why I would go over there with them.

Then when the working groups came over here, I would get more involved. Plus, there was a crew also with the program part of it involved issuing joint communiqués after the working group meetings were over. They usually lasted a couple of weeks or so. But basically the reason I got involved in it because I was so involved initially in both the program area and the crew area.

JOHNSON: After you drafted your part, did it then go to Headquarters?

RILEY: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: Was it changed significantly when it went to Headquarters, or do you remember?

RILEY: No, it was changed, but it wasn't changed significantly, because, as I say, I think Headquarters got involved in hashing it out with the Russians more than I did, so that they had to compromise in some areas. Like where we would want to say, "This is open to anybody that wants to do it," the Soviets, they liked phrases like, "We should follow our usual and normal practices and customs according to each other's country." So they said, "You can do what you like with your media, but we want to do what we like with ours."

Well, as I say, we were fairly deep into training before it got signed off completely by both sides, because we came up with a few problems, some in the photographic area, where the agreement was that we would exchange still photos and video and motion picture stuff. They were always dragging their feet on that, and they would give you excuses like, "Well, our labs are down," or, "We can't do this or that."

I remember one in particular. When we first started out, the Soviets had no idea about public information. They assigned a guy named Kozorev, Valentin [Ivanovich] Kozorev, who was the Scientific Secretary of Intercosmos, the space part of the Academy of Sciences, as their liaison for public affairs [and] the media. He didn't know anything about it. He was a fairly pleasant guy, but he could never give you a straight answer. I'd ask him about something, and he would say, "I don't know."

And I would say, "Well, who knows?"

Then he would say, "Nobody knows." [Laughter]

So I learned at one time those two phrases in Russian so I could throw them back at him. But I had the strangest discussion with him one time. It was our second or third crew visit over there, and I had taken a lot of photographs over to give to them. He said, "Well, we'll have some for you by the time you leave, but I don't have them right now."

And I said, "Okay."

Then a few days later he came to me and he said, "We would like to release some of these photographs you gave us."

And I said, "That's fine. You're free to do that."

And he said, "Well, thank you very much, but some of the photographs we give you, I'm not sure you'll be able to release all those."

And I said, "Well, the information plan says we can do that."

And he said, "I know, but we have not yet signed the plan."

It made me mad. I didn't yell at him or anything. But I said, "Valentin, you know as well as I do that the plan is going to get signed, and if you want to stall and wait, I guess that's your prerogative." But I said, "I'm going to act in the spirit of the plan whether it's signed or not, and you're free [to do] whatever you like with these pictures, these photos that I gave you."

It embarrassed him, I think. He said, "Well, I'm sorry. I can't offer the same thing to you."

And I said, "Well, I think it's strange." And then I would write a big memo about it to the Assistant Administrator for Public Affairs, [John P. Donnelly]. But things like that, we had problems with. They eventually got ironed out, but you had to go through a lot of bureaucratic red tape.

Then later the Intercosmos Council assigned another guy to be, in effect, their public affairs person. The guy's name was Vladimir[Aleksandrovich] Denisenko, really a nice guy. He didn't speak any English, and I didn't speak any Russian, but we managed to communicate. Well, we had interpreters, of course, but we got along very well. After Denisenko took over that position, if you went to him and asked him something, he'd give you an answer, and you knew

whatever he told you was going to happen. He was not a news guy. I think he was an engineer initially, but he grasped very well what we were trying to do and what we expected them to do, and he was very conscientious in trying to work. He would come over with their crews, and we had a very good rapport. That worked pretty well after that.

Well, occasionally you'd have problems. I know on our first crew trip over there in '73, we were going to have a news conference the day before we left to come back home. On the morning that we were leaving to come back, a phone rang in my hotel room. I answered it, and it was a correspondent from some West German publication, and he said he wanted to do an interview with the American astronauts. I said, "Well, I'm sorry. We did those yesterday."

And he said, "Well, I know you did," but he said the Russians had told him that that was only for Russians correspondents, that he couldn't attend, which I thought was strange, because, of course, there was an American contingent of media in Moscow, [U.S.S.R.,] assigned there, and they all were there, and there were a lot of Eastern Bloc media from Poland and East Germany and places like that there. But apparently somebody had tried to pull a fast one and limit the number of non-Soviet or at least the Western ones that weren't assigned to Moscow permanently.

We had little things like that occur, but I don't recall any problems like that after Denysenko took over their end of it. It was an interesting time, a rather frustrating time, but even the frustrating things were interesting.

JOHNSON: I imagine coming from a news background where getting the information out there as true and as accurate as possible and as quickly as possible, and then having to deal with a society

where that wasn't necessarily the case, would have been somewhat frustrating, especially in drafting the plan and trying to make it work.

RILEY: Yes, that's true. It was even frustrating to me working with some of the American correspondents that were stationed there. The first time I met with them, boy, they said—in fact, even before I went over there the first time, I got communications from them or from their organizations that, “We expect you to really do all you can to free up information for us on the Soviet side,” and that sort of thing.

So I decided that I'd try to, and when we got there, the first time we got there, we were still at the airport, and there were a couple of American correspondents out there to meet us, and I can't remember who they were. One of them said, “The Russians are going to take you to [Konstantin E.] Tsiolkovskiy's birthplace.” That's their father of their space—he was sort of the [Robert H.] Goddard of the Soviet Union. “They're going to take you there,” I forget the name of the town, “and we want to go along. But we haven't had any luck in applying for permission to go from the Soviets.” So they said, “You know, see what you can do for us.”

And I said, “Okay.” So I went to the Soviet counterpart and I said, “You know, we have some American correspondents that want to go on this trip. I know some Soviet newsmen'll be there, and we need to have some American correspondents.”

“Well,” he said, “I don't know whether we can do that or not.”

So I just went to Tom Stafford, and I said, “Tom, we're going to have at least say to these people that we're going to have to consider not going unless we get quid pro quo with Soviet newspeople,” and he agreed. So we kind of said to them, “We don't really want to not accept

your hospitality, but we're going to have to consider it if we're not able to have any American newspeople go on this trip with us. We're going to have to consider not going."

And then they said, "Okay, you can have some."

Then it turned out the day we were going to go was Thanksgiving Day. I went to the American correspondents in Moscow. "It's Thanksgiving. We don't want to go," and I couldn't get anybody to go.

And I had to go back with egg on my face to the Soviets and say, "Well, we're not going to have any." I said, "You know, this is Thanksgiving, an American holiday, and they have plans with their families," and they just kind of grinned their little Cheshire-cat grin and said, "Oh, that's all right, yes."

So there were problems both sides. But that really upset me because I did all I could to satisfy their demands, and then when we were able to accomplish it, they decided they didn't want to do it. But I didn't have any more problems with them after that, either. So everything worked out all right.

But, as I say, it was an interesting several years, and other than a lot of travel—well, I enjoyed the travel. I enjoyed going over there, and the people, a lot of the people were really nice. Then I was over there for the mission, too. Then on the crew's post-flight tour, I was on that.

JOHNSON: Was there an issue with the size of the room that they held the news conferences in? It wasn't quite large enough, and they wanted to limit the number of newspeople. Do you have any memories of that?

RILEY: That's vaguely familiar, but I don't really remember the specifics. Seems to me they did propose a room that really didn't handle the number of people that we expected, but that got worked out, as I recall, yes. It was not a real big deal, I don't think, as I recall.

JOHNSON: The part two of the plan, did you have anything to do with that?

RILEY: No. I think I probably had input because we had some meetings. Part two was primarily drafted at Headquarters, but several Headquarters people would come down, particularly during the working group meetings and things, and we would have discussions about part two and then kind of kick things around. So we were pretty much aware what was going to be in it, but I didn't get personally involved in putting it down on paper like I did part one with the original draft, no.

JOHNSON: Glynn Lunney, we interviewed him, he mentioned in his interview that he was a little concerned at that time about Headquarters coming in after the fact and maybe possibly destroying some of the rapport that had already been built up, and he felt that JSC PAO people were perfectly capable of handling everything. Do you have any specific memories about that issue or that time?

RILEY: Well, I remember that after we were pretty well into the preparations for the mission, that Headquarters took a lot bigger interest in it and got more heavily involved. I agree with Glynn. I think if it was left up to us, we could have handled it fine. I don't recall I had any real

trepidation that Headquarters was going to mess things up, because they got pretty heavily involved in the TV plans and the photo plans and stuff like that.

JOHNSON: Was that more part two?

RILEY: Yes, yes, particularly the TV plans on part two. But I thought the JSC people, Lunney and Stafford and everybody involved, we handled things pretty well, I thought.

JOHNSON: In part one of the plan, the one you were more involved in, how exactly was it decided and signed off that information would be handled?

RILEY: Well, Lunney had to sign off on it. The Assistant Administrator, I think, for Public Affairs had to sign off on it, and I think the Assistant Administrator for International Affairs at Headquarters also had to sign off on it.

On the Soviet side, I know that the academician--I can't think of his name right now, he was the head of Intercosmos, he had to sign off on it, and Professor [Konstantin Davydovich] Bushuyev, who was sort of Glynn Lunney's counterpart, had to sign off on it. There may have been another signatory on the other side, but I don't remember who it was.

Part one agreed that crews would be made available, both in this country and in their country, when the other crew was visiting and when there were working group meeting, for interviews and/or particularly news conferences at the start of the training period and at the end when they left. It also had provisions for the status reports during meetings and communiqués at the end of working group meeting, joint communiqués, that sort of thing.

I know I would draft those and give them to Glynn, and he would say, "Well, this is fine." But then the Russians always wanted to change something. A lot of times it was very cosmetic. They at least wanted to say, "Well, we want to change this." I think Glynn had some arguments with them on some of that stuff.

This is, I think, where we made some compromises with the Soviets. We had to agree that in their dealings with their press, they were entitled to use their normal customs and procedures, or something. I forget the exact language that was used, but, in effect, it said each side will honor the other side's normal practices when it comes to dealing with their own press.

Obviously, we couldn't demand that they deal with their press openly like we did with ours. We could try to nudge them along toward that end, but we couldn't say, "You've got to do this." It worked out fairly well. By the time we got to the mission, I thought the mission itself, from the news center standpoint in Moscow, worked very well. They had air-to-ground like we did and they had interpreters that were available to translate the Russian into English.

They had some innovative things that we didn't have even over here. Every newsman that covered that mission from the Moscow news center, they gave, in effect, it was a little radio receiver that they could hang around their neck. They didn't have [tape skips] the news center to hear the air-to-ground or things. Within a nominal distance, they could hear all the air-to-ground. We had a query desk, an interview desk, and that all worked smoothly.

Their news center was in a hotel, the Intourist Hotel, the third floor of the Intourist Hotel, which was across the street from Red Square. I thought it was a pretty neat news center. It was the only news center I've ever been in that had a bar. [Laughter] We didn't have bars in our news center. But they were out to make a buck anywhere they could.

But it worked pretty smoothly. There were a few snags here and there, but nothing we didn't handle. We had four people there. We had Al Alabrando from Headquarters was the head of our little group. We had a little group, and then I was there, and there was a guy from JPL [Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Pasadena, California], and I forget who the fourth one was. But, anyway, it worked pretty good.

JOHNSON: You didn't serve as a commentator during that—

RILEY: No, because I was over there.

JOHNSON: Were the commentators there or here?

RILEY: No, they were here. I think the Russians had some commentators in their control center. In fact, they may even have had one or two here. But I know they had interpreters here, translators to help the American press go from Russian to English on the Soyuz end of it. But, no, I think we went into Moscow about five days before the mission started and stayed until five days after it ended. So I wasn't in this news center or doing commentary here for that mission at all.

JOHNSON: Those innovations that they had, did we adopt any of those?

RILEY: No, not really, no. No, I don't ever recall us providing little individual receivers for our press.

JOHNSON: Interesting idea, though.

RILEY: Yes, it is. But you couldn't go three or four miles away and receive it; you had to be fairly close to the news center to get it. But they could wander around. You could go to lunch and that sort of thing and still get the air-to-ground. But it was kind of interesting, because once they kind of decided that it might be to their benefit to do some of this public information, they kind of got into the spirit of it.

JOHNSON: Do you feel like it changed the way they handled things after that somewhat?

RILEY: Well, I think it certainly did for that mission, and I think it did maybe for a brief period after that. But I don't think it stayed that way because, again, they didn't have anybody kind of pushing them, or they weren't doing a cooperative program like we did, until we got into later on with more cooperation with them, with the Space Station where they were partners.

Then we got to the point where—of course, I was retired by that time—we had a public affairs guy in Moscow for a year at a time as a liaison. I've really never talked to any of them too much about their experiences. Of course, that was after the fall of the Soviet Union, too, so it was obviously more open than it was during the period that we were there.

I remember the first time I went there. They didn't know who I was. They thought for sure I was CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] or Voice of America or somebody, because at the first big banquet we went to there, some of them made little snide remarks about that "The Voice of America was saying what we were doing over there." No sooner than we got there, they were

saying what we were—they were kind of looking at me like I was responsible. But they got used to me, and they understood what I was doing.

Then out of our whole contingent, with all the crews, “Deke” and I were the only World War II veterans, which impressed them. They were very big on what they call the Great Patriotic War. They don’t call it World War II. So they were very pleased that “Deke” and I had been involved in that situation.

JOHNSON: I could imagine that they would be somewhat skeptical of the American press and anyone to do with anything at that time period especially. Were you limited to where you could go and what you could do while you were there?

RILEY: No, not really. We could go out and walk the streets. Now, whether people tailed us or not, I don’t know. But on the free time you had, actually, I had more free time during the mission than we did on the training time we were there for crew training, because they had everything so organized and things planned for us. A lot of them were really nice. In the evening they’d take us to the Bolshoi Ballet or to the circus, and the Russian circus is just wonderful. They took us on one trip, took us to Leningrad, [U.S.S.R.,] it was at that time, for a weekend, and other kind of little cross-country trips, like the town where Tsiolkovskiy lived, and some other towns around there. But they didn’t say, “You can’t go here,” or, “You can’t go there.”

I think we were pretty well aware that our rooms were probably bugged. The first time we went, we were there, we stayed at the Intourist Hotel, because they were in the process of

constructing a small hotel for us out at Star City, [U.S.S.R.,] but it wasn't ready yet. I know every morning we'd go out to Star City for the crew training.

One day I had to go the embassy to talk to the press attaché about something, and I came back early. The car brought me in. It was about noon, I guess, when I walked into my hotel room before going over to the embassy, American Embassy. I turned the radio on when I got in the room, and shortly after that, my telephone rang. I picked it up and nobody was there. I'm convinced that somebody was listening and they heard the music go on from the radio and they called to see if I was back or what was going on. Even at the hotel out at Star City, everybody was pretty well convinced that they could listen to you if they wanted to.

I know the doctor that used to go over with us, he spoke Russian. He was born in the Ukraine and spoke Russian fluently, but he grew up in Tehran, [Iran]. His father, I think, was a victim of [Joseph] Stalin's purge, and his mother then took him and his sister, who were both pretty small at the time, out to Iran, and they grew up in Tehran. Then he came over here.

He used to delight in sitting in his room and singing bawdy songs in Persian, you know, Farsi. Then he would say, "Let them translate that." [Laughter] We never had any real evidence that they were listening, but there were just little things like the phone ringing and that sort of thing. It was just sort of assumed. So you were just kind on your guard all the time.

JOHNSON: Must have been an amazing experience.

RILEY: It was interesting. It was interesting.

JOHNSON: After ASTP there was a period of about six years where there weren't any flights. What kind of effect did that have on the Public Affairs Office? Were there cuts as far as the number of personnel? What exactly did you do during that time period?

RILEY: Well, we didn't have any cuts, but there was also in that time period where we didn't have any hiring authority either. By normal attrition you'd lose some people. As I recall, there was not any people sitting around and complaining about "I don't have anything to do," because we still had a lot to do in preparing for Shuttle and covering the normal day-to-day operation of the Center.

There was always interest in something that was going on at the Center. We were still bringing in new astronauts every once in a while, and the media was interested in that. It wasn't as frantic or as hectic or as busy as mission periods, but it was not a period that I recall where we really had to go out and scrounge for something to do either.

JOHNSON: In '78 they announced the new class of astronauts, including women and minorities. How did the public react to that, or the press? Was there a lot of interest?

RILEY: Yes, there was a lot. When we had the first women and the first minorities there, there was a lot of interest in that. Then when we started bringing in payload specialists from other countries and that sort of thing, there was a lot of interest, particularly in their home country, a lot of media interest. We managed to keep busy.

JOHNSON: Were you involved in any of the Shuttle approach and landing tests?

RILEY: Yes, I think I did commentary on—I think it was maybe on the second. It's the one Joe [H.] Engle was involved in, and I don't remember now who did those. I know Engle did. Did John Young do some of those? We didn't really have a Shuttle control center set up yet, and it was either the first or second one that I did commentary, and we operated out of what had been sort of the Sim Sup [Simulation Supervisors] area, where they did some of the simulations from. Or it was an area off from the—I don't know if it was Sim Sup or whether it was the SPAN [Spacecraft Analysis Room]. It may have been the SPAN area, the Spacecraft Analysis Area there. But it was a much smaller room off to one side of the MOCR itself, because they were reconfiguring for Shuttle. But I did do at least one. I remember doing at least one of the manned drop tests, but I don't recall that I did more than one. We only did two, didn't we? I can't remember.

JOHNSON: I'm not sure how many. Do you remember? Two.

RILEY: Yes, and I did one of those. I don't recall that I did both of them, but I just don't remember.

JOHNSON: In 1981 you became deputy chief of the Media Services Branch. How did your position change?

RILEY: Only the title changed, because prior to that I had had several—in fact, I'd had that same title before I went upstairs to the administrative assistant, and prior to that I was in some title,

like news operations manager or something. But the job never did change; just the titles changed. So that was all that changed. It was after that, '81, when I came back down, that's when we did the training program for the neophytes. So that was a little different than stuff I had been doing, but I still did a lot of the same stuff I had done.

JOHNSON: You were still doing some commentary on the early—did you do it on the first flight?

RILEY: The first Shuttle flight?

JOHNSON: Yes, the first Shuttle flight.

RILEY: To tell you the truth, I don't remember. We got to flying so many things, so many of them, and I did do a number of the Shuttle ones early on, but I couldn't tell you which ones I did and which I didn't. I don't know.

JOHNSON: As you mentioned earlier when we first talked about the *Challenger* accident, the public interest, of course, and the way things were handled, it was a little different than what the plan had called for. But obviously there was a lot of public interest before the flight ever took off because of the teacher in space and then some of the other things that we're talking about, as a journalist in space. Do you want to talk about that for a minute, let us know what you remember about that period?

RILEY: Well, yes, there was an extraordinary amount of interest in the teacher in space. In fact, all during the time she was here, she and her backup, Barbara [R.] Morgan, were here during the training, we got a lot of interest from media.

When it looked like they were going to fly a newsman in space, why, things got very interesting. It got as far as people submitted their applications, and they were down to the point where they were going to probably make a selection. Of course, the *Challenger* accident kind of blew that out of the water. But a lot of news guys had applied, particularly a lot of them that had been covering the program for years. So there was a lot of interest in that phase of it, but it just kind of fizzled out. I'm surprised they haven't mounted another campaign in the last few years. I don't know where that stands.

JOHNSON: Of course, then things changed again after the *Challenger* accident, and slowed down for a little bit as far as flights were concerned. Then in '87 you became the chief of the Media Services Branch.

RILEY: Yes.

JOHNSON: Did your job change any at this time?

RILEY: Yes, it changed considerably. I quit doing commentary, and I got a lot more involved in management and administration. Well, I got involved in assigning areas, but I'd done some of that before, performance reviews and all that kind of stuff, which I didn't particularly enjoy, because I had a lot of people in my branch that I thought did outstanding jobs, but you couldn't

give an outstanding rating to everybody that you thought was outstanding. You were kind of limited by—personnel would say, “Well, you can only give one outstanding or two, or you give one outstanding and three or four highly successful.” So there were some people that you felt bad because you couldn’t rate them as high as you wanted to rate them. I didn’t enjoy that part of it too much.

I got involved a lot more in personnel kind of matters, in hiring and that sort of thing, than I had before. But, in general, I was working with the same people that I’d work with, well, most of them for a fair number of years.

Also during the period I was the branch chief, I was able to hire some young people that were really outstanding performers, and I was able to see some of the people that—well, the two women we had left from that one program progress through promotions and stuff, which was very satisfying. Then I was able, like I say, to hire some people, some of which are still there and still doing a really good job. It’s kind of fun to bring in new blood, particularly people that are talented and you can depend upon. We had some retirements and stuff during that period, too. That’s why we were able to bring [in] some of the others.

But I think we were fairly successful in the people we were able to bring aboard and in picking people that were talented and hard-working, and, as I say, several of them are still there and doing a really good job. I’ve been gone for ten years, almost.

JOHNSON: During your tenure, while you were there, you worked under, I believe, five different PAO directors, from “Shorty” Powers all the way through Hal [Harold S.] Stall. Are there any particular memories about any of them that you’d like to share with us, or if you want to compare the differences between them all and their management style?

RILEY: Well, I think they were all different, but each had their own little ideas and quirks and stuff. “Shorty” was by far the most flamboyant.

I enjoyed working for Haney. He was an interesting guy, and he was outspoken guy. In fact, that’s what finally got him relieved, I think. But he was an interesting guy to work for and a good guy. In fact, I see Paul every once in a while, and we still enjoy visiting.

Brian Duff, of course, he had worked at Headquarters before he came here. He had a lot of interests. He was interested in the media side because Brian had been a newspaper reporter in Washington before he went to work for Headquarters. Brian was also very interested in beefing up the visitor program, and that was when we still had everything in the auditorium onsite. So he devoted quite a bit of time to that and community relations and stuff.

Then I guess—was Stall after—

JOHNSON: Jack [John W.] King, I think, came after that.

RILEY: Oh, Jack King. Yes, I forgot. How could I forget Jack? Of course, I’d known King from the Cape for a long, long time, known King for years, and he was a good guy to work for, too. He was more gung-ho on the media side probably than Duff was. King had very good rapport with Chris Kraft, and I think he was able to get a lot done because of that.

Stall, when he first came in, was sort of an unknown number. He came from the West Coast, and he didn’t have much of an aerospace background. He did work for a contractor maybe for a while. Nobody really knew much about him, and it took a while before people decided whether they thought he was going to be any good or not, I think. As several years went

by, I think Stall contributed a lot. Of course, Space Center Houston is almost entirely Hal Stall's brainstorm. He did a great job in bringing that to fruition.

JOHNSON: Did he come as director, or did he work here before?

RILEY: He came in as director, yes, and that's what kind of gave everybody a little pause at first, because normally we were used to people coming from Headquarters or another Center. But Stall was just a totally unknown factor. Not everybody was sure that they were going to be able to work with him, but I never had any problems working with him.

I thought Hal did a lot of good things. It took him a little while to get acclimated, but once he had educated himself on the things that were going on and things like that, he had a lot of new ideas and did a good job, I thought. See, I don't think anybody ever thought that something like Space Center Houston would ever come to pass, but he kept pushing it. Then I worked fairly close with him for two or three years when I was up there in that job I particularly didn't like.

When Roy [A.] Alford, who had that job left, retired, and Hal asked me to take it, I said, "Well, I don't know whether I really want to or not, but I'll see. I'll see what it's like." But I fairly quickly determined that I much preferred more operational kind of things than I did fidgeting with budgets. I wrote speeches for Kraft, a couple of them. I can write a speech if I have to, but I don't really enjoy writing speeches.

But I stuck it out, I guess till Doug Ward came in. He was at Headquarters for a while, till he came back. Then I said, "I'd like to go back down to the media area." I guess that was '81. That's when I went back down there, and I enjoyed that a lot more.

I had been involved in things like the administrative and budget stuff. For a couple of years I was the executive editor of the Independence, Missouri, *Examiner*, Harry Truman's hometown. It was owned by Stauffer Publications, and I had worked for them in Kansas City. Then they transferred me over there, and it was from there that I went to work for General Dynamics Astronautics. I'd had some experience in hiring and firing and budgets and stuff, but I never did like it as well. I kind of liked dealing with media and operational stuff. So I was pleased to get back down to the Media Services Branch, yes.

JOHNSON: And you retired in 1992?

RILEY: The last day of '92, yes.

JOHNSON: Did you have any particular reason for retiring then, or just the right time?

RILEY: I was getting old. [Laughter] And, frankly, I wasn't having as much fun as I had been, and NASA was going through some changes, Headquarters and senior management here. Of course, I was very attuned to working with directors like Kraft and [Aaron] Cohen, and these were guys that I had worked with for years, because they'd come up through either the program office or the flight operations there, flight directors and that sort of thing, and I knew them well.

But a couple of years before I retired there, we must have gone through four or five Assistant Administrators for Public Affairs at Headquarters. It seemed that they would last for a year or two, and then somebody else new, and they all had different ideas. Like I say, I'd been there a few months of thirty years, and I had about four years in the navy that counted toward

retirement. I was getting up pretty—I was about almost sixty-eight when I retired, I guess, because I was thirty-eight when I went to work for NASA. I'd gone through the fun times, and I was ready to retire, ready to quit and play golf.

JOHNSON: Yes, enjoy yourself.

RILEY: Yes, that's right. Travel some, so that's I did.

JOHNSON: Well, before we wrap it up, I want to ask Rebecca and Jennifer, if you don't mind, if they have any questions.

RILEY: Okay.

JOHNSON: Okay. Rebecca?

WRIGHT: I have a couple of brief ones. Those early days, when you were writing the news releases, when you were first here at JSC, was there an approval process before you could submit those to the press?

RILEY: Oh, yes. Yes, it had to be approved by the program manager. Whatever you were writing about, they wanted to approve, but that was usually no problem because that's who you got the information from to begin with. But there was an approval process, yes.

WRIGHT: When you talked about the pool, the press pool that began after Apollo 13, Roy Neal was the first—

RILEY: Well, we'd had pools. There'd been press pools before that, but not in the control center.

Wright: Who determined the rotation of who went in and went out? Did you leave that to the press?

RILEY: Yes, it was up to them. We didn't try to tell them. We said, "You tell us who you want, and this is the time periods, and tell us who's going to be here at each one of the—." No, we left it up to them.

WRIGHT: And contingency plans, was there one for Apollo 11 for PAO in case there was a problem?

RILEY: Yes, there was one for every mission, and a lot of it was the same, kind of boilerplate. But if there were any unique things about the mission, why, you had to include that. Like, one of the missions, I can't remember which one, we flew a radioactive something or other. It was to power one of the lunar surface experiments.

JOHNSON: Was it Apollo 13, where it had to come back? Is that the one?

RILEY: No, I don't think it was 13. I don't remember which one it was, but it was a scientific experiment that utilized some kind of radioactive source for power. There was a lot of people concerned that "Well, what if something happens on launch, like what happened to the *Challenger*?" What will be the problems that this will cause to people in the launch area?

So if there were unique kind of things like that, they were addressed in the contingency plan, but a lot of it was the same each time, because you'd go through the same powered phase and that sort of thing. But it was updated for every mission, yes.

JOHNSON: Jennifer?

ROSS-NAZZAL: I have a questions for you as well. The Oral History Project recently interviewed John McLeaish, and he talked about promoting products like Tang for companies. Did you ever do anything like that?

RILEY: Never did promote them personally. We got involved, John and I and several other people. Those companies had to submit what they wanted to do, to our office for approval. So I got involved in that sense, but I don't think any of us ever personally went out and promoted products. It was more of approving or disapproving what they wanted to do with their product.

ROSS-NAZZAL: So in terms of advertising per se?

RILEY: Yes, they had to submit their advertising to our office for approval. Some of them wanted to use astronauts in their ads. We didn't let them do that. At that time we didn't have a

lot of former astronauts who could do that kind of thing. But, yes, they had to submit all that stuff, and we dealt with a lot of their ad agency and marketing people who would come in and show us these storyboards and their ideas and wanted to know “Can we do this? Can we do that?” We’d say, “Yes, you can do this, but you can’t do that.” But I don’t think any of us ever got involved in, like, making a pitch for a product, no.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I thought that was interesting. I’m curious about how Brian Duff’s replacement of Haney affected the Public Affairs Office. I mean, he came onboard right before Apollo 10. Did that have a significant impact on the office itself?

RILEY: Well, it had a significant impact on me primarily because Haney had been scheduled to do liftoff commentary on Apollo 10, and this was just, I don’t know, it wasn’t very long before that mission. Suddenly I found that I was going to be doing the liftoff commentary, and I hadn’t done it before. This was my first. I did commentary on Apollo 9, but I didn’t do the liftoff. So I was a little startled to find that I was going to be thrown in at the breach there at the last minute, but it worked out all right.

I think we were all sorry to see Paul leave. But Paul is an Irishman; when he makes up his mind about something, he’s stubborn. He and Headquarters kind of got into it about—well, Headquarters, they kind of gave him the ultimatum. They said, “We think you should spend more time in managing the Public Affairs Office, so decide whether you want to do that or whether you want to do commentary.”

And Haney said, “Well, I think I’d like to do commentary,” which that’s not the answer Headquarters wanted.

So then suddenly they said, “We’re transferring you back to Headquarters and you’re going to,” I don’t know, “be in charge of press kits,” or something. I don’t know. And that’s when Haney quit. He resigned. And we were all sorry to see him leave, but I don’t think it disrupted anything. It didn’t throw the office into chaos or anything like that. It was just one of those things where you said, “Well, we’re sorry to see things work out like this,” because I think everybody enjoyed working for Haney. But he’s doing fine since.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I just have one more question. I was wondering if you could tell us about your role in the Gene Kranz book. I know that you worked with him on the book *Failure Is Not an Option*.

RILEY: Well, I got a call from Gene one day at home. This was several years ago, and I hadn’t done any kind of work for several years after I’d retired. Gene said, “I’m going to write a book, and I’d like for you to do the preliminary editing of it, if you would.”

And I said, “Well, I don’t know whether I want to do that or not, Gene.”

He said, “Well, I couldn’t pay you very much.”

And I said, “No, if I do it, I don’t want any pay for it. I’ll do it because I want to do it, but I don’t want any pay for it.” So I said, “Let me think about it, and I’ll let you know.” So I finally decided, well, I’ll try it and see how it goes.

So I called him back and said, “Yeah, I’ll give it a whirl.”

So at first he would send me his draft chapters, usually a chapter or two chapters at a time, and I would go through and edit it and review for context and grammar and that sort of thing. Engineers aren’t the greatest grammarians. Then before he finished it, he sold it to a

publisher, and then the publisher took over the editing part. But Gene said, “I would still like for you to read. Before it goes there, I want you to read it and give me comments on different things.”

His first publisher wanted him to have a co-author, like Mickey Herskowitz [phonetic] or something like that, and he had one for a while. In fact, he had Mickey Herskowitz. So then I would read it and I would write these long notes, e-mails, actually, to Gene. I said, “you know, this book is getting [to] where it’s not in your voice anyway.” I said, “Kranz has a very distinctive style, and you write a lot like you talk, and it’s pretty blunt and it’s forceful and it’s good and it’s interesting.” But I said, “This last chapter is not in your voice anymore.”

So then we had some meetings with Herskowitz, and then Kranz had problems with the publisher. They decided they wanted more of a book on Gene Kranz, where Gene Kranz wanted to write a book on the control center and the flight controllers and how the control center came together from a small group who went out on a lot of remote sites in the early days, Mercury and stuff.

Kranz said, “That’s not the story I want to tell.” So he finally wound up refunding the money to them that they had given in advance. I think he had to pay Herskowitz some money, too.

He kept on writing and sending, and I kept reading and giving him comments. Then he sold it to the publisher that eventually published it, and they were pleased with Kranz, the way he wrote it. They didn’t want him to have a ghostwriter come in or anything like that. I think we worked together on that book for three years, maybe. It was at least two, somewhere between two and three years. Eventually it got published.

We had a lot of meetings between some of the early flight controllers in the evenings, maybe at Space Center Houston several times. Gene would tape. He had a lot of questions about what they remembered, and he would tape that sort of thing.

So after the book was published, he threw a big party for everybody that was involved on it at the Lone Star Flight Museum in Galveston, [Texas]. Very nice. Well, he had a smaller party, he and Marta, at his home in Dickinson, [Texas]. Went to that. Then he gave a lot of us, he had the golf shirts made up with the Mission Control Center insignia on it, and so he called and said, "What color do you want?" To me, that was more than enough. I just enjoyed working with him on the book, and I didn't feel I needed to get paid for it.

So that's how that worked out. It was just a phone call out of the blue from Gene Kranz to me, and then, well, I just decided, well, I'd just been goofing off for two or three years, I might as well try it, and I did enjoy working with him on it very much.

JOHNSON: It sounds like your career has been very interesting and you had a good time with doing what you were doing.... I appreciate you coming and spending the time with us today.

RILEY: Well, I've enjoyed it. I hope it's been beneficial to you.

[End of interview]