

Reporting Space from Cape Kennedy

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Any launch from Cape Kennedy was always an exciting event. Life was easy on Merritt Island but not cheap, and it was pleasant to get there from London. A direct flight from London's Heathrow airport to Orlando in Florida was quite comfortable, even with my long legs in Tourist class, reading some space literature, present or future, thus passing the time agreeably. Often we flew on the most direct route over the icy wastes of Greenland, and one could imagine this to be some unexplored new planet.

From Orlando I drove in a hired Hertz car south to 'the Cape', where one of the many agreeable motels had a room booked for me. The car was an essential item, as the way to a press conference, or to the launch site, was always many kilometers away. Even the drive was exciting, through palm trees, semi-tropical bushes and trying to avoid small porcupines on the roads.

There was never enough time to read all the information provided by NASA, talk to all the American officials who could give additional facts, discuss with other learned colleagues additional details and the latest rumours. Next to write and telephone my reports to the New York office of the *Daily Telegraph* to a highly skilled clerk who typed my spoken words straight into a direct and private TELEX line to the London Office. There was never enough time to do it all.

The real difficulty was the time difference, 5 to 6 hours later in London, and therefore an early morning dispatch was essential from Florida. It was only much later, about 1970, that a primitive Fax gadget could be hooked on to my telephone in the motel and my written text arrived in New York instantly. It must have been one of the first FAX machines in use anywhere.

My first space reports from Florida always carried the date-line 'From our Science Correspondent at Cape Kennedy' until later, when the Apollo programme started. I still reported the launch from the Cape, but then it was a race to transfer to Houston, Texas, where the main Apollo Control Centre was located. It meant a hectic car drive to the nearest airport in Melbourne, Florida, from where special flights had been laid on for the many correspondents who had to get to Texas. For *Apollo 11* there were more than 1000 press men from all over the world, not counting the television crews and press photographers.

In Houston a small new town had grown up around the Johnson Space Flight Center which had by then expanded into a very large community of scientists, engineers and the inevitable NASA officials. It was often said that if the weight of their official paper documents did not equal that of the rocket, it could not be launched successfully!