


YOU

The Mail on Sunday Magazine

December 1, 1985

PLUS
y
Extra



**Katharine Hepburn
said this man
was an illiterate,
ill-mannered,
inconsiderate
piece of . . .**

YOU

THE FAR SIDE

You are mine... all mine.



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Mozart – it was dedicated to Haydn; Bob Dylan; Belgium; Jones; Trevor Francis; Alfred Nobel.

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FLIP & DEBRA SCHULKE

Spaced-out campers

The kids at space camp are in seventh heaven. They've walked on the moon, worked in zero gravity, flown the space shuttle and saved its crew from certain death. It's all simulated, of course, but as William Lowther reports, America's budding Han Solos are over the moon about the United States Space Camp

All had gone well on this experimental mission of the space shuttle *Discovery*. Orders had been given to prepare for re-entry to earth orbit when the near-disaster occurred. Red lights began flashing all over the pilot's control station, a buzzer sounded in one of the onboard laboratories and ground control, calm and collected, voice flat and steady as ever, warned: 'We have an emergency. Poison gas is escaping.'

An instant scientific analysis was ordered. 'You have three minutes to find and repair the gas leak.' The words crackled through space from Scott Goehring at ground control and again there was no trace of tension. He might have been ordering his favourite ice-cream sundae with chocolate sauce and chopped walnuts. Mustn't panic the crew, mustn't add to their problems, he thought. That's where all the training comes in. It was the long hours of preparation that kept him cool now that it mattered. For the unspoken truth was that if the gas leak was not found and stopped in three minutes everyone on board *Discovery* would perish.

Back on the shuttle, the astronauts were methodically but speedily going through the manuals. With two minutes left they found the only possible source of the gas. A minute to go and they located the buttons to shut down the equipment involved. And just before deadline, the green lights were on again and it was all clear to continue▷

◁ descent for landing. To celebrate their success, the astronauts and the ground crew all went out for pizza and pop. It had been another hard day with a mission accomplished at space camp.

The United States Space Camp: it's the next best thing to going into orbit for real. It's the closest a youngster will get to sci-fi dreams of travelling through the universe this century. It's a prep school for the Captain Kirks and the Luke Skywalkers of the future. For space-crazy kids, it's heaven on earth.

And not only is it lots of fun, it is also serious science with all of the equipment and standards coming right out of NASA – the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

The idea came from the late Wernher von Braun, the German-born rocketry genius and the brains behind Hitler's V-2 rockets. With the fall of Berlin, Dr von Braun was 'persuaded' to move his laboratories to the US. He set up shop at what was to become NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center at Huntsville, Alabama.

There, with a team that included many other German war scientists, he developed the Mercury, Gemini and Apollo programmes. It was von Braun's team that put a man on the moon. In the heady days that followed, while the nation was in the grip of space fever, he cajoled the state of Alabama to open the Alabama Space and Rocket Center, a 35-acre museum. 'We must make science as popular as sport. That's how we will attract the brains we need,' he argued.

The museum was a roaring success and von Braun took the next step. 'We want kids directly involved; we must make it as exciting as football,' he said. NASA and Alabama agreed. Dr von Braun's idea was to open a summer 'camp' where children between the ages of 11 and 17 could come for a week to train like real astronauts and ground controllers. Simulated spacecraft – exact in every detail – would be built. Everything would be authentic, from the space food – dried ice-cream and powdered chicken – to the specially made moon-walking suits in junior sizes.

Dr von Braun died in 1977 but his idea lived on, and three years ago the space camp opened. It has been an extraordinary success. Run by the state with NASA help and encouragement, it's a non-profit venture and costs campers £350 for the week. The camp is on the grounds of the rocket museum next door to the Marshall Space Center.

Each week-long course starts with sessions on the microgravity simulator chair which teaches how to carry on working in weightlessness. That leads to classes in a neutral-buoyancy water tank that simulates moving in space. Physics lectures on such topics as propulsion are scattered between walks around the camp in space suits made from 21 layers of material to provide protection from temperatures of – 290 to + 310 degrees F.

The final test comes on the last day when each camper is assigned a role for a voyage in the space shuttle. Again the simulations, from ground control uniforms to astronaut take-off and landing techniques, are exact. A perfectly modelled mock-up of the shuttle cockpit is used. And just like the real thing, ground and flight crews work from scripts. The big difference is that at least one emergency is built into every flight to see how well space camp has taught the would-be space travellers to handle it.

Looking back on the poison-gas incident, when the young astronauts had a three-minute life-or-death crisis on their hands, ground controller Scott



Goehring, 14, of Rockville, Maryland, recalls the real tension and team spirit involved. 'We knew that the only way to get out of it was for the team – ground controllers and astronauts – to work together. You learn that space exploration is all teamwork. That's one of the major things you learn at space camp.'

You also learn space jargon. Over to Bart Bedford, aged 12: 'I was surprised at how few mistakes we could afford to make. At one point we went EVA, took too much radiation and lost the TPS.' When asked, he explains with a smile that EVA is extra-vehicular activity or space walking, and TPS stands for technical payload specialist, a member of the crew.

Another camp thriller is being strapped into a moon-walk trainer, simulating one-sixth of the earth's gravity. Says 14-year-old Greg Galperin, of Miami: 'It's a strange sensation. You can't get your feet on the ground and can't get a good grip to move forward. It's kind of flying around. Every action you make is exaggerated. If you put your foot down too hard, you go flying up in the air.'

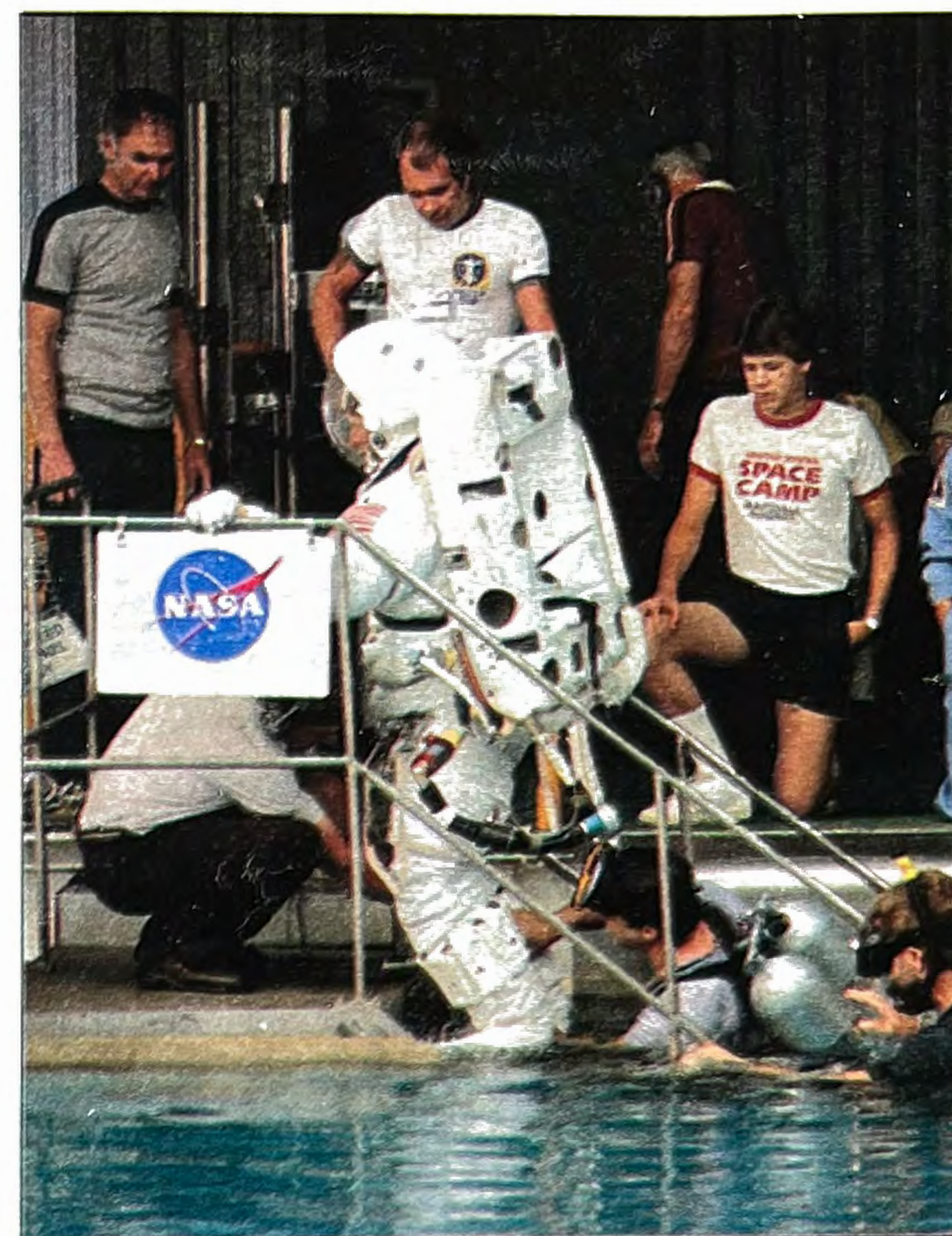
This autumn, the camp started three-day

sessions for adults. The emphasis and aims are quite different. The idea is not to attract recruits for the space programme but rather to let middle-aged men and women play out fantasies of space travel.

They fly the simulated shuttle, moon-walk and listen to the space lectures. 'It's just great fun. I loved playing astronauts. It made me feel like a kid again,' says 40-year-old Bob Miller, a Baltimore schoolteacher.

But the real appeal is to children. To date, nearly 4,000 boys and girls from all 50 US states and seven other countries have attended. Addressing students who may stay at the camp next year, Edward Buckbee, the programme director, says: 'You are a member of the fortunate generation that has the whole universe ahead of it.'

'As part of our first real space-travelling generation, you'll design spacecraft for inter-planetary exploration, occupy space stations and help solve scientific mysteries that have perplexed mankind for centuries. Now the dream is real. Strap yourself in. We're at T minus 10 and counting.'



A simulated mission in an exact replica of the space shuttle, left, is the ultimate test for the campers. Their preparation includes underwater training in simulated weightlessness, above; experiencing the G-forces of re-entry on the centrifuge, below left, and, below, sampling the astronaut's dessert, freeze-dried strawberries

