

U.S. Astronauts Receiving Training for a Possible Lunar Orbital Mission in December

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 23 — Astronaut training is under way for a possible American manned moon-orbiting mission later this year that would surpass the feat of the Soviet unmanned Zond 5, space agency officials said today.

The officials said they would decide in early November whether or not to go ahead with such a complex and spectacular flight, possibly in late December.

They left the impression that they would give it their ap-

proval unless Apollo 7, a manned earth-orbiting flight scheduled for next month, ran into major difficulties.

"Personally, I'd like to see us do it," William C. Schneider, Apollo mission director, said at a news conference here.

"We will try to do the maximum that the systems will allow," Mr. Schneider added, "and that maximum is lunar orbit."

Unlike Zond 5, which looped around the moon last week, Apollo would be capable of orbiting the moon for about a

day before returning to earth. Three astronauts would circle lunar vicinity.

at an altitude of about 70 miles without attempting to land.

There has been speculation of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, emphasized that the plans for a possible manned lunar orbit flight had been drawn up long before the Zond 5 success.

Apollo 8, which would be the designation of the mission, "is not engaged in a race" with the Russians, Mr. Paine said.

Crew Has Training

The Apollo 8 crew, Mr. Paine added, has received training in

navigation and guidance for a possible lunar orbit. The necessary computer data and instructions have already been worked out.

If the space agency rules out a lunar orbit flight, Apollo 8 might aim for a sweep around the moon in the Zond 5 manner or shoot for a high-altitude earth orbital flight.

The Apollo 8 astronauts are Col. Frank Borman and Maj. William A. Anders of the Air Force and Capt. James A. Lovell Jr. of the Navy.

Their eventual flight plan de-

pends on the results of Apollo 7, set as the first test of the Apollo capsule with men aboard.

Preparations are moving smoothly for a launching Oct. 11, Mr. Schneider reported.

The earth orbital flight is set to run up to 10 days and 19 hours at altitudes ranging from 120 to 150 miles.

Objectives of Flight

The primary objectives, Mr. Schneider said, are tests of the spacecraft systems and ground control facilities, completion of a rendezvous and simulated

docking with a spent rocket section and eight firings of the spacecraft's on-board rocket.

During the flight, the astronauts are expected to take experimental photographs of the earth's terrain and, once a day, take television pictures of themselves at work.

This would be the first live television coverage of American astronauts inside their orbiting capsule. The plan is for them to be on camera about 10 minutes each morning when their spacecraft passes over the United States.