



USAF

MOL: A 5-year pregnancy miscarries.

When President Lyndon B. Johnson first gave the MOL the go-ahead in August 1965, the plan was for a \$1.5 billion developmental effort, leading to five manned flights beginning in 1969. Since then, however, costs have skyrocketed, and the target date for the first manned flight slipped to 1972.

The reasons, said Deputy Defense Secretary David Packard in announcing the cancellation last week, were the need for unexpected design changes, the costs of improving the safety of the design and the expense of stretching out the program, because of limited availability of funds. Earlier this year, the Nixon Administration made an attempt to hold down costs by cutting the number of manned flights to four, even as the Air Force was announcing that it was planning to add more astronauts to the 14 already on the rolls. Despite such trimming, the estimated cost of the program had grown to at least \$3 billion.

In considering whether to shoot down the program, on which some \$1.3 billion has already been spent, the Defense Department was faced with the choice of slashing numerous small programs or one big one. "We have concluded," said Packard, "that the potential value of possible future applications of the Manned Orbiting Laboratory was not as valuable as the aggregate of other Defense Department programs that would need to be curtailed to achieve equal reductions."

Another factor is the fact that unmanned satellite technology has in some ways surpassed plans for the MOL, largely because the Air Force has not had any manned space programs such as NASA's Gemini and Apollo with which to work out new developments. Several MOL-related experiments, in fact, had been scheduled for the Apollo Applications Workshop. These may well be eliminated, although other military research projects may take their place to make up for the MOL's absence.

SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION

Controlling the flood

The quantities involved in the production of scientific and technical information are enormous: roughly 40,000 research papers in a year in physics, several times that number in chemistry, biology and agriculture, and even more in medicine. In all fields of science and technology together the numbers might reach two million articles totaling 10 million pages. They appear in 30,000 specialized journals worldwide and represent the central product—not simply a by-product—of scientific research.

Then-Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey once estimated that the inability to manage the flood costs the U.S. some \$2 billion a year in lost time and the needless duplication of research.

Some \$357 million a year is currently being spent by Government alone on information, but there is little coordination of efforts by Government, industry and the scientific societies.

Because of the magnitude of the problem, the National Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Engineering were asked by the National Science Foundation to study it. The report by the academies' joint Committee on Scientific and Technical Communication (SATCOM), now out after three years, has no easy answers.

The committee:

- Urges formation of a nongovernmental coordinating commission on scientific information.
- Chides the scientific societies for not being aggressive and innovative enough in their information activities.
- Reminds Government agencies of their responsibility to pay for publication of findings produced by the research they support.
- Attempts to encourage scientists and engineers to accept greater responsibilities for repackaging research findings in more useful forms.

The NAS-NAE committee's central recommendation is for the formation of a Joint Commission on Scientific and Technical Communication to stimulate greater coordination among private groups and help bring about more interaction between them and Government agencies. The group should be housed in the two academies; they seemed to satisfy best the group's final criteria for a "broadly representative, nongovernmental body of high prestige" with close ties to both scientists and the Federal complex. Centralized authority to dictate directions was specifically excluded from the recommendation.

One section of the SATCOM report is devoted to the need for more review articles and data compilations to orga-

nize and evaluate what is known about a scientific subject and present it in language which a worker can understand. The preparation of such items—which often requires great intellectual creativity—has not kept pace with the flow of developments, the report notes.

Dr. Burton W. Adkinson, director of information programs for NSF, thinks this is among the most significant of SATCOM's recommendations. "The difficulty in getting top flight scientists and engineers to do this type of thing is because they don't get any brownie points for it. I think the weight of the academies behind the idea will do a lot to encourage them to do so."

PATENT TREATY

Final touches on a draft

Among the headaches involved in patenting an invention in the days of stampeding technology, one of the worst, particularly for small firms, is getting protection in foreign countries. A multiplicity of forms and standards makes it difficult and expensive to file in all the countries where protection is needed.

For two years the United International Bureau for the Protection of Intellectual Property (BIRPI) has been sponsoring a treaty which would provide for a single filing on a standard form in the native language of the applicant, to be valid in all countries approving the treaty (SN: 6/17/67, p. 567).

This week, 10 of the 80 BIRPI members meet in Geneva to put final touches on the treaty. If all goes well in Geneva, the final draft should be ready for submission to a convention of the 80 member-nations in the United States by April of next year.

If money is approved by the U.S. Congress to host the two-to-three-week conference, the formal treaty would then be submitted to the individual countries for ratification.

U.S. Patent Commissioner William E. Schuyler Jr., the U.S. delegate to the Geneva conference, is cautious about prospects for the treaty.

"There is no guarantee the United States will sign next April," he says. "It will take a year or two after that before Senate approval (of the treaty). Because it won't be submitted until the following Congress, it might be ratified in 1971 at the earliest."

Schuyler estimates that it will be sometime between 1973 and 1975 before there are enough signatories to make the treaty effective. ◇