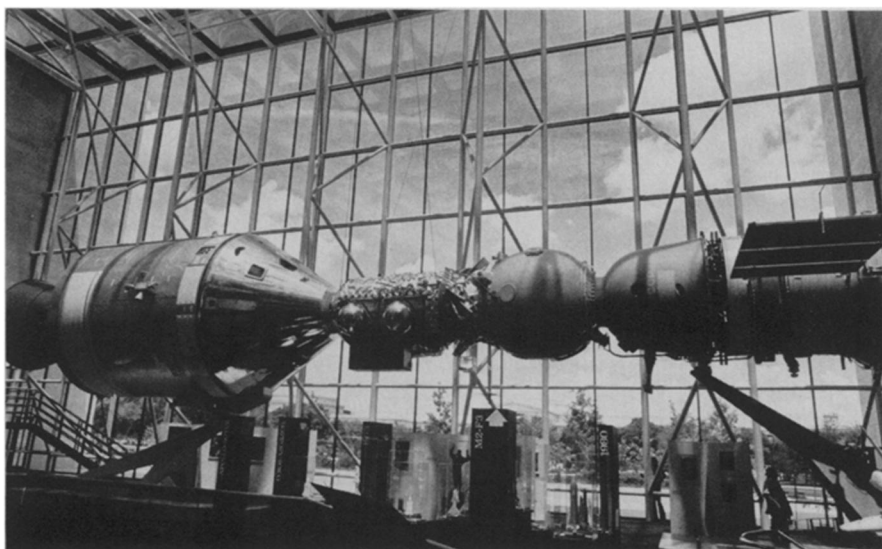


# CELEBRATING FLIGHT

National Air and Space Museum opens



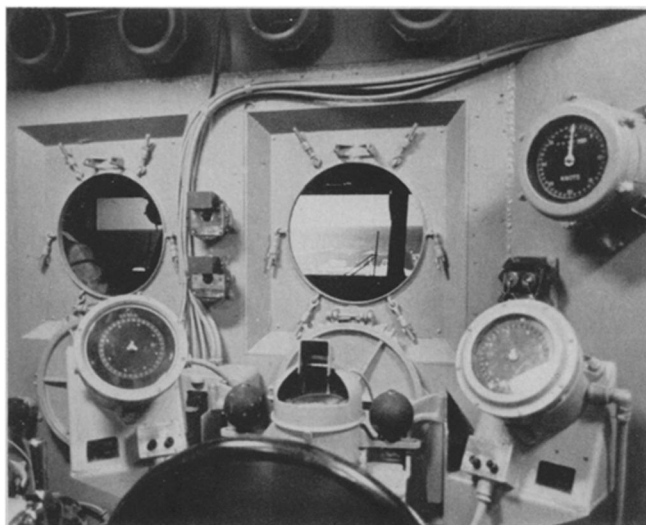
A lunar landing in sight of the Capitol.



The first exhibition of the historic docking between Soyuz and Apollo spacecraft.



Wright Brothers' plane joins Lindbergh's Spirit of St. Louis.



Through a porthole brightly: Planes taking off from a carrier.

Photos: John H. Douglas

The nation has given itself the "perfect birthday gift," President Ford said of the new National Air and Space Museum at its dedication on July 1. Spacious and bouyant, composed of steel frame boxes draped with marble and glass, the Smithsonian Institution's latest addition graces Washington's Mall as the world's loveliest hangar, offering the most spectacular array of flying machines ever exhibited.

But the best news for the 50,000 daily visitors the museum is designed to accommodate is the lively manner in which the displays are handled—a welcome departure from the often stodgy presentation of scientific exhibitions. A vast collection, which could easily prove overwhelming to the casual visitor, has been separated into comprehensible thematic units, explained by a variety of audio-visual presentations.

Here are enough triumphs of daring to

quicken the heart of even the most cynical, sufficient artistry to delight the eye of the most discerning, and enough gadgets to bring out the playful 10-year-old in almost everybody:

- The visitor can mount the bridge of a great aircraft carrier and, with hands on the wheel, watch (filmed) planes take off from the deck below.

- An auditorium with a 5-story-high screen has, for its inaugural performance, a half-hour film produced by Francis Thompson, who won the Academy Award for his giant-screen documentary film seen at the New York World's Fair.

- The 70-foot-diameter dome of the Albert Einstein Spacearium contains one of the world's finest planetarium instruments—West Germany's gift.

- Elaborate backgrounds have been used to lend an air of realism—World War I planes rest on a bombed out airstrip at

Verdun and the history of air traffic control is demonstrated by a life-size reproduction of the first control center.

- Past and future are blended with the present; from the dining salon of the dirigible *Graf Zeppelin* (the place settings are original) one can pass to an exhibit on the possibilities of life elsewhere in the universe (with a model of *Star Trek's Enterprise* over the door).

As Thompson's film notes, flight has been more than an adventure or a series of technological achievements; the way humans view themselves and their planet has been fundamentally changed. A museum on air and space should reflect that new vision, and it is a tribute to the Smithsonian and to museum director Michael Collins that this impressive collection has been presented so as to meet that challenge.

—John H. Douglas