

The Flight of Gemini 9

► THERE WERE troubles going up, and troubles staying there, but coming down was just great.

Despite a faulty computer on their spacecraft and a practically useless target waiting for them in space, Astronauts Thomas Stafford and Eugene Cernan guided Gemini 9 into orbit on June 3. Two days before, the same computer failure had scrubbed the flight, but space officials decided in the interim that if the same thing occurred they would go anyway.

The astronauts knew before they blasted off that all was not well with their target, a \$900,000 substitute for the scarce Agena rockets. Called the Augmented Target Docking Adapter (ATDA), it suffered from the error of some ground crewmen who failed to connect four tiny wires in the right way. The result was that the target floated in space with its key part—the docking collar—partially blocked by the two halves of the nose cone that failed to jettison completely.

Pilot Stafford wanted to nose Gemini 9 in between the halves and knock them apart, but Mission Control in Houston vetoed the idea. A suggested plan for Cernan to remove the sections by hand during his planned spacewalk also was not carried out.

When Cernan finally got out into space he was beset with troubles. Communications with the spacecraft were almost unintelligible. The most bizarre gadget on the flight, the Astronaut Maneuvering Unit (AMU), which was supposed to enable Cernan to move about independently in space, refused to budge from its spot on the aft section of the spacecraft. In addition, one of the AMU's control arms remained locked in its folded position, making the unit useless. While tugging at the AMU in an effort to spring it free, Cernan's heart beat faster than at any other time during the flight.

What proved to be the final straw, however, was Cernan's own perspiration, which misted on the inside of his gold-plated faceplate, making visibility almost nonexistent. Stafford therefore, decided not to use the AMU and also to end the spacewalk.

The flight's real triumph came at the very end. As millions of television viewers watched, the spacecraft descended through the clouds less than two miles from the carrier Wasp. Hanging from a huge colorful parachute, the capsule settled to the water.

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SPACEWALK—Gemini 9 pilot Eugene Cernan was photographed by command pilot Thomas Stafford as he passed in front of the craft's nose during the world's longest space walk. Photographed on 70 mm color film using a Hasselblad camera, the picture also shows the snake-like umbilical cord that kept Astronaut Cernan alive during his venture into space.



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READY FOR PICK-UP—Astronauts Eugene Cernan (left) and Thomas Stafford (right) sit in the open hatch of their Gemini 9 space vehicle awaiting recovery by the USS Wasp. U.S. Navy helicopters hovering in the background keep watch over the capsule, which is kept afloat by the floating collar attached by frogmen after splashdown.