

Historian's Corner

Space Program Animal Heroes

By Bill Cossaboom

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Did you know that The Martin Company (Denver) had an animal research center for a few years in the early 1960's? The research center was approximately where Chatfield Reservoir is currently located. The facilities activities supported the Gemini Program. Life Sciences and Human Factors had centers in Baltimore, MD and Denver, CO.

Think back to 1961, May 25th to be exact. - President Kennedy announced before a special joint session of Congress the dramatic and ambitious goal of sending an American safely to the Moon before the end of the decade. The nation was energized.

The effect of space travel on man was an unknown then. Would space adventurers' brain waves be impacted? What was the effect of space on the human blood pressure? Certain physiological questions needed to be answered prior to sending our first man into space. The Martin Company Animal Research Center existed to help answer these and other questions about space travel for mankind - too many to mention here.

The center was headed by Dr. Harry Gorman, a highly respected medical professional in the veterinary field, and a pioneer in artificial hip surgery. Dr. Gorman's Registered Nurses were Neva Gentry and Elsie J. Cossaboom, my mother. Mother, wanting a nursing change (she was a WWII Army Nurse) took the opportunity to play a part in getting the USA to the moon.

In this day and age, people conjured up horrible visions of abuse when they thought of animal research. This certainly was not the case with the Martin Company. All of the dogs were rescued from shelters and most had been abused by their owners. I don't know where the monkeys came from but they sure didn't like me! Mice were also studied as generational effects could be studied quickly.

I was a boy of 9 or 10 in those days, and my brother and I (of course The Martin Company Security organization had to approve us) were able to go out to the center one weekend a month, when it was mother's weekend rotation to feed the animals and clean the cages while Mother tended to the animals in the clinic. It was fascinating for this young boy and I wanted to work at this company when I 'grew up'- to be a part of the space program.

Lady was a beautiful and kind dog who stole everyone's heart. In this picture, my mother helps test the telemetry system with an assist from Lady. Note the bulky receiver mother is holding and the antenna under Lady.



I believe the center closed in 1963 having developed a method by which animal blood pressures could be taken in space and how brain waves could be monitored. All of the dogs were found good homes to live out their remaining years. All the monkeys were given to local zoos.

In this photo, Mother checks out a hero. Note the 'state of the art' autoclave in the background!



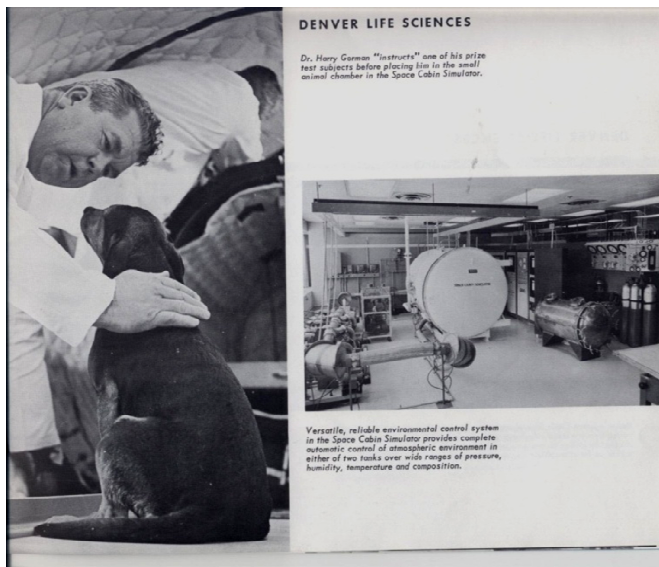
The Martin Company presented at the 34th Annual Scientific Meeting of the Aerospace Medical Association in Los Angeles California, April 29-May 2, 1963. The subject of the conference was "Life Sciences and Human Factors".

I think often of the unsung animal heroes, who gave of themselves, be it a dog on the ground or a brave monkey taking a quick ride into space.

Did you know?

- The Martin Company was a pioneering entity in the development of solar panels?
- The Martin Company developed a non-occlusive, non-invasive blood pressure measuring system? The data being transmitted by RF telemetry?
- The Martin Company also developed a variable torque simulator in 1962? The picture of that is a real riot! And torque issues still continue to rear up even today!
- Eight Four Nine
- The Martin Company developed a Space Cabin Simulator?
- In Baltimore, the Martin Company's Space Systems Division developed a two-man mooncraft model to simulate the critical rendezvous and docking steps of lunar landing mission?

Here, Dr. Gorman is 'instructing one of his prized test subjects before placing him in the small animal chamber in the Space Cabin Simulator.' To the right is the Space Cabin Simulator which could (and did) accommodate both animal and human heroes.



The following quote is submitted by Jeannie McElhaney Pershin, co-Grand Marshall of the 2011 Western Welcome Parade with her brother, Terry McElhaney:

"I remember getting to go out to Martin Marietta with Mrs. Cossaboom and daughter Nancy, a couple of times, to help feed and clean the cages. It was quite a treat to help with the animals, they were so excited to see us, at least the dogs were; the monkeys kind of scared me so I stayed clear of them."