

Future astronauts in training

'We're going to be the first kids in space'

By ERNIE CERESA

Heppner is noted for many things... vast wheat farms, cattle ranches, quaint parking meters and salty, rugged individuals.

Heppner also has something else—the first youngsters in training to become the first children launched into space.

One of the boys has been in the space program for the past five years; his co-partner has been in training for three years. They rigidly follow approved diet and exercise rules given them by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), study the problems of space travel, and keep in constant communication with NASA officials and particularly Astronaut Alan L. Bean, one of the group of 14 astronauts chosen by NASA on Oct. 8, 1963.

In pursuit of their goal of becoming the first children in space, they have dispatched 35 letters ranging from persons at the Space Administration at Houston, Tex., to President Nixon. Most have responded, furnishing the boys advice, encouragement and information about the possibilities of one day riding into space.

Some encouragement was received from the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena, Washington, D.C., when the boys asked for information regarding spaceships now in orbit and for identification of foreign craft aloft.

One letter received was from Sen. Sam Ervin Jr., U.S. Committee on Government Operations and chairman of the Senate Committee on the Watergate Investigations. Ervin was impressed enough to write the boys as follows:

"This is to acknowledge receipt of your recent letter," Sen. Ervin replied, "telling me of your interest and that of your friend in going into outer space and seeking my permission to do so. While I always like to be as helpful as possible, particularly to young people, I am afraid that the request you make of me is entirely beyond my control. Best wishes for all your future undertakings."

Gov. Tom McCall wrote the two: "I appreciate your willingness to volunteer to be the first children in space, but I don't think the Nation is ready to take that step just now. Please get the best education you can in the next few years, and maybe some day you will be the youngest man ever to go into space. But I'm sure that no children will be blasting off from Cape Kennedy in the near future."

Neither boy shows any discouragement upon receipt of such advice. Their playmates and fellow students scoff at their hopes, yet they continue their contacts with the space agency at Houston and Cape Kennedy. Officials there cooperate with them and encourage them in their plan. To illustrate, the boys have received a detailed checklist of guidelines for space travel. Both are in constant communication with Astronaut Alan L. Bean.

"Is spinach part of the required diet for an astronaut?" they asked Bean. No, Bean replied, and submitted a list of foods approved for space flight diet. He also recommended they eat plenty of fresh green vegetables and fruit and to abstain from candy and sweet drinks.

John W. King, Public Affairs Officer, Houston Space Center, encourages the boys to keep up their work. He sends them tests once a month. The tests are completed and returned to King at NASA for evaluation and, hopefully, for future use.

The boys' interest in space age began five years ago when one of them received a space game for Christmas. After playing the game until it was almost worn out, he decided to apply to NASA as the first youngster to go into outer space.

He telephoned Houston and asked the operator for the "man in charge." He got him. "If adults can go into space, why can't youngsters start their own training program and prepare themselves as future astronauts?" the boys asked the astonished administrator. "And," the boy continued, "isn't it true that youngsters weigh far less than adults, and being smaller, would not require as much room in a spaceship as an adult?"

The NASA officer admitted the boy was correct, and that if he were dedicated to becoming an astronaut, the time to prepare is now.

That's how the boys got involved with President Nixon's office, Sen. Ervin, Gov. McCall, Astronaut Bean and the whole parcel of NASA people.

Al Bean is their favorite astronaut, because he replies promptly to their letters. They can weather the rigid spaceman diet, exercise and study. What they find exasperating is that their friends and teachers refuse to believe they're in such close contact with the space administration. Recently, they phoned Houston and asked the path Pioneer 10 is taking in its orbital path. When they mentioned it to their teachers and friends, they were met with considerable skepticism.

"They think we're kind of odd," they confessed. Not wishing to be chided, they keep their telephone calls and correspondence from the eyes of their friends, and discuss "space matters" only among themselves, to avoid ridicule.

Well, meet the future astronauts. They are Donny Lott, 10, and Robert Bier, 9. Donny and Robert expect to get an invitation to Cape Kennedy soon. But eventually, they want to fly in space. They can wait. They are dedicated.

They are determined to be the youngest astronauts, and go into the history books that way.

Donny is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Randy Lott, 464 Morgan St. She confirms Donny's

Donny "would do anything to be the first youngster in space, even if he died doing it."

Robert is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Jim Bier, 273 N. Gale. His father says Robert is not the type who would get interested in the space pro-

Going through astronaut training programs are Donny Lott, left, and his pal, Robert Bier. Donny is holding a picture of his favorite astronaut, Alan Bean; Robert is holding a photo of Sky-Lab.

story that he has called NASA many times, but doubts he got through to any space official. According to Mrs. Lott, Donny has tried to contact Alan Bean by phone, but couldn't because "there are at least 10 Alan Beans listed in the Houston directory."

"Donny has a whole drawer full of letters from various astronauts, and as long as he is interested in the space program he's keeping out of mischief!" Mrs. Lott added.

Randy Lott, the father, says

gram without help from Donny. "I think this is only a phase the boys are going through. But sometimes I wonder," he said.

Bier is principal of Heppner High School.

Mrs. Lorena Jones, the boys' teachers, says she thinks the boys' project is "just wonderful."

She said both are "good boys" and average students. Nobody around this newspaper is going to pooh-pooh that possibility.



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