

Rayburn Unhappy With Handling of Shepard Welcome

By A. ROBERT SMITH
Mail Tribune

Washington Correspondent
Washington — Space man Alan B. Shepard has made Washington feel better than this care-worn capital has felt in a long time.



His visit to Washington for a hero's ceremonial welcome excited the thousands of school kids who will live in the space age for many years. His presence gladdened the politicians who are noticeably uneasy about international power politics in the rocket age.

To these leaders of today and citizens of tomorrow, Cmdr. Shepard rode from the White House to the Capitol as a healthy symbol of the vitality and ingenuity of a free society in deadly competition with totalitarianism.

When Shepard's white convertible reached the steps of the Capitol, an unforgettable scene transpired which showed the traits of a few VIP's in vivid contrast to those of the modest young fellow who had just received a medal in the rose garden of the White House from President Kennedy.

Grows Impatient

At the top of the long flight of marble steps, Speaker Sam Rayburn stood amidst the lofty columns, much as a noble Roman leader might have awaited the return of a conquering warrior. His bald pate glistened in the bright sun but he kept back in the shade of the columns, growing impatient with the tardy motorcade.

"Pershing was the only one who ever got his parade off on schedule," grumbled Rayburn.

The crusty speaker was even more grumpy about the behavior of his younger congressional colleagues from the Senate who had loused up his plan.

Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield had stationed himself at the bottom of the steps to greet Cmdr. and Mrs. Shepard when they alighted

from their car. Speaker Rayburn, standing at the top of the long flight, wanted none of that bottom-of-the-steps business which would interfere with the long and dramatic climb to the throne of congressional power.

Mansfield's Senatorial troops crowded around, shook hands, pressed up next to the hero as the photographers' flashbulbs popped. In this tiny political mob scene, the old hands showed their superior form. Old pros like Sen. Styles Bridges and Norris Cotton, from Shepard's home state of New Hampshire, never lost contact. Innocent freshmen lawmakers like Sen. Maurine Neuberger were left on the fringes, scurrying for higher ground, or completely outmaneuvered by the stars of this political ballet dance.

History Recorded

Half way up the steps, some wise politician stopped the procession, got the hero turned around to face the trailing photographers and the crowd; and as he waved and the politicians grinned, history was recorded — minus the scowl on Rayburn's face, well out of focus of the cameras.

Later when Cmdr. Shepard went into a news conference for the first time, there was private speculation among reporters about why he had been picked over the other astronauts. One theory was that he proved to be the best after dinner speaker. Another that he had the perfect wife to ride in such a parade — a beautiful girl with a natural All-American look that no beauty parlor could create.

In answering questions, Shepard proved himself all over again. He was candid, eager to share credit with his colleagues, quick in turning aside questions that reflected badly on the inquiring reporter — such as what did he say to his wife the night before he was shot into space.

For a fellow who is being acclaimed for his feat in outer space, the tact and composure of Alan Shepard showed that he had his feet on the ground more solidly than some of the local inhabitants.



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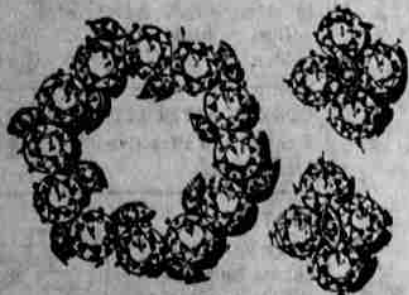
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