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DEC 2 1968

Mr. Stewart Atkinson
13 Beach Drive
Darien, Connecticut 06820

Dear Mr. Atkinson:

In response to your letter of November 13, 1968, I would like to summarize for you the thinking that went into the decision to fly the Apollo 8 mission during the Christmas period. The timing for this flight is based solely on technical and crew safety considerations. The earth/moon/sun geometry establishes what we call a "launch window." In this flight, we plan to orbit the moon; and one of the prime objectives will be to take photographs of planned lunar landing sites. To have proper lighting for this photographic phase of the mission, the "launch window" is between December 21 and 27. Other factors involved in establishing the launch date include the requirement for a daylight launch for maximum recovery time and performance of lunar injection over the Pacific Ocean to provide the maximum possible ground monitoring of the spacecraft and propulsion system. I might add that these three factors limit the "launch window" during each month to ten or twelve days.

The Apollo 8 spacecraft and launch vehicle have been scheduled for a December launch for some time. To delay this flight would mean a slip in our lunar landing flight. Those of us in the Apollo program have accepted the responsibility to meet our National goal of manned lunar exploration prior to 1970. The successful and early completion of the Apollo 8 flight will help us meet this goal.

Thank you for your letter and your interest in the manned space flight program.

Sincerely,
Richard S. Johnston
for:

Robert R. Gilruth
Director

INDEXING DATA
DATE 12-02-68
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SUBJECT
SIGNATOR GILRUTH
LOC 070-53

13 Beach Drive
Darien, Connecticut 06820
November 13, 1968

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ACTION AC
INFO 4j

The Director
National Space Agency
Houston, Texas

Dear Sir:

I wonder what sort of thinking went into your decision to send three men around the moon at Christmas time. This is by no means a sure venture, and the risk of ruining the Christmas Season for millions of Americans is enormous. Christmas is a time for care-free family reunions, for as much happiness as all of us can snatch in this miserable year of 1968. We do not need a space triumph to celebrate our greatest holiday, but a failure will be the crowning blow to a people already wunch drunk with the events of the year.

Along with millions of Americans I have been thrilled by the successes of the Space Program, and I have been downcast by its few failures. I suppose that some physical conditions of outer space make a flight around Christmas time necessary, but I am of the opinion that the American people would much prefer a delay of a month if such is essential.

Whatever occurs the team will have the thoughts and the prayers of all of us. In this fact lies the reason I believe that the timing of the flight is wrong.

Sincerely,

Stewart Udman