Apollo aims for perfect splashdown on Tuesday

SPACE CENTER, Houston—Apollo 14's lunar explorers, improving on the near-perfect, trimmed the course of their rock-laden spaceship Sunday and aimed for a splashdown in the Pacific as accurate as their touchdown on the moon.

Depending upon which side of the International Dateline they land, the splashdown techinically could come either Tuesday or Wednesday. On the time clocks of Americans, however, landing time remains at 4:01 p.m. EST Tuesday.

Flight director M.P. "Pete" Franks said the rocket burst the astronauts fired behind the moon Saturday night to lift themselves out of lunar orbit was "very good, perhaps the best ever," but a slight course correction still was needed.

On the outward voyage, spacecraft commander Alan B. Shepard described Apollo 14 as a "happy little ship," and although the spacemen reported Sunday they were feeling "really great," their moonship is much more crowded on the return voyage.

In addition to the 109 pounds of moon rocks the astronauts are bringing back, Shepard and his co-pilots, Edgar D. Mitchell and Stuart A. Roosa, also had to find room for an 80-pound docking mechanism that once proved troublesome.

Normally, the probe is jettisoned, but experts want to inspect it and correct any flaws.

The probe is stowed beneath one of the astronauts' seats and lashed down with a 100-foot rope which Shepard and Mitchell saved from their moon walks.

The rope was to be used as a tether while they were climbing around the rim of cone crater, but the two explorers ran out of time before they managed to scale the 400 foot high rise.

Astronaut Charles "Pete" Conrad, who flew aboard Apollo 12, pointed out the probe could prove a "lethal weapon" if it ever got loose in the spaceship during the buffeting, 18,000 m.p.h. re-entry.

Shepard piloted the lunar lander Antares to within 87 feet of the programmed landing spot on the moon, and ground control said he may just bring the command ship down within "87 feet or less of the International Dateline."

Apollo 14 is scheduled to splash into the ocean 900 miles south of American Samoa.

Northeastern Laos defense weakening

Desertions and the absence of the commanding general from his headquarters at Long Cheng have caused a serious deterioration in the defense of northeastern Laos, a Laotian government official said Sunday.

In Vietnam, six South Vietnamese soldiers were killed and 51 others wounded when an Allied plane mistakenly bombed their position near Khe Sanh, inflicting the first known government casualties in the massive buildup near the Laotian border, U.S. military spokesmen said.

The Laotian official said North Vietnamese troops have all but surrounded Long Cheng and appear to be preparing a major attack against the base. It serves both as headquarters for the Meo army of Gen. Vang Pao and as a communications center for the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

The official, who asked not be named, said about half of the Meo civilians and "many" of Vang Pao's soldiers have fled the big base, 95 miles north of Vientiane, in the past several days.

The official said this was interpreted as meaning the Communists were prepared to seize all territory that formerly belonged to the neutralist faction in the northeastern Laos under the tripartite arrangement from the 1962 Geneva Accords.

The U.S. spokesmen said the accident in South Vietnam occurred Saturday night in fog and mist-covered mountains six miles northwest of Khe Sanh, the outpost serving as a base for the operation. A "preliminary report" said the South Vietnamese paratrooper unit was hit by a 500-pound "cluster" bomb, which hurls chunks of steel across a wide area on detonation.

Ireland embroiled in 'war'

BELFAST, Northern Ireland—A sniper was shot and killed Sunday during the fifth straight day of violence described by Northern Ireland's premier as "war" between British troops and the outlawed Irish Republican Army (IRA).

The killing of the sniper brought the known casualty total to five dead. Dozens more have been injured in the latest outbreak of violence which originally started as a feud between Catholics and Protestants.

Four of the dead were civilians. The fifth was a British soldier slain by Catholic extremists.

An army spokesman said the civilian toll could be twice as high. He said a centuries-old custom of secretly burying the dead is still being observed in some working class districts of Belfast.

The latest trouble started Wednesday when British soldiers came under machinegun fire from gunmen believed to be backing the IRA which advocates unification of Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.

"This is quite clearly war with the IRA," Premier James Chichester-Clark said in a terse statement Saturday night. The government also appealed to civilians to stay off the streets and warned that tough security measures may be introduced without notice.

Ancient Tuscania destroyed

TUSCANIA, Italy—The ancient city of Tuscania, which for 2,300 years had weathered wars and natural disasters, lay destroyed Sunday—the victim of twin killer quakes that crushed it within minutes.

The earthquakes struck Tuscania and surrounding towns Saturday afternoon and evening, killing at least 15 persons, injuring 270 and leaving the town's 7,000 inhabitants homeless.

It was the worst such disaster in Italy since quakes in western Sicily three years ago killed 316 persons and left another 9,000 homeless.

Tuscanian residents moved into army tents Sunday and rescue teams dug into the rubble of this proud ancient Etruscan capital for more victims.

"The old city is destroyed," said Mayor Sergio Leonardi.

"The city inside the walls is 100 per cent uninhabitable," echoed Fire Chief Enzo Silverstini.

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The Daily Tar Heel

On The Outside

National Guard enters Wilmington

WILMINGTON—A white man was shot to death by a sniper Sunday and Gov. Bob Scott ordered units of the National Guard into action to help keep the racial peace in this tense seacoast city.

Authorities said Harvey Cumber was driving his pickup truck in the troubled black neighborhood south of the downtown area when he was hit in the back of the head by a sniper's bullet.

Sniper fire was reported about noon in several areas of the troubled black section, and authorities reported that police exchanged gunfire with snipers in several residences in a black neighborhood near downtown Wilmington.

A Scott aide, David Murray, said the governor had "authorized units of the National Guard for Wilmington."

Murray, who headed to Wilmington to help coordinate state and local law enforcement efforts, said the Guard units would more than likely be from the Wilmington area.

"The number of Guardsmen involved will be decided in meetings this afternoon," said Murray.

State Adjutant Gen. Ferd Davis headed to Wilmington to take charge of the National Guard forces.

Trouble erupted in this seacoast city three nights ago in the wake of a dispute by young blacks who issued a series of demands to school officials, including making Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday a holiday.

Late Saturday night, after a round of firebombings and sniper incidents, a policeman protecting firemen shot and killed a young black, Gib Corbett, 17. Police said Corbett was armed with a shotgun.

Egypt surprises Americans

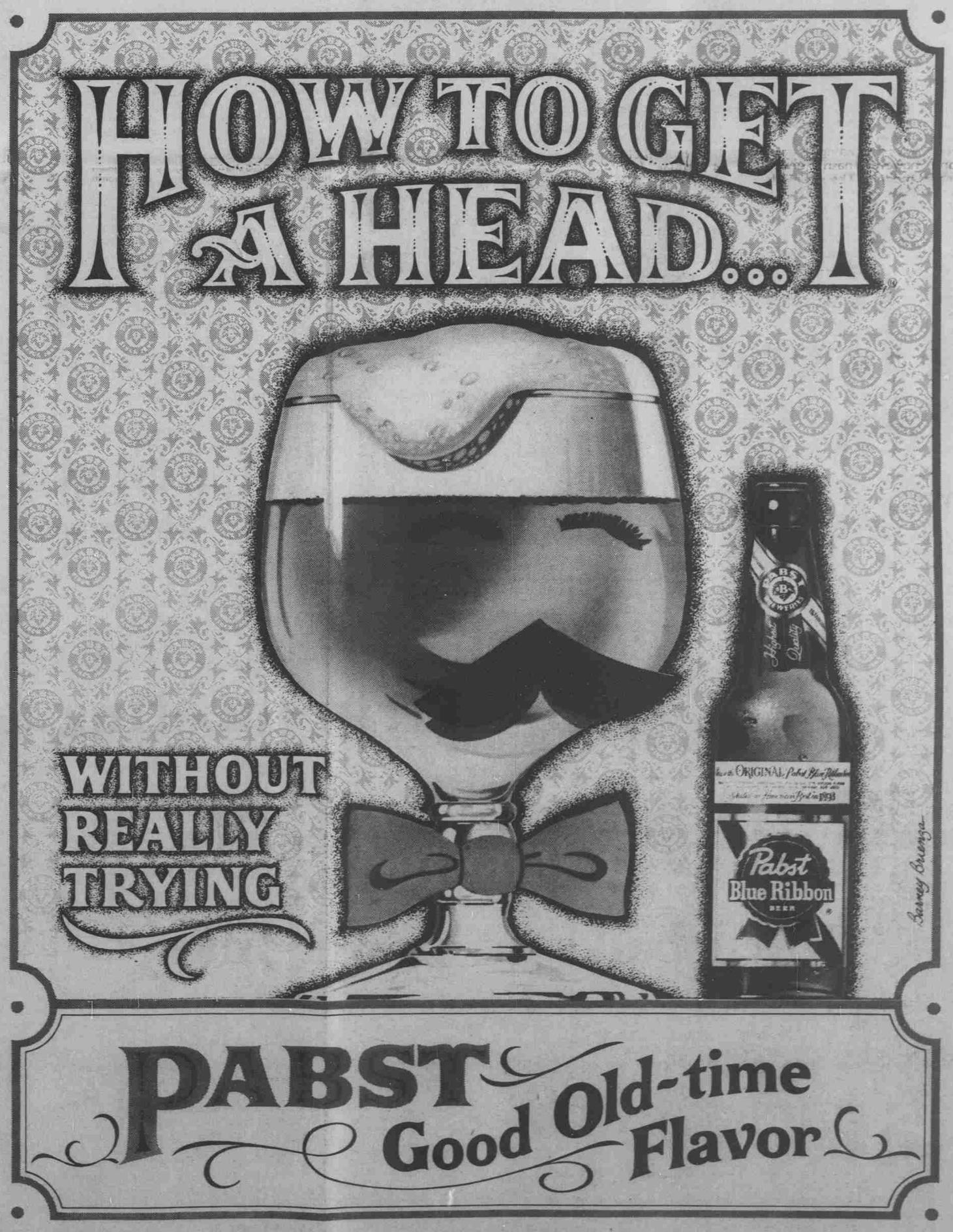
Cairo's semi-official newspaper Al Ahram said Sunday Egypt's offer to reopen the Suez Canal in exchange for a partial Israeli troop withdrawal caught the United States by surprise and could sharpen differences in Middle East policies between Washington and West European capitals.

The Israeli cabinet met in Jerusalem and discussed the canal proposal made Thursday by Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and it was announced that Premier Golda Meir will give Israel's formal reply in a speech to parliament Knesset on Tuesday.

Israeli political sources refused to speculate on the cabinet's decision. But it was noted that in a television interview Friday, Mrs. Meir dismissed the Sadat proposal as nothing more than a restatement of former Arab demands.

Sadat had agreed in an address to the Egyptian parliament Thursday to continue to observe the cease-fire with Israel for another 30 days to March 7. At the same time, he announced a new Egyptian peace initiative which called for reopening the canal to "international maritime traffic" if Israeli troops pulled back from the east bank of the waterway.

The newspaper Al Ahram, which often reflects Egyptian government views, said Sadat's initiative was "a complete surprise to the American government which did not expect such a proposal."

In a dispatch from its correspondent in Washington, the Cairo newspaper said the U.S. government feared that the proposal might push West European governments to take a more "independent attitude" toward the crisis in the Middle East. It said it might also deepen differences between Washington and the European capitals on how to deal with the situation.

Al Ahram said Sadat's proposal confronted the United States with two alternatives: Either to reject it and offend West European countries or reverse itself and pressure Israel to pull its troops back from the east bank.