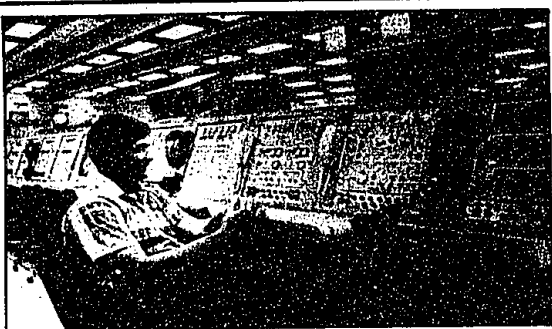


At the controls: A much younger Mike Liebowitz sits at a control panel during his days with NASA.



ANN HEALEY/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

## Moon from page 11A

down there. I lived just one and a half blocks from the beach."

For Liebowitz, it was an exciting time. He was away from home for the first time, had a chance to scuba dive. And he worked at Cape Canaveral on the most important scientific project of his time.

"By then, they (the Soviets) weren't that far ahead," he recalled. In fact, beating the Soviets to the moon was a race that did not involve radically new technologies.

"It was a matter of making things big enough," he said. "We knew how to do it."

Liebowitz said the oft-used comparison that "If we can put a man on the moon, how come we can't..." usually misses the point by comparing something we had the technology for to something we don't or that involves other problems.

Although he had little contact with the astronauts, on occasion one or more of them would ask Liebowitz specific questions about his area of expertise — the rocket launcher and its attachments.

"I don't think people realize that they were only about 5-feet-4

or -5," he said of America's space pioneers. "They were compact, so that they could fit into the capsule. I'm 6-feet, so it was strange taking them."

In addition, some of the stories about the astronauts seemed believable to Liebowitz.

"I remember one time when there was a red Corvette parked on the platform," he said. "I went out to see what was going on and there was Alan Shepard (Jr.) talking to an attractive blonde."

Liebowitz said although the control room, where he sat during much of the Apollo 11 mission, seemed highly sophisticated, the technology was pretty primitive by today's computerized standards.

"All we had were monitor lights," he said. "If you were to pull off one of the panels, you'd just find a bunch of wires."

As an engineer for Ford Motor Co. the past 21 years, Liebowitz has seen the radical changes in technology. And he's been a part of the auto giant's success, including development of the power train for the Ford Taurus.

And although he was saddened by the Challenger tragedy of January 1986, it didn't come as that

big of a surprise, Liebowitz said.

"I remember one time as we were going through the pre-countdown checklist, we found a pressure hose that had been hooked up to the wrong place," he said. "That's after four people had checked it. It was just too complex. You knew something had to go wrong sooner or later. The clock just ran out."

Although he is proud of the job he did, when the Apollo program was cut back in 1970 and Liebowitz was laid off, he didn't look back, landing a job in the auto industry with Volkswagen.

He had met some famous people, including the father of rocket science Werner von Braun. But many of his colleagues don't even know that Liebowitz was part of that history.

"It was a good experience," he said. "But it was a first job. I hadn't really thought of it as a career."

Liebowitz said he isn't nostalgic for that particular part of his past. But being part of that giant enterprise has given him a sense of accomplishment.

"I think it showed that America could do it," he said. "We really never doubted that we could."

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