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NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION  
ANNIVERSARY OF APOLLO 11 MOON LANDING  
PRESS CONFERENCE  
JULY 20, 1979

Participants:

Neil A. Armstrong

Dr. Edwin E. Aldrin, Jr.

Michael Collins

Robert E. Newman, Director of  
NASA Public Affairs

(This transcript was made from a tape provided by the  
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1 MR. NEWMAN: We turn now to Neil Armstrong.

2 MR. ARMSTRONG: We mark today the 10th anniversary  
3 of America's reaching its goal of landing on the moon. The  
4 interim ten years have been interesting ones in space,  
5 marked first by the spectacular successes of the Apollo  
6 landings of 12, 14, 15, 16 and 17. The middle of the decade  
7 marked by further manned flight and Skylab and the first joint  
8 venture with the Russians, Apollo Soyuz. And the latter --  
9 really all the decade, marked by remarkable achievements in  
10 exploration of our nearby planets, most recently of course,  
11 by the Jupiter encounter, which brought us the spectacular  
12 picture of Jupiter's moons.

13 UNIDENTIFIED PERSON: We can't hear you.

14 MR. ARMSTRONG: O.K. I'll try. So, in retrospect,  
15 I think it's a decade in which we can be very proud. A great  
16 deal was accomplished. Certainly not everything was accomp-  
17 lished that we might liked to have seen. A lot of things,  
18 a lot of projects that were gleams in the eyes of some enthu-  
19 siasts, did not occur and will have to wait for the next  
20 decade. But we can hope that the next decade will be marked  
21 by equal or even more striking progress, with the first flights  
22 of the shuttle which we look forward to with great anticipation.  
23 And as I previously said, I hope that leads to a number of  
24 other projects including particularly, a permanent space  
25 station. I'll turn it over to -- who's next?

1 MR. ALDRIN: Good morning. I'd like you to know  
2 that this is not my favorite pastime. And I get kind of ner-  
3 vous and uptight at affairs like this. But that's O.K. be-  
4 cause it's not going to last forever. In the past several  
5 years, I've really felt sorry for a few individuals. One  
6 of them happens to be the people in the Post Office in Los  
7 Angeles. They keep sending things to the wrong address and  
8 they have to forward them, so if you gentlemen might do me  
9 a couple of favors, one of them would be to sort of let people  
10 know that, if they don't have an address of Chinault  
11 Street in Los Angeles, it's the wrong one. For over seven years  
12 now, I've been getting fan mail forwarded from the test pilot  
13 school and I really feel sorry for that Post Office up there.  
14 I've decided that I will not participate in any more signing  
15 of first day covers or any philatelic  
16 material. I think ten years is enough for participation in  
17 any items that might be commercialized. I'm very happy that  
18 my three children have finally made it here for, not this  
19 function, but for some of the other festivities here in Wash-  
20 ington. And I also decided that this was the place for my  
21 first wife to come. We get along quite well now in items and  
22 matters pertaining to our three children and I think that  
23 whatever bitterness may have existed has faded, and there's  
24 forgiveness and whatever. And I feel that there needs to be  
25 a bit more of that in the world these days. And as an example

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1 of how we get along, I chose to ask her to come along because  
2 this event really commemorates part of my life and part of her  
3 life ten years ago. Apollo 11 may have been a small step for  
4 Neil but it was a beginning of a tremendous hurdle for me.  
5 And that hurdle eventually led to the disease of alcoholism.  
6 And I'd like you to know that I am certainly a changed person  
7 now, not the same individual that participated in that flight,  
8 that was rather uptight and anxious in the post-flight activi-  
9 ties. Most of the time, I feel quite comfortable and at peace  
10 with the world and with myself. There are a few exceptions,  
11 like this morning. But I find myself able to cope with many  
12 things that used to baffle me. And when I sort of add up  
13 where I am right now, it doesn't make much sense because  
14 there are a lot of things that might be more favorable in my  
15 life today, from a professional career, domestic standpoint,  
16 but nonetheless, I do have a sense of comfort that far sur-  
17 passes anything I've had before. I haven't been all that  
18 pleased with the way people have handled interviews that I've  
19 decided to grant a few people in hopes that some of my trials  
20 and tribulations, and where I am today, and what I think  
21 about, could be expressed properly. In particular, there was  
22 an interview I participated in, that I felt did the story very  
23 well, but editorialized and put into the context whatever was  
24 felt necessary in terms of portraying us as ill-adjusted or  
25 whatever. It didn't come across too well. So I thought I

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1 would like to take this opportunity to read what was written  
2 beforehand and I hope it won't stretch us out or eliminate  
3 too much time for questions. That'll make these guys very  
4 unhappy, I know. Of most importance to Edwin E. 'Buzz' Aldrin  
5 today are people, coming to know them, including himself. The  
6 toughest challenge of his life came after Apollo 11 in estab-  
7 lishing a pattern outside the rigid discipline of West Point,  
8 the U.S. Air Force, M.I.T., then being a N.A.S.A. astronaut,  
9 all of which constituted the majority of his life until the  
10 age of 39. Following his return to earth, which is the title  
11 of his autobiography, published in 1973, a year and a half of  
12 public speeches and appearances as one of the first men on  
13 the moon, Aldrin found that wearing and shedding the skin of  
14 heroism is no easy task. He tells in his book of a forty day  
15 leave after graduating from West Point at the age of twenty-  
16 one, when he took a trip to Europe and came face to face with  
17 the world. For someone who had always lived in groups and  
18 who had marched to definite orders, the sensation of casually  
19 wandering around Europe was strange indeed. And so did he find  
20 life after Apollo. In seeking a new road, he fell into a  
21 state of depression and eventually underwent treatment in an  
22 Air Force Hospital in Texas. Disguised in the depression was  
23 the creeping disease of alcoholism, which surfaced three and  
24 a half years later and was a struggle he describes as the most  
25 overriding event in his life. The space program was kinder-

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1 garten in comparison to coping with the culminating effects  
2 of alcoholism. You get into a pattern of just gradually  
3 spiralling down. As he speaks in an authoritative voice about  
4 the scientific technicalities of the space program, in a  
5 serious tone of admiration, he hails the advancement in the  
6 treatment of alcoholism in recent years. Colonel Aldrin was  
7 one of the most prominent citizens who gathered in Washington,  
8 D.C. in 1976 to announce themselves as recovering alcoholics  
9 to the National Council on Alcoholism. The acclaimed meeting  
10 was a steppingstone toward eliminating a long time stigma,  
11 and since then, many public figures have publicly acknowledged  
12 their need for help. Today, at age forty-nine, upward is  
13 again Buzz Aldrin's direction. He's treading with a much  
14 broader outlook toward helping all those who may have encoun-  
15 tered problems similar to his. For example, he plans to act  
16 as a consultant to major corporations with advisory programs  
17 for pilots and executive personnel who may suffer from the  
18 disease of alcoholism. And he's not severed the cord with  
19 N.A.S.A. entirely. A year ago, with a TRW group, he studied  
20 the projected training of crews for United States Air Force  
21 Space Shuttle missions. And more recently worked with a  
22 group from the Jet Propulsion Lab in Pasadena on the early  
23 stages of an unmanned Mars sample return mission. Today, he  
24 is the key in the preparation of a summer program at Griffith  
25

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1 Park Planetarium, Los Angeles, which recounts the lunar  
2 mission. Dr. Aldrin cheers the current Jupiter explorations  
3 and considers the prospect of solar energy as an economically  
4 competitive source in the future. But he observes, referring  
5 to national business and political affairs, a lack of unity  
6 in the American people, which awoke ten years ago at the hand  
7 of Apollo 11. People are too much in dissension about what  
8 is right and wrong. It would be nice if we could harness  
9 together meaningful effort that would unify thought and  
10 feeling. What seems to unify people today is what's wrong  
11 with what's going on, instead of taking a positive action.  
12 Among those people, Buzz Aldrin is getting to know better,  
13 are his children, of whom he speaks with great pride. Michael  
14 is twenty-three, working for Western Airlines and attending  
15 college in Hawaii. Janice, twenty-two, is an opera major  
16 at California University. And Andy, twenty-one, is studying  
17 pre-law, while employed by a company that customizes vans.  
18 Edwin E. Aldrin has made the switch from being a public figure  
19 to being a private man and has balanced his library. I now  
20 have the potential to be a far more satisfied individual and  
21 appreciate the little things in life. Now I wish you could  
22 have read something like that in the magazines instead of  
23 some of the things you have read. Thank you.

24 MR. COLLINS: This occasion reminds me of the story  
25 about the journalist, who was doing a profile on Cary Grant.

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1 And when he got all through writing it, he discovered he  
2 didn't know how old Cary Grant was. His age wasn't listed  
3 anywhere and he checked around and found **that** that was true,  
4 that no one really knew how old Cary Grant **was**. So he took  
5 a frontal attack approach and fired off a telegram to Cary  
6 Grant's press agent, saying how old Cary Grant? And right  
7 away, he got the answer back, old Cary Grant fine. And that's  
8 the way I feel. Old Mike Collins is fine. I'm sorry to  
9 hear from the space doctors that I'm so hard of hearing I  
10 couldn't get into the astronaut business if I were applying  
11 today, and I need glasses to read my newspaper, but despite  
12 that, I'm very optimistic, as you will see from, if you read  
13 the remarks that I think are in your press kit. And while I  
14 didn't put a title on those, they should be called earth,  
15 love it and leave it, and I'll be around later taking orders  
16 for bumper stickers, saying that. Thank you.

17 MR. NEWMAN: O.K. As I recognize you, would you  
18 please state your name and your affiliation, please? Yes,  
19 sir.

20 MR. : (Inaudible). United States Space  
21 Education Association. I have a question for all three of  
22 you gentlemen. If you had known ten years ago, what effect  
23 the flight of Apollo 11 would have on your lives, would you  
24 have rather flown that flight or a later one?

25 MR. NEWMAN: Yes. The question was, looking back

1 now ten years, if you had it all to do over again, would you  
2 have preferred to fly on Apollo 11 or on a later flight?

3 MR. ARMSTRONG: Well, I guess to lead off, I'd say,  
4 at the time, I was certainly willing to accept all the risks  
5 that might be inherent in such an assignment and I certainly  
6 couldn't regret then, having, living after the flight. One  
7 of the difficult-- not the fact. I was delighted to be on  
8 the flight. It was worth a great deal to me personally and  
9 I was very privileged to be a part of that, irrespective of  
10 the consequences.

11 MR. ALDRIN: It's a difficult question to answer  
12 because it presupposes information that we have today and  
13 reflecting back to the past and then making a decision. I  
14 feel that everything I decided to do was rather consistent  
15 with what my life was up to that point. I had an inkling of  
16 what might come afterward in terms of putting me in positions  
17 where I wasn't all that comfortable, but at that time, the  
18 treadmill was moving and it was really impossible to get off  
19 and re-board in a sense. So that was a momentary thought,  
20 perhaps, of preferring to be on maybe a second, third, or  
21 whatever landing mission. As difficult, perhaps, life has  
22 been at times for me, I feel that I wouldn't be where I am  
23 today if it were not for coming to grips with everything that  
24 was presented to me and walking through those and making  
25 necessary changes in my life and growing as a result of that.

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1 And if it took Apollo 11 and the aftermath to put me where I  
2 am today, then I'm very happy with that.

3 MR. COLLINS: I was on the crew of Apollo 8 and then  
4 got bumped off because of a medical problem. Those two flights,  
5 8 and 11 remain my favorite flights. I'd be happy to have  
6 either one of them. Those are the two best ones, I think.

7 MR. NEWMAN: Jules Bergman.

8 MR. BERGMAN: (Inaudible)

9 MR. ARMSTRONG: Well, the headlines always come out,  
10 disappointed, in capital letters, and that's really not an  
11 accurate reflection of my own opinion as I've expressed it  
12 over the years. Of course, those of us who were enthusiasts,  
13 would like to see more being done, and there haven't been  
14 resources available to do all the projects that those of us  
15 who are enthusiasts, would like to see happening. But, as I  
16 stated earlier, looking back, it's been a good decade. A lot  
17 of things have been done, not so many as some of us might have  
18 liked, but certainly a lot. I do hope that, as we progress  
19 through the next decade, we'll have the public will, that the  
20 public themselves will decide that this is a good investment  
21 in humanity's future and that we will take some new, big,  
22 initiatives. And, as I said before, I think that the first  
23 one might very well be a permanent orbiting station.

24 MR. NEWMAN: Anybody else?

25 MR. ALDRIN: I feel like you fell into a trap, Jules.

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1 I've always wondered why it is that, because we're crew mem-  
2 bers of a particular mission that we all of the sudden become  
3 experts in trying to figure out what the future ought to be  
4 and make judgments that then maybe get interpreted as what  
5 we really ought to do -- and I'm speaking just for myself  
6 right now. But I ran across something the other day that I  
7 thought made the point that I'm trying to make, that I feel  
8 a little uncomfortable in trying to take the role of judging  
9 where we are and what we're doing. This is a little article  
10 that was printed in the Test Pilot's Quarterly, taken from  
11 the Illustrated World, May, 1914, entitled 'Folly to Cross  
12 Atlantic in Air,' written by Orville Wright, aviator. And  
13 I'll read it rather quickly, parts of it. 'It's a fair  
14 possibility that a one-man machine without a float and favored  
15 by a wind of, say, fifteen miles an hour, might succeed in  
16 setting across the Atlantic. But such an attempt would be  
17 the height of folly. When one comes to increase the size of  
18 the craft, the possibility rapidly fades away. This is because  
19 of the difficulties of carrying sufficient fuel.' And he goes  
20 on to say that, on the basis of his calculations, fifty-three  
21 per cent would have to be fuel. I checked with a 747 captain  
22 the other day, and if unloaded everyone, and just went max  
23 range, it was sixty per cent. Of course, there's been some  
24 technological improvements that, I think, Orville was unable  
25 to anticipate. But anyway, it will be readily seen, therefore,

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1 why the Atlantic flight is out of the question. Now, maybe he,  
2 maybe in those days, ten years after he flew, we should have  
3 looked to some other people as to what the future was, maybe  
4 Billy Mitchell or Charles Lindberg. I feel uncomfortable in  
5 trying to be put in a position of saying where we ought to  
6 really go, because that's not my business today.

7 MR. ROGERS: (Inaudible) Rogers . If  
8 Buzz Aldrin and Neil Armstrong and Collins would have to do  
9 the flight all over again, would you like to go up again?

10 MR. ARMSTRONG: In a minute.

11 MR. ALDRIN: I think it would take more than a  
12 minute to get ready, though. So I'm not sure I would.

13 MR. NEWMAN: The question was, would you advise the  
14 youth of today to become an astronaut?

15 MR. ARMSTRONG: Well, as an educator, that is my  
16 business. I do advise youth, and they seek that question  
17 often, ask that question often, seek answers to that question.  
18 Although they probably state it a little bit more lucidly,  
19 in that they ask, should they go into the space technology  
20 field, without identifying a particular job, although some  
21 are attracted to the idea of being crew, of course. And I  
22 always advise them to do that which they are most interested  
23 in and think they're best qualified to handle. I point out  
24 to them that, for those who are interested in crew assignments,  
25 that flying is the very smallest part. It's only a few per

1 cent of your efforts go in flying as a crewman. Most of your  
2 effort goes into planning, strategy, testing and the same kind  
3 of hammer and tongs engineering work that most of the other  
4 people, who work for N.A.S.A. and industry in space arenas,  
5 are tackling, and that's the kind of thing they need to prepare  
6 to do because it will be the area of endeavor irrespective of  
7 whether they're in a crew capacity or in some of the many  
8 other interesting areas of space technology.

9 MR. COLLINS: Yeah, I'd just like to add -- I think  
10 an astronaut's job on the ground is much more interesting than  
11 most people realize. You think about astronauts in flight  
12 but the work that they do on the ground as quasi-engineers,  
13 quasi-test pilots, fascinating stuff. Talk to someone like  
14 John Young, who's I think going on seventeen years as being  
15 an astronaut. He has as fresh a point of view today as he did  
16 when he started. I think it's fascinating, John.

17 MR. ALDRIN: No, I guess what I was referring to  
18 was that, during the hectic days before a flight, especially  
19 a very important flight like Apollo 11, you just have to stay  
20 extraordinarily alert mentally. There's so many important  
21 bits and pieces of information being funnelled into your ears,  
22 you really have to pay attention. You have to be super-alert,  
23 sensitive. I don't think you can keep that. I don't think  
24 you can keep that pace. I just meant for a short period of  
25 time. It seemed to me that I was more receptive to and could

1 remember things better than I normally could.

2 MR. ARMSTRONG: I agree with that.

3 MR. COLLINS: I think that the shuttle will create  
4 a tremendous interest as we, over the next ten years, get a  
5 lot of hardware into the sky and have frequent sojourns on a  
6 more-or-less regular basis. Whether that will be met with the  
7 same degree of enthusiasm as previous space projects, I'm not  
8 sure, but I would hope not. I would hope that our use of  
9 space reaches a degree of maturity where it's accepted not as  
10 spectacular ventures in which everybody is interested but  
11 rather a kind of day-to-day, common occurrence that everybody  
12 expects and admires. I'll be happy with that. With respect  
13 to L-5, I would think that a permanent earth orbiting station  
14 by Two Thousand would probably have a greater number of bene-  
15 fits than an L-5 position, although that needs to be studied.

16 MR. NEWMAN: Yeah, the question was to do with  
17 one small step for a man or mankind, and the second -- there  
18 were two questions there, as I recall. And was there any  
19 particular point in time when you felt maximum peril. Is  
20 that correct?

21 MR. ARMSTRONG: Well, that sounds like a, ten years  
22 ago, similar questions. In listening to the tapes, I don't  
23 hear the missing a -- I thought I said it, but you can, since  
24 that was -- it's technically possible that it was there and  
25 not picked up by the box or (inaudible). But if you listen

1 to me talk here, you'll notice that I'm not really articulate,  
2 and I drop syllables. And so it would not be surprising to me  
3 if the syllable was dropped. It was intended and, if you like  
4 to put it in parenthesis, that's perfectly all right. Insofar  
5 as the greatest degree of peril, I assume now you're talking  
6 about during flight. We -- it's a difficult thing to say  
7 because I think if you look historically at where problems  
8 occurred in flight, they frequently occur at places where you  
9 least expect them and seldom at the point which you designate  
10 as the points of maximum exposure. Certainly in that latter  
11 case, we -- I always felt that the lunar descent was the one  
12 in which the greatest number of unknowns were present and the  
13 greatest -- the systems were working at maximum capacity and  
14 we had probably the least training to handle unforeseen circum-  
15 stances. So, going in, we regarded that as an area in which  
16 we wanted to train as hard as we possibly could. Well, I  
17 had very great difficulty getting these guys to come to Cin-  
18 cinnatti. I don't understand that, and they're always welcome.

19 MR. ALDRIN : I can't understand why you don't  
20 want to come to Los Angeles or maybe Las Vegas. I really do  
21 think it would be nice if we could get some kind of an annual  
22 gathering, not just of us, but of all the astronauts. Unfor-  
23 tunately, many times, if we begin to do that, we end up being  
24 kind of harassed to the point where we're sorry we ever thought  
25 of the idea. But I think from a reminiscing standpoint,

1 gatherings like the Dolittle raiders are something  
2 that we ought to try and establish in some fashion. I'd  
3 really like to see that come about.

4 MR. COLLINS: Everybody knows that people in  
5 Washington don't know what's going on, so I'm very reluctant  
6 to invite the two of them here.

7 MR. NEWMAN: The question was, not addressed to  
8 Buzz, but to Neil and Mike, have they had any problem since  
9 the flight of any nature, and what about on the satisfaction  
10 side.

11 MR. ARMSTRONG: No, not really. I think I've been  
12 blessed with good circumstances and a university that's been  
13 very hospitable and allowed me to operate just like every  
14 other faculty member there, and I've enjoyed that very much.  
15 I probably wish there was some way to cut down on some of the  
16 incoming mail and incoming phone calls, but other than that,  
17 I'm very satisfied.

18 MR. ALDRIN : I'd like to say that my disease may  
19 affect a lot of people surrounding the individual but it's not  
20 contagious.

21 MR. COLLINS : The only thing I would say is, I  
22 think there is a little tinge of sadness to the fact that, at  
23 age thirty-eight, I had what will probably be the most fascin-  
24 ating job I'll ever have in my life. But, you know, that's  
25 tough. That's just the way it was and is, and that doesn't

1 bother me.

2 MR. ARMSTRONG: Well, Bill, I think you've got me  
3 confused. I'm an engineering professor, not a history pro-  
4 fessor and I'm not -- I know others have been active in  
5 evaluating and correcting and challenging statements made by  
6 various Presidents but that's not the business that I've been  
7 in and I don't think I'll start now.

8 MR. COLLINS: Well, I thought the rhetoric was a  
9 little overblown then and now. I suppose the most historic  
10 phone call is probably the first one ever made, I would guess.  
11 In terms of the enormity of that week, I think when the history  
12 books are written a hundred years from now, it may very well  
13 be that Apollo 8 was a more meaningful flight than Apollo 11.  
14 I'm just not able to say.

15 MR. ARMSTRONG: I guess I'd like to say one more  
16 time, I've made this point before, but for me personally, the  
17 moment of triumph was the landing. We thought that was the  
18 real challenge. That was the difficult thing to do. Aviators  
19 conventionally like to make a smooth touch-down on the runway,  
20 a good landing. And you never think too much about climbing  
21 down the ladder. And I think, to me, it was a matter of  
22 triumph for the program and triumph for the three of us per-  
23 sonally when we reached the surface, and I think if there was  
24 an emotional high point, it was the point at which, after  
25 touch-down, Buzz and I shook hands without saying a word, but

1 know that that, you know, we'd made it. That's still in my  
2 mind. It is the high point and that's -- I guess I'll never  
3 change.

4 MR. ALDRIN: Well, in my case, it comes back  
5 every day. And not because I necessarily choose to do that,  
6 but because it's impossible for me to avoid because of the  
7 conversation with other people where the subject is brought  
8 up, or the mail will re-introduce the subject. And so, this  
9 day, it's a special occasion because it marks the anniversary  
10 of reaching the overall goal, but in another respect, it's  
11 like every other day because I'm reminded of it every day.

12 MR. COLLINS: I'm a bureaucrat these days. I'm  
13 afraid it gets washed away in a sea of meetings and memos in  
14 my life. And I don't think about it nearly as often as Neil  
15 does.

16 MR. ALDRIN : I guess it's in the subconscious  
17 most all of the time like any experience a person goes through  
18 that is one that has made a meaningful impact on your life.  
19 Little things that may come up during the day may cause you  
20 to say, yeah, hey, I was one of those guys that went up there.  
21 But then there are a lot of other things that kind of put you  
22 in, taking one step at a time, in your daily activities, but  
23 I think it's pretty hard to remove anything like that and say  
24 it's not involved in daily activities. It's just a part of  
25 you, of what you are and what you've been involved in in the

1 past, makes up what you are today. And as I think you address  
2 each moment of the day, many times the fact that you're an  
3 astronaut has absolutely nothing to do with it, but when you  
4 meet some people, you know darn well that **they** know you are,  
5 and it depends on your relationship with **those** people as to  
6 whether that really makes any difference at all. And I find  
7 that, in many ways, we have a very unique position in terms  
8 of image, celebrity status or whatever. We certainly have a  
9 place in history, but I can also run on down to the corner  
10 drug store, and nobody knows who I am. I celebrated the  
11 tenth anniversary of liftoff by driving along a freeway in  
12 Los Angeles, and I was in a hurry to get where I was going.  
13 And there was a red light flashing in the rear view mirror.  
14 And that chap wasn't particularly impressed, whether he didn't  
15 hear my name when I mentioned it to him, or what I was doing  
16 ten years ago. I still got a ticket.

17 MR. NEWMAN: On that note, we will close. If  
18 you will sort of hold your positions, we'd like to take the  
19 crew over to the Hall of Firsts in front of the command module.  
20 Any of you that would like a few pictures over there, no more  
21 interviews, a few pictures, we will grant that. So, thank  
22 you very much.