

Interview with Col. Edwin E. Aldrin, Jr., USAF, NASA Hq.
Washington, by Robert Sherrod, 4 December 1970, 1330-1599.

Buzz Aldrin came to Washington today and did drop in, as he had promised. After mechanical malfunctions involving four tape recorders we finally taped the interview in Les Gaver's studio set-up, which is the best place, after all. James Cast set up the big machine and changed the reels.

We used nearly two complete reels, but I'm not sure that I have learned a great deal that I didn't know already. Young men like Armstrong, Collins and Aldrin finally talk themselves out.

Here are a few points that were raised, which are spelled out in more detail in the tapes:

1) The name "Tranquility Base" was selected before the mission was flown, but nobody was told about it except Charlie Duke, who was CapCom for the moon landing. "We were mulling over a call sign that seemed appropriate, and 'Tranquility' was it. 'Base' indicated explorers." Incidentally, Charlie Duke is Aldrin's favorite CapCom: "We picked him. He had been on Apollo 10, on the check-out of the LM, and he seemed the logical one."

2) On the other hand, Neil Armstrong told nobody, not even his crew mates, that he was going to say, "One small step...." upon touching foot upon the moon. (Mike Collins confirms). Did Neil say "a" man? Aldrin: "I could have sworn he did at the time, but after listening to the tapes I don't think so."

3) Did Aldrin take any photographs on the moon? "I took some panorama shots including the earth and the LM. Then I put the camera on the LM. (I took one shot of Neil in a panorama view). It's too bad we didn't schedule the photography better. The Russians are getting good at these things; I have been showing the Soyuz IX documentary (yesterday before the Bar Association in Oklahoma City) and it is excellent." So --- it's not correct to say that there is no shot of Armstrong on the moon -- but almost correct.

4) Just what did you feel when you took your first step on the moon? "I've been asked that a thousand times before; it's a silly question," Aldrin replied, "when you look at the surface and see that the LM has sunk in a half inch, an inch..." I said I didn't mean he would have any fear of sinking in. "Well, one-sixth g was easier than I had expected; a very pleasant environment.

"I used more cooling water than Neil -- maybe 1-1/2 to 2 times as much. I forced myself to drink water because I knew dehydration was a possibility. I lost only two pounds on the entire trip."

5) Did you mention your communion on the moon to anyone? "Yes, to Deke Slayton -- I had to get permission to carry it on board. I also mentioned it to somebody else" -- I didn't pursue this cryptic remark -- "I still believe it was a wise thing to do."

6) I asked again about the original plan to have Aldrin step on the moon first, because I wanted his answer on tape. "The people writing up the time lines had to pick one. They assumed the experimenter, the co-pilot in the right-hand seat, would be the first to do the EVA, as in Gemini. I was in the dark about it." I said so was George Mueller, who told people during Apollo IX that Aldrin would be first out -- and I showed Aldrin a clipping from the Chicago Daily News' correspondent Arthur J. Snider (in the N. O. Times-Picayune, 27 Feb 69), headlined, "Aldrin to be First Man on Moon." (CN 4 Mar. 69).

"Sure it makes a difference; it has its drawbacks. But I was not the second man to land on the moon." He repeated what he had said last month, that the new things in Apollo 11 were not the EVA, but powered descent and ascent. He'll have a hard time making that argument stick.

7) Armstrong had said in Tech. Debriefing II, 24-48, that 60% of the procedures were not the best to use. -- case of procedures development people versus the checklist people versus onboard data. Aldrin: "Procedures can stand optimization. They are adapted from previous flights. Procedures are handled like the spacecraft -- you've got to go before a change control board to make a change. Those guys weren't the ones who wrote the checklist." (This was said before taping began).

8) Aldrin was surprised that no one paid much attention at the debriefings to his comments about light flashes he saw in the spacecraft. "Then I found it wasn't under 'anomalies' but under 'meals' or something. It took about three months for it to get out." Recent theories indicate these flashes may be caused by physical effects of weightlessness on the eyeball. (CK). It may be heavy (radiation?) particles penetrating the eyeball or hitting the fluid in the eye. "I thought at the time it was inside the spacecraft, not the eyeball," Aldrin said.

9) Regarding the naming of craters: "We didn't come up with any new ones, since more significance might be attached to

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them than in previous missions. We did name West Crater -- for the direction, not a person. None of the names survived, anyway, did they?" I obtained from Dr. Brunk a set of maps of the moon with the new crater names and gave it to Aldrin. He autographed the near-side map, which contains the Apollo XI's little craters, that is on our wall. "This is the first time I have seen the crater Aldrin. 3 Nov. 1970. Buzz Aldrin." (I showed him the maps when he was here last month.)

10) "On the flight home we did a couple of TV shows, but no experiments."

11) Because of the 8 and 9 illness and Cernan on 10, "we were concerned about inner ear troubles. I'm a little more than normally susceptible to seasickness. We were concerned about Neil, who hadn't done as much EVA simulation as Mike and I had ...only about six orbits in Gemini VIII. A couple of days before launch(?) they flew a T-38. I got in the plane and shook my head every which way, to 2 G's." (This is not good transcribing; see tapes).

12) "I took no seconal, but a couple of aspirins a day to sleep." Aldrin laughed at Frank Borman's insistence that it was the seconal that made him sick. He had heard of the recent frogs' flight that seemed to indicate the inner ear would respond after a brief spell of illness, and everybody get all right. "But it is a subjective thing. None of us on XI had any semblance of sickness."

13) On the Time-Life book, "First on the Moon," Aldrin said he was disappointed in the sales. He deplored the lack of publicity it got (almost nobody reviewed it). But he thought it was a pretty good job. He thought some of the Goldenbaum corrections were themselves in error (I said G. was usually more correct than the PAO tapes, though). He thought the wives' quotes in the book were all right; he took out some of the stuff from his wife's press conferences -- might look wrong out of context.

14) As for the Life contract: "It gave us some isolation for the stories about our personal lives. We got the kind of coverage we needed. We all shared equally." Didn't the insurance feature appeal to him. "Well, I didn't happen to need it."

15) How did he and Collins, West Pointers, feel about a naval pilot being in command? "Well, we didn't question his piloting credentials." Did Armstrong have a sense of humor? "Yes, but it was sometimes slow in coming." Couldn't think of any examples.

16) He knew about the letter his father wrote to Webb, 29 Sept. 1968: "I do not favor a manned flight of Saturn V until the changes being made have been proven. What is the value of risking lives at this stage? You really need less Yes-men in the space program." He also knew of Webb's long reply (copy to LBJ), and deplored his father's announcing flights shouldn't be made until there was a rescue capability, "but now I'm not so sure, after what has happened." Aldrin thinks two Saturn V's should be launched consecutively, and the LM should have a capacity of four passengers.

17) Aldrin met Webb on several occasions, and Webb always introduced him as the author of rendezvous techniques. "he wasn't quite right. I wasn't the author, but I supported certain premises. The transfer itself was the subject of my dissertation -- the proving out of certain guidance. Tied into terminal phase; concentric maneuvers." (rough notes).

18) Aldrin spoke at some length about EVA, of which he accomplished over five hours on Gemini XII. "Ed White did twenty minutes, using the maneuvering gun. It went almost perfectly except for the hatch sticking. Gemini VIII was to be the big one, but you know about its troubles. On XI Cernan worked up perspiration and the visor fogged. X had two EVA's, stand up at night and WHAT. ECS system (malfunctioned?), eyes smarted; on the second EVA Mike went to the Agena, and it was cut short, but it wasn't a failure. On XI Gordon was perspiring before he opened the hatch; steamed up and had a high heart rate. Tried the straddle system on the slippery metal and came back from the Agena.

"I was in the water tank in Baltimore, using the astronaut maneuvering unit to zip around in space when got word it was canceled. I tried to pull some strings through the AF to keep it going. I even came up with a new method of flying the AMU; its trouble was it had no side thrusters. But thrusters fore and aft weren't needed. DID WHAT? Amazing no one else thought of that. Happens once in a while; shows the mind is not going to pot altogether."

USEFUL TO LISTEN TO THIS PART OF TAPE FOR GEMINI

19) Aldrin apparently is at odds with the planners on other items? "Should a man be in the booster in the space shuttle? I say 'No.'"

20) The water tank is good for zero gravity, but not for 1/6 training.

21) Aldrin thought in June 69 (re Sam Phillips's telecon on whether to postpone launch from July to August), "we could use the extra month. A lot of things were not yet resolved. Looking back, we were more than adequately ready, but I didn't

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think so then."

22) On his crack at the press at press conference during Apollo XII: "I'd say it again, though I understand some of the press were down on me.

"I went back to New Jersey last week, when Apollo XI spacecraft to be shown. I was late for the Wednesday show, having to come from the Governors' conference. Next day was Thanksgiving and I'd arranged to appear Friday. The press coverage was weak. All they had in Saturday's papers was one photo in the Trentonian with a little caption, one in the Philadelphia Inquirer -- showing CM as 'spacecraft that went to the moon!" They played a Congressman from Missouri as the big attraction." POOR FELLOW DOESN'T THINK ASTRONAUTS ARE DEJA VU.

23) Recollections of the 204 fire: "I was in Los Angeles, working on the 2 TV-1. I forget who I was flying with but Dick Lucas, chief of maintenance (at Ellington?) told me about the fire."

24) Had he read any books about space? "I've thumbed through a lot. I read a good one by a professor at MIT." I told him it was John Logsdon of G. Washington U., pub. by MIT Press.

25) "It was great to be a back-up crew member for Apollo 8." That was a bold decision, says Aldrin.

26) Aldrin says MIT offered him either a Ph. D. or Sc. D., "which is usually honorary." Never heard of such an option before.

27) Aldrin is now working on the space shuttle, travels to North American, McDonnell-Douglas, Edwards. "I have a couple of vendettas there, too." NOT ON TAPE: HE WILL HAVE A PRESS CONFERENCE IN JANUARY TO ANNOUNCE RETURN TO AIR FORCE.

These are very rough notes, for guidance as to subject matter. Anything quoted should be taken from the tapes.

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