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Interview (luncheon) with Colonel Collins, Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, with RS, Federal City Club, 3 September 1970.

Every time I've seen Mike Collins this year, beginning at George Mueller's farewell dinner last January, I've said I'd like to come to see him. He has always said sure. Last week I got around to calling him, and today I took him to lunch at the Federal City Club. He had assented to a taping job last week, but today he held back, saying, "Do you really want to do that?" I didn't push the point. We spent two hours at the Federal City Club -- and in the Carlton Hotel lobby -- and never did go to his office for the taping.

Collins was very cordial, upholding his nice-guy reputation.

Our talk ranged over a wide area:

1) Mike hasn't the faintest idea what he'll do after he ceases to be an Assistant Secretary of State. He does want to write a book, and he expects to start on it soon. Just a first-person memoir, I judge.

2) He was disappointed in the Apollo 11 crew's "First on the Moon," which was written by Gene Farmer and Dodie Hamblin (who has since taken early retirement from Life to live in her beloved Rome.) He has heard that the reviewers ignored the book because all editors were sore at the astronauts about the Life contract. (I hadn't heard that report). He says he spent quite a few hours being interviewed by Gene and Dodie for the book, in addition to the time spent on the Life article in the 22 August 1969 issue.

3) We talked about the Life contract. "I'm of two minds about it," said Col. Collins, "I know we shouldn't have been taking the money -- at least I don't think we should have, although generals and submarine commanders and others did. But the protection we got from the contract was fabulous. Neil misses it, too. I have a stack of 250 invitations to make speeches. I accept ten to fifteen percent of them. I don't know." I told Collins what Webb had said: the Life contract kept NASA from having to serve up Annie Glenn to the society editor of the Podunk Herald. I also said I was against the contract, and Mike said I might be right.

4) Mike said he hadn't read a single book about the space program. Then he said he had read John Wilford's, which came out right after the Apollo 11 landing -- "it was pretty good, considering the circumstances." He had never heard of the controversial "Journey to Tranquility."

5) Mike's job is different from what it was under Dixon Donnelly, Jim Greenfield and Bob Manning. News has been removed from the public affairs department, and put under McCloskey (CK). Mike is in charge of exhibitions, speeches (CK), history and a half dozen odds and ends I don't remember. He is very modest about his accomplishments and, as Churchill is supposed to have said of Attlee, "he has much to be modest about." (Perhaps, I don't know; Mike hasn't had a very good press). Mike and Pat have bought an "ugly" house in the Cleveland Park area which has become fashionable since the Kennedy era, he hears.

6) There is a man named Seymour Kessler who sends Mike tapes of his speeches, television appearances and various other oddments. No obligation. Just a space buff, Mike thinks. Believe he works for CBS. Mike will send me his full name and address.

7) What does he hear about the space program? "Well, I've heard that the first Sky Lab is going to be commanded by Walt Cunningham. Then I heard Pete Conrad. Then Alan Bean. I don't know."

8) I had frequently heard that Mike was far and away the best handball player among the astronauts. Who was second? "Cunningham, or Worden." Mike had a phone call from Cunningham just a day or two ago.

9) John Young is a very funny guy. (He was Collins's partner on Gemini X.) "He's really fabulous. Puts on his country-talking act before a gathering of scientists -- 'Wal, I don't know what it's all about,' he says; but actually knows more than anybody in the room. Young is a very smart fellow." I said I had the impression Young was a sort of Okie from the deep south who happened to be born in California instead of Georgia. Collins didn't know; "I've met his parents, and they seemed to be average middle class people."

10) In his speak-well-of-everybody (well, everybody except Schirra and Chuck Berry), Collins said, "The people in this space program are great. I enjoyed it. I loved working with them." The second group of astronauts was the greatest, Collins thinks -- "You can't beat that group. Not only Young and Borman and McDivitt, but also Lovell and Armstrong and Conrad and Stafford (Mike mentioned all these except Stafford; besides these seven, there were the late Ed White and Elliott See).

11) The one astronaut Mike had no use for was Wally Schirra. "A terrible guy; an egomaniac."

12) Mike had heard Borman rumored as the next administrator, as had everyone else. He obviously has high admiration for Frank. He says Frank's current mission, to try to make some progress in freeing American prisoners of the North Vietnamese, has no connection with H. Ross Perot's abortive effort in the same direction. Apparently it's a Nixon mission.

13) I commented on the prevalence of left-handedness among the astronauts -- Collins himself, Lovell, Ed Mitchell, Schirra, Eisele, Freeman, Gordon. Collins wasn't sure about Gordon and Freeman, but it seems quite certain.

14) Mike says he was lured to that unveiling of the Apollo 11 crew's portrait on 26 July because it was offered as a farewell party for Dr. Paine. He thinks the portrait is awful (so do I). Is by a Texas artist, and is donated by Dr. Maxwell and other Dallas citizens.

#### APOLLO 11 FLIGHT

1) How was quarantine -- a bore, debriefed to death, worse than anticipated? "Not at all. We had all the comforts of home -- a bar, an exercise room. Except for missing our families, we couldn't have cared less about being in quarantine," he added.

2) Who was your favorite CAPCOM? "It's hard to say. They were all good. I guess I'd rank Tom Mattingly first. He worked so hard at it."

3) Did Buzz Aldrin ever speak of his private communion? "Not to me. He sprang a complete surprise."

4) Did the Pope think you were a Catholic, like most men named Michael Collins. "The Pope wasn't the only one. I guess a lot of people assume I'm a Catholic." (Mike's wife and children are Catholics).

5) How worried were you about the landing? There is a lot of disagreement about the alarms and the closeness of Neil's fuel supply. "It's a fragile daisy chain -- no, knock out that daisy chain. I notice that Mike uses "fragile daisy chain of events" in his Life piece 22 Aug 69 -- he must be getting self-conscious about the expression<sup>7</sup>. The alarms are something you get used to. You know you depend on the ground. If all say 'go' except one, and he says 'nyet', then you don't do it. If it had been necessary for Neil to abort he would have done it."

6) How much time did you spend planning the worse case contingency -- having to go back to Earth, leaving Neil and Buzz stranded? "Actually, this was not a subdivision of the training. I had to know how to make the burn alone, of course. I did it routinely in the simulator.

7) When did you learn that Neil was going to say "One small step" as he set foot on the moon? "Not until he said it. No advance warning." How about "The Eagle has landed?" "Didn't know about that one either." How about naming the landing spot Tranquility Base? "We talked about that one a couple of weeks before the launch; it was decided at the Cape. (NOTE: GEORGE LOW SAYS HE NEVER KNEW).

8) Why didn't you ever spot the LM on the moon? "I could have seen it if I had known where to look. The maps had a grid overlay. Looking through the sextant I could see one grid square, maybe two. They were giving me eight or ten. So, I couldn't spot the LM because the ground didn't know where it was.

9) What are "woo-woos" -- Aldrin uses it on p. 191, DSE, among other places. "Oh, that was a kind of noise we couldn't explain -- Apollo 10 had it, too -- it happens on VHF when the LM and CM are airborne at the same time. So far as I know, there is no explanation for it.

10) What was Armstrong like as a commander? I notice Borman could be pretty tough (I didn't tell Mike I read it in DSE), and Walt Cunningham had said Schirra was a real martinet. "It was not Neil's nature to be like Schirra or Borman. He accomplished what he wanted to by persuasion."

11) How did you happen to grow a moustache? "I've always grown one when I took a trip. I first did it in 1954, when I ferried a plane from California to France. But it looked pretty bad this time."

12) What were the thoughts of the crew about a July launch as opposed to August? It was debated in Phillips's telecon of 12 June 1969, and Chuck Berry seemed to be against going in July. "I was for a July launch. The others were less so (they had LM problems), Berry is a nut; I don't know how he has got away with things for years." (SEE TRANSCRIPT OF 12 JUNE TELECON, ABOUT PAGE 38).

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