

SALUTE TO APOLLO

By MORT CRIM

Photos by Jim Koepnick, Donna Bushman, and Mike Steineke



Editor's Note:

Mort Crim (EAA 374925) is a journalist, author and pilot. His daily radio show, *SECOND THOUGHTS*, is syndicated nationally. His national network reporting assignments have included covering manned space missions from Gemini 5 through Apollo 12. An Air Force veteran (SAC), Mort flies his Seneca II around the country meeting a tight speaking and reporting schedule. For one week every summer, you can find Mort, his wife Renee (EAA 374926), their Seneca and their tent somewhere on the Oshkosh "North Forty."

He was grinning as he climbed out of the Pitts and dropped to the tarmac. It had been a good ride. He'd even gotten in some stick time. But two decades of absence

from
aerobatics
had taken a toll.

His legs were a bit wobbly, his insides a little queasy.

"Amazing how much I've forgotten in 20 years," the middle-aged pilot confessed. "And how soft my stomach's become."

Certainly not an unusual response to loops, barrel rolls and spins on a hot Wisconsin afternoon. Even for a veteran pilot like this. Still, his host found the confession mildly amusing. Twenty-six years earlier no one could have imagined this guy ever feeling rusty at the controls, or looking for a sick-sack. Less than three decades before, he'd soared out of Cape Canaveral with a fire-belching Saturn rocket tied to his tail, headed for the moon.

Now, as he walked toward the hangar, Walter Cunningham

glanced back at the Pitts with an affection and admiration only another aviator can fully understand.

"There's a kinship among pilots," he said. "We (astronauts) feel fortunate that we've had a life where we've been able to fly."

It was this love of flying which had drawn Walt Cunningham and 14 of his fellow space travelers to Oshkosh: the world's greatest celestial explorers visiting the world's grandest aviation event. Their names had been household words at the apex of America's manned space flight program: Schirra, Borman, Lovell, Armstrong, Aldrin, Collins.

They were as familiar then as Madonna and Michael Jordan are now. In the late '60s and early '70s, they had performed feats no mere superstar could match: these modern day Magellans had traveled out of this world, circled the moon, explored it and returned.

They had romped, golfed, motored and clowned on lunar dust. They had appeared on national magazine covers and national TV shows. They were an elite corps that had experienced a rare condition called "weightlessness." Now they were here, at Oshkosh, in an unprecedented gathering that also included Cunningham, Anders, Roosa, Duke, Worden, Cernan, Gordon, Conrad and McDivitt.

Fifteen in all - men so talented, so courageous, so special, they must be different than the rest of us.

That's why Pat Settlemyer was surprised.

"What amazed me more than anything," she said, "is that they're just plain, ordinary people."

Pat and her husband, Don, had come to Oshkosh from their home in Waxahachie, Texas. They attend the EAA Convention every year but this time there was a special attraction . . . the Apollo astronauts.

"They've been to the moon," Pat

went on. "They've done the ultimate. Yet they took time to come here and joke and talk with us. They're very intelligent, but they're just ordinary people."

Don, who flies a Cessna 152, couldn't believe it'd been 25 years since the first moon landing. He thought it was "just great" that the astronauts were commemorating the event with a visit to Oshkosh.

Interestingly, while their presence inspired memories of moon walks and space walks for Convention goers, the astronauts were experiencing a different kind of nostalgia.

"It's nice to see the airplanes again," Jim McDivitt responded when asked what brought him to Oshkosh. "To get back and smell the kerosene and the gasoline. I don't have a Private license, so I don't get to fly. But I sure love to be around them."

If McDivitt hasn't traded his astronaut wings for a Private pilot's ticket, he's definitely in the minority. Frank Borman flew his T-6 in from new Mexico. Jim Lovell piloted his Beech Baron from Texas and brought Stu Roosa with him in the right seat. Neil Armstrong flew his well-worn Cessna 310 up from Ohio. Gene Cernan flies a Cessna 421 - mostly for business - but came "commercial" to Oshkosh because of a tight schedule.

Mike Collins thought he was saving time by taking an airliner, but his jet was put into a holding pattern while Bruce Bohannon set a world time-to-climb record on Saturday. He arrived in time to participate in the Apollo news conference. Charles Duke, the 10th man to walk on the moon, also arrived at Oshkosh by private plane as did Buzz Aldrin. A Cessna 340 was dispatched to pick up Aldrin, Duke (now a retired air Force General) and Duke's wife, Dotty, in Milwaukee. Charlie greeted me with a big grin and a friendly handshake as he stepped out of the 340 at EAA's hangar on Wittman Field.

"Still love to fly the smaller planes," Duke volunteered. And, airplanes seemed to dominate the astronauts conversations at Oshkosh. They especially enjoyed that time honored sport of hangar flying. Many of their yarns recalled practical jokes played on each other.

"Frank was the worst," Jim Lovell began his epoch about Frank Borman. "I was flying this T-33. Frank was in the back. He'd discovered that by rubbing the face of his EGT gauge, it created static electricity which would

push the needle up to the red line. It also would register the same reading on my EGT on the front panel.

"Well, on this flight, Frank sat back there rubbing that gauge and I was watching the EGT just go up and up, dangerously high. Just as it hit the red line, Frank banged his feet on the floor. It sounded like an explosion and I nearly came out of my seat.

"I didn't say a word until we landed. As we walked away from the airplane, I turned to Borman and I said calmly, 'Frank, if you ever do that again, I'll kill you.'"

Something Old, Something New

Oshkosh this year had what it's always had: the mind-boggling display of airplanes: the mind-stretching assortment of educational forums, workshops and seminars; the bustling fly market; and the incredible daily air shows. There were famous aviation authors signing books. There was F. Lee Bailey telling a gathering on the grass near the Press Center how he plans to help Bob Hoover get his medical certificate back.

But clearly this year the presence of 15 space super heroes gave the Convention a special aura. You could feel it from the flight line to the chow line:

"I think it's fantastic that the astronauts came here," enthused Doug Kelm. Doug's a "local" from just down the road at Ripon. He flies a 172 with the Civil Air Patrol.

"I didn't realize they had volunteered their time to come to Oshkosh," he said. "To me, these are the real heroes."

John and Barbara Matter of Philadelphia shared that assessment. Even though they've flown their Piper Warrior for years, this was their first visit to Oshkosh.

"We just wanted to see the astronauts," John told me. "After everything they've done and accomplished - you know, 25 years ago - that's mainly what drew us."

Nearby, someone interjected, "25 years? I can't believe it. It seems like yesterday."

Indeed it does. And for those of us who were there covering America's manned space program from the beginning, it was sobering to realize more than a quarter of a century had passed since President Kennedy challenged Americans to put a man on the moon within the decade.

Wally Schirra, Frank Borman, and Jim McDivitt laughed at the changes

25 years had brought when I showed them photographs of us all swimming in the Holiday Inn pool at Cocoa Beach, Florida. That motel was headquarters for both astronauts and journalists during the heady days of Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo.

As a network news correspondent with ABC, I'd been assigned, along with veteran newsman Merrill Mueller, to report on all manned flights from Gemini 3 through Apollo 12. We would move our entire news operation to that Holiday Inn for one week preceding a launch. Each morning I would broadcast my "News Around the World" from a motel room, electronically (and somewhat, miraculously) converted into a newsroom - complete with typewriters, teletypes, a bank of telephones and a small army of producers and staff.

In the more relaxed setting around the pool, we got to know many of the astronauts close up. Now, at Oshkosh, I was discovering they hadn't really changed. A little older. A little grayer. Some a little heavier. But the same professionalism. The same bawdy sense of humor. And above all, the same deep love of flying.

Perhaps the move revealing line came from Neil Armstrong. When he was asked the inevitable question, "What was it like, walking on the moon," Neil's reply was simple and eloquent, "You know, we pilots don't care an awful lot about walking. We like to fly."

Down Where The Air Is Clear

These tried and true test pilots may have loaned their minds and their skills to NASA, but their hearts always belonged to airplanes. Following them along the flight line, watching them gaze longingly at the warbirds in flight, it was clear they were pilots first, astronauts second. And they made no





(Left to right, top row) Stuart Roosa, James McDivitt, Buzz Aldrin, Richard Gordon, William Anders, Eugene Cernan, Michael Collins, Walter Cunningham, (front row) Neil Armstrong, James Lovell, Pete Conrad, Tom Poberezny, Charles Duke, Al Worden, Frank Borman, Wally Schirra.

pretense otherwise:

"The defining experience in my life was becoming a Marine Corps fighter pilot," Walt Cunningham proudly acknowledged. "It was as a young man - a pilot - that I developed my attitude about life and about death."

Most of the astronauts spoke nostalgically of their days as test pilots. But their infatuation with airplanes

began much earlier. Almost all had begun their lifelong love affair with airplanes by building models, reading airplane magazines, and hanging around airports.

Wally Schirra may have had an additional influence: "Mom and dad were barnstormers," he said, adding, "I learned to wear a hat from Bob Hoover."

Stu Roosa said building models and reading "Smilin' Jack" are what started him down the runway which eventually led to the moon.

Frank Borman used to work all week to earn enough for one flying lesson Sunday. (How many of us can identify with that?) Bill Anders took his first plane ride out of a cow pasture. It cost him a dollar.

Al Worden's introduction into the world of flight came suddenly. A plane crashed in his backyard. Nobody was hurt but, as Al tells it, "... it piqued my interest."

The interest has continued for all

the astronauts. The culmination of EAA's "Salute to Apollo" took place Saturday night with an unforgettable program at the Theater in the Woods. By the way, that event, hosted by former "Good Morning America" host David Hartman, pulled the biggest crowd in the Theater's history... more than 9,000.

When Sunday arrived, many of the astronauts stayed. Gene Cernan couldn't pull himself away from the air shows and he couldn't stop talking about airplanes. He spent about 20 minutes explaining to me why one airplane I'm considering purchasing would be better for me than another model.

Charlie Duke was glued to the flight line as the warbirds staged their loud and impressive mock battle. Mike Collins was just as captivated.

"Boy, I'd sure love to fly one of those," Mike mused, as a P-51 roared by on a low pass.

"The P-38 - now that's the airplane



for me," Stu Roosa countered. "I know everybody says the P-51 was the greatest fighter ever built, but I don't care. I like the P-38."

Guess it takes an astronaut to argue with another astronaut.

None of the 15 seemed anxious to forfeit even a minute of the air show. But they finally agreed to huddle long enough for news photographers to take pictures. Unprecedented pictures. Historic.

What It Meant - Then And Now

Here at Oshkosh, twenty-five years after the first moon landing, the eagles had gathered. As Tom Poberezny lined them up and cameras began to click, I recalled how these astronauts had carried our flagging spirits to much-needed heights back in the '60s and '70s. When Neil and Buzz took that giant leap for mankind, America was mired in a bitter conflict called Vietnam. Our cities were rioting. Leaders were falling to assassins' bullets. Teenagers were turning on us. It seemed the whole world was at war or in rebellion.

The Apollo astronauts gave us reason to hope, again. To be proud, again. To believe, again.

Their visit to Oshkosh seemed so very natural. After all, they had flown the ultimate experimental aircraft. Like the thousands of homebuilders who flock to Oshkosh and to the EAA Fly-In Convention each year, they were test pilots who put it on the line - pushed the envelope.

It was evident they also represented the core values of those who attend the EAA Convention: family, patriotism and faith in the future.

Stu Roosa had brought back more rocks from the moon than any other astronaut. But that wasn't his proudest achievement:

"The greatest thrill of my flying career was the day I soloed my daughter," Stu readily admitted. He bought a Cessna 172 primarily so he could teach his four children how to fly.

And patriotism? Nobody's got more of it than these fellows.

"Ladies and gentlemen, that was the sound of freedom," Dick Gordon announced after a departing jet drowned out part of his talk. The crowd burst into applause.

Their patriotism is of the humble variety. Asked how they felt about the considerable risks of moon flight, Bill Anders noted, "Our buddies in Viet-

nam were at far greater risk, and they weren't getting ticker tape parades when they got home."

Another round of applause.

As for faith in the future, the Apollo astronauts have it - but wish more Americans shared it. They believe we've become too complacent. Too comfort oriented. Too reticent about taking chances.

"We can't make progress if we insist on a society that's risk free," Wally Schirra philosophized.

"Could America be successful if the Apollo project were happening today instead of 25 years ago?" he was asked.

"We have the technological genius, the skill, the ability," Schirra said. "What we lack is the courage and the commitment." No, he's not sure we could pull it off today.

But enough rhetoric. These guys didn't come here to preach. They came for the same reason we all did: to be around airplanes and the people who build and fly them. They came for the smell of the gasoline and the roar of the radials.

They came so they could communicate in that language of the soul which only a fellow pilot truly understands.

They love to fly.

And it shows.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS . . .

By **JOHN BURTON, STEVE BUSS and DICK KNAPINSKI**

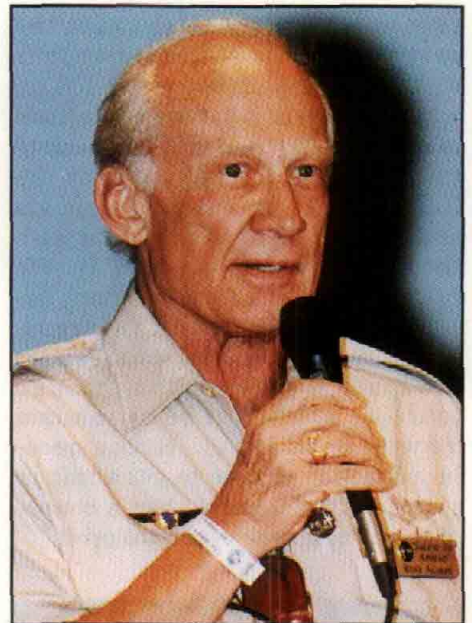
Before any of the Apollo astronauts ever listened to Mission Control count down their liftoff, they had become pilots. For many of them, their aviation experiences are just as important albeit not as newsworthy - as their Apollo flights. The astronauts commented on many questions and issues during their appearances at EAA Oshkosh '94, including:

1. How were you first inspired to learn to fly or become a pilot?

2. What do you consider as one of the highlights or most vivid memories you still carry from the Apollo program?

3. What is the future of the space program in the United States?

Following are their comments on these questions, as gathered from their appearances at the "Salute to Apollo" program on Saturday, July 30, the news conference held earlier that day and the numerous mini-forums held throughout the weekend.



BUZZ ALDRIN
Apollo 11

"The airplane I had my first flight experience in was a Lockheed Vega at about age two. I grew up in an aviation household and it was obvious that I was going to fly airplanes. I pursued that by going to the military academy and being involved in the latter phases of the Korean War. I got bit by the space program when I was going to M.I.T. for my doctorate instead of being a test pilot."

"There was a very ambitious sequence of missions that were laid out even before we started flying Apollo at all. Apollo 7, 8, 9 and 10 each had very specific tasks to carry out and a failure in any one of them would have set the program back. Each one of them did a magnificent job and we had success. And that's what made the difference and gave us the very good fortune to be on the mission that gave us the opportunity to proudly represent the country and the world and land on the moon."

"We've got to move toward

