

The Time of Apollo – 1975

Bill Anders: For all the people back on Earth, the crew of Apollo 8 has a message that we would like to send to you. In the beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth. And the Earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light." And there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good, and God divided the light from the darkness.

Jim Lovell: And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

Narrator: In the beginning, the void, the darkness; then light, then life. And from life came man, joining the caravan for the long slow journey through a world of discovery, invention, exploration. His marks, his milestones, stretch out through the centuries. His footsteps echo down through the corridors of time. Time: July 1969 in Florida, the footsteps, the caravan quickened, the corridor shortened as man reached outside his world into another void.

Today in Florida they go about their lives, taking only a sideways glance at the reminders of that milestone. Reminders, images that vaguely jog our memory.

Kennedy Launch Control: This is Apollo/Saturn Launch Control, aiming toward our planned liftoff time of 32 minutes past the hour, the start of our launch window on this the mission to land men on the Moon. The countdown still proceeding very satisfactorily at this time...

[Continuing in background] *We've got by an important test with the launch vehicle checking out the various batteries in the 3 stages and instrument unit of the Saturn V. We remain on external power through most of the count to preserve those batteries which must be used during the powered flight.*

Narrator: Time, it plays tricks on us; it smudges and blurs the sharp edges of reality. But we turn the trick and summon up our own reality, images, sounds, to help us remember.

Kennedy Launch Control: The batteries all look good. The next time we go internal will be at the 50 second mark with those batteries and they will remain, of course, on internal power during the flight. The Lunar Module, which has been rather inactive during these latter phases of the count, also is going on internal power at this time on the two batteries in the ascent stage and the four batteries of the descent stage.

[Continuing in background] *We're aiming for our planned liftoff at 32 minutes past the hour.*

Narrator: They came, one million of them, to this place, drawn by the magnet of history in the making.

Kennedy Launch Control: The astronauts, the prime crew, were awakened at 4:15 a.m. Eastern Daylight and proceeded to have a physical examination in which they were declared flight ready. They sat down for the normal astronaut fare on launch day as far as breakfast is concerned, orange juice, steaks, scrambled eggs, toast, and coffee.

The target for the Apollo 11 astronauts: the Moon. At liftoff we'll be at a distance of 218,096 miles away.

The astronauts departed from their crew quarters. After checking out their suits they departed from the crew quarters at 6:27 a.m. and some 27 minutes later, 8 miles away from the crew quarters at the Kennedy Space Center atop the launch pad at complex 39, 6:54 a.m., the commander, astronaut Neil Armstrong, was the first to board the spacecraft. He was followed about 5 minutes later by Mike Collins and finally Buzz Aldrin, the man who's sitting in the middle seat during liftoff, was the third astronaut to come aboard.

The weather is certainly Go. It's a beautiful morning for a launch to the Moon. We expect a temperature of about 85 degrees in the Kennedy Space Center area.

We're still Go on Apollo 11 at this time.

T-25 seconds. 20 seconds and counting. T-15 seconds, guidance is internal, 12, 11, 10, 9, ignition sequence starts, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, zero, all engine running, liftoff. We have a liftoff, 32 minutes past the hour. Liftoff on Apollo 11. Tower cleared.

Neil Armstrong: Tranquility Base here. The Eagle has landed.

Capsule Communicator (CAPCOM): You got a bunch of guys about to turn blue. We're breathing again. Thanks a lot.

Neil Armstrong: I'm going to step off the LM now. That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.

Narrator: Apollo 11, Armstrong, Aldrin, and Collins. They and millions of others reached out and, in their own way, touched another planet. The images remind us that it happened, but not how it really was in the context of the times. George Low, one of the architects of the Apollo program, does remember.

George Low: If you think back at the period of the sixties, they weren't very happy years in general. We had, well, the ever-deepening involvement in Vietnam, we had riots on the campuses, riots in Watts and elsewhere, three terrible assassinations, a great deal of strife and turmoil in the country. And yet all of this was overcome by one single event and that was Apollo 11. The decade ended with it, it was a fantastic adventure that I believe helped overcome all of the bad things of the decade. It represented Americans to ourselves and particularly to the rest of the world as we like to see ourselves and as we hope the rest of the world likes to see us.

Narrator: The equipment of Apollo. Some of it is now in museums, artifacts from an age of discovery. These strange-looking objects, they're there as reminders that after all it did happen, and it happened the way we remember.

The facilities of Apollo, now silent and still. In Houston, mission control, the nerve center of manned flight operations. The chapters of space history, first Mercury then Gemini then Apollo, were written by the people who sat at these consoles. And these chapters of history came at us with breakneck speed. Christmas Eve 1968 – "in the beginning" – Apollo 8. The footsteps were

quicken. A few months later, Apollo 9. The long years of preparation were contracting into days, hours, minutes. The first manned flight of the Lunar Module, the Spider. Apollo 10, the dress rehearsal for the real thing. In five months, three missions, and in the seventh month, the payoff. Then, the celebrations.

The images and the sounds fade in our memories, but some things we can't forget. Names: Apollo 11, Armstrong, Aldrin, and Collins. Other names: Grissom, White, and Chaffee. They remind us that it wasn't all success and celebration; there was failure, tragedy. Early in 1967, the three crawled into the Command Module at Cape Kennedy for a test. There was a flash fire; all three died. After the shock came the long, painful job of picking up the pieces, learning the lessons, coming together for a common goal. The remains of the launch structure stand as a reminder that the goal was reached.

These strange shapes, what do they mean? These towers of steel, what are they? Monuments? Or leftovers from some earlier age of discovery? In the long history of man, in the slow journey of the caravan, what point do these mark? Historian Arthur Schlesinger: "I have no doubt at all that if posterity remembers the twentieth century for anything, historians 500 years from now looking at the twentieth century, it will be because it will be the century when man first began to break his terrestrial bonds and began the exploration of space." So that's it?

As man learned, moved on, and discarded the earlier structures, he came to these. They are marked for further milestones, reserved for future missions, other reaches to other, different voids. Historians five centuries from now will mark this century, this place, and they will further note that from the void – life, man; it took eons to reach this point. But once there, the centuries and years compressed into days, hours, split seconds of exploration. The wheel, the engine, the airplane – they came slowly at first, then with increasing velocity. And then, this, so huge, so powerful, so different that no ordinary modern name would suffice. They reached backward through antiquity to Roman mythology and they named it Saturn. Saturn, his father was heaven, his mother, Earth.

The complex organization of mammoth machines, the incredibly detailed technical knowledge, the dedication – it was all harnessed, sharpened to a fine edge, and focused. The program developed and matured. Apollo 17 was launched at night, and even the old hands, the hardened veterans of the space program, couldn't help but feel the awe, wonder, and excitement. In the excitement of the split second of exploration, man doesn't stop to freeze the moment in history, to look at it and ask what it means. He simply lives it out. But in the Apollo program, on the way to the Moon, they found a way to live out their strange moments in those strange spacecraft. It may be the peculiar nature of Americans to make history and to have fun in the making. They relaxed and had fun because they – we – were confident of success

But the program teaches lessons. Confidence is a transitory thing. Apollo 13:

Fred Haise: Okay, Houston—

Jim Lovell: I believe we've had a problem here.

CAPCOM: Houston. Say again, please.

Jim Lovell: Houston, we've had a problem.

CAPCOM: Stand by, 13. We're looking at it.

Narrator: Three days out, barreling toward the Moon, an explosion. No one would see the problem for some time, but they went to work on it. The people of Apollo coalesced into a single dedicated unit, linked themselves with their technology, and cheated tragedy. A new chapter in space history was written in mission control. Eugene Kranz was the flight director when the problem developed.

Eugene Kranz: Throughout this entire next several days, there was one dominant thought in the minds of all of the flight controllers. We teach them that between God, country, and your own capability that you can solve any problem that may occur in flight. Throughout the entire course of Apollo 13 there was never any doubt that we'd get the crew back, so there a very positive approach, and with this kind of approach you can solve just about any problem that comes up.

Narrator: Solve any problem, country, capability – old-fashioned words during a time when some said the old-fashioned virtues were forgotten. Well, they weren't forgotten. They were translated into action, into programs which took man soaring above the surface of the Moon, away from Earth but always looking back on it. These divided thoughts – the Moon, the Earth – run through the Apollo program, a sort of theme. They went there flying in their graceful machines, but they always thought back to where they came from. Perhaps that's natural. The Moon is a strange place for men to be flying to.

If it's strange for men, for mankind, it's stranger still for the individual man. Harrison Schmitt, Dr. Harrison Schmitt, a geologist – he touched the Moon and remembers how it was. When Apollo 17 was making its descent, the last flight to the Moon, the last time that man walked on its surface, Schmitt remembers how it was.

Harrison Schmitt: One's first feelings are a mixture, a very complex mixture of humility, excitement because of something you had planned to do was being accomplished, but of a great attention to detail, to the detail that you had thought about and learned about for so many years prior to the actual event. That detail keeps you occupied with where your hands are and where your feet are, which rung they might be, you try to remember "Well, am I at the bottom of the rung?" And then, as one moves away and tests his way on the surface of the Moon, and looks around, and in my case looked around a very magnificent valley, you see a rolling, hilly country that is interspersed with some blocky fields of rocks that you know, because you've studied the photographs and you saw them as you descended, surround large craters that have been formed in that rolling countryside. These rolling dark hills merge in the distance, a few kilometers away, with the very smooth but very bright-colored slopes of the Massifs. And they rise with a majesty to rocky tops that are almost beyond description because there's nothing like it that we have seen on Earth.

Narrator: The Sea of Tranquility, Hadley Rille, Taurus-Littrow – they were once strange names on the map of the Moon, but the men of Apollo gave reality to the names by being there and showing us the places. They explored 60 miles of its surface and their travels took them to craters, foothills, to explore, to observe, and to sample. The hard rock proof of Apollo enshrined in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC: 478.8 grams of micro-breccia, under glass for

mere Earthlings to see and whisper about. Other rocks from the Moon, 840 pounds, are being studied and talked about by scientists in laboratories around the world. Not only rocks – tens of thousands of photographs of those strange, exotic features of the Moon and telemetry, data on tape, facts, figures. The studies will go on for years and the answers will come slowly, answers to questions about the Moon and the solar system. The science of Apollo is not merely concerned with samples from past milestones, yesterday's missions. In a special room in Houston, men sit at consoles and command instruments on the Moon to send them today's data, and they receive it today within eight seconds of the command.

Science, that's the key, and technology and something else. In the drama of the moment, few stop to think of the essential element, the one thing that made it happen. People came to this program, government people, university people, contractor people. They brought to Apollo skills and knowledge and determination. This source of human intellectual energy was marshaled, focused, challenged. What came out of the effort was not just a very successful program, but a rich national resource of vast proportions.

Crystals from the Moon, the symbols of the science of Apollo. Behind it, causing it, was the spirit of Apollo.

Harrison Schmitt: [Singing] I was strolling on the Moon one day –

Harrison Schmitt and Eugene Cernan: [Singing] – in the merry, merry month of –

Harrison Schmitt: – December.

Eugene Cernan: No, May!

Harrison Schmitt: [Singing] May.

Eugene Cernan: May's the month this year.

Harrison Schmitt: May – that's right.

Eugene Cernan: May is the year of the month.

Harrison Schmitt: [Singing] When much to my surprise, a pair of bonny eyes, be-doop de-doo de-doo –

John Young: That's the truth.

Charles Duke: Do that in West Texas and you get a rattlesnake.

Narrator: We saw something of this spirit. We shared in the adventure, the excitement, the euphoria of being there. We shared it with the men who bounced across the surface of the Moon.

Charles Duke: Look at the size of that biggie.

John Young: It is a biggie, isn't it?

Narrator: And the surprise of discovery. We were there too, all of us, watching, vicarious explorers.

CAPCOM: Press on for the big boulder.

Charles Duke: Okay. We're headed that way. You get the tongs, John?

John Young: Yep. I got them.

Charles Duke: I'll carry the rake. Look at the size of that rock!

John Young: Okay, we got it.

Charles Duke: I can't either

John Young: Okay, let's go on back.

Charles Duke: I am.

Narrator: And the meaning, the significance, of an occasion – that too came to us, flashed into our living rooms on our 19-inch window on the universe.

Eugene Cernan: [In background] *When we return this rock or some of the others like it to Houston, we'd like to share a piece of this rock with so many of the –*

– countries throughout the world. We hope that this will be a symbol of what our feelings are, what the feelings of the Apollo program are, and a symbol of mankind that we can live in peace and harmony in the future.

Narrator: There was also pride. They put up the flag and then posed for pictures as any visitor to a foreign place might do. The flag of each mission stood there, as a reminder that we had been there. But there was the realization that in truth it belonged to all the people. There are no boundaries on the Moon. The focus was the Moon, that's what it was all about. But by reaching up there we, in a sense, came back here.

Astronaut: As one stands and scans a 360 degree panorama of his own, one of the first objects in the dark lunar sky that you see is a bright and beautiful bluish globe that we call Earth. This globe represented, to all of us I think, not only home but a very fragile place that we have come back and felt it needed not only protection but understanding.

Narrator: They first went there in 1969. The last left there in late 1972. Between the beginning and the conclusion they came to feel, to dimly perceive, what it was all about, to come to a perspective on the meaning of it all. Poet Archibald MacLeish has said it better than most: "To see the Earth as it truly is, small and blue and beautiful in that eternal silence where it floats, is to see ourselves as riders on the Earth together, brothers who know now they are truly brothers."

The excitement of the mission, the tension and drama of the splashdown, they remain only in our memories. And in time they'll be replaced in the future by other missions, other memories. The moments of Apollo may be over but the understanding and the discovery, they go on. And the full meaning, the real meaning, may yet be in the future too. But for now, for the present, the images and the sounds provide meaning enough to each in his own way and to each in his own time.