



September 6, 2007

Astronauts recall time as men on the moon

By Traci Watson, USA TODAY

NEW YORK — The men who flew to the moon in the 1960s and '70s wasted little time then musing about the meaning of their historic adventures, let alone their own emotions. They were macho test pilots, and they had a job to do.

"The mind-set then was, 'How do we get to the moon?' " said Alan Bean, 75, who strolled on the lunar surface in 1969. "We weren't thinking about the philosophical things more than in passing."

Today the moonwalkers are in their 70s, and the passage of time has allowed them to mull over their feelings about the extraordinary things they did. Their memories and opinions have recently gained fresh relevance as NASA, at the direction of President Bush, works to send humans back to the moon by 2020.

Lately, the astronauts who flew the Apollo missions to the moon have been much in demand, this time by filmmakers. Two new documentaries capitalize on the willingness of the astronauts to wax poetic about their journeys — and to talk more candidly than they could when they made their flights.



Friday's release of a documentary film, *In the Shadow of the Moon*, brings together Apollo astronauts, from left to right, Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin, 77, Charles Duke, 71, Ed Mitchell, 76, Alan Bean, 75, and Harrison Schmidt, 72. "We never talked about anything that was going on in the rest of the world. We had tunnel vision," Duke says of those days.

Five of the astronauts who appear in the films gathered at a hotel here Wednesday to promote *In the Shadow of the Moon*, an audience award winner at the Sundance Film Festival, held in Park City, Utah.

In the Shadow of the Moon features eight of the 12 men who walked on the moon. Three others are dead, and the famously media-shy Neil Armstrong did not participate. Also featured are two men who circled the moon but didn't land there.

The documentary will be released Friday in New York and rolled out nationwide in coming weeks. The astronauts received no compensation, other than \$4,000 apiece for their expenses.

The other documentary, *The Wonder of It All*, includes all but one of the moonwalkers from the first film. It has been shown only at film festivals.

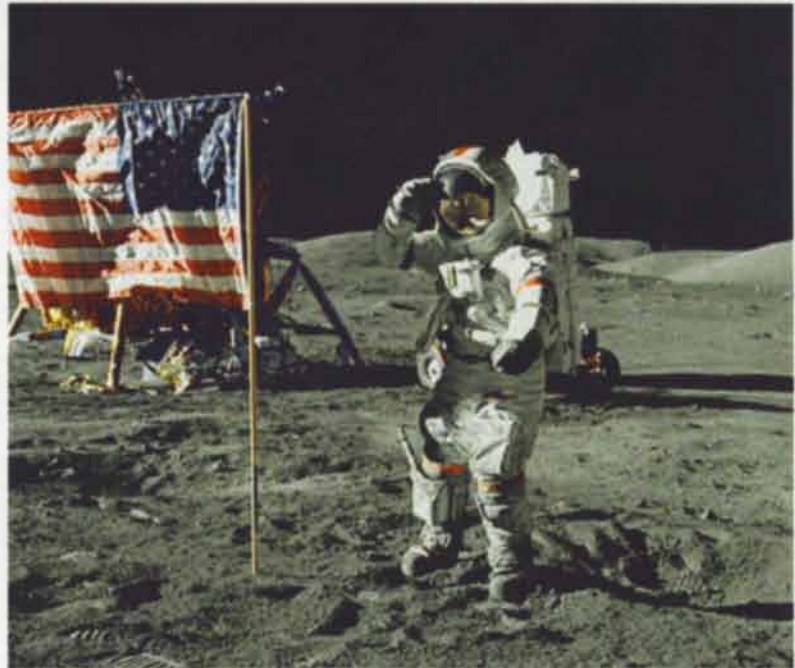
The surge of interest may be due in part to NASA's new lunar program, said Harrison Schmitt, 72, who in 1972 was the second-to-last man to walk on the moon.

"People have finally begun to spend some time thinking about what it was like to be on the moon," he says. "Apollo was a successful effort to go to the moon."

One of Schmitt's colleagues was less idealistic. Filmmakers realized "a part of history was about to pass them by," said Edgar Mitchell, 76, who spent 1½ days on the moon in 1971. "We're all in our 70s now — better grab us before we're gone."

Even for the participants, *Shadow* was a revelation. It was "very, very enjoyable ... for me to watch and to get to know the emotional side" of his colleagues' moon trips, says Charles Duke, 71, who walked on the moon in 1972.

Apollo 17 astronaut Captain Gene Cernan salutes the US flag on the surface of the moon in a NASA photo used to promote the motion picture "In the Shadow of the Moon." Cernan was commander of Apollo 17 and was the last man to walk on the moon. (Editors note: An earlier version of this story incorrectly identified the astronaut as John Young)



In conversations Wednesday, the astronauts talked about what it was like to compete in the Cold War's space race and visit the moon:

- Bean emphasized how engrossed the Apollo astronauts were in their work. "We never talked about anything that was going on in the rest of the world," he says. "We had tunnel vision. ... I found out about the '60s after the (Apollo) program was over, on the Discovery Channel."

- "I was in awe of the beauty, as Buzz (Aldrin) captured it, 'magnificent desolation,' " said Duke, referring to Aldrin's words in 1969 as the second man to set foot on the moon. "The only color is that lunar module. ... It's just fantastic!"

Aldrin, 77, interrupted Duke: "You guys had so much better scenery to look at, and more time to go out and monkey around. Three different times, you went outside."

- Though Mitchell walked on the moon, he had what he calls his "profound experience" on the way back. On his three-day return to Earth, he had little to do but look out the window. Mitchell says he got the "big-picture story" by "seeing the Earth in this tiny little perspective in the huge cosmos, and seeing its beauty. It's a little oasis in this vastness of space."

James Hansen, a space historian at Auburn University and Armstrong's biographer, says most of the astronauts from the Apollo era had a hard time articulating their feelings because they were trained as engineers and lapsed into technical speak when they discussed their missions.

Today's lunar astronauts are "half a lifetime at least away from (the Apollo) era," says Hansen. "They do have a lot more perspective. ... It does tend to bring out emotions in them."

Now, that perspective is also helping to shape the moon missions NASA hopes to launch in the coming decade. Schmitt is chairman of NASA's advisory council, which examines the space agency's activities, including the lunar campaign. Duke was a consultant to Lockheed Martin while it drew up the first design of the ship that will carry astronauts back to the moon.

Aldrin serves no formal role but proffers his advice — such as having an odd number of crewmembers for long flights, so there's never a tie vote in an argument. He says it's better than being a paid consultant. "A consultant is somebody who tells the customers what they want to hear," he says. "I don't tell them what they want to hear."