

Aldrin Visits USS Hornet on Apollo 11 Anniversary



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ALAMEDA, Calif. - Astronaut and second man on the moon, Buzz Aldrin appeared aboard the USS Hornet (CVS 12) - now a museum - as part of the famous aircraft carrier's Splashdown 2009 celebration held July 23-26. The event commemorated the 40th anniversary of Apollo 11's mission to the moon and the Hornet's role in the recovery of the Apollo astronauts from the Pacific Ocean.

The event featured a display of the old space suit similar to the astronauts would have worn, a replica of the command module "Columbia" - which held the crew of the Apollo as they splashed down into the Pacific Ocean - and a key note speech from Aldrin.

"The Hornet means something to my youth, I appreciate what the Hornet has done, and I can assure you that this occasion will be well remembered on this 40th Anniversary," Aldrin began in his speech.

The former astronaut was also there to promote the release of his new novel, "Magnificent Desolation." In his book, he annotates his life leading up to the Apollo 11 mission, and the trials and tribulations - including alcoholism - he faced long after the mission ended. The title comes from the famous phrase Aldrin uttered when he walked out onto the surface of the moon 40 years ago.

Aldrin's stepdaughter, Lisa Cannon, acted as moderator during his keynote speech and asked her step father how he came up with that famous phrase.

"When you listen to the radio transmissions from the Apollo 11 mission, you'll hear the word 'magnificent' by itself," he said, "and you'll hear the word 'beautiful,' and somehow that triggered something in my mind, and I choose to use the words 'magnificent desolation.'"

The members of the Apollo 11 recovery team also made an appearance at Splashdown 2009, and gave their accounts of what it was like to serve on the Hornet and be a part of the team that were the first to make contact with the men from the moon back in 1969.

"Prior to them landing, we had gone through this drill 15 times before," said Bill Wasson, a former Navy Seal, and member of the Apollo 11 recovery team to Military.com.

"It was special, but they were completed isolated afterwards."

Wasson was the first recovery team member to reach the capsule and help the astronauts into the hoist that pulled them up to the SH-3 helicopter hovering overhead. Once the astronauts reached the Hornet they were put in quarantine because NASA scientists feared that they might spread Moon-based pathogens. It was during this lockdown that President Richard Nixon, along with several members of the news media, came to congratulate the Apollo 11 crew.

Four decades after that landmark event, Aldrin wants to make space exploration more accessible through Share Space - a non-profit organization designed to share the wonders of space with children of all ages, and make space travel affordable for all.

"The future of our industry depends on our kids K-12 being inspired. We are behind in our education system and I intend to help. We need to have the inspiration that was there in the 60s and 70s of achievements, space aeronautics, and we can do that in the coming decades."

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