



# 'One Small Step for Man:' Apollo 11 And the 1st Moon Landing

MARIO RITTER: Welcome to EXPLORATIONS in VOA Special English. We continue our history of the American space program with the flight of Apollo Eleven. We also remember Neil Armstrong, the first man to set foot on the moon. He died on August twenty-fifth.

Today, Shirley Griffith and Steve Ember tell how America met its goal of placing astronauts on our only natural satellite by the end of the nineteen sixties.

(SOUND)

STEVE EMBER: A rocket launch countdown. A common sound in the nineteen sixties. But this was not just another launch. It was the beginning of a historic event. It was the countdown for Apollo Eleven -- the space flight that would carry men to the first landing on the moon.

(SOUND)

The ground shook at Cape Kennedy, Florida, the morning of July sixteenth, nineteen sixty-nine. The huge Saturn Five rocket moved slowly up into the sky. It rose perfectly. Someone on the launch crew spoke the words: "Good luck. And Godspeed."

In the spacecraft at the top of the speeding rocket were three American astronauts whose names soon would be known around the world: Neil Armstrong, Edwin Aldrin and Michael Collins.

Neil Armstrong was the commander of the spacecraft. He was a test pilot. He had flown earlier on one of the two-man Gemini space flights. Armstrong was a calm person, a man who talked very little.

Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin was pilot of the moon lander vehicle. The astronauts gave it the name Eagle. Aldrin had flown on the last of the Gemini flights. He also was a quiet man, except when he talked about space.

Michael Collins was the pilot of the command module vehicle, Columbia. He also

had made a Gemini flight. He would wait in orbit around the moon while Armstrong and Aldrin landed and explored the surface. Collins was very popular and always ready with a smile.

SHIRLEY GRIFFITH: Two-and-one-half minutes after the Apollo Eleven launch, the first-stage rocket separated from the spacecraft. Twelve minutes later, the spacecraft reached orbit. Its speed was twenty-nine thousand kilometers an hour. Its orbit was one hundred sixty-five kilometers above the Earth.

This was the time for the crew to test all the spacecraft systems. Everything worked perfectly. So, the NASA flight director told them they were "go" for the moon. They fired the third-stage rocket. It increased the speed of the spacecraft to forty thousand kilometers an hour. This was fast enough to escape the pull of the Earth's gravity.

Apollo Eleven was on its way to the moon. In seventy-seven hours, if all went well, Apollo Eleven would be there.

(MUSIC)

STEVE EMBER: Halfway to the moon, the astronauts broadcast a color television program to Earth.

The broadcast showed how the astronauts lived on the spacecraft. It showed their instruments, food storage, and details of how they moved and worked without gravity to give them weight.

The television broadcast also showed the Earth behind Apollo Eleven. And it showed the moon growing larger in the blackness ahead. As hours passed, the pull of the moon's gravity grew stronger. Near the moon, the astronauts fired rockets to slow the spacecraft enough to put it into moon orbit.

SHIRLEY GRIFFITH: Apollo Eleven circled the moon while the crew prepared for the landing. Finally, spacecraft commander Armstrong and NASA flight controllers agreed it was time to separate the lander module Eagle from the command module Columbia.

Armstrong and Aldrin moved through the small opening between the two spacecraft. Then they moved Eagle away from Columbia. Armstrong reported: "The Eagle has wings!" The lunar module was ready. Men were about to land on the moon.

On Earth, all activity seemed to stop. President Richard Nixon gave federal government workers the day off to watch the moon landing on television. Around

the world, five hundred million people watched the television report. Countless millions more listened on their radios.

STEVE EMBER: Armstrong and Aldrin fired the lander rocket engine. The firing slowed the spacecraft and sent it down toward the landing place. It was in an area known as the Sea of Tranquility.

The lunar lander, controlled by a computer, dropped toward the airless surface of the moon. One hundred forty meters from the surface, the astronauts took control of the lander from the computer. They moved Eagle forward, away from a very rocky area that might have caused a difficult landing.

The voices of Aldrin and Armstrong could be heard in short messages.

EDWIN ALDRIN: "Forward. Forward. Good. Forty feet. Down two and a half. Kicking up some dust. Thirty feet. Two and a half down. Faint shadow. Four forward. Four forward. Drifting to the right a little. OK. Down a half.

MISSION CONTROL: "Thirty seconds ..."

NEIL ARMSTRONG: "Forward drift?"

EDWIN ALDRIN: "Contact light. OK. Engine stop. "

Armstrong reported:

NEIL ARMSTRONG: "Tranquility Base here. The Eagle has landed."

SHIRLEY GRIFFITH: NASA's plan had called for the astronauts to test instruments, eat and then rest for four hours before leaving the Eagle. But Armstrong and Aldrin asked to cancel the four-hour sleep period. They wanted to go out onto the moon as soon as they could get ready. NASA controllers agreed.

It took the astronauts more than three hours to complete the preparations for leaving the lander. It was difficult -- in Eagle's small space -- to get into space suits that would protect them on the moon's surface.

STEVE EMBER: Finally, Armstrong and Aldrin were ready. They opened the door. Armstrong went out first and moved slowly down the ladder. At two hours fifty-six Greenwich Mean Time on July twentieth, nineteen sixty-nine, Neil Armstrong put his foot on the moon.

NEIL ARMSTRONG: "That's one small step for man; one giant leap for mankind."

The world could see the history-making event on television. But the man who was closest to what was happening, Michael Collins, could only listen. He was orbiting the moon in the command module Columbia. It did not have a television receiver.

SHIRLEY GRIFFITH: Armstrong moved carefully away from the Eagle. He left the cold, black shadow of the lander and stepped into the blinding white light of the sun. On Earth, all was quiet. No sound came from televisions or radios. No one felt able to talk about what was happening.

Armstrong began to describe what he saw: "The surface appears to be very, very fine grain, like a powder. I can kick it loosely with my toes. I can see footprints of my boots in the small, fine particles. No trouble to walk around."

STEVE EMBER: Aldrin appeared on the ladder. Down he came, very slowly. Soon, both men were busy placing experiments to be left behind on the moon. They collected more than thirty kilograms of rock and soil to take back to Earth. They moved easily and quickly, because the moon's gravity is six times less than Earth's.

Hours passed. Too soon, it was time to return to the Eagle. Armstrong and Aldrin re-entered the lander. They rested for a while. Then they began to prepare to launch the lander for the return flight to the orbiting command module.

SHIRLEY GRIFFITH: Listeners on Earth heard the countdown from Tranquility Base: "Three, two, one ... first stage engine on ascent. Proceed. Beautiful. Twenty-six ... thirty-six feet per second up. Very smooth, very quiet ride." Eagle was flying. Man had been on the moon for twenty-one and one-half hours.

Eagle moved into the orbit of the command module. It connected with Columbia. Armstrong and Aldrin rejoined Collins in the command ship. They separated from Eagle and said good-bye to it. The lander had done its job well.

(MUSIC)

STEVE EMBER: Eight days after it started its voyage to the moon, Apollo Eleven splashed down in the Pacific Ocean. Left behind on the moon were the footprints of Armstrong and Aldrin, an American flag and scientific equipment. Also left forever on the moon is a sign with these words:

"Here men from the planet Earth first set foot on the Moon -- July, nineteen sixty-nine A. D. We came in peace for all mankind. "

(MUSIC)

MARIO RITTER: Our program was written by Marilyn Rice Christiano. Shirley Griffith and Steve Ember were our announcers. I'm Mario Ritter. Join us again next week when we continue the story of the Apollo space flight program on EXPLORATIONS in VOA Special English.