

Co-op relives day with Neil Armstrong

Visit with Armstrong, Young and Runco makes for memorable experience

By Nicholas Saadah

When I started my first tour as a co-op at JSC last fall, I knew I was in for the experience of a lifetime, but nothing could have prepared me for what happened one Monday in late June. What started as a normal day of sims and display modifications ended with a ride aboard the Shuttle Motion Simulator while Apollo 11 Commander Neil Armstrong and JSC Associate Director (Technical) and Astronaut John Young flew simulated approaches to the Kennedy Space Center. Needless to say, it was an experience I will never forget.

I first met Armstrong earlier that day in the viewing room of the Mission Control Center. I introduced myself and explained that I was a co-op from Purdue University, his alma mater. I found Armstrong to be as personable and friendly a person as I have ever met. Standing there, speaking about the Purdue women's basketball team and its recent accomplishments, one would never guess that this man was the first to walk on the moon. He had come to JSC to appear on Italian television via satellite and was to be interviewed in front of Mission Control.

After lunch, I gave Armstrong a tour of the White and Blue Flight Control Rooms which he had never seen. Astronaut Mario Runco Jr., three-time shuttle flier and lead capcom for STS-93, joined us as we took Armstrong in and out of the various control rooms, much to the



JSC Associate Director (Technical) John Young, left, co-op student Nicholas Saadah, Apollo 11 Commander Neil Armstrong, and Astronaut Mario Runco share memories of the nation's space program.

delight of everyone there to see him. He asked many questions about the space shuttle and mission operations and was fascinated to know how they worked. Listening to him speak about the differences between Apollo and the space shuttle further made me realize how very much this organization has advanced in the last 30 years, and indeed how much it continues to advance.

When we arrived in the Blue FCR, Runco began to tell Armstrong how he had watched the moon landings with wide

eyes and decided he wanted to be an astronaut. The irony of the situation became clear. Here I was, looking up to people like Runco, hoping to someday accomplish what he had accomplished, just as he had looked up to Armstrong years ago. It was then that Runco asked Armstrong if he had ever flown the shuttle simulator before. When Armstrong responded that he hadn't, Runco scheduled a sim and invited me along.

So, at the end of a long and exciting day, I found myself sitting in the fifth seat

inside the SMS while Armstrong and Young flew two approaches. This was the most incredible part of the day, not because I was inside the SMS, not because I was in the presence of three astronauts, but because I was getting the world's most exciting history lesson.

I listened as Armstrong and Young, two of the space program's most famous and decorated, reminisced on the days of Apollo. Runco, the Public Affairs Office escort, and I could only sit and listen as these two Apollo commanders relived those miraculous days of 30 years ago.

As I listened to them laugh and share memories, it took everything within me to remain composed. This was history; this is what NASA and America's commitment to the exploration of space is all about. It was an aural masterpiece, flowing from the mouths of these two incredible individuals, and incredible friends.

Young pointed to the switches on the center console. "These are original Apollo switches," he explained. "They weigh a pound and a half each, but Deke [Slayton] wasn't about to let us throw these away." As we approached the runway, Young coached Armstrong down the path. "Doin' fine, Neil. Ffly the needles, just like in the old LM. This is a Delta wing. Just hold it in ground effect and it'll come down nice and soft." Armstrong put it down softly and made a perfect landing... once again. ■

Employees line up to meet the 'Last Man on the Moon'



“Here Man completed his first exploration of the Moon, December 1972 A.D. May the spirit of peace in which we came be reflected in the lives of all mankind.”

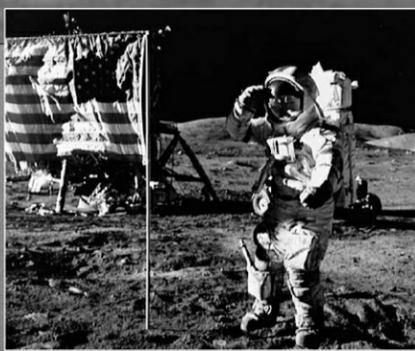
—Apollo 17

All available copies sold out when employees lined up July 14 in the Bldg. 3 cafeteria to get an autographed copy of Apollo Astronaut Gene Cernan's book, "Last Man on the Moon." Employees received a free autographed photo of Cernan with each book purchased from the JSC Exchange Store, which hosted the book signing.

Cernan, 65, last man to walk on the moon, was commander of Apollo 17. He and fellow crewmembers Ronald Evans and Harrison Schmitt journeyed to the moon and back in December 1972. While Evans circled in "America," Schmitt and Cernan collected a record 108.86 kilograms of rocks during three moon walks.

Schmitt and Cernan roamed 33.80 kilometers through the Taurus-Littrow Valley in their rover, discovered orange-colored soil, and left behind a plaque attached to their lander "Challenger," which read: "Here Man completed his first exploration of the Moon, December 1972 A.D. May the spirit of peace in which we came be reflected in the lives of all mankind." The Apollo lunar program had ended.

Earlier in the Apollo program, Cernan descended to within nine miles of the moon's surface on Apollo 10 in May 1969. Cernan also flew as pilot of Gemini 9 in June 1966. ■



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