

## WALTER CRONKITE – IMAGE #1

In July 1969, a program begun by President John Kennedy reached its goal – putting a man on the moon. He had been keen on space exploration from the beginning of his presidency. The American effort to send astronauts to the moon had its origins in a famous appeal by President Kennedy made to a special joint session of Congress on May 25, 1961, in which he proposed that the nation commit itself to landing a man on the moon within the decade and returning him safely to Earth. The Soviets had already beaten the United States into space with the 1961 flight of cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin. At the time of Kennedy's speech the United States was still trailing the Soviet Union in space exploration, and many Cold War-era Americans welcomed Kennedy's bold proposal.

Capitalizing on America's fascination with space, Kennedy persuaded Congress to increase funding for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). This enabled the United States to pull ahead of the Soviet Union. NASA's overall human spaceflight efforts were guided by Kennedy's speech. Projects Mercury (at least in its latter stages), Gemini, and Apollo were designed to achieve his goal. In 1966, after five years of work by an international team of scientists and engineers, NASA conducted the first unmanned Apollo mission, testing the structural integrity of the proposed launch vehicle and spacecraft combination. Then on January 27, 1967, tragedy struck at Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida, when a fire broke out during a manned launch-pad test of the Apollo spacecraft and *Saturn* rocket. Three astronauts were killed in the fire.

Despite the setback, NASA and its thousands of employees forged ahead. In October 1968 *Apollo 7*, the first manned Apollo mission, orbited Earth and successfully tested many of the sophisticated systems needed to conduct a moon journey and landing. In December of that same year *Apollo 8* took three astronauts to the dark side of the moon and back. In March 1969 *Apollo 9* tested the lunar module for the first time while in orbit around Earth. Then in May 1969 the three astronauts of *Apollo 10* took the first complete Apollo spacecraft around the moon in a dry run for the scheduled July landing mission. With the world watching on July 16 *Apollo 11* took off from Kennedy Space Center with astronauts Neil Armstrong, Air Force Colonel Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin, Jr., and Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Michael Collins aboard. Armstrong, a 38-year-old civilian research pilot, was the commander of the mission. After traveling 240,000 miles in 76 hours, *Apollo 11* entered into a lunar orbit on July 19. The next day, at 1:46 p.m. EDT the lunar module *Eagle*, manned by Armstrong and Aldrin, separated from the command module, where Collins remained. Two hours later, the *Eagle* began its descent to the lunar surface, and at 4:18 p.m. EDT the craft touched down on the southwestern edge of the Sea of Tranquility. Armstrong immediately radioed to Mission Control in Houston, Texas, a famous message: "The *Eagle* has landed."

At 10:39 p.m., five hours ahead of the original schedule, Armstrong opened the hatch of the lunar module. As he made his way down the lunar module's ladder, a television camera attached to the craft recorded his progress and beamed the signal back to Earth, where

people watched with great anticipation. President Kennedy's ambition was realized on July 20, 1969, at 10:56 p.m. EDT, when American astronaut Neil Armstrong, 240,000 miles from Earth, spoke these words to more than a billion people listening at home: "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." Stepping off the lunar module *Eagle*, Armstrong became the first human to walk on the surface of the moon.

"Buzz" Aldrin joined him on the gray, powdery surface of the moon at 11:11 p.m. EDT. Together they took photographs of the terrain, planted a U.S. flag, ran a few simple scientific tests, and spoke with President Richard Nixon via Houston. By 1:11 a.m. EDT on July 21, both astronauts were back in the lunar module, and the hatch was closed. The two men slept that night on the surface of the moon. At 1:54 p.m. EDT the *Eagle* began its ascent back to the command module. Among the items left on the surface of the moon was a plaque that read: "Here men from the planet Earth first set foot on the moon – July 1969 A.D. – We came in peace for all mankind."

At 5:35 p.m. EDT Armstrong and Aldrin successfully docked and rejoined Collins. At 12:56 a.m. EDT on July 22 *Columbia* began its journey home, safely splashing down in the Pacific Ocean at 12:51 p.m. EDT on July 24. *Apollo 11* was a stunning success for NASA and the United States.

There would be five more successful lunar landing missions and one unplanned lunar swing-by – *Apollo 13*. The last men to walk on the moon, astronauts Eugene Cernan and Harrison Schmitt of the *Apollo 17* mission, left the lunar surface on December 14, 1972. The Apollo program was a costly and labor intensive endeavor, involving an estimated 400,000 engineers, technicians, and scientists. It cost \$24 billion (close to \$100 billion in today's dollars). The expense was justified by President Kennedy's 1961 mandate to beat the Soviets to the moon. After the feat was accomplished, ongoing missions lost their viability.