



## Neil Armstrong Has Lewis Ties

"I've wanted to be an NACA test pilot all my life."

So spoke Astronaut Neil Armstrong, command pilot of the March 16 abbreviated Gemini 8 mission, during an interview at Purdue University in 1955 with Bob Graham of Lewis' Chemistry and Energy Conversion Division.

"I was so impressed with his sincerity," recalls Dr. Graham, "that we hired him immediately."

Armstrong's career at Lewis as an aeronautical research pilot was short-lived, however, as he transferred within a year to the NASA

Flight Research Center in California. Eventually, he was assigned as one of the prime pilots in the X-15 research program.

Thus, in addition to being America's first civilian astronaut in space, he is also the first to have flown both in space and in the rocket-powered X-15 aircraft.

For his work with the X-15, he received the IAS Octave Chanute Award in 1962. He is a senior member of AIAA and a member of the Experimental Test Pilots Assn.

# Speakers' Corner

# Moonman started at Lewis

by

*Dr. Robert W. Graham*

(Ed. note: Dr. Graham, head of the Experimental Heat Transfer Section, Physics and Chemistry Division, was a personnel recruiter for NACA/NASA until 1959. This article gives his reflections of an interview with Purdue University senior Neil Armstrong in 1955).

If I had been asked, ten years ago at the completion of my recruiting assignment for NACA/NASA, which college student had impressed me the most in my interview with him, I would have unhesitatingly answered "Neil Armstrong."

Armstrong made a direct request as he opened the interview at Purdue University in 1955 by saying that he had always wanted to become a NACA test pilot. This handsome, clean-

cut young college

senior was articulate and self assured. His ambition was backed up by the fact that he learned to fly at the age of 16. I asked him what experience he had and he modestly stated that he had over 1,000 hours of experience flying high-speed jet aircraft with the U.S. Navy. He entered college at Purdue after his military service because he knew that a prerequisite for test pilot status was a degree in engineering.



**DR. GRAHAM**

In encouraging Armstrong to join the NACA ranks, I talked to him about the prospects in high-speed sub-orbital flight which was currently under study. Also, just a year before, the X-15 program had been approved, and we talked of the possibility that he might find an opening at Edwards Flight Research Center for test pilot training.

Armstrong's interest in flying was very great, and he said he would be willing to hire on in any capacity that might lead him to test pilot training. NACA salary offers in 1955 were not too competitive, and we were emphasizing the fringe benefits and advanced education assistance for applicants. Yet not once in this interview did Armstrong mention salary. His career flying interest seemed to overshadow all other considerations.

I was so impressed by the qualifications and determination of this young man that at the close of the interview I assured him that he would receive an offer from Lewis or Edwards. Lewis did accept Armstrong as a member of its flight crew in February, 1955 and a few months later he transferred to Edwards Flight Research Center in California.

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Editor .....

# Apollo 11 mission...

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## Recalling the recruitment of Neil Armstrong for Lewis

BY DR. ROBERT W. GRAHAM



DR. ROBERT W. GRAHAM

In the early 1950's, I was involved in the Center's recruitment efforts at Purdue University and the University of Illinois. In 1955, Bill McCann (now retired) and I visited these universities. On this particular trip, the recruitment office requested that we try to interview candidates who would qualify as test pilots for the upcoming X15 experimental rocket powered plane.

At Purdue, a young man came in who said, that in addition to his aeronautical degree, he had 1500 hours of jet experience as a pilot with the Navy. Not only were these credentials impressive to me because of the need for a qualified test pilot, but I was impressed by his quiet, assured manner. He said that his life-time ambition was to be a NACA test pilot and all

he wanted to know was how he could become involved in such a program. Frankly, I was so taken back by his qualifications and by his approach that I hardly knew what to say at first. Obviously, he was a real 'find' and so I told him with considerable enthusiasm that he would have no difficulty beginning in such a test pilot program with NACA.

Even though I could not anticipate what would eventually happen to this person in his career, this particular interview always stood out in my mind as one of the most memorable that I ever conducted in the recruiting program. Frequently, in talks that I had to give to young people in schools, I cited this experience as an example of a young person who was completing his education and knew exactly what he wanted to do. It was also significant to observe that Neil Armstrong was not interested in the kind of salary offer NACA could make. He was primarily interested in the kind of challenge that a test pilot position would offer.

When I returned to Cleveland with the interview form in which I recommended that Neil Armstrong be hired by our agency, his qualifications made a great impression on the management here. Irving Pinkel, who was then the Division Chief in charge of flight operations at Lewis, decided that he should go to Purdue and give

Armstrong the official offer in person.

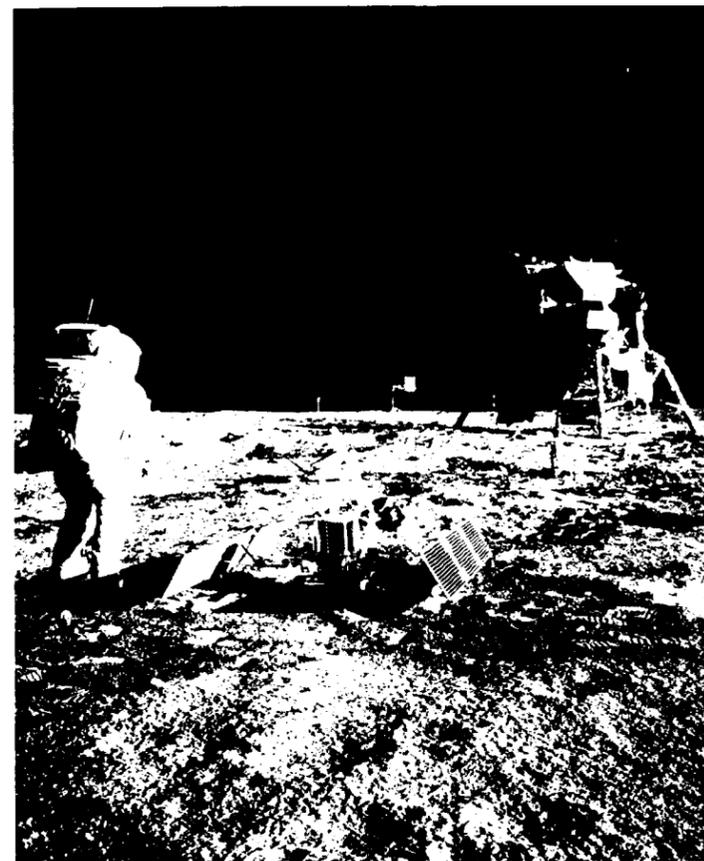
After I found out that NACA had hired him, I was very interested in following his career. He spent a short time here at Lewis and then was given the opportunity to become a part of the X15 program at Edwards Airforce Base in California. I noted that he later flew the X15 in some of its record-making flight missions. Next, I became aware that he had applied for the astronaut program and soon was assigned as one of the Gemini mission pilots. From that particular program, he went on to the Apollo program. Then, as we all know, he was selected to be the Commander of the historic Apollo 11 mission, the first flight to the moon.

I have had the thrilling experience of talking with him twice since the moon landing; once here in Cleveland at the Lewis Center and the second time in New York City at a meeting of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, where he received a medal for his space exploits.

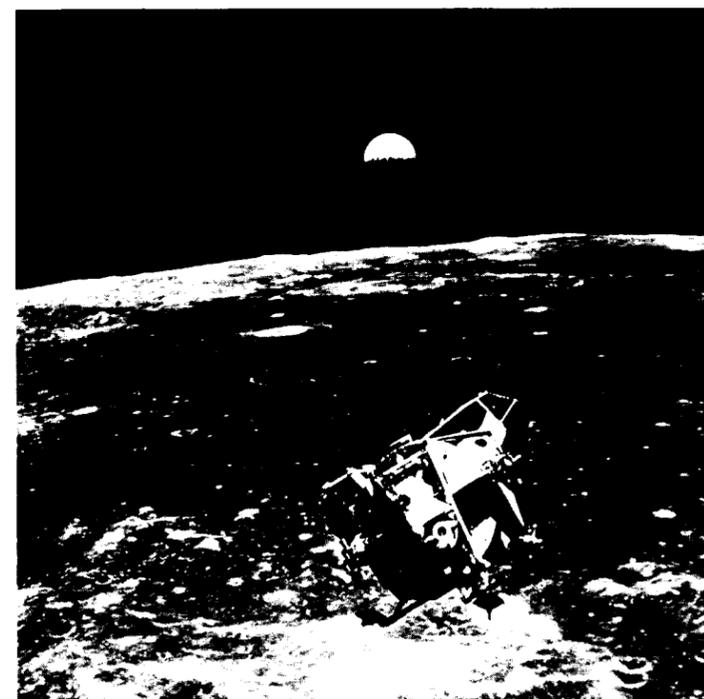
During the live television broadcast of the Apollo 11 moon landing, I felt a strong personal identification with the mission. Fourteen years earlier, I wouldn't have imagined that a young Purdue graduate being interviewed would become the first man to set foot on the moon.



Astronaut Edwin E. Aldrin, lunar module pilot, walks near the lunar module during Apollo 11 extra vehicular activity.



Astronaut Aldrin performs activities on the Moon.



Lunar module ascent stage photographed from the command service module.

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