

FLIGHT

*MY LIFE IN
MISSION
CONTROL*

CHRIS KRAFT

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4:00 A.M. now came to the next moment of truth at 9:30 P.M. Lunney gave the go for cabin depressurization. Bruce McCandless, now Capcom, passed the approval and we watched our displays as *Eagle's* atmosphere evacuated to the moon.

I thought back to the intense and private discussions we'd had about who should be the first man on the moon. In all the early flight plans and timelines, it was the lunar module pilot. Buzz Aldrin desperately wanted that honor and wasn't quiet in letting it be known. Neil Armstrong said nothing. It wasn't his nature to push himself into any spotlight. If the spotlight came, so be it. Otherwise, he was much like Bob Gilruth, content to do the job and then go home.

I thought about it. The first man on the moon would be a legend, an American hero beyond Lucky Lindbergh, beyond any soldier or politician or inventor. It should be Neil Armstrong. I brought my ideas to Deke, and then to George Low. They thought so, too.

So now we were in another Gilruth-Low-Kraft-Slayton meeting, talking it through from every angle. Not once did anyone criticize Buzz for his strongly held positions or for his ambition. The unspoken feeling was that we admired him and that we wanted people to speak their mind. But did we

think Buzz was the man who would be our best representative to the world, the man who would be legend?

We didn't. We had two men to choose from, and Neil Armstrong, reticent, soft-spoken, and heroic, was our only choice. It was unanimous. Bob Gilruth passed our decision to George Mueller and Sam Phillips, and Deke told the crew. Buzz Aldrin was crushed, but took it like a stoic. Neil Armstrong accepted his role with neither gloating nor surprise. He was the commander, and perhaps it should always have been the commander's assignment to go first onto the moon.

There was an engineering side to it all that we hadn't considered. I thought of it while Buzz took a couple of tries to get *Eagle's* hatch open. When he did, it blocked Aldrin's position. The only way for him to be first out would have been to switch places with Neil hours earlier, before they put on their space suits. It was a small thing now. Our decision was based on other things.

Every eye within view of a television set anywhere in the world watched. Neil wasn't visible yet, but he was pulling a D ring to open a panel in *Eagle's* side and release that black-and-white television camera. There was fuzz and snow on the screen. Then there was Neil Armstrong.