

Astronauts recall where they were for 1969 landing

By Mark Pattison
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Kevin Chilton remembers where he was when Neil Armstrong and Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin landed on the moon July 20, 1969. So does Sid Gutierrez. And Tom Jones, too.

The three Catholics astronauts in the U.S. space program, know exactly where they were and what they were doing 25 years ago.

So too, perhaps, do many Americans, but for these three the excitement of the Apollo XI moon landing only rocket-fueled their drive to become astronauts.

Jones, 39, said in a telephone interview with Catholic News Service from the Johnson Space Center in Houston that he was with his parents on a cross-country trip from their Baltimore home to California.

"We were reading newspapers" during the trip, Jones said. "We'd brought a portable radio to listen to the landing on the radio. I had been following the space program for five, six years, putting clippings in a scrapbook, building models and so on.

"We were on the road, but my parents knew how important it was to me. We had been camping every night, but we pulled into a motel, because they had a TV, for just that night ... I just stayed glued to it until it was over."

Jones said seeing the astronauts was "quite striking to me. I wanted to learn the things it took to be one."

Gutierrez, now 43, already had the moon on his mind when he was accepted into the Air Force Academy. As a cadet in the summer of '69, he arrived for basic training and the hazing given new students at the military academies.

The training regimen would last from before sunup to after sundown — except on July 20, 1969. Gutierrez and his fellow "dooleys," as they were dubbed by upperclassmen, were in the middle of an exercise as the Eagle, the lunar module piloted by Armstrong, was approaching the moon.

"They stopped training long enough to march us into a room and had us stand at attention watching it on TV," Gutierrez recalled. After Armstrong uttered the now-famous words — "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind" — "it was back to work again," Gutierrez said.

"I just remember being in front of the TV, watching. The memories are black and white because the images were black and white," said Chilton. He recalled being at the home of good friends of his parents in Portuguese Bend, Calif.

"I remember exactly," he said, adding that he was 14 at the time.

"As a boy, I wanted to be a pilot," said Chilton. When he was a freshman at St. Bernard High School in Playa del Rey, Calif., near Los Angeles International Airport, "the jets used to fly by every hour," he said. "I can remember when the first 747 took off. We all went to the windows, much to the surprise of our Spanish teacher."

Chilton got a coveted spot at the Air Force Academy and "fell in love" with

Pilot

Continued from page 1
and Space Administration space-shuttle mission.

Collins is now locked into intense training at NASA's Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center in Houston, preparing for an eight-day mission on the shuttle which is scheduled to take flight in January, 1995. An astronaut since 1991, Collins is anxious to finally embark upon the journey for which she has prepared so long.

"It's very hard to be patient. I've been here four years, and I'm ready to go," Collins remarked with the exuberance of a high-school girl looking forward to prom night.

Collins is one of only about 20 female astronauts in the United States. For the January mission she will pilot a shuttle crew of six other astronauts, marking the first time in the NASA space-shuttle program's 15-year history that a woman will lead a mission.

Collins' educational journey to NASA began at the former St. Patrick's School in her home parish of St. Patrick's Church in Elmira. She later graduated from Elmira Free Academy before receiving an associate's degree from Corning Community College and a bachelor's in mathematics and economics from Syracuse University.

She went on to earn a master's degree in operations research from Stanford University in 1986, and another master's in space-systems management from Webster University in 1989. Collins graduated from the Air Force Test Pilot School in 1990, the same year she was selected by NASA for the astronaut program.

During her career, Collins has logged more than 4,000 hours in 30 different types of aircraft.

Married since 1987 to Pat Youngs, a commercial pilot for Delta Airlines, Collins acknowledges that some people are initially surprised to discover that she doesn't attempt to act like "one of the guys."

"A woman in a man's job does not have to be like a man," she emphasized. "You can be very feminine."

On a humorous note, Collins noted that co-workers have remarked to her on how much the language has cleaned up among her male colleagues since she arrived at NASA.

Collins, who enjoys speaking at schools when she can find the time, said she instructs youths not

engineering. "As a test pilot, I found out you could do both" flying and engineering, Chilton said.

When he inquired about the space program, "they were glad to see that I had such varied experience," said Chilton, 39.

Maybe it was in the stars back then for Chilton, Gutierrez and Jones that one day as astronauts they would take part in the same space mission. In April they were all aboard a space shuttle launch.

Chilton, the commander, remembers a Sunday morning in space when the sun rose. Not like any sunrise on Earth.

"It reminded me of what the Transfiguration must have been like," he said. "It was the brightest, whitest light I'd ever seen."

Chilton, a eucharistic minister at St. Bernadette Parish in Houston, had

brought Communion for his fellow Catholic astronauts to share.

"Just as we were receiving the host, the sun was emerging with a big shaft of light," Jones said. "I was lying on the floor" of the cramped space shuttle at the time, he added.

"It was kind of neat to have all three of us on the same flight," said Gutierrez, who is leaving the space program and Houston in August to move with his wife and children to a civilian job in his hometown of Albuquerque, N.M.

But what Gutierrez finds especially touching was that Jones' pastor, Father John Kappe of St. Clare of Assisi Parish in Houston, came to the space center on Easter and celebrated Mass for the three of them while they were under quarantine as a flight precaution.

"I missed Easter the normal way,"

to conform to stereotypes but "to be yourself." She added that she is hoping to make a series of appearances in the Elmira area sometime next year after she returns home from her mission.

Another message Collins stresses with the general public is the ultimate good that NASA programs such as the space shuttle can offer.

"The space program provides a tremendous return on investment for your tax dollars," she said, referring to extra jobs that are created and the increased motivation of young people to study math and science.

International relations are also improving through space travel, she said. "We're starting to work with Russia, and we used to be Cold War enemies," Collins said.

A primary example of this emerging relationship will occur on Collins' upcoming shuttle mission when crew members will become the first flight to rendezvous with the Russian space station, MIR.

Another highlight of this shuttle will be the deployment and retrieval of Spartan 204, a satellite which studies solar wind and physics.

In the meantime, Collins is staying extremely occupied with a myriad of preparation drills for the shuttle, often spending up to 16 hours per day in training. She has only been allowed to grant two personal interviews per week with media members, and beginning this week, that schedule will be reduced to press conferences except in special circumstances.

When asked what her daily training agenda currently involves, Collins replied with a laugh, "There is no typical day here."

In addition to running test launches in a shuttle simulator, many of Collins' current duties involve emergency procedures she will hopefully never need to use. However, "I need to know the shuttle inside and outside," she said.

She has also been polishing her non-aeronautical skills such as first aid and photography.

"I feel almost like a professional photographer," she remarked.

Collins' survival training course also included this simulated parachute-aided escape from a jet aircraft.

Gutierrez said with a laugh.

Jones is going up again this month to continue the work of life science and radar topography experiments performed in the April shuttle launch.

He said he is asked often about how his feelings about God have changed after being in space.

"Faith is a source of strength," Jones said. "You and your family undergo a bit of stress in the training for a mission. You have a little opportunity in the launch pad to say some prayers. And you're aware of a lot of people rooting for you and praying for you."

After being in space, "you look at the wonder of creation," he said. "It's just another confirmation that you're made in God's image. What in our brain can appreciate that beauty? ... It's just another confirmation of God's presence."

