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NASA/Associated Press

Neil Armstrong, photographed inside the lander after the moonwalk on July 20, 1969. [More Photos »](#)

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Neil Armstrong, a quiet, self-described nerdy engineer who became a global hero when he made “one giant leap for mankind” with a small step on to the [moon](#), died Saturday. He was 82.



The front page of The New York Times from July 21, 1969.

Mr. Armstrong died after complications from cardiovascular procedures, according to a statement from his family. The statement did not say where he died. He lived in Cincinnati.

Mr. Armstrong commanded the Apollo 11 spacecraft that landed on the moon on July 20, 1969, capping the most daring of the 20th century's scientific expeditions. His first words after setting foot on the surface are etched in history books and the memories of those who heard them in a live broadcast.

“That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind,” [Mr. Armstrong said](#).

In those first moments on the moon, during the climax of the heated space race with the Soviet Union, Mr. Armstrong stopped in what he called “a tender moment” and left a patch commemorating [NASA](#) astronauts and Soviet cosmonauts who had died in action.

“It was special and memorable, but it was only instantaneous because there was work to do,” he told an Australian television interviewer in 2012.

Mr. Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin, who was known as Buzz, spent nearly three hours walking on the lunar surface, collecting samples, conducting experiments and taking photographs.

The moonwalk marked America’s victory in the cold war space race that began on Oct. 4, 1957, with the launching of the Soviet Union’s Sputnik 1, a 184-pound satellite that sent shock waves around the world.

Although he had been a Navy fighter pilot, a test pilot for NASA’s forerunner and an astronaut, Mr. Armstrong never allowed himself to be caught up in the celebrity and glamour of the space program.

“I am, and ever will be, a white socks, pocket protector, nerdy engineer,” he said in February 2000 in a rare public appearance. “And I take a substantial amount of pride in the accomplishments of my profession.”

A man who kept away from cameras, Mr. Armstrong went public in 2010 with his concerns about President Obama’s space policy that shifted attention away from a return to the moon and emphasized private companies developing spaceships.

He testified before Congress, and in an e-mail to The Associated Press, Mr. Armstrong said he had “substantial reservations,” and along with more than two dozen Apollo-era veterans, he signed a letter calling the plan a “misguided proposal that forces NASA out of human space operations for the foreseeable future.”

When he appeared in Dayton, Ohio, in 2003 to help celebrate the 100th anniversary of powered flight, he bounded onto a stage. But he spoke for only a few seconds, did not mention the moon and quickly ducked out of the spotlight.

He later joined the former astronaut and senator John Glenn to lay wreaths on the graves of Wilbur and Orville Wright. Mr. Glenn introduced Mr. Armstrong and noted it was 34 years to the day of the moon walk.

“Thank you, John. Thirty-four years?” Armstrong quipped, as if he had not given it a thought.

Mr. Armstrong’s moonwalk capped a series of accomplishments that included piloting the X-15 rocket plane and making the first space docking during the Gemini 8 mission, which included a successful emergency splashdown.

In the years afterward, he retreated to the quiet of the classroom and his southwest Ohio farm. Mr. Aldrin said in his book “Men from [Earth](#)” that Mr. Armstrong was one of the quietest, most private men he had ever met.

Derek Elliott, curator of the Smithsonian Institution’s U.S. Air and Space Museum from 1982 to 1992, said the moonwalk probably marked the high point of space exploration.

The manned lunar landing was a boon to the prestige of the United States and re-established its pre-eminence in science and technology, Mr. Elliott said.

“The fact that we were able to see it and be a part of it means that we are in our own way witnesses to history,” he said.

The 1969 landing met an audacious deadline that President John F. Kennedy had set in May 1961, shortly after Alan Shepard became the first American in space with a 15-minute suborbital flight. The Soviet cosmonaut Yuri A. Gagarin had orbited the Earth and beaten the United States into space the previous month.

“I believe this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before the decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to Earth,” the president had said. “No single space project in this period will be more impressive to mankind, or more important to the long-range exploration of space; and none will be so difficult or expensive to accomplish.”

The goal was met with more than five months to spare. “Houston: Tranquility Base here,” Mr. Armstrong radioed after the spacecraft settled onto the moon. “The Eagle has landed.”

“Roger, Tranquility,” the Houston staff member radioed back. “We copy you on the ground. You’ve got a bunch of guys about to turn blue. We’re breathing again. Thanks a lot.”

The third astronaut on the mission, Michael Collins, circled the moon in the mother ship Columbia 60 miles overhead. In all, 12 American astronauts walked on the moon from 1969 and the last moon mission in 1972.

Neil Alden Armstrong was born Aug. 5, 1930, on a farm near Wapakoneta in western Ohio. He took his first airplane ride at age 6 and developed a fascination with aviation that prompted him to build model airplanes and conduct experiments in a homemade wind tunnel.

As a boy, he worked at a pharmacy and took flying lessons. He was licensed to fly at 16, before he got his driver’s license.

He enrolled in Purdue University to study aeronautical engineering but was called to duty with the Navy in 1949 and flew 78 combat missions in Korea.

After the war, Mr. Armstrong finished his degree from Purdue and later earned a master's degree in aerospace engineering from the University of Southern California. He became a test pilot with what evolved into the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, flying more than 200 kinds of aircraft from gliders to jets.

Mr. Armstrong was accepted into NASA's second astronaut class in 1962 — the first, including Mr. Glenn, was chosen in 1959 — and commanded the Gemini 8 mission in 1966. After the first space docking, he brought the capsule back in an emergency landing in the Pacific Ocean when a wildly firing thruster kicked it out of orbit.

He was backup commander for the historic Apollo 8 mission at Christmastime in 1968. In that flight, Cmdr. Frank Borman, Jim Lovell and Bill Anders circled the moon 10 times, paving the way for the lunar landing seven months later.

An estimated 600 million people — a fifth of the world's population — watched and listened to the landing, the largest audience for any single event in history.

Parents huddled with their children in front of the family television, mesmerized by what they were witnessing. Farmers abandoned their nightly milking duties, and motorists pulled off the highway and checked into motels just to see the moonwalk.

Campers in California ran to their cars to catch the word on the radio. Boy Scouts at a camp in Michigan watched on a generator-powered television supplied by a parent.

Afterward, people walked out of their homes and gazed at the moon, in awe of what they had just seen. Others peeked through telescopes in hopes of spotting the astronauts.

The three astronauts were given ticker-tape parades in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles and later made a 22-nation world tour. A homecoming for Mr. Armstrong in Wapakoneta drew 50,000 people to the city of 9,000.

In 1970, he was appointed deputy associate administrator for aeronautics at NASA but left the next year to teach aerospace engineering at the University of Cincinnati.

He remained there until 1979 and during that time bought a 310-acre farm near Lebanon, where he raised cattle and corn. He stayed out of public view, accepting few requests for interviews or speeches.

From 1982 to 1992, Mr. Armstrong was chairman of Computing Technologies for Aviation, a company in Charlottesville, Va., that supplies computer information management systems for business aircraft.

He then became chairman of AIL Systems Inc., an electronic systems company in Deer Park, N.Y.

He married Carol Knight in 1999, and had two sons from a previous marriage.

Those who knew him said he enjoyed golfing with friends, was active in the local YMCA and frequently ate lunch at the same restaurant.

In February 2000, when he agreed to announce the top [20 engineering achievements of the 20th century as voted by the National Academy of Engineering](#), Mr. Armstrong said there was one disappointment relating to his moonwalk.

“I can honestly say — and it’s a big surprise to me — that I have never had a dream about being on the moon,” he said.

