



# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of NEIL A. ARMSTRONG

August 5, 1930 – August 25, 2012



Written by NASA (n.d), AMA staff (01/1998, 11/2012); Transcribed by JS (09/2006),  
Updated and/or reformatted by JS (10/2007, 08/2012, 01/2013, 03/2018)

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*The following was printed in the January 1998 issue of Model Aviation magazine. Neil was inducted into the Model Aviation Hall of Fame in 1997.*

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## Neil Armstrong

**The Academy** enjoyed an unexpected visit during the Celebration of Eagles by Neil, a longtime modeler and friend of aviation. Throughout the day, he chatted with the pioneers of modeling, helped a youngster trim a Free Flight model, and in general, recalled the days that planted the seed in his life for a career that helped shape a new frontier in aviation.

Acting within the rules governing the election to the Model Aviation Hall of Fame, Cliff Weirick, a committee member, nominated Mr. Armstrong for this award. The committee decided unanimously to approve this action.

In recognition of Mr. Armstrong's significant contributions to model aviation as an aeromodeler and role model specifically, and to aviation advancement in general, it is a distinct honor for the Academy to induct Mr. Neil Armstrong in the Model Aviation Hall of Fame.

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*The following was printed in the November 2012 issue of Model Aviation magazine, in the In the Air section, after Neil's passing.*

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## Neil Armstrong

There is little proof of his last confirmed visit to AMA Headquarters in Muncie, Indiana. He didn't sign the banner for the event, he dodged cameras trying to snap photos of him, and he wore sunglasses and a white hat to hide his face.

To those who couldn't make the connection, he looked like an average modeler – taking photos of the event and enjoying a casual day of flying. That's how he wanted it. That's how the first man who walked on the moon lived most of his life.

Retired astronaut and aeromodeler, Neil Armstrong, passed away on August 25, 2012, at the age of 82, from complications from his heart surgery. His last confirmed visit to the International Aeromodeling Center was for the AMA's Celebration of Eagles, held July 6 and 7, 1996.

“I went over to him and introduced myself. We shook hands; we spoke,” Norm Rosenstock, AMA Historian, said of meeting Neil at the 1996 event. Norm said Neil came to the event with members of a CL group to which he belonged. Neil lived near Cincinnati, Ohio.

“A guy was taking photos of the event, and whenever he took photos, [Neil] hid,” Norm added.

In a photo taken at the event and published in the November 1996 issue of *MA*, Neil was identified as “former Purdue aeromodeler Neil Armstrong.” There was no mention of his historic 1969 walk on the moon.

Dave Thornburg, who wrote that article, said he remembers seeing the retired astronaut at the event, but never approached him. “He was just mobbed every time I saw him.

“He was a very quiet, typical pilot... withdrawn.” Dave added.

“He did kind of hide from the limelight a bit,” said retired astronaut and AMA Ambassador Robert “Hoot” Gibson, who knew Neil for more than 30 years.

Neil was nominated for and inducted into the Model Aviation Hall of Fame after he attended the 1996 event. Cliff Weirick, who nominated him, had this to say about Neil’s presence:

“The Academy enjoyed an unexpected visit during the Celebration of Eagles by Neil, a longtime modeler and friend of aviation. Throughout the day, he chatted with the pioneers of modeling, helped a youngster trim a FF model, and in general, recalled the days that planted the seed in his life for a career that helped shape a new frontier in aviation.”

This wasn’t the first time Neil had been to an AMA event. Through his research, Dave learned that Neil was part of the U.S. Navy team at the 1949 CL Speed Nats and attended the 1962 Nats. He also attended several Nats held at AMA Headquarters in Muncie, said Bob Underwood, former AMA technical director and executive director.

“He wouldn’t necessarily announce himself at events,” Bob said. “He was a very, very private person. He would show up and help people with their Free Flight models during the Free Flight Nats. He was frequently at the Nats but people didn’t recognize him.” Bob, who worked for AMA from 1985 until approximately 2001, said he would sometimes hear of Neil’s visits after the fact.

Ron Morgan, who retired this year after more than 50 years as a Nats volunteer, confirmed that Neil occasionally attended the Nats in the 1970s. He said the retired astronaut was known to watch more than just the FF Nats.

It is believed that Neil was once an AMA member, but there are no membership records prior to 1974. Neil is not in the current membership database.

However, according to the June 1984 issue of *MA*, Neil was a member of the Purdue Aeromodelers club and flew in model aircraft competitions between 1946 through 1950. Neil’s model aviation experience is believed to have shaped his future as a naval aviator and astronaut.

Hoot knew Neil more as an astronaut than an aeromodeler. Neil began training Hoot to become a National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) astronaut in 1978. They remained friends throughout the years.

“He wasn’t just the first man to set foot on the moon. He was a gifted test pilot, an accomplished pilot. He had a personality that I couldn’t picture anyone not liking him. You had to love the guy,” Hoot said of his friend.

To read more of Hoot Gibson’s recollections of this shy man and the astronaut who made a giant leap for mankind,” visit <http://www.modelaviation.com/neilarmstrong>.

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*The following is bonus online content for the November 2012 issue of Model Aviation, posted in 2012 on the web at <http://www.modelaviation.com/neilarmstrong>, written by Rachelle Haughn.*

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Neil Armstrong was a private person. He didn’t like interviews, he avoided cameras, and he didn’t want any special recognition for his famous walk on the moon. Few people had the opportunity to get to know him personally. One who did is retired astronaut and AMA Ambassador Robert “Hoot” Gibson.

The retired astronauts had known each other for more than 30 years. “He had a personality that I couldn’t picture anyone not liking him,” Hoot said. Neil and Hoot clearly had a love for anything that flew. Both had retired from the Navy, and for both, their interest in full-scale aviation began with aeromodeling.

Hoot first met Neil in 1978, shortly after he began training at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to become an astronaut. “We had most of the former astronauts come back to brief us,” Hoot said. Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin and Michael Collins also discussed their experiences with the astronauts. Neil, Buzz, and Michael made up the crew of Apollo 11. Buzz and Neil became the first men to set foot on the moon on July 20, 1969.

That wasn’t Hoot’s only encounter with the man who tended to shy away from the public eye. “Gee, over the years I’ve seen [Neil] a number of times,” Hoot said. When reflecting on Neil’s passing, he had some good memories to share. One of those memories wasn’t related to space exploration.

Hoot, who competes at the annual Reno Air Races, held in Reno, Nevada, said Neil often attended the event and made sure to see Hoot’s airplanes and say hello. “He was just a really, really nice guy,” Hoot said. He said he believes the National Aviation Heritage Trophy, awarded during the event to pilots who restore vintage aircraft, will be renamed in Neil’s honor.

Hoot is an ambassador for the National Aviation Heritage Invitational, which awards the trophy. Neil presented the trophy to the winners at the 2006 Reno Air Races and the 2003 Dayton Air Races.

The two also once found themselves sharing close quarters.

In the early 1990s, Neil hosted a television show called First Flights. It aired on A&E. Neil asked Hoot to be part of an episode called "Rocket Pilots," Hoot said. The episode was filmed at Edwards Air Force Base in Edwards, California, which is where some of the NASA space shuttles landed when returning from orbit.

The television crew filmed Neil riding alongside Hoot in a shuttle training aircraft. Hoot said that Neil quizzed him and gave him tips on climbing up to altitude, landing, etc. during the flight.

"He wasn't just the first man to set foot on the moon. He was a gifted test pilot, an accomplished pilot," Hoot said. He believes he still has that episode on video tape.

Last summer, Hoot saw Neil at a convention held in Atlanta. Neil was there for a ceremony, Hoot said. "He was just walking around and looking at airplanes. There were no name tags, so most of these people didn't know who he was.

"He did kind of hide from the limelight a bit," Hoot added.

Although Neil didn't like to be recognized, he felt it was important to recognize others.

In early 2011, Neil spoke at the Space Camp Hall of Fame induction ceremony, Hoot said. "What a gifted speaker. How clever, how insightful he was. He just had everything wrapped up in one package," he said. Hoot was inducted into the Space Camp Hall of Fame this year.

Hoot clearly was affected by Neil's August 25 death. He said he was at his home in Tennessee when he overheard of his friend's death on the news.

His last memory of Neil is one that he will always treasure.

In April of this year, Hoot was inducted into The Golden Eagles, an organization for naval aviators. He said Neil attended the ceremony.

"Six people were inducted. After we had all been introduced, a whole bunch of people came up to me. Neil gave me a great big hug" and introduced his wife, Carol. Hoot said he was expecting merely a handshake. "Neil saw it fit to give me a big hug the last time I saw him." Hoot said he will never forget his last memory of Neil.

He plans to attend a tree-planting ceremony held in memory of Neil at the Johnson Space Center in late 2012. Hoot added that he likely would contribute if a scholarship were created in memory of Neil.

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*The following biography is from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration website, accessed September 26, 2006. The material below is in the public domain.  
(See: <http://www.jsc.nasa.gov/Bios/htmlbios/armstrong-na.html>).*

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**NEIL A. ARMSTRONG**  
**NASA ASTRONAUT (FORMER)**

**PERSONAL DATA:** Born August 5, 1930 in Wapakoneta, Ohio. Married. Two sons.

**EDUCATION:** Bachelor of Science degree in aeronautical engineering from Purdue University; Master of Science degree in aerospace engineering from University of Southern California. He holds honorary doctorates from a number of universities.

**SPECIAL HONORS:** He is the recipient of many special honors, including the Presidential Medal for Freedom in 1969; the Robert H. Goddard Memorial Trophy in 1970; the Robert J. Collier Trophy in 1969; and the Congressional Space Medal of Honor, 1978.

**EXPERIENCE:** From 1949 to 1952, he served as a naval aviator; he flew 78 combat missions during the Korean War. During 1971-1979, Armstrong was professor of aerospace engineering at the University of Cincinnati, where he was involved in both teaching and research. Currently serves as Chairman, AIL Systems, Inc. Deer Park, N.Y.



**NASA EXPERIENCE:** Armstrong joined NACA, (National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics), NASA's predecessor, as a research pilot at the Lewis Laboratory in Cleveland and later transferred to the NACA High Speed Flight Station at Edwards AFB, California. He was a project pilot on many pioneering high-speed aircraft, including the 4,000 mph X-15. He has flown over 200 different models of aircraft, including jets, rockets, helicopters, and gliders.

In 1962, Armstrong was transferred to astronaut status. He served as command pilot for the Gemini 8 mission, launched March 16, 1966, and performed the first successful docking of two vehicles in space.

In 1969, Armstrong was commander of Apollo 11, the first manned lunar landing mission, and gained the distinction of being the first man to land a craft on the Moon and the first man to step on its surface.

Armstrong subsequently held the position of Deputy Associate Administrator for Aeronautics, NASA Headquarters Office of Advanced Research and Technology, from 1970 to 1971. He resigned from NASA in 1971.

-DECEMBER 1993 (This is the only version available from NASA. Updates must be sought direct from the above named individual.)

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NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION  
MANNED SPACECRAFT CENTER  
HOUSTON, TEXAS 77058

IN REPLY REFER TO: CB

Mr. John Worth  
Executive Director  
Academy of Model Aeronautics  
1239 Vermont Avenue  
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear Mr. Worth:

The following are the answers to the questions in your letter of 10 April:

1. I flew in model aircraft competitions during the years 1946-1950.
2. I was a member of the U. S. Navy team at the 1949 Nationals (control-line, speed), but was not a winner.
3. I was an AMA member for a number of years in the 40's, but do not have the dates.
4. My model building and flying activities significantly contributed to my interest in aeronautics and was a primary force in directing my education toward aeronautical engineering.

I was honorary control director at the 1964 Nationals at Dallas and also 3 or 4 years earlier at Glenview while I was in the X-15 program.

I look forward to seeing you at the Collier event.

Best wishes,

  
Neil A. Armstrong

*The above letter, sent to John Worth (while he was AMA Executive Director) from Neil Armstrong, appeared in the AMA publication Getting and Keeping Flying Sites.*



*1964: Neil at the Glenview, IL Naval Air Station, talking with model airplane contestants at the National Model Airplane Championships, or “Nats.” (Official Photograph of the U.S. Navy, #0001 AMA Collection, National Model Aviation Museum)*

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