

## **Time Bullet: Apollo 11, unchained ...**

by Daniel J. Sullivan

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### **The Space Explorers Conference: July 17, 1995**

“Wake up, nearing the parking zone ...”

The computer onboard Neil's flying car notified him that they were near their destination, the Houston Space Explorers Conference – one of the most popular conferences in the Free Nations of the Americas (the Free Nations comprising the Native Peoples Alliance, the frontiers, the original colonies, and Texas). Neil, who was nearly 65 years old, had been up the previous night, with friends from his old days, drinking whiskey and playing cards. His last health check-up had him at “43 years of age” in terms of physical age, but he knew that was meaningless after 15 shots of Glenmorangie (scotch). He believes the number was 15, perhaps 20 shots ...

“Mr. Armstrong, you will need to be awake during the landing process.”

“Judy”, the AI running his flying car, had done all the driving.

Despite the fact that flying cars had been available, in use, for 10 years, without incident, it was still the policy of many building owners and parking lots to require at least one occupant to “be awake” during landing. Yet Neil, no novice when it came to the vagaries of automated control and avionics, wondered why she had to wake him - “come on, the gizmo works”, he thought.

Neil could give the AI/Pilot of his car any name he wanted when he bought it ... he decided to name it after a troublesome girlfriend he'd had, a long time ago, Judy “X” (last name omitted to protect the innocent).

“Jesus Judy, can you shut the fuck up?”

“Sir, this building's owner requires one person, meaning human, to be awake during landing ...”

“Yes ... ok.”

Neil wiped the sleep from his eyes, it was late morning and Judy had already prepared a cup of coffee, waiting, hot ... with an English muffin. His, Neil's, 1992 Cadillac HGX, with onboard pilot AI (Judy), was capable of traveling 600 miles without refueling and at an efficiency cruising speed of 250 MPH - it was a flying car of the highest quality. His friends had loaded his semi-conscious body into his car, sometime late the previous night – perhaps 11 PM, probably later. It was now nearing 11 AM – Neil was supposed to speak in an hour.

Neil Armstrong never had a reputation as a “big drinker”, he wasn't sure why he'd had so much the previous night. He was, by his nature, a private person, not quite a hermit but not nearly as gregarious

as “BUZZ”. Buzz, or Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin, was almost annoyingly upbeat (something Neil remembers from Apollo 11).

“Sir, do I have your permission to land the car?”

“Yes, fuck ...”

The conference was being held at the space commerce center – a building, paid for, by the voluntary donations of all members of the Houston Space Society. Members of the HSS had been, since the Apollo Foundation missions, on the cutting edge of space travel. It was their work that enabled the Moon missions, and it was the success of Apollo that allowed for the concomitant largess, wealth.

In the years since Apollo, the free and prosperous peoples of the “Confederation” (as they sometimes called it) had expanded the human footprint to Mars, and were, recently, on the verge of even greater journeys, innovations – possibly to a nearby star. Cassidy Aerospace, owned by one of the first people to orbit Mars, and first woman to do so, was the principal sponsor of this year's conference – and for good reason ...

Nancy Cassidy, who had been inspired while still in high school by the acts of men like Neil Armstrong, was one of the richest people in the world – worth nearly 20,000 tons of gold. She had pioneered the field of plasma-ion drives, hybrid drives capable of both high-exhaust velocity and mass produced for acceleration. Simply put: she had reinvented the ion drive, and then provided it with “kick”. She studied, while at MIT, the works of T. Townsend Brown. Only recently it had been revealed, officially, that the Apollo 11 mission used a version of the *Townsend-Drive* to both shield itself while traversing the Van Allen belts and to boost acceleration, velocity, and control during the missions. Nancy, as so many space enthusiasts, suspected Brown's influence – but the Apollo Foundation, the organization which organized the Moon exploration, had kept this information secret for 20 years.

Nancy was also of the “first peoples”, she was of their nation, Cherokee sub-nation, an organization that had managed to do what no other indigenous peoples had done before – negotiate a truce, and an agreement, with an expanding European colonial power. American history is impossible to imagine without this agreement, and what it did to enable one of the greatest economic expansions in human history.

Neil had met Nancy once, and he was quite impressed – more geek than him, less annoying in her optimism than “Buzz”, a true entrepreneur and adventurer. Nancy was, like Neil, an inhabitant of N. America that personified the essential free spirit that was American – since the attempted coup of 1787, that failed, being “American” meant not simply valuing human liberty, but also being very sceptical of government in any form. The nation had been founded, during and after the Revolutionary Wars, on the notion of liberty above all else. In 1787, when George Washington, and a few Prussians, tried to seize power – they were quickly defeated and those that were not killed were sent, by ship, back to Europe.

“Sir, we're parked ...”

Neil wasn't looking forward to this ...

He didn't hate giving speeches or answering questions, but he did hate the constant “what were you feeling” questions – the truth was far too simple for people to understand: during that precious short time, he was mostly focused on keeping himself, and his team, alive. He was focused on the mission, and obsessive about it. He simply didn't have a lot of time to dwell on his feelings.

“What was I feeling”, Neil muttered, as he walked toward the main hall ...

He answered, to himself, “I was scared, nervous, nauseous, and too busy to think about it!”.

July 1969, those were strange days ... and a different world.

**“Neil, we have a problem ...” : July the 20<sup>th</sup>, 1969**

“Houston, we are coming up on LEM detachment and descent, over.”

“Neil, you look good for detachment and descent ... over.”

Neil was nervous ...

Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin had a reputation for too much self-confidence. This wasn't a bad thing, in a pilot, but it was frustrating for Neil. The LEM detached from the command module, leaving Michael Collins alone, for almost a day, until the LEM ascent 21 hours later. The LEM was nothing more than an extremely well-equipped, pressurized, aluminum balloon with a basic landing system. Edwin, or “Buzz”, was well aware of how “improvisational” this all was ... and how dangerous.

“Buzz, you're going to need to use some delta-v to adjust your descent velocity, over.”

“Mission control, this is not behaving like the simulator ... over.”

“No, we suspected that Buzz, over.”

Buzz had only ever used the simulator. The “trainer” amounted to a platform housing 2 turbine engines, vertically mounted, and it had almost killed Neil Armstrong during training. After the incident with the “trainer”, NASA had decided that all further preparation would be done with the simulator – a device which had many defects, and an impossible to evaluate “realism”.

“Buzz, are you listening?”, Neil asked abruptly.

“Jesus Neil, I'm focused ... shut up for a bit ...”

At that moment, the command module, being piloted by Michael Collins, experienced a radiation alarm ...

“Mission control, this is Columbia, we just detected a radiation spike, over ...”

There was silence, from Houston, for about 30 seconds ...

“Michael ... our SOL-45 satellite ... well, it has detected what appears to be a particle release event from the surface of the Sun ... it was damaged ... we're unclear what is coming your way, over ...”

Of course, this was one the worst case scenarios: an ejection of charged particles, from the Sun, or solar-flare in the path of the mission.

All of the astronauts had trained on the dangers of radiation during space flight. The 45 minutes plus it took to travel through the Van Allen belts was very sketchy – their alarm had gone off 3 times during that. Now, to receive another warning, in lunar orbit? - this was not just a little concerning, this could be life or death.

“Buzz, Neil ... this is Columbia, over?”

“Yes Columbia, over?”, Neil barked back, they were, he and Buzz, intensely in the moment with the maneuvers for landing the LEM ...

“Neil, we have a problem ... Houston let us know that some amount of ...”, there was a loud buzz over their comms, and then silence.

Buzz, who was intensely focused on landing the LEM, was barely aware of the conversation happening around him ...

“Neil, what the fuck is he talking about?”

“I don't know, he was cut off ...”

Neil waited for a call-back from Michael, and then, moments later ...

“Eagle, this is Houston, the command module has been destroyed ... at this time we have no idea if you are in the shadow of the Moon, in some way, and are being blocked or protected from the radiation storm or flare ... we suggest that you continue with the landing maneuver, and then contact us once you land ... over.”

The astronauts were trained to behave in disciplined ways under very difficult conditions – this was one of them. Neil and Buzz both knew this was it – a death sentence. Even if they managed to land the LEM, it wouldn't matter ... after about a day, maybe 2, they would both be dead, forever, on the surface of the moon. Of course, they discussed trying to “escape moon orbit” with just the LEM during wargaming, and scenarios training, but no one had a plausible scheme by which this could work. Not to mention the fact that the LEM, supposing it could travel back to Earth, had no heat shield and would burn up quickly in the atmosphere of the Earth.

Neil was commander, and he needed to keep Buzz focused.

“Buzz ... BUZZ! ... you listen ... you have a job to do, at this moment, ONE JOB TO DO: solve this problem ... get us on the moon safely ... we'll worry about solving the other problems once we're down.”

“Alright Neil ...”

The “Eagle”, what the lunar excursion module, or LEM, was called, was 1,000 meters above the lunar surface, when every light, indicator, dial, went black. The main engine cut off, and the LEM began falling towards the lunar surface, faster and faster.

“Jesus Neil, I've got no stick ... no control.”

Neil didn't have ideas, thankfully, for him, the situation was no longer under his control.

What Neil, Johnson Space Center's Mission Control, and Buzz didn't realize was this: the Sun had not experienced a coronal mass ejection, it had, in fact, experienced a collision with a very small black hole. As a result, the black hole, with a mass no greater than the Moon (but infinitesimally small in size), had passed through the Sun and passed near the LEM, very closely, at nearly the speed of light.

The LEM shook, and then, without explanation, the LEM began tumbling, uncontrollably.

Neil and Buzz were both knocked out, from concussions and the strange and rapid accelerations and decelerations. Neil didn't remember much of those minutes – was it only a minute, was it 5 minutes, he didn't know. When he woke up, he simply had a smiling Buzz, with his swagger returned, standing over him from inside the LEM.

“Neil ... shit ... you're not going to fucking believe this ...”

Neil didn't.

### **The “Landing”**

“Neil, you're not going to believe this ... I think we've landed back on Earth, near an undeveloped part of Jones Beach State Park ... crazy ... we're only a few miles from New York City ...”

Buzz had recovered from the “event” first – to find the LEM damaged, but on the ground, and not the lunar surface.

Neil and Buzz looked outside the crew porticoes with amazement ...

They saw green, and light, and mist, and what appeared to be a N. American deciduous forest surrounding the LEM. The LEM had a tilt, as if one of the LEM's landing pads had been damaged or was sticking in a hole. After the shock wore off, Neil and Buzz formulated a plan and decided, after 30 minutes, to open up the main door on the LEM and to journey outside.

Neil thought it was appropriate to take off the excursion suits, and to dress down to their basic uniform.

They walked, outside, for a number of hours – not seeing many signs of people. And then, suddenly, they came across a man leading his horse with a wagon – dressed in 18<sup>th</sup> century colonial fashion.

“Good sirs, are you well?”, the man asked.

“We're doing very well Sir, do you know the way to New York City?”

“Yes, Sir, I'm going that way myself! ... have to stop in Elizabethtown too ... I'm Horace Mann ...”

Neil and Buzz wandered with this man for several hours. Passing villages, and people, and wondering ... to each other and themselves ... if they had died or if they were somehow on a different planet.

There were no cars, no telephone poles, no ... well nothing.

They had to take a small ferry to reach NYC, and then, eventually, wandered over to Elizabethtown, NJ. Neil and Buzz didn't believe it when they saw the “Big Apple”, like a shrunken head version of itself, so they continued with Horace along the way to Elizabeth, NJ.

Elizabethtown was filled with activity.

There was commotion in the streets, a great deal of it – it was May 10, 1775.

A loyalist to the crown, Myles Cooper, had just finished giving an impassioned speech for restraint and mediation. The colonies were on the verge of insurrection ...

“Neil, if this is all for show, like some Soviet Psychological camp ... hell, they're trying too hard ...”

“I'd say the same ...”, Neil was circumspect.

Alexander Hamilton was there, that day, protecting President Cooper, the president of the college, from attack ... Alexander and Myles were well aware that things were getting serious, out of control. The crowd wanted blood, and the blood of Myles Cooper would suit just fine.

Neil and Buzz were still dressed in what looked like long-underwear to some, and strange clothing to all – many suspected they were British and began throwing rotten food at them as well ...

“Neil, I think we need to get out of here!”

Neither Neil nor Buzz could be aware, but a young Alexander Hamilton was moving their way, through the crowd, with Myles Cooper in tow, only a few feet away.

“Sirs, I don't know from where you come, but would you help me and my companion?”

Alexander thought they, the astronauts, looked Prussian, perhaps soldiers during rest, and hoped they would help.

Buzz said, “Sure, let me help the old man ...”, the old man comment offended President Myles, but he was happy to get the help ...

“YOU FISH-WIFE!”, and with that scream one of the blustering rabblers pulled a hand-held flint-lock pistol out, and attempted to shoot President Cooper.

Buzz, having more courage than insight, pushed the man with the musket to the ground – and at that moment the pistol discharged ... missing Myles and hitting the young Alexander Hamilton, a critical figure in the Constitutional Convention of 1787.

When the musket went off, the crowd began to scatter – not simply for fear of being shot, but they knew the noise would bring the British army regulars.

A frightened boy, a young Alexander Hamilton, lay there, bleeding out, writhing, from a gut wound ... a very painful way to die ...

“Sirs, can I pardon to ask your names before I pass?”

“I'm Neil, and he's Buzz ...”

“Where are you from?”

Neil didn't know what to say ... so he made something up.

“We're sailors, in port ...”

“Then please, dear sirs, let my classmates and those that wish to know, know this ... I fight to protect the innocent, and I tried to protect this man from the angry crowd ... I sought only ...”, and in that moment, as Alexander Hamilton was giving his final speech, his body gave out ... Alexander Hamilton was dead, at 18 years of age ...

Buzz and Neil didn't know what to do, it was impossible for them to know what had happened. To them, they had merely interacted with some strangers during a riot ... many years later, they would grok out the truth of it ...

Buzz and Neil, after Alexander had passed, also made their way out of the crowds ... down to the docks.

They were able to work a few hours to earn enough to buy appropriate clothes – to fit in. They spent days arguing about what had happened - “where they were?”, or, more frighteningly, “when”.

After many months had passed, they assumed that “wherever” they were, it didn't really matter ...

They were alive ...

They found lives, wives, and lived on the frontiers, in where Kentucky is today, for the rest of their days ...

They did not participate in the *Revolutionary War*, nor did they speak out against it – keeping as low a profile as possible. Buzz became a school teacher, and Neil, who had always enjoyed wood working, opened a furniture store. They lived to see the “Coup of 1787” (the attempt to overthrow the Articles of Confederation by George Washington), they lived to see the “great peace” of 1805 between the native

peoples, and the “Confederation” - native Americans would have their lands, own their lands, for good, period. They lived long enough to see, emerging, a different version of American history – and they didn't hate it, it was reassuring ... as if maybe they hadn't “fucked shit up” after all ...

They lived their lives, Buzz and Neil, and history forgot about them ... or at least their reality, which would likely never occur now.

Buzz died in 1810 ...

Neil died one year later.

### **The other “Neil's” Speech**

Neil, the Neil Armstrong that was born in 1930 on this other timeline, knew nothing of his “parallel self” - he knew nothing of that strange flight, of the United States of America and its constitution, of World War 1 or 2. This Neil had been born into an America that valued, above ALL THINGS, LIBERTY! - and he likely took this for granted, not knowing the tyranny that existed, just a few wrong choices away ...

Neil participated in the round table, and then, at closing, he gave his speech, and he ended it this way:

“Folks ... we went to the Moon, under the auspices of the *Apollo Foundation*, to do one thing – to prove, to the world, that it could be done! Like so many adventurers, businessmen, scientists, artists and thinkers before us, we attempted to break the mold of human ignorance, and to illuminate a different world, beyond this Earth, where the frontiers expand almost as far as human imagination. You might contend that what we did was for ego, or pride ... perhaps, we were and are human. I can tell you why I did it, personally? - because as a young man a professor, at university, told me 'Neil, it is impossible for mankind to travel and live in space' ... at that time I simply snickered ... I could not fathom such a close minded fellow. I will tell you, what I told this luddite professor: ...”

“You might be right, Sir, it might be impossible ... but a human being has to try, or he might as well be a slave.”

**THE END**