



Neil Armstrong and Father: Neil's first flight. July 26, 1936.  
Warren, Ohio. Illustrated by Woodi Ishmael, 1970.

## NEIL A. ARMSTRONG: BIOGRAPHY

### EARLY CHILDHOOD

Neil Alden Armstrong was born on August 5, 1930. His parents are Stephen and Viola Armstrong. Armstrong was born on his grandparents' farm in Auglaize County, near Wapakoneta, Ohio, on Washington Pike Road. He has a sister, June, and a brother, Dean.

Because his father was an auditor for the State of Ohio, Armstrong lived in several Ohio communities, including Warren, Jefferson, Ravenna, St. Marys and Upper Sandusky, before the family settled in Wapakoneta. The family lived on West Benton Street at the corner of Benton and Buchanan Streets.

Armstrong developed an interest in flying at an early age. His curiosity about airplanes was aroused at age two when his father took him to the National Air Races in Cleveland, Ohio. His interest intensified when he went for his first plane ride in a Ford Tri-Motor, a "Tin Goose," in Warren, Ohio, at age 6. From that time on, he was fascinated by aviation. Armstrong built many model airplanes, conducted experiments with a home-built wind tunnel, and read many books and magazines about planes.

At age 15, Armstrong began taking flying lessons at an airport north of Wapakoneta. At the time, lessons were \$9.00 an hour. Armstrong worked at various odd jobs in town and at the airport to earn the money for these lessons in an Aeronca Champion airplane. By age 16, he had his student pilot's license, before he got his drivers' license.



## EDUCATION AND EARLY CAREER

Nell A. Armstrong graduated from Blume High School in Wapakoneta, Ohio, in 1947. At that time, he received a scholarship from the U.S. Navy. He enrolled at Purdue University and began his studies of aeronautical engineering.

In 1949, the Navy called him to active duty where he became a Navy pilot. In 1950, he was sent to Korea. There he flew 78 combat missions and was stationed on an aircraft carrier, the U.S.S. Essex. He flew Navy Panther jets. Armstrong had one narrow escape when he had to parachute from a damaged plane. He received 3 medals for his military service.

In 1952, Armstrong returned to Purdue University and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Aeronautical Engineering. He later received a Master of Science degree in Aerospace Engineering from the University of Southern California. He has since been given honorary degrees from several universities.

Armstrong's first position after college was at the NACA Lewis Flight



Armstrong with the X-15  
NASA Photo

Propulsion Laboratories (now NASA Lewis Research Center) in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1955. For the next 17 years he worked for NASA, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and its predecessor, the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics, as engineer, test pilot, astronaut and administrator.

Armstrong went from Cleveland to Edwards Air Force Base in California where he worked as test pilot, engineer and experimenter. There he flew several planes. Most notable of these was the X-15. In this plane Armstrong flew at 4000 mph and to a height of 40 miles. He has flown over 200 different models of aircraft, including jets, rockets, helicopters and gliders.

## ASTRONAUT CAREER

In 1962, Armstrong was accepted by NASA as an astronaut. Armstrong was one of the nine astronauts in the second group of astronauts to be chosen. He moved to El Lago, Texas, near Houston's NASA Manned Spacecraft Center, to begin his astronaut training.

Armstrong's first flight assignment as an astronaut was as backup command pilot for the Gemini 5 mission.



On March 16, 1966, Armstrong flew his first space mission as command pilot of the Gemini 8, with David Scott. The purpose of that mission was the first space docking. Armstrong piloted the Gemini 8 spacecraft to a successful docking with an Agena craft already in orbit. The docking went smoothly, but as the craft orbited together, they began to pitch and roll wildly. Armstrong was able to undock the Gemini and used the retro rockets to regain control of his craft. However, the astronauts had to make an emergency landing in the Pacific Ocean.

For the next 2 years, Armstrong continued as a test pilot and continued astronaut training. He served as backup commander for the Apollo 8 lunar orbit mission.

On July 16, 1969, Armstrong, Michael Collins and Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin began their trip to the moon. Collins was command module pilot and navigator for the mission. Aldrin, a systems expert, was the lunar module pilot and became the second man to walk on the moon. As commander of the Apollo 11, Armstrong piloted the lunar module to a safe landing on the moon's surface. On July 20, 1969, at 10:56:20 P.M. EDT, Neil Armstrong became the first man to walk on the moon. At that time he made his famous statement, "That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind." Armstrong and Aldrin spent about 2 and one-half hours walking on the moon collecting samples, doing experiments and taking photographs. On July 24, 1969, the three men splashed down in the Pacific Ocean. They were picked up by the U.S.S. Hornet.

The three Apollo 11 astronauts were honored with a ticker tape parade in New York City. Armstrong received the Medal of Freedom, the highest award a U.S. Civilian can receive.

The three astronauts and their wives then began a world tour. They visited 22 countries and received many awards.

Armstrong's awards include the NASA Distinguished Service Medal, the NASA Exceptional Service Medal, 17 medals from other countries, and the Congressional Space Medal of Honor.

Wapakoneta celebrated the historic moon landing with the rest of the world. There was a large welcome home parade for Armstrong, and a street was renamed Neil Armstrong Drive. Also, an airport in Auglaize county was named for him.



Armstrong before Gemini Flight  
NASA Photo



## **LATER CAREER**

In 1970, Armstrong was appointed Deputy Associate Administrator for Aeronautics at NASA.

In 1971, Armstrong resigned from NASA after 17 years of service. He moved to Ohio where he was a Professor of Aerospace Engineering at the University of Cincinnati from 1971-79.

Armstrong served as a member of the National Commission on Space in 1985-86 and as Vice-Chairman of the Presidential Commission on the Shuttle Challenger Accident in 1986.

At the present time, Armstrong resides in Ohio and is employed in private industry. He also serves on the board of directors of several companies and organizations.

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Neil Armstrong Air and Space Museum  
Wapakoneta, Ohio

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