OSINT4Fun Advent of OSINT 2024: Day 7

*Did you know there's an Earth Day flag? Surprisingly, the image that appears on this flag is world-famous; however, the photographer's identity remains uncertain.*

*A man decided, as a personal challenge, to find an answer to this question and created a website dedicated to this research.*

*“The identity of the photographer is unverifiable? I decided to take that as a personal challenge.”*

*When was the last revision of his website (YYYYMMDD format)?*

Let’s start finding this Earth Day flag by Googling “Earth Day flag”. This gives a Wikipedia page for a .png image of this flag. The description mentions John McConnell as the flag designer. Also, NASA is cited as the author of the Earth photograph. The description links a page about the photograph used in the flag, so let’s click on that. This image is called “The Earth seen from Apollo 17 with transparent background.png”. The description states that the photo is called “The Blue Marble” and that the picture was taken on December 7, 1972 by the crew of Apollo 17. The source refers to a NASA page. This page includes some metadata as well as two authors/curators: Dave Williams and Jay Friedlander. Let’s remember these names. Now it’s time to pivot to search for the website dedicated to finding out the photographer of the Blue Marble photo. Let’s Google for: “Blue Marble” photographer. Although not the website we’re looking for, a Wikipedia page pops up that mentions Ron Evans and Harrison Schmitt as possible photographers. Furthermore, the page says that the original NASA image is named AS17-148-22727. The Google result doesn’t give much further info, so I decide to specify it further: “Blue Marble” photographer identity. A forum entry pops up from a website called collectSPACE.com, that mentions that the identity of the photographer is unverifiable. That seems similar to the quote, so let’s look on that page. Aha, a post pops up with the exact quote! The post mentions that the quote belongs to Eric Hartwell’s InfoDabble via HobbySpace. InfoDabble links to a page, so let’s see what’s on there. The page ehartwell.com/lander seems to no longer be active… But we might find out more with the Wayback Machine. Looking back at the post, the InfoDabble link linked to ehartwell.com/Apollo17/ and the post is dated for December 27, 2006. So, let’s look for this page on the Wayback Machine for around this timeframe. This page was first cached on June 19, 2006. And this snapshot shows the quote mentioned in the challenge! So, we found the right website. The last snapshot is for December 8, 2024, but the page was already down at that point. The snapshots for 2023 also seem to be empty. Let’s look back to just after the most snapshots of the page were cached, which is 2019. The snapshot for August 22, 2019 also does not show the page. I decided to just click on snapshots until seeing the right page pop up. Eventually I saw the page when clicking on a snapshot of March 18, 2016. At the very bottom of the page, the author included a revision history, with the last entry: March 21, 2007. Therefore, our answer for this challenge is: 20070321. However, this is incorrect! So, I decided to go forward in time snapshot by snapshot. The last snapshot that showed the page is dated May 16, 2017. Still, the last entry is dated for March 21, 2007. However, I am now noticing that the top of the page mentions that the last update by Eric Hartwell occurred on April 25, 2007. So, that gives us the answer: 20070425.

Again, another question pops up: *To support his theory, Eric Hartwell relies on the radio exchanges of the astronauts. When it was too late to take more photographs, Ronald mentioned the value displayed on the camera's image counter. How many photos were taken?* To answer this, I am reading through the last updated page of Eric Hartwell. At some point, a transcription is mentioned of Evans(?) saying: “Houston, Magazine, November, November is on about 123 right now.”. Eric interprets this as Evans reporting the frame count, noting that the frame count could be 1 more or less due to the analog frame counter. So, let’s try 123 as our answer. This however is incorrect. Now, let’s try 122, and this does seem to be the correct answer.