

= Jay Barbree =

Jay Barbree (born November 26 , 1933) is a correspondent for NBC News , focusing on space travel . Barbree is the only journalist to have covered every manned space mission in the United States , beginning with the first American in space , Alan Shepard aboard Freedom 7 in 1961 , continuing through to the last mission of the Space Shuttle , Atlantis 's STS @-@ 135 mission in July 2011 . Barbree has been present for all 135 space shuttle launches , and every manned launch for the Mercury , Gemini , and Apollo eras . In total , Barbree has been witness to 166 manned space launches .

= = Early life = =

Barbree grew up on his family 's farm in Early County , Georgia , and entered the United States Air Force in 1950 , when he was only 16 years of age . Following the Air Force , Barbree began his broadcast journalism career at WALB in Albany , Georgia where , in 1957 , he saw Sputnik 's spent booster rocket orbiting in the sky and then wrote radio and TV reports about the Soviet Union 's launch of the first artificial satellite .

= = Career = =

= = = Reporting career = = =

Barbree was so interested in the space program , that he paid for his own ticket to get to Cape Canaveral , Florida in 1957 , and watched the attempted Vanguard launch . The failed launch was one Barbree would never forget : " There 's ignition . We can see the flames , " Barbree reported . " Vanguard 's engine is lit and it 's burning . But wait ... wait a moment , there 's ... there 's no liftoff ! It appears to be crumbling in its own fire ... It 's burning on the pad ... Vanguard has crumbled into flames . It failed ladies and gentlemen , Vanguard has failed . "

Early the next year , he returned and witnessed the successful launch of Explorer 1 on January 31 , 1958 , all the while calling in his reports to WALB . Eventually , Barbree was hired by radio station WEZY in Cocoa Beach , and worked as a traffic reporter , covering the space program as well .

Six months later , Barbree joined NBC as a part @-@ time space program reporter , eventually moving up to full @-@ time . Over the years , Barbree had been offered the opportunity to move to Washington , D.C. , or New York , but he turned down every offer , preferring to stay and report on what had quickly become his passion , spaceflight .

" This is a job where ? you have to be , whether you like it or not , a certain member of the space family . "

In 1958 , while in a restroom , Barbree overheard a general and a NASA official , talking about an upcoming launch called " Project SCORE " , one of the earliest American satellites . This would become one of Barbree 's many " scoops " , when after a bit of digging , he found that President Dwight D. Eisenhower would use the satellite to broadcast a pre @-@ recorded Christmas message from outer space . When SCORE launched in 1958 , Barbree broadcast the story , knowing the military would not deny it once the satellite was in space .

In the early days of the space program , astronauts and reporters would often socialize together in Cocoa Beach , and had a very different relationship than they do today . Barbree described his relationship with the astronauts as a friend and confidant , often going out to dinner with them , or socializing together when the astronauts were in town . In his book , Barbree writes that in 1961 Alan Shepard told him an " off the record " fact : He was going to be the first American astronaut in space . Barbree noted that if he were to report this , it would not only jeopardize the friendships , but possibly his career as well , so he said nothing . Barbree also recounts a conversation with Gus Grissom about the astronaut 's concerns regarding Apollo not long before the fatal Apollo 1 fire . Barbree 's association with the astronauts had some unexpected bonuses as well , Neil Armstrong

carried a gold coin to the moon on Apollo 11 for Barbree , and Pete Conrad flew several flags and patches on Apollo 12 , which Barbree later handed out to friends .

In the early 1980s , when NASA developed the Teacher in Space program , a similar program was developed , the Journalist in Space program . Barbree was one of forty finalists to be selected as a Journalist in Space . Both the teacher and journalist programs were discontinued after the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster .

In 1986 , following the Space Shuttle Challenger accident , Barbree placed a telephone call to a friend and retired employee of NASA , who ? as a favor to Barbree ? went to Kennedy Space Center , looked over the accident information and analysis being done , and later reported the early findings to Barbree . Consequently , Barbree was the first journalist to report on the source of the destruction of the Space Shuttle Challenger : Faulty O @-@ rings . He was also part of the NBC News Space Unit that won an Emmy award for NBC 's coverage of the Apollo 11 moon landing . Following the Space Shuttle Columbia accident , Barbree was the first reporter to break the news of an internal NASA memo expressing concerns about foam striking the orbiter 's left wing during ascent .

In 1995 , NASA awarded him with recognition for being the " only journalist known to have covered all 100 flights " . Among those present for the ceremony were several NASA officials , Alan Shepard , and shuttle commander Robert L. Gibson .

In 2011 , Barbree was honored by the Space Foundation as a recipient of the Douglas S. Morrow Public Outreach Award in recognition of the role he played in shaping the way the nation views and understands space .

At age seventy @-@ seven , Barbree is one of the longest @-@ serving network correspondents to work continuously on a single subject . He started working for NBC on July 21 , 1958 covering the space program , and continues in that capacity to the present . He has never missed a mission launch , despite suffering a heart attack while jogging along Cocoa Beach in 1987 , and being declared clinically dead for several minutes . Following his heart attack , he had bypass surgery , and still did not miss any launches .

Barbree covers the shuttle program and space missions for the cable network MSNBC , and NBC 's news reports covering missions . His contract with NBC runs through 2010 , allowing him to complete the coverage of the entire space shuttle program , and he has expressed hope that he will be there for the return to the moon missions .

= = = Career as author = = =

Barbree is the author or coauthor of seven books , including two memoirs . In 1993 , Shepard , fellow Mercury astronaut Deke Slayton , journalist Howard Benedict , and Barbree collaborated to write the book Moon Shot . Slayton was a participant in name only and died before the book was completed .

Barbree 's most recent book , " Live from Cape Canaveral : Covering the Space Race , from Sputnik to Today " , was released on August 28 , 2007 , to coincide with the 50th anniversary of spaceflight , that began with the Sputnik 1 launch on October 4 , 1957 . The foreword is written by Tom Brokaw . Barbree 's book attempts to illustrate how the media has changed in their coverage of the space programs , from the early enthusiasm to the relative disinterest in the program today . Barbree says he wrote the book because as he looked back over his career , when recalling all the people he 'd worked with , very few were left . Barbree claims that he told himself , " You 're the only one who has covered the whole program going all the way back to the beginning , and if you don 't tell the story , who is going to do it ? " It received generally poor reviews from space historians .

Barbree also collaborated with Martin Caidin on a number of non @-@ fiction works , such as Destination Mars : In Art , Myth and Science (Penguin , 1997 , ISBN 978 @-@ 0 @-@ 670 @-@ 86020 @-@ 3) and A Journey Through Time : Exploring the Universe with the Hubble Space Telescope (Penguin , 1995 , ISBN 0 @-@ 670 @-@ 86018 @-@ 2) . Barbree also wrote the novelization of " Pilot Error " , an episode of The Six Million Dollar Man , a television series based upon Caidin 's novel Cyborg (Warner , 1975 , ISBN 0 @-@ 446 @-@ 76835 @-@ 9) .

Over the years , Barbree has stated that he has stayed away from sensationalizing the space

program , or those associated with it , and commented that he would not put some items that could be considered harmful into his newest book , stating " The whole idea of the book is not to hurt somebody . " Barbree attempts to illustrate this in his memoir by telling of a private investigator who approached him with an audio tape which allegedly contained proof of an extramarital affair involving an astronaut . Barbree told the investigator he would speak to his superiors , but then proceeded to erase the tape .

= = Personal life = =

Barbree has been married since 1960 to the former Jo Reisinger , whom he met while covering her participation in Florida beauty pageants . They live in Merritt Island . They have three children , Steve , Alicia , and Karla . Their son Scott died in infancy following a premature birth .