Living in the Past

Historical perspective



Forgotten Apollo 11 eavesdropper



20 July 1969, the day of the Apollo 11 moon landing, Larry Baysinger W4EJA of Louisville, Kentucky, made history by being perhaps the first amateur to independently pick up the moon landing dialog using home-grown and surplus equipment.

Ever since the 1950s Larry has had a fascination with radio, and the fact that military surplus equipment left over from World War II was not only abundant but very inexpensive, allowed many tinkerers and DIY enthusiasts like Larry to cobble together their dreams for a song. By the late 1960s Larry was working for WHAS radio 840 AM in Louisville while experimenting on the side with radio astronomy and satellite tracking.

At the time, rumors had already started circulating regarding fake NASA space achievements, and Larry was interested in verifying them by listening in on their conversations. He was determined to either bring to light information NASA didn't want the public to know or demonstrate unedited communication from the lunar surface by a non-NASA amateur.



After a series of successful distant space projects, Larry and friend Glenn Rutherford built a fully steerable 8-foot by 12-foot corner horn made of chicken wire, connected to a customized military receiver with unparallelled sensitivity.

Larry recorded about 35 minutes of the moon landing, including talk among Armstrong, Aldrin, and Collins and the congratulatory message from President Richard Nixon.

In the end, Larry said that he was disappointed to discover that NASA had not edited anything, but transmitted to CBS everything he had heard himself. He said he was listening directly while his wife and daughter were watching the moo landing TV broadcast, and noticed that he and Glenn were receiving the transmissions about five to ten seconds before his wife and daughter were hearing them.

Then, just like that, this story vanished from history, living only on lost university microfilm until recently, when Chris Graney, physics professor in Louisville, uncovered the story in 2009.

You can read more about Larry's adventurous eavesdropping from ARRL and Vatican Observatory and Courier Journal.