Museum exhibit tells of Pax River’s role in space flight

Moon rock goes on permanent display
By Donna Cipolloni
NAS Patuxent River Public Affairs

Fifty years ago, on July 20, 1969, three Apollo 11 astronauts completed an integral phase of NASA’s perilous, first-of-its-kind attempt to land men on the moon and return them safely to Earth.

As Command Module Pilot Michael Collins orbited above in Columbia, Commander Neil Armstrong – below on the moon’s surface – stepped off the Lunar Module at 10:56 p.m. EDT, uttered his now famous statement, “That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind,” and became the first human to set foot on the moon. He was followed shortly afterward by Lunar Module Pilot Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin at 11:16 p.m., who described what he saw as “magnificent desolation.” Lasting only about two and a half hours, the astronauts concluded their lunar exploration, returned to the module, and entered the world’s history books.

Dan Bramos, test resource manager for the E2 program at NAS Patuxent River, wasn’t born for another three years after man first walked on the moon, but it didn’t take him long to become fascinated by space flight.

“The day I was born, Apollo 16 splashed down in the Pacific Ocean after an 11-day moon exploration mission, and it’s something my parents always talked to me about when I was a kid,” Bramos said. “Then, when I was eight years old, I watched the first launch of the space shuttle Columbia on TV and got very excited about it.”

In his boyhood enthusiasm, Bramos drew a picture of the launch and mailed it to NASA.

“A few weeks later, I received an unexpected packet that included photos and a letter signed by Columbiapilot Bob Crippen and Commander John Young,” he said. “That letter hooked me. It’s what really pulled me into space flight and I’ve been watching and keeping up ever since.”

Now volunteering at the Patuxent River Naval Air Museum (PRNAM) as its director of communications, Bramos is involved with helping the museum not only remember the 50th anniversary of Apollo 11, but of also telling the story of what he calls Pax River’s biggest contribution to the space program – its people.

“The second satellite ever launched by the U.S. was designed and built here by [the Naval Research Laboratory], but overall, Pax River’s biggest contribution to the space program has been its people,” Bramos said. “Whether they be the pilots and naval flight officers who’ve gone on to become astronauts, or the engineers who’ve been here and have gone on to work for NASA, that’s the story we’re trying to tell at the museum.”

‘Naval Aviation in Space’
Part of that story will be told in the museum’s newest “Naval Aviation in Space” exhibit opening July 20.

Featured in the exhibit is astronaut Jim Lovell, who graduated top of his class in 1958 from the U.S. Naval Test Pilot School and served a four-year stint as a test pilot at Naval Air Test Center, Patuxent River. While aboard the air station, he also worked as the program manager for the F-4H Phantom fighter.

Lovell, a retired Navy captain, is best known for serving as the commander of Apollo 13. Intending to land on the moon, the mission was aborted following the explosion of an oxygen generator.

Bryan O’Connor, NASA associate administrator, Office of Mission Assurance and Safety, left, presents the Ambassador of Exploration Award — a piece of moon rock encased in Lucite — to former Apollo astronaut James Lovell, April 3, 2009, at the Patuxent River Naval Air Museum in Lexington Park, Md.

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CH-53E Heavy Lift Helicopter logs 1 million flight hours

By Victoria Falcon
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H-53 Heavy Lift Helicopters (PMA-261)

The CH-53E Super Stallion helicopter reached a major milestone this year when it achieved more than 1 million flight hours since entering service with the Marine Corps in 1981.

The CH-53E is a versatile machine used for amphibious assault and long-range insertion, delivering troops, vehicles and supplies. This rapid resupply vehicle is still one of the most used aircraft in the U.S. military air arsenal.

“The CH-53E has seen more work than was ever anticipated it would see,” said Maj. Matthew Baumann, H-53 In-Service, Heavy Lift Helicopter Program Office co-lead.

Currently, there are 142 Super Stallions in service. Though out of production, the CH-53E is in the middle of a “RESET”—a rolling period of rebuilding, upgrading and increasing safety, reliability and capabilities to lengthen its service life through 2032.

According to Baumann, the first 25 helicopters have completed their RESET process, “allowing the squadron commanders to plan for training, operations and maintenance with renewed confidence.”

Resetting of the CH-53E fleet is an important segue from the current platform to the new CH-53K, King Stallion, its heavy-lift replacement.

“The CH-53K is the most powerful helicopter ever built by the U.S. military,” said Col. John D. Perrin, Heavy Lift Helicopter program manager. “It will be safer, faster and more capable than any previous heavy lift helicopter in the battlespace.”

Its development is currently in the testing and capability requirements phase, with a goal of bringing the CH-53K to fleet Marines by 2024.

“A Super Stallion CH-53E helicopter takes off from USS America July 12, 2016 during deck landing qualifications and initial arrival.

“It’s a game-changer,” Perrin said. “We can’t wait to have the K available for fleet use. But for now we’ve got a capable, reliable and safe helicopter doing heavy-lift for our Marines.”