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Apollo 11 Crewmen Don't Know Which Will Step on Moon First

HOUSTON, Jan. 10 (UPI)—The crewmen who may become the first humans to land on the moon said today that they were thrilled that the "twists and turns of fate" had brought them the coveted assignment, but that they did not know yet who would first step out on the lunar surface.

Neil A. Armstrong and Lieut. Col. Michael Collins and Col. Edwin E. Aldrin Jr., both of the Air Force, who were named yesterday to make the Apollo 11 flight, held a news conference at the space center. They described their mission as one toward which all past American manned space flights had been targeted.

Mr. Armstrong said the earliest day they could shoot toward landing site No. 1 on the right-hand side of the moon's face would be July 15.

"In a sense the [manned space] missions that have taken

place in past years have been at a disadvantage, because they have been in support of this mission," Colonel Aldrin said. He called the landing flight "one that has been well conceived, well matured and well exercised over the past years."

The plans call for all three men to ride into moon orbit and for Mr. Armstrong and Colonel Aldrin to descend to the lunar surface in a special landing module while Colonel Collins orbits 69 miles above them.

One man will step out onto the moon 45 minutes before the other, Mr. Armstrong said, but it will take months of practice missions to determine which will be first.

Colonel Aldrin said "the twists and turns of fate" had brought him "this tremendous responsibility."

"Since all of us have been hoping for this assignment, I think there's a feeling of relief that it's finally been made," he said.

The astronauts said their wives' reactions to their assignment ranged from happiness to apprehension.

"In my own case," Mr. Armstrong, a civilian, said, "my wife asked me if that's what I wanted." He said he replied "Yes" and that she was satisfied.

Colonel Collins had been assigned to the Apollo 8 moon-orbiting crew but was replaced by Capt. James A. Lovell Jr. after he underwent surgery for removal of a bone spur on a neck vertebra.

"This is the fifth crew I've been assigned to," he said, "and my wife gets happier every time. I think she's reached the peak of happiness, and we'll just leave her where she is."

Colonel Aldrin was the only man who said his wife's reaction was not completely positive.

"My wife thought she was prepared for it," he said. "Now that it's come about, I'm not sure she was. But she'll come around."

The three, each of whom is 38 years old, have all taken part in space flights.

Donald K. Slayton, the astronaut chief, said the Apollo 11 crewmen would face 900 hours of training, concentrating on the lunar landing craft and the activities they will perform during their 21 hours on the moon's surface.