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Tracking a Giant Leap for Mankind

A man and his camera journeyed to the Land Down Under to thank the crew responsible for snaring from high above the black and white TV images of the first steps on the moon to transmit to the world's TV screens.

Stan Lebar, the program director of the Westinghouse Lunar TV program, in March journeyed more than 9,000 miles to Australia, bringing with him a model of the small camera, to express his, and the global community's, gratitude for the work done in the tracking stations there to capture Apollo 11's historic moment. Westinghouse's heritage space business preceded what is now Northrop Grumman's space sensors business unit in Baltimore.

"I wanted to thank them personally," Lebar said during the trip. "No one has ever done that and they deserve credit for the work they did. They take great pride in their participation in the space program and they should. They were a part of something special and they were a special part of it."

Lebar, 80, traveled from his home in Severna Park, Md., to attend the reunion of the workers of the Honeysuckle Creek Tracking Station at the Southern Cross Club in Canberra March 16. There he addressed a luncheon crowd of about 60 people—the workers and their families—eager to hear the man whom they felt gave them an opportunity to be a part of history and to see the camera that joined their lives. He also spoke at the National Museum of Australia that evening, giving a crowd of 150 insights into the lunar camera program through a detailed PowerPoint presentation.

Nearly 37 years ago, they were strangers unknowingly connected by the NASA space program and a giant leap on the lunar surface. In recent years, technological advances of another sort brought them together as they have communicated via email. They invited Lebar to visit to honor him and

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Stan Lebar, retired Westinghouse Lunar TV program director, holds vintage Apollo 11 TV camera during presentation in Canberra, Australia.

This photo substituted in place of the original Canberra Times photo for copyright reasons

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he, in turn, wanted to honor them with an old-fashioned handshake and words of appreciation.

“As the world and I watched the TV images of the event on the moon in utter amazement,” Lebar told the crowd, “you on the other hand were not going to be just a witness, but one of the most important players whose one and only goal was to serve the world community and posterity, by receiving the TV signal from the moon, processing it, recording it and transmitting it, allowing possibly the world’s most important TV imagery to be viewed in the homes and elsewhere, for those who lived in every corner of the world.”

About 100 were employed at the station in 1969, according to its staff roster sheet that year, and both Honeysuckle Creek and Parkes, the other tracking station, fixed their dishes on the transmission from the Sea of Tranquility on July 21, 1969—Australia being a day ahead of the U.S., which marks July 20 as the historic date. The two tracking stations dispute which delivered the first images, both claiming that distinction. But according to research by Colin Mackellar, a dedicated space enthusiast in Australia, Honeysuckle Creek trumped Parkes, and Goldstone in the U.S., with the pictures of Armstrong’s first steps.

Workers from both tracking stations attended the Honeysuckle Creek reunion, with one coming from England to attend the event, to see the camera and to hear Lebar’s comments.

What the workers at Honeysuckle Creek saw, Lebar said, was the image from the moon “before it was processed and transmitted.” “You have no idea how I envy what you, only a handful of people in the entire world, saw—the imagery as produced by the camera. You saw what no one in the world was given the opportunity to see. Not NASA. Not anyone else.”

Lebar brought with him the small seven-pound camera, a model on loan from the Historical Electronics Museum in Linthicum, Md. The museum is supported by Northrop Grumman, which also provided transportation of the valuable camera within Australia and ensured its return to the States. Lebar invited members of the audience to pose for pictures with the camera, many of which can be viewed at <http://community.webshots.com/album/548635197PAJWSv/1> and at http://www.honeysucklecreek.net/people/Reunion_2006/colin/index.html. To see a video of the speech, go to: http://www.honeysucklecreek.net/people/Reunion_2006.

In addition to his talk at the National Museum, Lebar spoke to the Sydney Space Frontier Society on March 14 at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney. In both his talks, Lebar traced the beginnings of the camera development, delighting the crowds with tales of how the handle—basically a pipe—was developed; to overcoming the



Photo courtesy of Colin Mackellar

Stan Lebar (left) poses with Ed von Renouard and Mike Dinn (holding the lunar camera) following Stan’s presentation in Canberra, Australia, on the international team effort that enabled the world to see live TV coverage of the historic mission to the moon back in July 1969. Ed von Renouard was the video tech at Honeysuckle Creek Tracking Station and the first person to see the lunar TV images as they emerged from the receiving equipment. The images of Neil Armstrong stepping on the lunar surface were relayed to NASA in Houston and then seen by viewers around the world. Mike Dinn was deputy director of Honeysuckle Creek and announced to Houston that video from the moon was being received. He later went on to become the director of the Tidbinbilla Deep Space Tracking Station near Canberra.

resistance to the camera in some quarters of NASA; to how the astronauts avoided tripping over the coiled and potentially dangerous cable; to the damage to the color camera on Apollo 12; to the positioning of the TV camera on the gantry to capture the launch of Apollo 13, video of which he showed both crowds.

Lebar, who was accompanied to Australia by his wife Elaine and two sons, Mark and Scott, has devoted a portion of his retirement years to accommodate various commemorations of the moon landing and to ensure that his team and its accomplishments are remembered for enabling the world to watch a moment unparalleled in history.