

OBITUARY

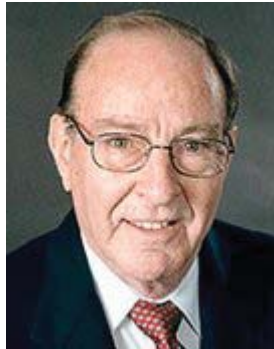
Edgar D. Mitchell, 1930–2016

On February 4, 2016, America lost a great hero: Captain Edgar Dean Mitchell, Ph.D., a member of an extremely elite club of men who walked on the Moon. Dr. Mitchell had been a member of SSE and a personal friend to many of us, and an inspiration to all who knew of his momentous achievements.

Transfixed, on February 5, 1971, the entire world watched with bated breath as Apollo 14 astronaut and command pilot Edgar Mitchell successfully landed the LEM, Antares, on the surface of the Moon near the Fra Mauro highlands. Given the near-fatal catastrophe that had befallen Apollo 13, their renaissance venture into space was a testament to human courage and determination. With fellow astronaut Alan Shepard, he conducted two EVAs (Extravehicular activities, as Moonwalks were called) and accomplished a series of records. They included the first color television transmissions from the Moon and the collection of the largest lunar rock sample payload (42.6 kg). Mitchell and Shepard had the longest lunar surface stay time (33 hours), the longest lunar surface EVA (9 hours and 23 minutes), and also traversed the greatest distance on foot on the Moon.

Edgar D. Mitchell was born on September 17, 1930, in Hereford, Texas, and considered Artesia, New Mexico, located just south of Roswell, his hometown. He graduated with a B.S. in Industrial Management from Carnegie Institute of Technology (later Carnegie-Mellon University) in 1952, a B.S. in Aeronautics from the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School in 1961, and a Doctorate in Aeronautics and Astronautics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1964.

In 1953, Mitchell joined the U.S. Navy, where he attended Officer Candidate School and flight school and became qualified as a carrier pilot. He then flew A3D Skywarrior aircraft in a Heavy Attack Squadron from the aircraft carriers *USS Bon Homme Richard* and *USS Ticonderoga* while serving on deployments in the Pacific region. In 1959 he transferred to aircraft development. From 1964 to 1965 he served as Chief of the Project



Management Division of the Navy Field Office for Manned Orbiting Laboratory, then a highly classified program for the development of crewed space reconnaissance capabilities and which spawned several astronauts. Mitchell then served as an instructor in advanced mathematics and navigation theory for astronaut candidates at the U.S. Air Force Aerospace Research Pilot School in preparation for astronaut duties. In 1966 he received his certification as a test pilot and shortly thereafter he was assigned to NASA, joining the Apollo Program.

Few people today nor then ever understood the true significance of the Apollo Program. Consuming more than 4% of the national budget, that critical project established America's technological dominance in the world, and Mitchell was a key member of that effort. Prior to the Apollo 14 mission he was designated as backup Lunar Module Pilot for Apollo 10, and after his return was the backup pilot for Apollo 16. He retired from NASA and the U.S. Navy in 1972.

There is little doubt that being the sixth man to walk the lunar surface was his crowning exploit, but far from his only one. Ever inquisitive, Mitchell spent the rest of his life pushing the boundaries of human knowledge. Based on his quenchless thirst for knowledge, he conducted an ESP experiment during the epic Apollo 14 flight. At prearranged times (though they were actually off due to launch delays), Mitchell attempted to mentally contact Chicago psychic Olof Jonsson using a numbering system based on ESP cards (then known as Zener cards). The results were controversial but sufficient to encourage further interest. A few years later I met Jonsson and had him demonstrate the procedure for me. He was impressive. It is significant to note that Mitchell felt compelled to state that the experiments were not authorized by NASA and were conducted during periods designated as personal sleep time.

On his terrestrial return, Mitchell continued his exploration into the fundamental properties of human consciousness. An encounter with a Tibetan Buddhist, Norbu Chen, yielded a firsthand demonstration of spontaneous healing when his mother's eyesight was restored. From Andrija Puharich, Mitchell learned about a young Israeli with reportedly remarkable skills named Uri Geller. In a quest for hard evidence, they arranged to bring him to SRI International (then known as Stanford Research Institute) for scientific testing with Hal Puthoff and Russell Targ. The phenomenal experimental results are well-documented. There also were, however, extemporaneous events including psychokinesis and apports that I have heard attested to from all participants. Some were dramatic and defy any traditional scientific explanation.

As a result of those mystical experiences, in 1973 he founded the

Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS), which has as its mission “Broadening our knowledge of the nature and potentials of mind and consciousness and applying that knowledge to enhancing human well-being and the quality of life on the planet.” As a result of his efforts, IONS has excelled with numerous pioneering experiments in consciousness. At one time, IONS had 120,000 members.

To his credit, Edgar Mitchell was one of the few astronauts to talk openly about the transformative experience he encountered on his lunar voyage. The understanding of the true nature of consciousness was thereafter at the forefront of his efforts. Remembering his spiritual encounter, he once stated that he “was experiencing the primordial energy of the universe, the primal and subtlest energies.”

Not surprisingly, he became a controversial figure to many people in NASA, especially when he embraced the UFO phenomena. Mitchell was always careful to note that none of the information he had about the topic came from his NASA assignments, nor had he experienced any firsthand sightings. Rather, his position was generated from trusted people who confided their experiences to him.

We at the SSE owe Edgar Mitchell an immense debt of gratitude for his willingness and courage to stand up and push the frontiers of science based solely on his convictions of the spiritual component of all humans. In his book *The Way of the Explorer*, Mitchell noted, “Earth is our cradle, but not our final destiny. The universe itself is our larger home.” He ends the book with:

All I can suggest to the mystic and theologian is that our gods have been too small. They fill the universe. And to the scientist, all I can say is that gods do exist. They are the eternal, connected, and aware Self experienced by all intelligent beings.

JOHN ALEXANDER