

53rd IAA HISTORY OF ASTRONAUTICS SYMPOSIUM (E4)
“Can you believe they put a man on the moon?” The Apollo Program. (3)

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KEYNOTE: A GIRL IN THE MAN-ON-THE-MOON PROGRAM: CAMARADERIE AND
DISCRIMINATION IN THE APOLLO ERA

Abstract

I reported for duty 51 years ago, in the summer of 1968, to the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center. My position title was AST Data Analysis, at the entry level for technical personnel. I was placed in the Data Operations Branch of the Manned Flight Planning and Analysis Division. My duties included the testing and development of the Goddard Real Time System (GRTS) to assure operational readiness for Apollo missions. My role in Apollo 11 was to be monitoring the GRTS computer, including assisting in recording radar data from the tracking sites and using this data to update the orbit and send out acquisition messages.

During the first manned Apollo mission, I was stationed at the message composer where I manually transmitted requested information to one and/or both of the IBM 7094 computers used for real time tracking operations. Here I recorded information sent by the tracking stations, sent out acquisition messages to the various sites, and prepared manual insertions to update the orbits of the vehicles. I wrote in my Progress Report that “I thoroughly enjoyed being a member of the Goddard team for the Apollo 7 mission. I observed and participated in one of the United States’ greatest efforts, the effort to land a man on the moon. I hope to be involved again in the December (1968) mission and all future missions that our section will support.”

The camaraderie period lasted approximately one year until the Branch Head asked why I was not pregnant after a year on the job. Thus began the discrimination period, more specifically gender harassment. This paper addresses how the “girl” accommodated both behaviors throughout her 46-year career with NASA.

I offer the extensive background information above to set the stage for a 20-minute constructive dialogue between the “girl” and the audience regarding camaraderie and discrimination in the Apollo era.