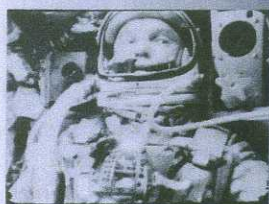
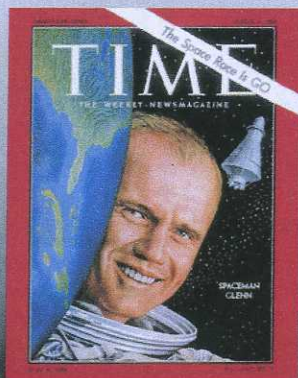


# ORBIT



John Glenn First American to Orbit Earth 20th February 1962



John



Glenn



## Apollo 11 Insurance Covers by Umberto Cavallero, Editor of Ad Astra\*

One philatelic novelty introduced by the Apollo 11 mission were the "insurance covers", pre-signed envelopes that the astronauts left with trusted individuals as a form of life insurance that family members would be able to sell to collectors if something went wrong. They are therefore unflown covers that, in the context of the collectables, have a special meaning.

The triumphant trip to the Moon was of course a trip into the unknown. The most dangerous part of the trip was not landing the lunar module on the moon, but launching it back up to the mothership. If that failed, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin could not be rescued. In 1999 a journalist, while investigating on White House's documents related to affairs with China in the 60s, quite by chance discovered the paper "In Event of Moon Disaster", written as a contingency by speech writer William Safire, apparently under suggestion by Frank Borman, two days before the lunar landing.

The undelivered speech that President Richard Nixon would have read in the case of a tragic outcome read:

*"Fate has ordained that the men who went to the moon to explore in peace will stay on the moon to rest in peace. These brave men, Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin, know that there is no hope for their recovery. But they also know that there is hope for mankind in their sacrifice."*

*"These two men are laying down their lives in mankind's most noble goal: the search for truth and understanding. They will be mourned by their families and friends; they will be mourned by their nation; they will be mourned by the people of the world; they will be mourned by a Mother Earth that dared send two of her sons into the unknown."*

*"In their exploration, they stirred the people of the world to feel as one; in their sacrifice, they bind more tightly the brotherhood of man. In ancient days, men looked at stars and saw their heroes in the constellations. In modern times, we do much the same, but our heroes are epic men of flesh and blood. Others will follow, and surely find their way home. Man's search will not be denied. But these men were the first, and they will remain the foremost in our hearts."*

*"For every human being who looks up at the moon in the nights to come will know that there is some corner of another world that is forever mankind"*.

A longer version of this was first published in Ad Astra 9-10 for July 2011. This feature is an extract from Umberto's book *Propaganda e Pragmatismo* not yet available in English.

Because of the high risk, there wasn't an insurance company that would insure a man ready to go to the Moon. While in quarantine prior to launch, the crew was approached by a representative of the Houston Manned Spacecraft Club (MSC), who suggested the idea to sign a quantity of Apollo 11 covers with the MSC cachet and to leave them with their families as a form of life insurance that could be sold to collectors in the event that something went wrong. The crew agreed, and bought around 1,500 MSC covers, but nobody knows for sure the exact number.

Philately was at that time a sort of "national pastime" and space attracted the attention of people and, particularly, of collectors. Not only in the States. Those space covers were therefore assigned the task of providing a limited financial means of support for the families should they fail to return.

(The expectation for easy earning through space covers—how times have changed! —, carried to excess, would lead two years later to the scandal of the Apollo 15 covers).

It seems that during the pre-flight quarantine, the crew decided to include not only the Club's own printed cachet envelope but also other popular covers available and asked colleagues to find others on the market. Due to the shortness of time available, they found locally cover of two different types. Therefore three types of "insurance covers" do exist: 1) MSC covers; 2) Mission Patch covers; 3) Dow Unicover covers. This is tentative because no "official" record was kept and it has been noted that the style of crew autograph is different on the MSC covers compared with the other two.

The latter two type of covers were cancelled at the Kennedy Space Center central post office on the day of the launch using the pictorial NASA postmark "dark Nasa logo" according to F.I.P. rules regarding competitive astrophilately prescribing that postal documents (envelopes and cards) must be cancelled at the post office nearest to the place and on the exact date of the special events.



Mission Patch Cover cancelled at KSC central post office  
On Jul 16, 1969, day of launch.





*Dow Uncover Cover—the rarest type—cancelled at KSC central post office on Jul 16, 1969, day of launch.*

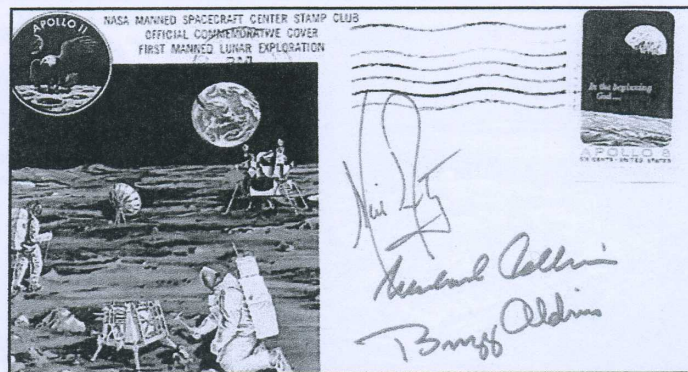
Tom Stafford took then care of the MSC covers and brought them to Houston where the Mission Control was. In Houston they were then cancelled the day of the Moon landing – again according to competitive astrophilately rules – at the post office nearest to the site where the technical support was assisting the astronauts who had landed on the Moon.

After this operation, all the covers were equally divided into three groups and a few hundred covers were delivered in equal amounts to each astronaut's family. "Insurance Covers" are very sought after by collectors for several reasons: first of all signatures are "coeval" since the covers were certainly signed during the pre-flight quarantine (unlike covers signed years later at different locations). Consequently, and a point not to be undervalued, the signatures are certainly genuine. Finally, Insurance Covers transcend generic autograph items because of the role they played, and dramatically remind the risk that astronauts faced with bravery.

The tradition of the "insurance covers" went on until Apollo 16. An Apollo 17 insurance cover has never been seen. This may be because Apollo 17 occurred at the time that the fallout from the Apollo 15 flown postal cover "scandal" arrived, and covers became "taboo". It's interesting to note that crew signed Insurance Covers were prepared also for Apollo 13, but those covers were signed days before launch by the original crew and the last-minute replacement of Ken Mattingly by Jack Swigert, resulted in Apollo 13 Insurance covers not being signed by Swigert who flew in Mattingly's place. Only after the mission did Jack Swigert sign a few of them, but at that time they had, fortunately, lost their "insurance" purpose.

## 2. The first Lunar Post Office - the Moon Letter.

Meanwhile, U.S. Post Office Department had delivered to NASA an engraved master die – created in secret – which would later be used to make the stamp's printing plate. The master die had to be carried to the Moon on-board the lunar module *Eagle*, together with an envelope franked with an imperforate b/w die proof of the stamp, still to be issued. It's difficult to say if this event somehow influenced the



*MSC Cover cancelled at Houston on Jul 20, 1969, day of the Moon Landing. 1286 examples of such an insurance cover seem to exist but sadly often with an indistinct cancel*

decision to bring 214 covers and fly them on the Apollo 11 mission.

The "Moon Letter" had to be cancelled at the moon landing site, in the "Lunar Post Office" temporarily operating at the Sea of Tranquility. For this event Armstrong had been appointed Post Master and equipped with a special stamp pad, made for Apollo 11 by the Baumgarten Company of Washington, D.C., a manufacturer of rubber stamps for postal use since 1888.

When the cancelling device was delivered, NASA officials told the company it was too heavy. On the Moon mission, and especially on the *Eagle's* lift-off from the Moon's surface, there was great attention was paid to any ounce of excess weight. So a Baumgarten worker drilled a series of holes in the wooden handle and mount. "It looked like a piece of Swiss cheese when we were finished," recalled James A. Baturin, the firm's president.

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20260  
OFFICIAL BUSINESS

PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE TO \$100  
PAYMENT OF POSTAGE \$100

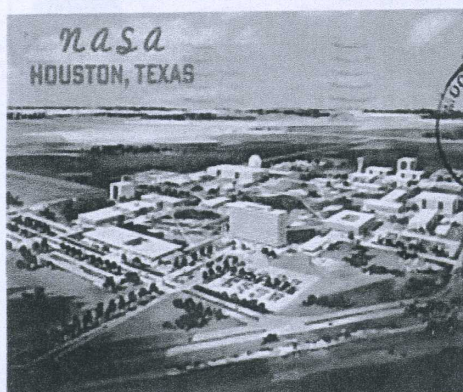
*Envelope enclosed to  
be cancelled on landing  
anytime during mission  
on moon T.E.J.  
die proof on envelope*

Besides the "Moon Landing" cancel, the kit delivered to Armstrong included an ink pad and a handwritten memo by T.E. Jenkins, responsible for the operation, with the recommendation:

*"Envelope enclosed to be cancelled anytime during Mission"* then corrected as: *"on landing on moon"*.

Help was requested from Matthew Radnofsky, the NASA engineer who since 1967 was deeply involved in the development of beta cloth, the flame proof material developed, as a result of the Apollo 1 fire, to protect the astronauts. Matt was also a well known collector and, at the time, he was serving as President of the NASA Manned Spacecraft Center Stamp Club.





PROOF (#4 of 4)

Front of Proof # 4 of 4 from the collection of Walter Hopferwieser

He simulated cancelling in space in his laboratory, where he tested the "Moon Landing" postmarking device with four proof covers (numbered by hand 1 to 4). Then he additionally prepared 150 *Specimens for Philatelic Reference*, numbered 1 to 150, which also have on the back a Webster "Aug 11, 1969" machine cancel.

Most of the 150 specimen covers were MSC covers (prepared by the Stamp Club where Matt was President) and some were blank covers. All of them were marked "Specimen for Philatelic Reference (# ... of 150)". To avoid any misunderstanding, both proof and specimen covers were marked with a rubber handstamp clearly reading: "The marking and inscriptions on this cover are examples of the usage of the postmarks and cancellations applied to mail which was carried aboard the flight of Apollo Eleven. This is not a flown cover".

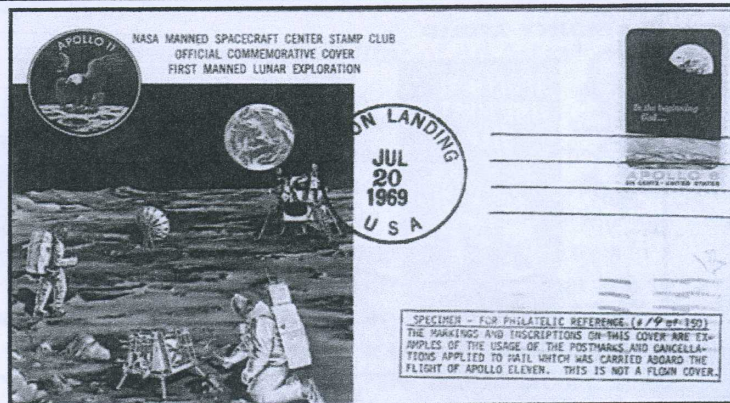
The Post Office Department wanted to have this great event recorded through live TV, with commentary by the astronauts (as it would be done later by Dave Scott during the Apollo 15 Mission) but NASA refused any additional task, because the astronauts' schedule was already too busy with scientific tasks and other duties.

Ironically later it turned out that the astronauts forgot to cancel the "Lunar Letter" on the Moon.

So the "Moon Letter" was then "back-dated" by the crew on their way back to Earth, on July 22, 1969, after docking with the *Columbia* CSM.

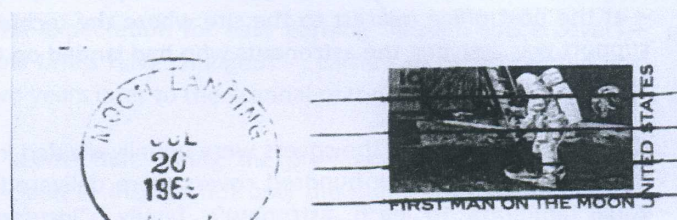
In his book "Carrying the Fire", Mike Collins described the short "postmarking ceremony": "We also have a stamp kit, including a first day cover commemorating the issuance of a new ten-cent stamp showing an astronaut at the foot of the LM ladder about to sample the lunar surface. With the envelope is an ink pad and a cancellation stamp which says "Moon Landing, Jul 20 1969, USA"

(In the book Mike Collins reproduces a small draft of such cancel). Never mind that it is July 22. This is the first chance



Matt Radnofsky specimen cover: #19 is a MSC cover

Below This is the one and only Apollo 11 envelope cancelled on the Moon. It is franked with a imperforate b/w die proof of the C76 stamp designed by Paul Calle. This document is property of the US Government and may be considered the rarest postal item existing worldwide. It is now on display at the Postal Museum in Washington,



we have had to get to it. We try the cancellation out first, inking it and printing it in our flight plan three times until we get the hang of it, and then we apply it gingerly to the one and only envelope, which we understand the postmaster general will put on tour".

After the recovery, the official "Moon Letter" and the other items returned from the moon were placed in the decontamination area of the Mobile Quarantine Facility, embarked on the *USS Hornet* Recovery Ship. The die was especially processed for decontamination before the prescribed quarantine period in the Lunar Receiving Laboratory had elapsed, and was flown on a special flight from the Houston Space Center to Washington, where it was delivered to the Post Office Department.

On July 31, Postmaster General Blount provided press photographers with a quick look at the die, then sent it to the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, where the process of preparing the plates for stamp production began promptly. The Moon letter, after the prescribed 18 days quarantine, was put on show. The Post Office noted with pride that the Moon letter travelled more than a half-million miles, the longest distance any piece of mail had ever gone. It is now on display at the Postal Museum in Washington, D.C

### 3. The Apollo 11 flown covers – postmarked after their return from the Moon

It was during the Apollo 11 pre-flight quarantine that the Apollo 11 crew came up with the idea of carrying postal



covers to the Moon. Shortly before launch, the crewmembers Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Michael Collins were presented by the NASA Manned Spacecraft Center Stamp Club with special MSC Apollo 11 postal covers, later known as "Insurance covers".

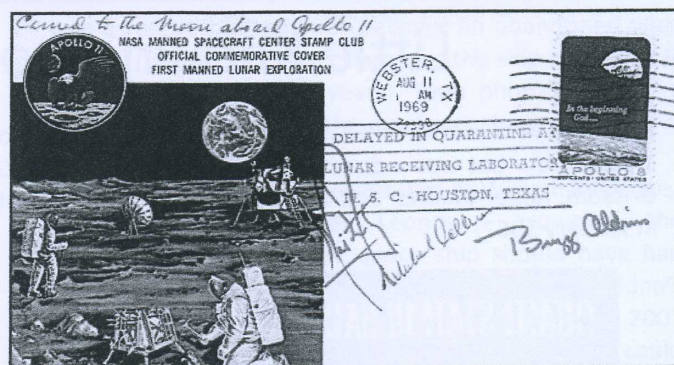
Meanwhile, U.S. Post Office Department had delivered to NASA the secret engraved master die together with an envelope to be cancelled on the Moon, shown on page 23. To repeat it is difficult to say if this did influence the decision of the crew, but shortly before launch, they decided to bring 214 covers and fly them in the Apollo 11 mission. They decided, as above, to include not only MSC covers but also other popular cachets available on the market. With the due permission of Deke Slayton, the legendary Chief of the Astronaut Office, the covers were inserted in the PPK (*Personal Preference Kit*) and put in the *Columbia* CSM, where they remained for the 8 days of the mission. So they did not reach the Moon surface.

After the recovery, also those covers were quarantined for 18 days in Lunar Receiving Laboratory, as documented by the red rubber stamp, for the fear of unknown pathogens that may have existed on the moon. Only after the Apollo 14 mission, did biologists realize that there was no threat of contagion and the quarantine process was dropped. During their quarantine the three astronauts signed all the covers.

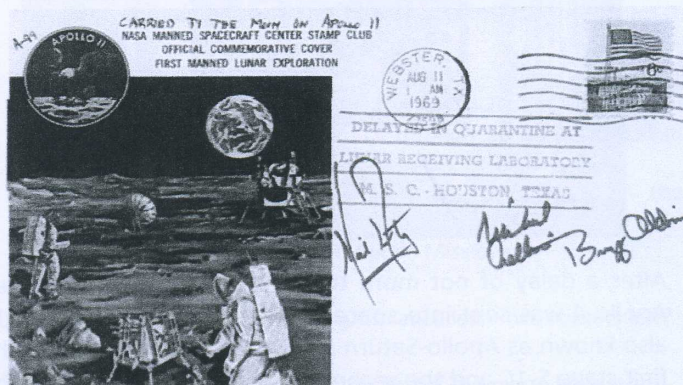
Aldrin signed with a Sharpie pen and added on his 104 covers the handwritten notation in capital letters "Carried on the moon on Apollo 11" and individually numbered each envelope with a progressive number, using different systems: from #1 to #54 the number is preceded by "EEA", while from #55 to #104 the digits are preceded by "A". Collins signed with ball-point pen and added on each of his 63 covers, in italics, "Carried on the moon aboard Apollo 11", without numbering the items.

Little is known about the 47 covers hold by Armstrong, who signed with Sharpie pen. I've never seen such a cover on the market. On the afternoon of August 1969, 10, the astronauts entrusted to Radnofsky the package containing the flown covers, and asked him to have them postmarked at the nearest post office. Buzz Aldrin, using a Sharpie, listed on the package the envelopes held by each crew member: 47 by Armstrong, 63 by Collins, and 104 by Aldrin. Radnofsky the following day brought the

DELAYED IN QUARANTINE AT  
LUNAR RECEIVING LABORATORY  
M. S. C. - HOUSTON, TEXAS



Above flown cover from the collection of Mike Collins and below one signed and numbered by Buzz Aldrin



package to the Webster post office, south of Houston, cancelled the covers and brought them back to Aldrin. Only two covers exist, with a postmark applied at the moon (the Apollo 11 "Moon letter" and the Apollo 15 cover officially cancelled at Hadley Rille) but they are not in private possession and are owned by the US Government. Private collectors may however have specimens of the three postmarks prepared for the Moon (one for Apollo 11 and two for Apollo 15), which are occasionally seen in the specialized auctions.

#### 4. The First Man on the Moon stamp: the greatest philatelic success ever.

The stamp designed by Paul Calle is perhaps the best known American stamp ever. Paul Calle, who passed away on December 30, 2010 at 82, was from the outset, a Honorary Member of AS.IT.AF. the Italian Society for Astrophilately. Known since the beginnings of the 50's as an illustrator of Science Fiction stories, Paul had specialised in space for almost 50 years. Paul was selected in 1962 as one of the first eight artists in the NASA Arts Program, newly established with the purpose of recording for history Space Exploration through the eyes of artists.



To be continued