

Moon Landing Pics: "Gee-Whiz" Afterthoug

Written by Steven Leckart



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This is, perhaps, the most famous photo from the Apollo Moon landing. It was taken by Neil Armstrong, who shot most of the pics taken on the Lunar surface using a [Hasselblad 500EL](#) camera outfitted with a Zeiss Biogon f-5.6/60 mm lens and 70mm Kodak film that was "thin-based and thin emulsion double-perforated."

Called the Data Camera, the 500EL used on the Moon was modded with a special silver finish to boost the hardware's ability to withstand extreme thermal variations (the middle camera [pictured here](#) has the silver finish). The Data Camera also featured a glass [Reseau plate](#), which produced a 5x5 grid of little crosses you can still see on the image. NASA used the markings to help account for film distortion and calculate the angular distance(s) between specific points in the image.

Pictured above is [Buzz Aldrin](#), who appears in the bulk of the Moon landing pics. In fact, there's essentially only one photo of Armstrong taken while on the Moon, a blurry close-up of his reflection in Aldrin's visor.

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Although a lot of brainpower went into creating the camera taken to the Moon, Aldrin says little planning went into the photography itself, which is why he became the unofficial star of the Moon.

From Aldrin's book ***Magnificent Desolation***:

"Neil shot most of the photos on the moon, having the camera attached to a fitting on his spacesuit much of the time while I was doing a variety of experiments. I didn't have such a camera holder on my suit, so it just made sense that Neil should handle the photography. He took some fantastic photographs, too, especially when one considers that there was no viewfinder on the intricate Hasselblad camera. We were basically "pointing and shooting." Imagine taking such historic photographs and not even being able to tell what image you were getting. Unlike the digital camera era of today, in 1969 we were shooting on film, typically looking through a small optical opening on the back of the camera that corresponded with what the camera's lens was "seeing." But with our large space helmets, such a viewfinder would have done little good anyhow. So, similar to cowboys shooting their sixguns from their hips, we aimed the camera in the direction of what we wanted to photograph, and squeezed the trigger. Given that ambiguity, it is even more of a credit to Neil that we brought back such stunning photographs from the moon.

if you look more carefully at the reflection in the gold visor on my helmet, you can see the Eagle with its landing pad, my shadow with the sun's halo effect, several of the experiments we had set up, and even Neil taking the picture. It is a truly astounding shot, and was the result of an

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entirely serendipitous moment on Neil's part. Later, pundits and others would wonder why most of the photographs on the moon were of me. It wasn't because I was the more photogenic of the two helmet-clad guys on the moon. Some even conjectured that it must have been a purposeful attempt on my part to shun Neil in the photos. That, of course, was ridiculous. We had our assigned tasks, and since Neil had the camera most of the time we were on the surface, it simply made sense that he would photograph our activities and the panoramas of the lunar landscape. And since I was the only other person there . . .

Ironically, the photography on the moon was one of those things that we had not laid out exactly prior to our launch. NASA's Public Affairs people didn't say, "Hey, you've got to take a lot of pictures of this or that." Everyone was interested in the science. So we did the science and the rest of it was sort of gee-whiz. We had not really planned a lot of the gee-whiz stuff that, in retrospect, proved quite important."

You can purchase a 16x20 print of the above pic and other Apollo-11 shots from Moonpans.com

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