

Apollo 11 Dual Recovery Team Leaders

by John Stonesifer

It was somewhat unusual, but two of us were designated as Recovery Team Leaders (TL) on the Prime Recovery Ship, USS Hornet, for Apollo 11. Because of the historic nature of the mission and because Doc Stullken and I served as TL on most of the previous ones, Jerry Hammack was in a quandary as to whom to assign.

So he asked our friend and past boss, Bob Thompson, what to do? Bob's response was, "Send both of them and let them work it out." I took the lead for I thought we better get this understood before too much time passed and before deployment. Actually, it was quite easy for the two of us were Branch Chiefs in the Landing and Recovery Division responsible for distinctly different activities. I had performed the lead up to the quarantine/isolation activities and development of the procedures that were approved by the Interagency Committee On Back Contamination (ICBC). The preparations for carrying out the required support and the development of equipment in this area were done by the folks in my Branch. Doc's folks were associated with aircraft ops, collar handling, basic retrieval of the spacecraft etc. so the split was quite obvious.

We agreed he would be TL for "Operations", and I would be TL for anything to do with "quarantine/Isolation" and return of crew to Houston. It worked quite well. Doc dealt with the Houston communications and mission progress, helo search/photo/swimmer ops, aircraft operations, spacecraft retrieval, planning with the ship on Simexs, and working with the ship on accommodating all PAO/press requirements.

My team would take over while underway the quarantine type briefings and processes so that ship's company understood the unusual nature of the mission. Working with Doc's folks, we assisted in making sure the swimmers knew what to do in all situations and how they interfaced with the Biological Isolation Garment (BIG) swimmer. You might say that once the BIG swimmer entered the water, isolation/quarantine began and from then on my team would lead. I interfaced with the Secret Service so that they understood what/where /when the President and group could complete their visit. Mobile Quarantine Facility (MQF) operations were

carried out by those folks handling spacecraft items, transporting the rock samples expeditiously and returning the MQF with crew to Houston.

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Apollo 11 dual Recovery Team Leaders Doc Stullken (left in dark suit) and John Stonesifer (left center in suit and tie) direct astronauts Armstrong, Aldrin, and Collins in Biological Isolation Garments (BIGs) toward the Mobile Quarantine Facility (MQF) on board the USS Hornet on July 24, 1969. (Photo Credit: NASA S69-21441)