

Kansan Dreams of Being

Salina 8/20/67



Kansas Astronaut

Lt. Cmdr. Ronald Evans and wife, Janet.
(Journal Photo)

By KAREN LAMBERT

The space suit was missing, but the easy charm, disciplined mind and good looks that seem to mark all U.S. astronauts was evident in Lt. Cmdr. Ronald Evans as he relaxed in Salina Saturday.

Just back from one of the few rounds of golf he has time to play each year, Cmdr. Evans talked candidly about an astronaut's life, his dreams, and the U.S. space program.

He and his wife, Janet, are visiting Mrs. Evan's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Pollom, 917 Millwood drive.

Evans, 33, a native of St. Francis, was named an astronaut in April, 1966, along with another Kansan, Capt. Joe Engle, Chapman. He is a member of the astronaut support crew for the manned Appolo project — the program to land a man on the moon.

The support team is the

"second back-up" to the command crew which will actually make the Apollo flight, he explained.

"We're sort of responsible for all the odd jobs," he said. That includes preliminary and final systems testing and "all the things the prime and alternate crews don't have time to do."

He was on the support crew in January when three American astronauts — Virgil Grissom, Edward White and Roger B. Chaffee — died when a still unexplained fire swept through the spacecraft.

Evans refers to the first American space program tragedy as "the incident," and does not like to dwell on it.

But he tried to explain why the astronauts are more determined than ever to boost the Apollo program.

"Most of us who were directly involved are military men and realize there will be trag-

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edies," he said. "You don't just stop and cry. You continue to work and make it better."

He promised that the U.S. would also have "a much better spacecraft and program as a result."

Evans graduated from Kansas university in 1965 with a degree in electrical engineering. He entered the Navy from the KU Navy ROTC program and attended Navy flight school in Pensacola, Fla.

The former jet fighter pilot and Vietnam combat veteran earned a master's degree in electrical engineering after he joined the Navy.

He dreamed of being an astronaut for seven years before he was chosen. Being an astronaut is "a realization that I could do something to help the nation get to the moon."

The glory that he admits is involved is "only a by-product."

He'd like to be the first man on the moon, but concedes that "so would everyone else." He said there are about 20 active astronauts ahead of him whom he feels are more likely to be selected.

Before the first manned Apollo flight, which Evans said would be in early 1968, will come launching of what the astronauts have dubbed "Big Mother." That is the moon rocket, Saturn 5, which will be fired this fall.

Until the astronauts have conquered the lunar territory, Evans said, scientists won't know what to do with it.

"It could be a communications station. We might find rich mineral resources there.

Who Cares?

"But I feel it really doesn't make any difference what might be up there," he said. "The fact that we are going to go and the

technology we have developed just trying to get there are going to be the real advantages."

Two products Americans already enjoy as a result of space research are highly durable paints and bottled draft beer, he said.

These and other goods are developed by private companies who can get technological information for the asking and put it to their own use.

The benefit to all Americans is only one reason why Evans is sure that "there will always be a space program."

Its ties to civilian industry and the millions of dollars allocated in government spending have made it one of the vital factors in the American economy, he explained.

"Of course it costs a great deal," he admitted. "But when you compare it to the cost, say,

of a war, you find that almost all of the money comes right back into the economy."

He said that 60 percent of all war costs "are thrown away in things like bombs and ammunition. But 90 percent of the space funds come back into the economy, so everyone benefits."

To Evans, critics aren't justified who contend too much is spent on the space program when there are so many unsolved domestic problems.

"Our nation has decided we are going to attempt this project," he said, that should be reason enough

Evans said he was not the man who could say which country is ahead in the U.S.-Soviet Union "space race" and he doesn't agree that it is a contest.

"Nobody really knows what the

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Russians are doing. Some people want to call this a race. But you can be sure that we are not going to sacrifice some item of safety to beat the Russians to the moon. We are not going until we are ready."

What about the equipment which seems so strange to earth-bound Americans — space suits, food and physical weightlessness?

Evans, who has trained in simulators at the manned spacecraft center in Houston, Tex. and at Cape Kennedy, Fla., said the astronauts get used to it. "Most of the time, we're too busy to notice."

He said a space suit "isn't really uncomfortable. It's pretty well designed, although it does take some force to move around in it."

Space food is "really quite palatable." He said there are so many varieties that even a gourmet could choose a menu to suit his tastes.

Weightlessness, or zero G, is hard to describe, "except that you can float, stand on your head, bounce off things, and it doesn't make any difference."

He said space scientists didn't know whether or not astronauts could survive at zero G until they tried it.

Can Shed Suits

Crewmen on Apollo flights probably will be able to take off the cumbersome space suits after launching, he predicted.

The capsule's cabin will give them the protection they need.

He said the disrobed astronauts would wear "long johns" and also would have "in-flight overalls" to wear for the space cameras.

Space dreams that are today the property of science fiction writers are in the realm of future possibility.

"It's going to be a long time before we have a mass exodus to the moon, and it's really science fiction to imagine that someday it will be a tourist spot," he said. "But when you rationalize what has happened just in the past 20 years, it isn't impossible."

Conquering space is a natural part of man's destiny, Evans believes. "We are meant to get up there and see what's there, see if we can use it or improve it."

But it isn't something man will do by himself.

"There isn't an astronaut in the program who doesn't believe in God," he said quietly. He paused to grope for words of explanation.

"You have to thank God that you are able to do it. That's what it amounts to. I don't think you can do it without believing in God."

Evans and his wife and their children, Jon and Jaime, plan to visit in Topeka and Kansas City before returning to their home in Seabrook, Tex. Aug. 27.