

# **JIM LOVELL: Iconic astronaut who went to moon twice, back on Earth, now in Edwardsville**

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**EDWARDSVILLE** – For those who grew up in the 1960s and early 1970s, the nation was glued to the television and radio every time Americans or Soviets sent a man or crew of men into space.

The first tentative steps came in the early 1960s, when the Soviets first sent Yuri Gagarin into orbit aboard Vostok 1; the Americans countered by sending first Alan Shepard into space on board the Mercury capsule Freedom 7 in May 1961, then John Glenn into orbit in February 1962 aboard another Mercury capsule named Friendship 7.

What became known as The Space Race culminated on a warm Sunday – July 20, 1969 – when Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, in their lunar module named Eagle – landed and walked on the moon.

Nine months later, on board Apollo 13 with **Fred Haise and Jack Swigert, Jim Lovell** – who was commanding the flight and was slated to walk on the moon – heard a loud bang coming from somewhere in the spacecraft. That bang – which was the explosion of an oxygen tank that damaged the other oxygen tank – became the start of the defining moment of his career with NASA.

The three astronauts, along with the tireless efforts of the ground crew at Mission Control in Houston, overcame all the odds and worked together to get home safely after the explosion on board the service module of their main spacecraft, code-named Odyssey, forced their intended moon landing to be aborted.

The story, which was chronicled in his book “Lost Moon: The Perilous Voyage of Apollo 13”, became the basis for the 1995 film “Apollo 13”, which starred **Tom Hanks, Bill Paxton, Gary Sinese, Kevin Bacon and Ed Harris**, still resonates today. Friday, Lovell was at SIU-Edwardsville as part of the school's Arts and Issues lecture series to tell his story about what happened on board Odyssey and the lunar module Aquarius as the crew and controllers worked together to bring the crew home safely.

Lovell discussed what happened on board the spacecraft and the future of space flight – including the dream of sending a crew to Mars in the near future – in a media availability session prior to his Friday night lecture, entitled “Apollo 13: A Successful Failure” at SIUE.

Lovell discussed the interest of what happened and how the crew got back to Earth; what the result of the flight and how the crew got home, Lovell said. “What they (the result of the flight) do is bring up the true value and true talent of the NASA Mission Control team and the associated NASA people, plus the contractors that worked (together),” Lovell said.

Prior to the flight of Apollo 13 in April 1970, public interest in the space program had begun to wane, mostly because of the 1969 Apollo 11 moon landing and the accomplishment of the goal President John Kennedy had set after Shepard's Freedom 7

flight “before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and bring him back safely to the Earth”. Americans returned to the moon four months later on Apollo 12, with Pete Conrad and Alan Bean landing and performing two moon walks.

“Before Apollo 13, things got to be so routine,” Lovell recalled. “The news media had not come around much anymore. On Apollo 8, which I was on (the first flight that sent astronauts to the moon in December 1968; Lovell, Frank Borman and Bill Anders flew to the moon, performed 10 orbits, took pictures and scouted potential landing sites and even sent two television transmissions back – including the famed Christmas Eve telecast that mesmerized Americans getting ready to celebrate the Christmas holiday), they were all over the place; on my yard and down at the Johnson Space Center (in Houston, then known as the Manned Spacecraft Center).

“On 13, the only person who was around my house was the protocol officer, and his job, it turned out, was to take care of the dog, and my wife (Marilyn) could do other stuff. But then, the explosion occurred, and we did not land. What happened was the NASA Mission Control team went through their leadership and their teamwork and their initiative turned an almost certain catastrophe into a successful recovery.”

Swigert had taken over as the Command Module Pilot for Ken Mattingly, who was taken off the flight after the crew had inadvertently been exposed to German measles prior to the scheduled launch of the flight. Swigert, despite how he had been depicted in the movie version of Apollo 13, was a highly competent astronaut who trained with the rest of the backup crew the same time the primary crew trained for the flight.

“The movie shows (Swigert) as having to earn his wings every day,” Lovell said. “That was not true; he was a very competent astronaut. In the movie, I think Ron Howard (the film's director) had to show a bit of artistic license to make it a bit more exciting; everyone was wondering if Swigert could do it. If Jack couldn't (had docked the ships together), Fred could do it or I could do it. That's a director for you.”

Lovell flew on four flights, two in the Gemini program (with Borman on the two-week flight of Gemini 7 in December 1965 and Gemini 12 with Aldrin in November 1966) prior to his two Apollo flights; when he went up on Apollo 13, Lovell was America's most experienced astronaut in terms of time spent in space. He had spent time in the St. Louis area preparing for his Gemini flights as what was then known as McDonnell Aircraft in north St. Louis County built the Mercury and Gemini capsules that paved the way for the Apollo flights beginning in late 1968.

“I spent time at McDonnell for three or four years, week in and week out, preparing for (his Gemini flights). It's slowed down now, and McDonnell (later McDonnell-Douglas) is now Boeing; there's just a couple of aerospace companies now.”

Lovell recalled his days as a Navy test pilot and flying out jets that McDonnell produced prior to their days as the company that helped put the nation into space and also recalled his two-week Gemini 7 flight with Borman that also became the first rendezvous in space when Gemini 6 was also launched a week-and-a-half later, carrying Wally Schirra and Tom Stafford to a meeting some 150 miles above the earth, a maneuver that helped pave the way for the future Apollo missions.

“It was the easiest and best thing we could have done” when the Gemini 7 and 6 spacecraft got together several days before Christmas 1965, Lovell recalled. “You have to remember that this was a big flight; Gemini 6 had both Wally Schirra and Tom Stafford, and they were both Naval Academy graduates, and on Gemini 7, there was myself, a Naval Academy graduate, and Frank Borman – a West Pointer.

“So when we finally rendezvous, Tom put up a placard that said 'Beat Army' and I took the picture. That's the highest 'Beat Army' rally we ever had!”

One of the defining pictures of the race to the moon was taken by Anders early in the lunar orbital operations on board Apollo 8. Entitled “Earthrise”, the picture has become one of the most iconic shots taken. “It's just one picture, but it shows how insignificant we really all are,” Lovell said. “I could put my thumb up to the window and I could completely hide the Earth with my thumb.

“Everything I ever knew, the existence of people, all the problems we have here, was behind my thumb, and it gave you the idea of also how insignificant we are, but also how fortunate we are that we exist on that particular planet.”

