

were strapped firmly onto their reclined acceleration couches, which had been custom-made to fit each astronaut's body and cushion him from the force of liftoff and reentry. The astronauts were packed close together in the cramped space, which was only 11 feet (3.4 m) high and 13 feet (4 m) across at its widest point. Above them, *Columbia's* massive dashboard was covered with more than 400 switches and controls. These would allow the men to monitor and operate the spacecraft with the assistance of two small computers, each less powerful than a modern cell phone. Scattered in open spaces throughout the CM were storage compartments for holding toothbrushes, food, and medical equipment. There were also star charts and navigational tools such as a **SEXTANT**. Fastened at *Columbia's* tip was a launch escape tower, which would pull the craft free from Apollo 11's rockets and land it in the Atlantic Ocean should anything go wrong during the launch.

At nine seconds before liftoff, the five powerful engines that made up the first stage of the Saturn V rocket ignited, sending a roaring fireball into a water-filled pit beneath the rocket. As the engines built up to full power, the clamps holding Apollo 11 to the launch tower were released, and it began to rise slowly into the air. Gradually, the rocket picked up speed, clearing the launch tower 12 seconds after liftoff. Its deafening roar drowned out the screams of "Go! Go!" by the more than 1 million spectators who had crowded into central Florida to watch the history-making launch. The Parisian newspaper *Le Figaro* summed up the feelings of people around the world that morning by proclaiming, "The greatest adventure in the history of humanity has begun."



APOLLO 11 PROFILE: BUZZ ALDRIN

Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin was born on January 20, 1930, in Montclair, New Jersey. He graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and flew fighter jets during the Korean War before earning a doctor of science in astronautics from MIT. Aldrin joined NASA in 1963, and in November 1966, he flew on Gemini 12. After serving as LM pilot for Apollo 11, Aldrin worked with NASA on the shuttle program before retiring in 1971. He later struggled with depression and alcoholism, which he wrote about in his memoirs *Return to Earth* (1973) and *Magnificent Desolation: The Long Journey Home from the Moon* (2009). Aldrin has also written a number of other books, both fiction and nonfiction. Today, he dedicates much of his time to promoting the development of affordable space travel for all.