



## NASA Johnson Space Center Oral History Project Edited Oral History Transcript

**William A. Anders**  
**Interviewed by Paul Rollins**  
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*[This transcript has been edited and approved by William Anders.]*

**Rollins:** Well, when did you make the decision to become an astronaut and what did you do towards ...

**Anders:** [Early in my Air Force career as a fighter pilot] I was trying very hard to get into the Air Force Flight Test School. ... I ... talked to Chuck Yeager and the people running [the school] and Yeager ... said "We're really looking for people with advanced degrees." This was in [1959]. So, I signed up for the Air Force Institute of Technology masters [degree] program [where I] graduated with honors. [I went back] to Edwards thinking I was a shoe-in and [was told by Yeager], "Oh, well [that] the criteria [had been changed and that advanced degrees didn't count as much as flying time.] ... I was disappointed but I still kept trying to get in and [applied] for the Flight Test Program [anyway]. [In the meantime,] ... I was driving my Volkswagen bus, [one Friday afternoon] going home from work [in] Albuquerque [New Mexico] at the Air Force Special Weapons Center, where I was an engineer and an instructor pilot [when] I heard this announcement [over the car radio] that NASA was looking for another group of astronauts. Now one had to be a test pilot for the first two groups [of astronauts] and it didn't occur to me that they would change that. But [for] this group [the radio announcer] went down the list of things [NASA required. He said the applicants] had to be a graduate of Test Pilot School or have an advanced degree. I remember pulling over to the side, tuning it up, and then waiting for the next fifteen minute [news cast where the "... or advanced degree" message was repeated. By the time I got home] ... I had decided that ... I was going to put in an application. ... I wrote up a letter [that weekend], ... mailed it to [NASA on Sunday]. [W]hen I got to work at the Air Base the next [Monday the pilot officers were] told that if ... we were interested, [we should fill out some] forms [and] submit them through the channels. ... I went to my boss and said [that I] already sent [NASA] a letter [of application.] ... [H]e said, "Well, that's okay, just go do it again [through channels]." ... [T]o my surprise [I] was asked to come down for the various physicals and tests [several weeks later]. And, to my increasing surprise, [I] kept surviving [the cuts]. [On October 17] of 1963 [(my birthday), I] was called by Deke [Donald K.] Slayton and asked if I wanted to [fly with them, I accepted immediately]. Two days later, I [received] a call from Chuck Yeager who said, ... he was really sorry [and that] I was really a great candidate but I didn't make [the USAF Test Pilot School]. I made the mistake, in retrospect, of saying, "Well, Colonel I appreciate [your call] ... but I [have] a better offer anyway." "What was that?" [he asked surprised]. I told him I [had received] a call from Deke Slayton [to come to NASA. Yeager] said that's not possible because we ... screened all the applicants and since you weren't a member of the test pilot school you didn't go forward. I said, "Well, sir, I put in [another application directly to NASA]." ... [He was upset about that and] actually put some energy into that trying to get me kicked out of the [NASA] program... [Fortunately he was not successful.]

**Rollins:** By-gones are by-gones...

**Rollins:** Now what are the tests like for becoming an astronaut? Are there a lot of written tests that you have to pass, and then oral interviews and that sort of thing? For instance how many people applied when those fourteen of you were selected?

**Anders:** I don't remember, I mean the record is around, but I had the impression that it was several thousand, maybe five thousand of which two thousand met the published criteria, of which I think they invited about three hundred. They just kept doing it in waves and chopping out about half of the group each time. I remember going down to San Antonio [Texas] for [testing on] an aptitude machine, ... like a massive pinball or video game ... that we played for a score... [A]pparently [I] did very well on that.

Mainly because I figured out how to beat it. In fact the write up was the Anders required more time in the checkout than was normal. Because I said, "Now how to score this thing?" And I found out there [were] ... ten [games] going at once. Some of them were essentially impossible to play without total dedication at the expense of all others. But I found out that the scoring system was based, not only on getting the right answer or the wrong answer, but how long it took [to make your choice]. So, you're cumulative score was the number of wrong answers times the time [it took]. So I thought to myself, 'Fine, if there's one of these games that's very difficult, then I'll just always hit "A" instead of wondering whether it's "A" or "B" and I'll just do it instantaneously because zero times any number is still zero.' ... I weeded out about three of the games, and maxed out on the rest and I think my score was [probably] 150% better than anybody else's mainly because [the rest were] trying to do all the fancy stuff. ... [A]nother little feature that might be worthy in record. During this [test the shrinks] look at you through a one way glass to see how you take stress because they really load you up. I mean you're like a one arm paper hanger... Well in the middle of the test, when ... we're moving ... at double speed and I kept hearing this "RRRRR RRRRR RRRRR" over [at] the side of the room, [which was supposed to be]. I thought, well that's distracting. So I [gestured toward the noise thinking that ... these jerks are trying to screw me up. ... [A]pparently this behavior caused [the] shrinks to start flocking in [thinking,] "Hey, here we've got a live one that's about to go nuts." Well towards the end I looked over where this noise was and a drill bit came through the wall... Well it turned out that [a maintenance man had] been hanging fire extinguishers on the outside of [the room, the shrinks] didn't know about, they couldn't hear him. Anyway that was one of the tests, but there were quite a few and right up to—there was written tests. I used the mumbling theory which I learned in college that if you have an essay [answer] to write and you don't know the answer just start mumbling because most of the professors are bored and half asleep when they read it and they'll at least give you a C or C- [if you've written a lot]. ... I knew the answers to a few and I wrote those up very succinctly and [when] I didn't know the answers to others and I mumbled. ... [I]n any event, I survived [the testing. Now,] I will tell you something ... that I've only told one other person [Claudette Gage the Flight Medicine Nurse] besides my wife... [W]hen I came to the final [screening], there were a row of guys..., Al Shepard [Alan B. Shepard, Jr.], Wally Schirra [Walter M. Schirra, Jr.], Chuck [Charles A.] Berry, who was the head flight surgeon and some other flight surgeon, and the chief shrink, ... (the big names of the day), were lined up at [a] table. And I was asked, I guess along with others, to come in and they had [a] stack of records. They were going through [this stack of records] and I was kind of standing there a little bit uncomfortably... I remember Chuck Berry saying something like, "Well," he said, "we basically are ... satisfied with what we have here, you've done well, a strong candidate, but we want to ask you [again] about that concussion ... that you had five years ago." ... I had never had a concussion, so I'm thinking, what's going on here. I didn't know Al Shepard then but I know now and I know he's quite capable of throwing out a fish, a Red Herring, out there to see how you react. ... [Maybe] are they testing me, are they just seeing whether I'm going to be honest and confess that I've never had it, or, seeming unlikely ..., did they get my records mixed up with somebody else? Since I made it this far and since there were five hundred others, odds are that maybe [the official] Anders [record was] rejected because he had a twisted foot or he didn't do well in the psychiatric exam. ... I couldn't bring myself to lie... So I thought okay, I'll just say, "I've never had a problem with a concussion." "Fine." And the next thing I knew I was a member of the program. ... [I've recently asked the Flight Medicine Nurse to go back through the records to] see if those original physical blood type actually match all the others [of mine]...

**Rollins:** So you're wondering whether you're here by mistake or not... Well, when you finally ended up coming to Houston, was there any sort of initiation for the rookie astronauts, hazing, good natured—

**Anders:** No, there wasn't

**Rollins:** You weren't immediately embraced I wouldn't imagine?

**Anders:** No, since I was not a test pilot, there were several of us who weren't, we basically figured out real fast that we were at that bottom of the totem pole... Also [our] group was not immediately embraced because ... the Time Life [magazine] contract was a bit of an issue. The first group were well into that, the second group had been brought along by the first group reluctantly and the last thing they wanted was to start dividing the pie even further... [T]hey really didn't know what to do with [us]. So there were some tensions that I didn't fully understand going on because of that. ... [G]enerally we were accepted and the lines were accepted, but if you had gone to test pilot school, whether it be Air Force or Navy, you were more accepted than if you were an 'egghead', so to speak, like I and several others were [considered].

**Rollins:** So what were those first few weeks like when you arrived?

**Anders:** Just a lot of briefings and ... a lot of logistics of trying to get our families located and that kind of thing. ... [W]e were treated well [but] you definitely knew there was a totem pole, just like in any organization.

**Rollins:** And you all were given other duties—

**Anders:** ... [W]e were trained in [spacecraft systems,] rendezvous and in geology which I particularly liked. I volunteered to go on all the geology trips which probably didn't go over too well because you weren't supposed to be interested in that kind of stuff. Then eventually we were assigned various duties, somewhat related to our experience, mine mainly being in space radiation shielding ... [and] I was assigned that [responsibility for] the environmental control system...

**Rollins:** Well part of the research, they noticed that you're experienced with that, radiation and the Van Allen belts, you were asked about that?

**Anders:** In the interviews you mean, when?

**Rollins:** Well, no. Before the Apollo mission for the Gemini missions. For instance for 9, they were wondering whether that was going to cause a problem.

**Anders:** Well, and there were various experiments on board the spacecraft measuring radiation and I generally got involved in reviewing those. Pete Conrad [Charles C. Conrad, Jr.] and I particularly on Gemini 11, which was highly elliptical orbit up through the Van Allen belt, went up to the Naval Research Lab and we had a little, (still have) a ... joke [why] we wanted him to look good but he didn't know anything about the [radiation] and wasn't going to learn anything about. [We had] signals where [one finger] meant "no" and [two fingers] meant "yes". So when you interview Pete Conrad you can [ask], "Does that [one finger] means anything to you?" ...

**Rollins:** Well do you think when they were choosing the crews for the various missions, were the individuals personalities taken into account?

**Anders:** The best source I have there is the book Deke because I could never figure out what the selections were based on. Some guys got picked early that I wouldn't fly with and others seemed to get ignored who I thought were on the top of the pile. ... I was picked as a back up crew for Gemini and was going to fly on Gemini 13 because we rotated every other flight with Neil Armstrong, but then the Gemini program was truncated. And then Neil Armstrong and I trained together in the lunar landing training vehicle [and] I thought this was a very good sign. Then we had the fire and so the various crews got shifted around and I was crewed up with Frank Borman and Mike [Michael] Collins and I thought that was a [very] good sign. ... I was a Lunar Module pilot [and] I was particularly interested in landing on the Moon being interested in geology, but ... because of the Russian threat of a circum-lunar flight in early '68, they changed Apollo 8's mission and we didn't have a Lunar Module... The next thing I knew I was the Command Module... Jim Lovell [James A. Lovell, Jr.] came kind of late onto our crew. So that sort of welded me into the Command Module seat. And, ... from Deke Slayton's book, I read ... that [Borman] and his Apollo 8 crew were offered the lunar landing flight and that [he didn't accept]. [Borman] left [the program], that [made me the] Command Module pilot for Apollo 13, I was on that crew for awhile before it was announced. Then I was [asked by the NASA administrator] to go to Washington to work on space policy. [When I left NASA] Ken Mattingly [Thomas K. Mattingly II] took my place...

**Rollins:** And that's what I'm curious about and of course a lot of us are curious about how those crews were chosen and so that's why I asked. And so far I don't think from the people we've talked to, none of you come up with a very deceitful answer, because for instance, some astronauts got many missions and others, like you, only got one.

**Anders:** But I selected out, if I'd had hung around, I'd have flown on Skylab probably but when this opportunity [for a] presidential appointment came up [I felt I had to take it]. I'd been complaining about [NASA not having a space policy] after the lunar landing. I thought the American public was supporting Apollo not because they wanted science or even because they wanted exploration, they wanted to show those "dirty commies" that America [was still #1 technologically]. So the first time that flag went in the Moon, which is what JFK [John F. Kennedy] and LBJ [Lyndon B. Johnson] really had [in mind]... It was put the flag in the Moon so that America wouldn't be embarrassed [by Sputnik or Gagarin]. Well NASA lost track of what the real [political] reason was. They liked a more romantic reason, and I did too for that matter, but I think that I was one of the minority who maybe realized correctly that the American public really wasn't for what NASA wanted to do. And they wanted their NASA to land on the Moon [and plant the American flag] but they weren't that interested in lunar rocks or even going to Mars. We've got the same problem today. So my concern was how do we get a space program that actually has public support. How do we start not only exploring, but pioneering space? So I went to Washington and helped get Skylab and Viking and ... the Space Shuttle... So that's why I didn't get [anymore] flights...

**Rollins:** Well were you disappointed that you weren't able to ... I guess you had a choice to make more flights.

**Anders:** I did, but I could see because I had been put on the Command Module track by default even though I trekked down the lunar training vehicle [track] and checked out in the Lunar Module... [NASA] took our Lunar Module away from us to go around the Moon real quick. All that made sense. So I feel

extremely fortunate to have been able to participate on man's first flight away from [our] own planet but I would have traded the last lunar landing for the first flight away from the planet...

**Rollins:** Well were you surprised when they made the decision to send Apollo 8 to the Moon?

**Anders:** Yes.

**Rollins:** And what were your concerns?

**Anders:** Well my concern was that I was losing my Lunar Module, because if you had your name on the side of the Lunar Module, so to speak, then that meant, unless you screwed up, that you were going to make a lunar landing. When that Lunar Module went away, I could really quickly see the domino effects.

**Rollins:** You'd lost those responsibilities.

**Anders:** Right and [then] I [became] a Command Module expert and the hook there was that the more expert I became in the Command Module, the more I became welded to the Command Module [and] Command Module guys ... don't land. And my position on the totem pole was such that it was going to have to be Apollo 16, 17, 18, or later when I'd be a commander. ... Gene [Eugene A.] Cernan sweated it out, but Gene ... also flew [in] Gemini so he had slightly greater number of brownie points. ... [I]f I'd have waited [there might have been a chance to land on Apollo [19] or [20]]... But ... at the time, I didn't expect [NASA] to go past Apollo 15, given the [public] unrest that was developing over the cost of the space program.

**Rollins:** And you had a better feel for that because weren't you then in Washington?

**Anders:** I had to make that decision before I went to Washington. Once I went to Washington, ... though, I made a deal with the administrator that I could come back [if I so chose I] even got to fly NASA airplanes for five year later, [but I had] pretty much cast my lot of not [landing on the Moon. It was a good call].

**Rollins:** Well when I asked about concerns with Apollo 8, those were your personal concerns but did you have personal concerns about the equipment because it was the second time—

**Anders:** No, we were test pilots ... and that was our job. In retrospect, I've been in a lot more dangerous positions. Flying in the Air Force or just a couple of months ago in the Reno Air Race is more dangerous than on Apollo 8. ... [I]t was not that we were blasé about it. I mean, we really checked. ... I knew every little wire and relay in that Saturn and in the Command Module. And, as an engineer, [I] probably was [more] able, ... than a lot of the other guys to determine whether it was safe or not. I had made that determination. I didn't think it was risk free but I thought that the [national] reasons for doing it were important, [as well as] the patriotic and ... exploration... [This] all made me decide that ... there was [probably] one chance in three that [we] wouldn't make it back, that there was probably two chances in three that we wouldn't go there either because we didn't make it back or [we had to abort] and one chance in three we'd have a successful mission, [that this was a risk worth taking]. You know, [Christopher] Columbus [sailed] out with probably worst odds. This was very much like Columbus voyage. So on the one hand I was very excited about it and on the other hand I was disappointed about it. I wasn't really worried about it anymore than any other mission.

**Rollins:** Do you have any special memories or anything stands out about that mission?

**Anders:** [Several] things ... stand out. We had simulated essentially everything we could think of or anything anybody could think of on that flight, all previous flights, and in centrifuges, in zero G airplanes, and procedure trainers and that kind of stuff. And yet the very first seconds of the flight were a total surprise to everybody because the Saturn V which is a big tall rocket, kind of skinny, more like a whip antenna on your automobile, [and we were] like a bug on the end of a whip... It actually gets very massive near the bottom, with the center of gravity near the bottom so if you rotate it, what little bit of wiggle [on the bottom that] translates to a big wiggle up [at the top]. ... [T]hese giant F-1 engines, [each] producing a million and a half pounds of thrust, ... were trying to keep [the rocket] going straight. So, it was being thrashed at the bottom and we were getting really thrashed at the top. I mean, violent sideways movement and massive noise that ... no where near had been [simulated] properly in [our] simulations. ... [F]or about the first ten, seemed like forty, but probably the first ten seconds we could not communicate [with each other]. Had there been a need to abort detected on my instruments I could not have relayed that to Borman. So we were all out of it, [on our effectively] unmanned vehicle for the first ten or twenty seconds... The next most impressive thing was that as we burned out on the first stage... [W]e were hitting about six or eight G's ... and [we] were back in [our] seats. You could hardly lift your arms, you have trouble breathing, [but] you're not blacked out because the way your blood was flowing from your legs ... down into your torso. But, ... try to reach up, it's like you had a twenty pound weight in

your hand... [A]ll the fluid in your ears is ... being pushed [back] into the seat along with your body. ... [T]hen the engines cut off, and just as they cut off some retro rockets fire to try to move that big first stage away from the second and third stage but slightly before it separates. So, you go from a plus 6 G to a minus one-tenth, and the fluid in your ears just [goes wild]. ... I felt like I was [being] catapulted right through that instrument panel. ... [Instinctively] I put my hand up [in front of my face] and just about the time I got my hand up ..., the second stage cut in. ... [W]hack-o, right onto the face plate with the wrist ring which left [a] gash. ... I thought, 'Oh, damn,' ... here I am, the rookie of the flight, and sure enough here's this big rookie mark. [When] we got into orbit and I got out of my seat and we [took] off our suits and each guy handed me their helmet [to stow] and, sure enough, each one of them had a gash in it from the same thing. But, the most impressive aspect of the flight was [when] we were in lunar orbit. We'd been going backwards and upside down, didn't really see the Earth or the Sun, and when we rolled around and came around and saw the first Earth rise. [T]hat certainly was, by far, the most impressive thing. To see this very delicate, colorful orb which to me looked like a Christmas tree ornament coming up over this very stark, ugly lunar landscape really contrasted...

**Rollins:** This is the famous photograph.

**Anders:** ...[T]hat one [view] is sunk in my head. Then there's another one I like maybe [and this is] of the first full Earth picture which made it again look very colorful. ... [T]o me the significance of this [is that the Moon is] about the size of your fist held at arm's length ... you can imagine ... [that at a hundred arms' lengths the Earth is] down to [the size of] a dust mote. [A]nd, a hundred lunar distances in space are really nothing. You haven't gone anywhere not even to the next planet. So here was this orb looking like a Christmas tree ornament, very fragile, not [an infinite] expanse [of] granite ... [and seemingly of] a physical insignificance and yet it was our home...

**Rollins:** Well, was there anything on that flight that you wish could have been accomplished that you, maybe, ran out of time?

**Anders:** In retrospect I wish I would have taken more pictures, but Frank was concerned about whether we were rested or not so he forced Lovell and I to go to sleep which probably made sense. One screw up I did was I used some film that had been designed as ASA 2000, very high speed film, to photograph the Earth's side of the Moon which was in Earth shine on that flight. ... I got them mixed up and ... used the Earth shine film on the intense lunar back side and vice versa. But fortunately I confessed to Dick Underwood who was the [NASA photo] guru and they were able to change the chemistry of the development and at least salvage some of [the photos]. But no, we made it up and back and that was our job and so I don't have any regrets other than what I've already articulated about not making a landing...

**Rollins:** Mr. Collins was here, of course before, and he said that he felt that it was more significant that your mission had left the Earth than their mission where they had actually landed on another.

**Anders:** I've heard that from him and others.

**Rollins:** And so I'd like to hear your...

**Anders:** Well I've thought about that and I try to be objective. I certainly think it was very significant. I think landing on the Moon was very significant... [W]e were the first to leave our home planet, they were the first to go to ... another planet. So even though maybe the lunar landing which was the objective got a lot ... more hoopla, I certainly would put them both on the same level. To say that Apollo 8 is more significant, I'm not ready to say that. They were both significant.

**Rollins:** What do you feel is your most significant contribution to the space program?

**Anders:** ... [W]ell that's difficult because so many things we did were just a culmination of all the activity and the fact that we happened to be the ones who were there. Maybe taking that picture which had a lot of ecological and philosophical impact at the time. Probably just making sure that the Apollo 8 Command Module and service module worked, not only during the flight but was rung out thoroughly during the tests, which I really had dedicated a tremendous amount of energy to which probably just doing my part in one link in the chain of success of Apollo 8 [in particular and the Apollo program in general].

**Rollins:** When you were doing that, you got to go to the factory a lot and talk to all the engineers.

**Anders:** To inspect the tests. Yea.

**Rollins:** Do you have any memories of that? Were there any particular things that you recommended or suggested that were put into place, did engineers redesign anything?

**Anders:** Well it was just a continuous dialogue back and forth between me personally or the astronauts as a group or non-astronauts. There was a very good working relationship. The contractor clearly was more interested in doing it right than making a lot of money, although I suppose they did all right. But I don't remember any issues where things weren't resolved to my satisfaction whether I thought about them initially or not, so it was a very good. And there wasn't, particularly prior to the fire and even after the fire there wasn't, the kind of who shot John aspect that you see in the Shuttle today or who forgot to pull the plug out of the Mir or whatever they did. People now seem to be, maybe it's the age of the yuppie or something, looking for blame, who can be blamed for this or who can be blamed for that, as opposed to, "Oh, the Mir's probably pretty good." Certainly better than nothing. And yet the press focus is on what's the leak of the day. And we put people in much greater risks, we the United States, down in Antarctica or in airplanes everyday than the astronauts are put at risk in Mir, in my view, and yet the press hasn't jumped on that. Why did I tell you this, you didn't ask me about Mir?

**Rollins:** No, no, but that's good, that's a good point. Because that was going to be one of my later questions was, what do you think NASA's future is and ...

**Anders:** Is that the question now or later?

**Rollins:** Well we can do it now since you're on the subject.

**Anders:** Well I think NASA got off the track a bit and is still off the track a bit and I don't mean this as a big negative comment about NASA. I think what happened was very human. But I think NASA started believing their own press releases about mid Apollo and they forgot, this point I made earlier, that the real reason for Apollo was a [battle in the] cold war, as Frank Borman is fond of saying, "Another battle in the cold war." It was not an exploration program, even though I thought of myself more of an explorer than a fighter pilot, and it was not a way to generate technology. Contrary to what NASA would like to have you think, it's a lot cheaper to develop Teflon without going to the Moon than the other way around. [Yes,] there were some interesting spin-offs, [and] the lunar rocks, to me anyway, [are] an interesting spin off. NASA, particularly the hierarchy, both in, and this is one of the things that I was reacting negatively to at the time and the reason I went to Washington, was that somehow that the six billion dollars per year that NASA was getting early on [should be continued regardless of the banes of NASA]... Well the real question [was], "Where have the Russians embarrassed us last?" Did they embarrass us on Mars? No. In Earth orbit? Well, not yet. And so the idea that the American public was behind Apollo for these more accepted politically correct reasons so to speak; exploration and the benefit of mankind [was not correct]. [Yet] we said so much that I think we started to believe it. It just wasn't there with the taxpayers in Iowa. Sure they were interested [in space exploration], they're interested in the Martian program but they are not going to double their taxes to get a man on Mars in any near future in my view. Also the NASA system required a "big deal" [project] in order to survive—in order to keep all the centers. I find it interesting ... that we still have the same centers that we needed to go to the Moon [yet] now we're just kind of nibbling [at space]. ...[H]ow come? Well they've got the political constituencies... I use that figuratively. Everybody in Houston wants to keep their jobs so we've got to have a Shuttle, we've got to have a Space Station because the Marshall people want to have a job, and everybody at the Cape wants to launch something so they keep their jobs. And so terrific amount of political support ... an incorrect idea. That is that the American people really wanted another Apollo like thing. They wanted it if it was free but were they willing to pay for it when it wasn't ... there to beat the "dirty Commies." We spent like, what three trillion, some say thirty trillion dollars to fight the cold war of which NASA is a part. But now the cold war's over, are we putting any money to help the Russians become democrats, hardly any, it's amazing. And the same phenomena then with Apollo, you land on the Moon, do the people really want to go with for a big Shuttle. I don't think so but NASA wanted it, NASA needed it... I was in the position [in Washington] where I could see the political forces at work. And the reason the Shuttle is as it is today is not because it's a great idea, maybe it is. There were strong recommendations for a continuation of Skylab which the Mir did, and a smaller ... test Shuttle... [F]rankly, I thought [it] was a better idea to ... go at [it] step-wise. [but I attended] a meeting in the White House and Mr. Halderman in the presence of the President said, "Well which one [shuttle] would get the most votes in California?" Well, the bigger the Shuttle, the more the votes; therefore the big Shuttle—which [has] no where near ... lived up to it's economic advertisement in the beginning of cutting the cost of orbit down by a factor of ten. In that regard, it's been a big joke. The massive tragedy, even though it's a fine vehicle [and] we are learning some things, but if we had not done that and gone to a smaller Shuttle as a test vehicle and continued Skylab, we may be in better shape today then we are with a Shuttle that people don't know what to do with other than put together a space station that people don't know what to do with. So that's the long answer to your question... [R]ight now, we're being distracted in my view about from what makes sense. We're being distracted [with] a manned Mars program which is going to be fraught with difficulty, radiation and otherwise, ... not to mention expense when there's so much that could be done by getting back to the Moon putting [in] bases like Antarctica, McMurdo up there. Finding out what you could use the Moon for. If for nothing else than a jumping off spot to Mars but probably [it will make a] great solar or space observatories, [platforms and] radio observatories [on] the back [side]...

**Rollins:** Well the United Space Alliance I think is trying to privatize the Shuttle.

**Anders:** What is that?

**Rollins:** Well the United Space Alliance.

**Anders:** I got so tired of NASA politics I retired to my island and I fly my P-51 and fish for salmon and I don't pay much attention anymore.

**Rollins:** There's a new organization that's been made up of consortium of aerospace companies as the United Space Alliance and they are responsible for the Shuttle. And I think the goal is to privatize the Shuttle. Do you think that's a good idea or workable?

**Anders:** It basically is a massively uneconomical venture. If you privatize it, it will have to be subsidized in some way. So I can't imagine that it can be successful in the [truly] private [unclear]. [W]here [is] their money? ... Are they willing to buy the thing? [If note, why should the taxpayer?]

**Rollins:** Well, that's the talk.

**Anders:** Yeah, well, I mean, are they going to pay for the non-reoccurring costs? If you give me a Cadillac, I can probably afford the gas... So if this alliance is given a massively subsidized, by the taxpayers, capital situation for free, well maybe they can make a success out of it. But I wouldn't call that a real private activity. If they want to take over the job of the civil servants, who, with all due respect, may be are not as easy to manage as people are in the private sector, ... that's just trading one, sort of, frozen-in bureaucracy versus a somewhat more flexible bureaucracy. Maybe that would work better but that doesn't mean that it makes sense. I wouldn't buy stock in it myself. I've been asked to be the administrator of NASA three times and I've turned it down because I figured they couldn't stand hearing this so I'm telling you this, more or less, in private. Okay. But that's what I'd be saying on the hill.

**Rollins:** Well then why didn't you take the job and go ahead.

**Anders:** Because in [Gerald R.] Ford's day and in George Bush's day it was clear that [NASA and some politicians] were still mesmerized by the big-deal... I [would have] had to get rid of a lot of people to have it make sense and that's always a very painful exercise and ... maybe I'm too lazy...

**Rollins:** How did you end up in Washington state?"

**Anders:** My father had been a naval officer and was stationed in Bremerton [WA] when I was four. And so I never remembered [it] raining, I remember nothing but all the blackberries you could eat and all the garter snakes a four year old could catch. ... I went to check that out forty years later and found that it really wasn't that great but my wife and I went up to the San Juan Islands and found that it really was nice. So we bought property and fantasized ... about it for years and eventually bought a home up there and that's where we live...

**Rollins:** Well, what way did your fame as an astronaut affect you and your family? ... Did you feel effects?

**Anders:** I felt the effects but and certainly there was this sort of knee-jerk adulation. I used to be a little cynical with the thought that if you'd been to the Moon you could answer any question. I mean people are dumb enough to ask you, 'What do you think about the events in Tanzeekestan, or Birth Control or DNA or something?' It's amazing how many [astronauts] will answer [those] question[s] and think they really do know the answer[s]. ... [A]so it was clear that [many] of the guys were getting sucked into [being] what I'd call door-openers. P.R. guys, quick buck, but [short timers]. ... I thought, '... I'm not that famous, and I'm certainly not glib, so maybe I'd really ought to [get real] work for a living.' And ... I did that both in the government and in private industry. ... [S]ure, the fact that I had been to the Moon might have gotten the door open a crack but you really couldn't get [it in and keep it in] for the long term. ... [T]he shareholders at General Dynamics couldn't have cared less whether I had been at the Moon or not. So it helped me some but not all that much. And if you look at the other participants, depending how you measure it, if you measure [success] in economic terms, it didn't help all that much, most of them were expecting [too much from the exposure].

**Rollins:** But at the time you were bugged a lot? Were you recognized?

**Anders:** Still am, still get requests for autographs and every now and then somebody will actually recognize me, some nerd somewhere. They'll say, "Ah, I follow that space program, aren't you Bill Anderson?" ... [I]t's still kind of surprising... [W]e went down to this Astronaut Hall of Fame [event] over the weekend and Disney or MGM or somebody wanted to have a motorcade. ... [S]o here all these geriatric cases sitting on the top of the Corvettes going by and people applauding, most of whom weren't even born. These little kids were ... looking and their mothers would say, "Applaud." So, ...

maybe it's part of the human instinct, to try to perpetuate heroes, which in my view is getting overworked. Get some of the new heroes instead of the old ones... [P]eople still get turned on to that and want you to autograph a Kleenex. It still goes on.

**Rollins:** Are you bothered by that?

**Anders:** A little bit. Yeah.

**Rollins:** It gets on your nerves after all these years.

**Anders:** No, I'm particularly bothered when somebody gets an autograph and tries to sell it. I got a real hard nose policy because even one of our lunar landing colleagues sold some stuff that our crew gave him and that really burned me up. I tried to buy it back on the open market. It was a flag that had been to the Moon or around the Moon and autographed by the Apollo 8 crew. Next thing I know, it was for sale. And it even had, I won't say the name, you might guess who it was, 'To so and so, thanks for all your help, Frank, Jim and Bill.' ... [T]here's amazing amount of autograph sellers out there, who use every excuse you can think of to get an autograph. Like, "I'm dying of Cerebral Palsy," or "I've been hit by a train and my last wish is that you give me your [autograph]." My secretary used to keep a record of the addresses versus the stories and there [were] about 100 people who had applied ten times under ten different aliases with ten different diseases or whatever to try to get the autograph.

**Rollins:** We had heard that Ken Mattingly does that too. That he has some database that he checks against all these.

**Anders:** Yeah. I quit doing that, I just quit signing them [at] all unless it's somebody that I really know [and that it's] for their own use. But it's amazing how many of these, 'Oh, I swear I'll never sell it,' type stories end up ... in the autograph catalog... One of our colleagues said "Well, okay, if they want to buy them, I'll sell them." So he gives them all his canceled checks for fifty cents or something. That has more honor than the other as far as I'm concerned.

**Rollins:** Speaking of geriatrics, John Glenn wants to have another mission. Do you think that's a good idea? Do you?

**Anders:** I think they ought to send me instead of him, because I'm a lot smarter and in better shape. [No, I'm joking of course. I think it's great John is going. He's earned it and we might actually learn something. But I'm next.]

**Rollins:** That was my next question. If you were offered would you like to go?

**Anders:** Sure. I actually thought that by this time, you could actually buy you a seat on something. Unfortunately the Shuttle and the Challenger ... have now blocked that [possibility] in my lifetime. But sooner or later people will be able to buy a ride into space. And if John can go, great. But they'd better be prepared to take me, because I'm going to write to my Senator. That would be an interesting experience. Why not, they took Jake Garn, he's not a bad guy but there was less of a reason [for Jake] than [for] John Glenn... And, since I've only been once, I ought to go too. You know, the older guy and the somewhat middle aged guy. Tell ... and I'll retract everything [bad] I've said about NASA if you pass that message on.

**Rollins:** Okay, we'll do that. Well, can you think of anything?

[End of Interview]

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