

MY FIRST SOLO BUZZ ALDRIN

WHO Buzz Aldrin, combat pilot, lunar module pilot and moonwalker **WHEN** October 1951 **WHERE** Gilbert Field, Florida **AIRCRAFT** T-6 **HOURS AT SOLO** 20 **HOURS NOW** 4,500 hours of flying time, 290 in space

It's about time we met an original Moonwalker

Starting out as a trainee pilot in the US military took Buzz Aldrin on a life-long journey – a journey of around 238,855 miles

On my first flight I got airsick. I was two years old and we flew from Newark (New Jersey) to Miami (Florida). That time there weren't any child seats in aeroplanes yet, so I was held in someone's arms the entire way. The plane was a Lockheed Vega flown by my father.

My dad was an early aviation pioneer. This had a large impact on my life and on my desire to pursue a career with aircraft. Actually, my entire family was involved in aviation in various degrees. I grew up in the 1930s, which was an exciting time. It was just after Lindbergh had crossed the Atlantic and my dad had made a transatlantic trip to Germany in the Hindenburg airship.

I always wanted to get into aviation, but I wasn't one of those boys who'd go out to the airfield, watch planes get fuelled up and hitch rides with pilots. Instead of that I would put orange crates together

and simulate a cockpit. Because of the movies I had seen and the stories I had heard, for me it was a natural thought that the best training for flying would be military training.

After graduating from West Point in the summer of 1951, a year after the Korean War started, I went to Bartow, FL, a small U.S. Air Force Base for flight training. Some former WWII air bases were brought back into use and I went through my training at Bartow where for first solo flights they used Gilbert Field, an auxiliary airfield near Lakeland. I learned to fly in a T-6, also known as the Harvard, it was an advanced trainer used in WWII, 10 years earlier. It was a taildragger and would sometimes get uncontrollable on landing and slide sideways, called a 'ground-loop'.

In the USAF, students receive the same training, from primary to basic, before moving on to the next

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