

1972

Edmonds man helps televise Apollo splashdown pictures

BY MARIE BOTNEN

The television pictures which viewers around the world saw of the recent Apollo 17 splashdown in the Pacific Ocean were described by many as the best ever and an Edmonds man played a part in the 'show'.

Everett (Bud) Johnson of 1527 9th Ave. N., Edmonds, an employee of KING Broadcasting for over 20 years, has been involved in such exciting things as the Seattle Seafair hydroplane races but says there is nothing to compare with his experience as technical director on the moonshot splashdown coverage.

Johnson was with a crew of Northwest Mobile Television, a division of KING Broadcasting, which was contracted to provide network coverage of the splashdown 500 miles southeast of Samoa in the Pacific.

Johnson was responsible for putting the remote broadcast together and was the technical director. Four men went from Seattle and two from Portland and there was a crew of almost 20 when they arrived on the ship, the Ticonderoga. KING people drove their mobile unit to San Diego to board the ship. Johnson flew from Seattle to Hawaii, joining the ship there.

Splashdown rehearsed

They boarded ship Dec. 3 and spent the travel time to the splashdown point rehearsing for the real thing. Johnson said they figured they would have 'a pleasant cruise' but there was alot of complicated camera set-up work to do. The Navy crew on ship had a dummy capsule which they practiced retrieving, even once at night in case there was a change in splashdown plans.

Johnson said the splashdown was all closely calculated. They had been practicing with the capsule three miles from the ship and that's where the real capsule came down on Dec. 19. "It was all very scientific," Johnson commented.

They had three cameras ready to take splashdown pictures. One was on the flight deck where the ceremonies were held, one was high up on the ship and another was on the helicopters.

"As the big day approached, things grew very tense. I guess I became very up-tight about it. I knew we just had one chance to get the pictures," Johnson said.

Things worked out well, though. They captured the splashdown and all three major networks carried some of the best pictures ever shown of a splashdown. The TV pictures were carried by satellite to the U.S. and then

aimed back at the satellite for transmission virtually all over the world.

The capsule was spotted by one camera and then it went into a cloud layer and was lost from the picture momentarily. However, the mobile helicopter picked it up with its camera and followed it down.

Johnson said the first indication they had that the capsule was coming was a report from the ship's radar that it had been spotted 100 miles up in the sky. The next warning was a sonic boom and then the capsule appeared with its main shoots opened.

"I guess I let out a bigger yell than anyone when we finally saw the capsule and knew we had been successful," Johnson said.

The three astronauts were taken to the ship's medical center after brief ceremonies but Johnson and the others gathered on the hangar deck that evening to hear the three talk about their trip to the moon. "It was all very intriguing," Johnson said.

Senator on board

Also on board the Ticonderoga during the splashdown was Senator Barry Goldwater. Johnson had taken along his ham radio and arranged calls to his crew's families during the time they were there. Senator Goldwater is also a ham radio buff and he spent quite a bit of time there.

Another event while they were aboard ship was the crossing of the equator. That day was declared free time and about 400 people went through a special ceremony to become 'shellbacks' for crossing the equator.

Johnson stayed on the Ticonderoga until Dec. 20 when they were flown by helicopter to Samoa. They spent one day there and then flew to Hawaii. Johnson and his wife, Maxine, spent three days in Hawaii before returning to Edmonds Christmas eve to spend the holiday with their children, Linda, Gary, Steve, Debra and Robin.

Johnson got started in TV work when he took training in the Army signal corps. He has been at KING over 20 years, starting there as a camera man.

He is a technical director at KING working on studio programming such as the news shows and other local shows.

Johnson has worked on the Seafair hydro races for the last 20 years and the past three years was in charge of setting up the technical end for the broadcast.

"I've done alot of remote broadcasts but the splashdown was the first thing of that magnitude. It was a once in a lifetime experience," Johnson said.