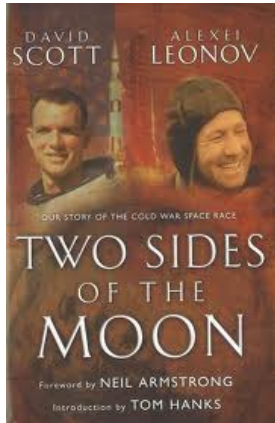


Book Review – Two Sides of the Moon **by David Scott and Alexei Leonov**

Review by Chris Hope, Master CFI



I was in middle school when the first seven astronauts were announced in the spring of 1959, the perfect age to get excited about the space age. Like all kids of that age, I devoured Life Magazine each week to read about the astronauts' accomplishments, and the plans for upcoming missions. We knew all of the details about the American program, but not so much about the Soviet program.

We were truly in a race, a space competition. President Eisenhower stepped his toe in, but President Kennedy loved competition and threw down the gauntlet. He plunged in deep and enthusiastically. After his death, Presidents Johnson and Nixon continued the game. And all the while, we only knew of the competition's progress when they wished to announce a success.

The book, "Two Sides of the Moon", by David Scott and Alexei Leonov, fills a lot of gaps on both sides. David Scott flew three missions, one Gemini, the two-person missions, and two Apollo missions. He touched down on the moon on Apollo 15. Alexei Leonov was in the Soviet Union's first group of astronauts, and was the first man to float freely in space and was scheduled to be the first USSR cosmonaut on the moon. The two met in the mid '70s when the Americans and Russians joined together for a joint mission.

The writing is straight-forward, told by each man in turn. They talk of their childhoods, Alexei growing up in Siberia where they lived when his father was exiled by Stalin. David grew up as an Air Force brat, beginning with his birth at Randolph AFB. (How can one not become interested in flying with that background?)

The book is not technical, but it is written by men with a technical mind, not by poets. However, Alexei is a painter, and his creative side is obviously sparked when he first sees the earth while floating free, 100 miles up.

"What I saw as the hatch opened took my breath away. Night was turning to day. The small portion of the earth's surface I could see as I leaned back was deep blue. The sky beyond the curving horizon was dark, illuminated with bright stars as I looked due south toward the South Pole. I craned back until it hurt. I wanted to see more. . . Nothing will ever compare to the exhilaration I felt in that moment. No matter how much time has passed, I can still remember the conflicting emotions. I felt almost insignificant, like a tiny ant, compared to the immensity of the universe. At the same time, I felt enormously powerful. High above the surface of the earth, I felt the power of the human intellect that had placed me there."

It turns out that the experiences of the two men were very similar. David's first mission, with Neil Armstrong as commander, nearly ends in disaster as their Gemini capsule begins spinning faster and faster like a carnival ride. The two men regain control, but at the expense of using fuel that was planned for their re-entry.

The mission is cut short, and they splash down half a world away from their planned spot.

On Alexei's spacewalk, the world's first, he finds that the pressure inside of his suit, being greater than the outside, has caused his suit to expand like a balloon - not a lot, but enough that he cannot slide himself back into the capsule as planned. Crisis eventually resolved, but their landing is also far from expected, landing in a forest in six feet of snow in Siberia. With the wolves howling nearby, they wait for two days for the recovery team to find and extricate them.

Dave talks of his geology expeditions on the moon, and of driving the lunar rover, the first vehicle to move about on the moon's surface. Just like driving a car? Well, not quite.

The two men talk of the high points and the low points of their respective programs. They talk of the politics of each nation which spurred on the competition, and the politics which brought each country's program to a halt. They talk of the program they shared, the joint USA-USSR Apollo-Soyuz program. They talk of their lives afterward (David was the technical advisor on the move, Apollo 13.)

If you grew up during the early space age, you will find that this book fills in a lot of the gaps in your knowledge, both from the US side and that of the Soviets. And if you are of an age that did not allow you to watch those first steps on the moon, this book will give you some insights on the race for the moon as well as why this nation and Russia still act as they do.

Enjoy.

Chris loves to read, write, and fly, but not necessarily in that order

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