

On 25 May 1961, President John F. Kennedy had given NASA the task to land a man on the Moon and return him safely before the end of the decade. That this was achieved by *Apollo 11*, with 6 months to spare, was the greatest technological achievement of the 20th Century. I was extremely fortunate to be able to follow the many intricate steps that had to be taken before man stepped on to the Moon's surface. As the Science Correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, my employer, expected me to give a full and clearly understandable account of these events, and if this meant commuting from London to Cape Kennedy and elsewhere in the United States, I only had to say so. My not inconsiderable expenses were never queried, always provided that I filed my reports quickly and substantially.

By March 1965 there was no longer a question "if" America would reach the Moon, but only "when". This I argued fully in a long feature article, published under the title "End of the Beginning in Space". One of the reasons why I was justified in writing this was the belated success of the *Ranger* programme. Started in August 1961, this unmanned spacecraft was designed for a hard landing on the Moon, sending back television pictures of the lunar surface during its last 28 minutes of flight before crashing. *Ranger 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6* failed for a variety of reasons, and only *Ranger 7* on 28 July 1964 sent television pictures back to Earth. I was able to follow *Ranger 9* in detail on my visit to Cape Kennedy at the end of March 1965, after I reported on *Early Bird*.

Before any manned landing on the Moon could be attempted, a thorough knowledge of the Moon's surface had to be obtained, by the Russians as well as by the Americans. The Russians sent 24 unmanned *Luna* spacecraft to the Moon between 1959 and 1976, and achieved some remarkable successes. So for example, *Luna 17* soft landed on the Moon in November 1970 and launched a remote controlled vehicle *Lunokhod 1* which explored the chemical and physical properties of the surface for 10 months.

The Russian results were kept secret and I could do nothing about this, except mention the fact that 'a Russian vehicle had explored the Moon'. Had the Russians adopted the same 'open information policy' as the Americans, the *Daily Telegraph* would, no doubt, have sent me to the Baikonur Kosmodrome as readily as to Cape Kennedy.

So I was thrilled to watch on television at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, during the morning of 24 March 1965, the live pictures of the Moon's surface which *Ranger 9* sent from the Crater Alphonsus, having witnessed its successful launch from Cape Kennedy three days earlier. Like everyone else, I was thrilled, the 'End of the Beginning' had been reached.