

How Quickly Events Become History

HISTORY was made 15 years ago when Neil Armstrong became the first astronaut to walk on the moon.

Just how rapidly such events become ancient history is shown by estimates that one-third of people now alive are too young to remember this historic voyage into space. What happened before we were old enough to remember seems like ancient history.

Experts in such matters have made a number of calculations about how fast the present becomes the past, and I have run across them in three or four places. They include such provocative statements as:

68 percent of today's population has no personal recollection of World War II;

65 percent cannot remember life before television;

74 percent cannot remember the Great Depression;

94 percent cannot remember the first time women could vote, which was in 1920;

90 percent cannot recall Charles Lindbergh's solo flight to Paris, a fantastic achievement in 1927 and a cut-rate competitive everyday trip now;

98 percent are too young to remember when the first income tax went into effect in 1913 and the other 2 percent may be too old to remember it;

53 percent of the people can't recall when the Russians launched Sputnik, the first manmade earth satellite in 1958, and probably even fewer could explain why there are more than 5,000 satellites girdling the globe now.

Similar comments might be made about the automobile, the airplane, radio and common home appliances. But many of us can remember clearly the first time we rode in a car or plane, the first time we heard radio or TV, and the first talking movies.

Scientists tell us that we are entering the "Information Age." Advancements in means of transmit-

ting information have come so rapidly in the last decade or two that youngsters not yet old enough to vote could recall their arrival, if they noticed.

Computers in the classrooms, in the homes, and in the playrooms are preparing today's younger generation to enter a business and professional world where data are stored in computers and transmitted instantly for processing by robots or humans, or to transact business or manufacture products.

Highly paid professional athletes might do well to be alert. Coaches already are using electronic devices to calculate the outcome of certain plays in particular situations. We can imagine that ultimately players might not be needed as coaches slug it out computer to computer, while fans watch on TV.

The next generation may find recreation in reviewing on their VDTs the olden days when people actually worked, played ball games and did their own jogging, golfing or swimming.