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Courtesy of U.S. Army



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NEW

NASA astronaut Doug Wheelock, Expedition 24 flight engineer, attired in his Extravehicular Mobility Unit (EMU) spacesuit, is pictured in the Quest airlock of the International Space Station as the final of three planned spacewalks to remove and replace an ammonia pump module that failed July 31 draws to a close.

Photo Courtesy of NASA



SHERIFF IN TOWN

Army Astronaut Finally Commands Space Station

By DJ Montoya (Compiled from NASA Staff Reports)



2010

INTERNATIONAL SPACE STATION – For U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command Soldiers (astronauts) in the NASA Army Detachment, the old adage of “always a bridesmaid but never a bride” may have seemed the norm concerning the International Space Station, but that all changed this September with Expedition 25.

The International Space Station finally has its first active duty Army Astronaut, COL Douglas H. Wheelock, serving as its commander until the end of November. No stranger to space, this is Wheelock’s second trip with the first as a mission specialist onboard STS-120. On this current trip, Wheelock began serving as an International Space Station flight engineer as part of Expedition 24 in mid-June. With over three months of his six-month tour onboard complete, Wheelock began heading up Expedition 25 on Sept. 22, as Russian cosmonaut Alexander Skvortsov (Expedition 24 commander) and flight engineers Tracy Caldwell Dyson and Mikhail Kornienko departed from the ISS via a Soyuz TMA-18.

“... pass that torch, keep that dream alive, the same dream that was handed to me so many years ago when I watched the first Apollo moon landings ...”

Astronaut Doug Wheelock

Getting to this point has been a long time coming as Soldiers from the NASA Army Detachment have been trying to achieve this “brass ring” since Expedition 13 back in March 2006. That was when the first active duty Army Soldier, COL (Ret.) Jeffrey Williams (NASA Detachment commander) served in the role of flight engineer aboard the International Space Station. This was followed by COL Timothy L. Kopra in July 2009, also serving as a flight engineer for Expedition 20.

No time was lost when in December of last year, COL Timothy J. Creamer, current commander of the NASA Army Detachment, arrived at the International Space Station to become part of the crew for Expedition 22 and 23, also assuming the role of a flight engineer. Of interest, Williams, who retired from the Army in June 2007 but continued with NASA finally got a shot at being commander of the International Space Station during Expedition 22.

Back to Wheelock, during a preflight interview conducted by NASA back in early June, the native of Windsor, N.Y., was asked about his upcoming six-month mission onboard the International Space Station.

“When I first arrive on the station I will be part of the Expedition 24 crew ... slated to be the commander of Expedition 25. This gives me a bit of time to get spooled up, to get ready to take command of the space station from our Russian commander for Expedition 24, which is Alexander Skvortsov.”

“As we approach the Expedition 25 time frame I will be busy developing my leadership style to be able to run and operate the station as a commander, delineate tasks to the various crew members, and to keep the ship flying,” said Wheelock.

Wheelock stressed that as part of a six-member crew, “There’s going to be more time spent on science in more laboratories.”

“One of the focuses of station science has been about finding how people respond to being in that weightless environment and how they respond then to returning to gravity.

“We’re sort of replicating what it would take for the effects on the human body of someone flying to Mars or making a long journey to some sort of a planetary body or maybe even a near-Earth asteroid.”

But he was quick to point to other kinds of science research that is going to be underway in the several laboratories onboard.

“Now as a fully-functional laboratory [ISS], we can pretty much do it real time almost like a telemedicine type of thing. We can have the principal investigator directly involved real time as we’re performing these experiments. We have onboard a myriad of experiments ranging anywhere from medical experiments to how better to use pharmaceuticals for instance, to attacking cancer cells in our body.”

And like every mission there is always a lot to be done inside as well as outside the station.



Already Wheelock, a fellow FA40 (Space Operations Officer), found time to record an eight-minute video greeting back at the end of July for the annual Army Space Cadre Symposium which took place Aug. 3-6 in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Shortly after this he and fellow flight engineer Tracy Caldwell Dyson were kept busy with several spacewalks in August to replace/install a spare ammonia pump critical to the station's cooling system.

And early in September, Wheelock, Dyson, and Shannon Walker took on approximately 500 middle school students and teachers at the Pinellas County Science Center in St. Petersburg, Fla., for an out-of-this-world phone conversation with astronauts aboard the International Space Station.

On the new responsibility Wheelock stated, "I'd like to say, there's a new sheriff in town, but, no, we've got a great crew and there will be a period where [there are] just three of us onboard as we wait for the arrival of the other component of our Expedition 25 crew ... scheduled to be Scott Kelly, Oleg Skripochka, and also Sasha Kaleri."

Wheelock was asked about the future of human space exploration 20 or 50 years from now, and how will the International Space Station have played a part in getting us wherever that is?

"When I get a chance to talk to schools and to kids, that's exactly what I think about. That I may be looking one day 30 years from now, 20 years from now, 40 years from now, I may come back to this place and one of the kids that's sitting in here will come up to me and say, 'I remember when you talked to me, years ago.'

"But I think that we as astronauts, we look at that as part of our mission ... to kind of pass that torch, keep that dream alive, the same dream that was handed to me so many years ago when I watched the first Apollo moon landings ... and thinking ... man, that's just awesome."



NASA astronaut Doug Wheelock, Expedition 24 flight engineer, services the Minus Eighty Laboratory Freezer for ISS (MELFI-1) in the Kibo laboratory of the International Space Station

Photo Courtesy of NASA



The Soyuz TMA-19 spacecraft relocates from the Zvezda Service Module's aft port to the Rassvet Mini-Research Module 1 (MRM1) of the International Space Station. Russian cosmonaut Fyodor Yurchikhin; along with NASA astronauts Doug Wheelock and Shannon Walker, all Expedition 24 flight engineers, undocked their Soyuz spacecraft from Zvezda's aft end at 3:13 p.m. (EDT) on June 28, 2010, and docked it to its new location on the recently installed Rassvet module 25 minutes later.

Photo Courtesy of NASA



NASA astronaut Doug Wheelock, Expedition 24 flight engineer, attired in his Russian Sokol launch and entry suit, occupies his seat in the Soyuz TMA-19 spacecraft docked to the International Space Station. Wheelock, along with Russian cosmonaut Fyodor Yurchikhin and NASA astronaut Shannon Walker (both out of frame) were about to relocate the Soyuz from the Zvezda Service Module's aft port to the Rassvet Mini-Research Module 1 (MRM1)

Photo Courtesy of NASA