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Be proud of Phase 1, STS-91 commander tells JSC

By John Ira Petty

Andy Thomas, the astronaut who closed out America's presence on Mir, described the spirit of cooperation in the Phase 1 program as one of the great historical events of the 20th Century when he made his return to Houston.

The STS-91 crew, launched aboard *Discovery* on June 2, returned to Ellington Field some 11 days later, not quite a day ahead of Thomas, who remained in Florida an extra day to regain his land legs.

Commander Charlie Precourt told the welcoming crowd that "We couldn't be happier with the way things have ended for Phase 1." He said it should be a joyful moment for the crew and for all who joined them in putting the program together. "You have a lot to be proud of," he said.

In fact, he said, the end of the flight marks the beginning of Phase 2. Phase 1 was a step-

ping stone, and its success bodes well for the future of cooperation with the Russians and other international partners.

Dom Gorie, STS-91 pilot, said many expectations were exceeded during his first space flight. One reason was the backing he received, beginning with support from his fellow crew members, he said.

Franklin Chang-Diaz, making a record-tying sixth space flight, said he thought that perhaps this mission would be "old hat." It wasn't—docking with another spacecraft and getting to see the inside of Mir were new highlights. The mission specialist and payload commander called Mir "a remarkable piece of engineering and achievement."

Chang-Diaz, like several other members of the crew, expressed special thanks to the training team that had prepared them for their flight. "I really appreciate all of you and what you did for us," he said.

Mission Specialist Wendy Lawrence said

there are too many people to list who have made Phase 1 what it is. She did single out Phase 1 Program Manager Frank Culbertson. She said she believes history will show that Culbertson has been the foundation of the Phase 1 program and that he has made it the success it has been.

Janet Kavandi recalled several scenes from the mission. One was when the Mir first came into sight as a distant, tiny speck. "You realized there are actually human beings on that station, 200 miles above the Earth" with only voice contact with other humans."

Valery Ryumin, director of the Russian portion of the shuttle-Mir program and a veteran of 362 days in space on three previous flights, spoke briefly in English to the welcoming crowd. Then, in Russian, he thanked NASA leadership for the opportunity to fly on the shuttle. He also thanked Culbertson, his NASA counterpart, for his tremendous contribution to this program.

Ryumin had been commander of mission control in Russia when the first Mir module was launched, but never thought he would visit the space station. He suggested that JSC Director George Abbey and Culbertson visit the International Space Station in five years.

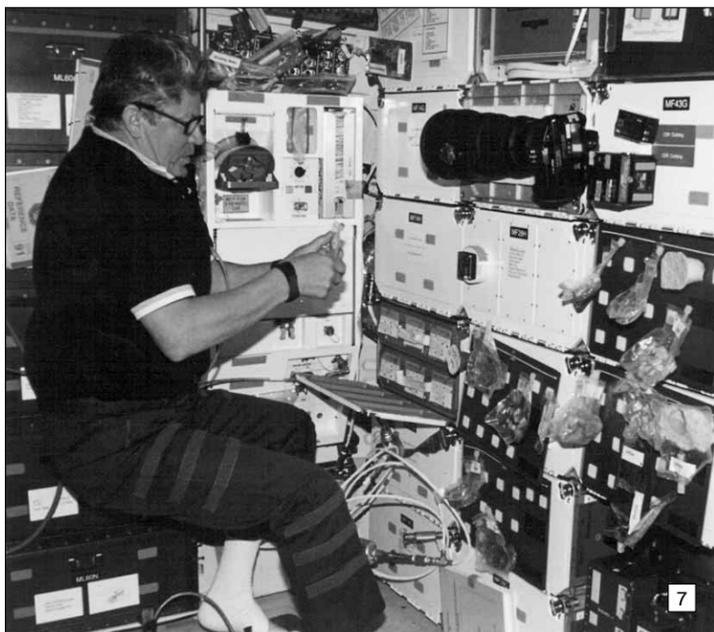
"I always thought Valery had some great ideas," said Abbey.

Culbertson said Phase 1 had been demanding, and that Phase 2 also would be a real challenge. "But we'll get there," he said.

When Thomas returned the following day, he echoed his crewmates remarks..

He thanked the STS-91 crew "for the great ride home," and the STS-89 crew for taking him to Mir.

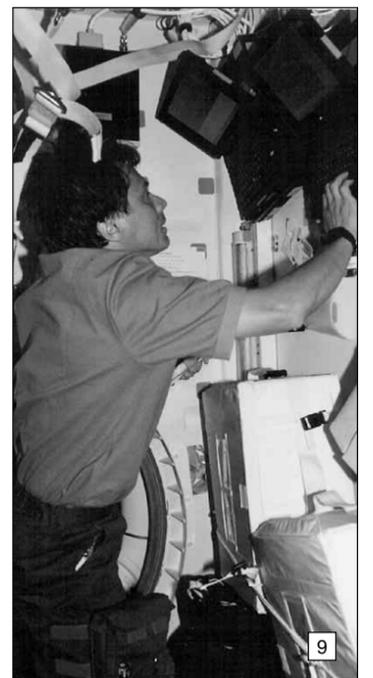
Thomas said the space age began in competition. "I think one of the great historical events of the 20th Century is that that spirit of competition has evolved into a spirit of cooperation, peacefully." The Phase 1 program is a great symbol of that cooperation. □



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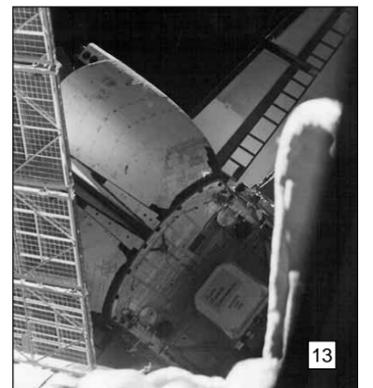
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