

Astronaut recalled Uncle Frank during Hubble fix

May 20 2009, By SETH BORENSTEIN , AP Science Writer



In this image from NASA TV the crew of Shuttle Atlantis hold a news conference on the flight deck Wednesday, May 20, 2009 . Front from left, Gregory Johnson, Scott Altman and Megan McArthur. Rear from left, Andrew Feustel, John Grunsfeld, Michael Massimino and Michael Good. (AP Photo/NASA TV)

(AP) -- Sometimes all the high-tech training is nothing compared to what Uncle Frank and a big screwdriver can teach an astronaut about removing stubborn parts, even 350 miles above Earth.

During a news conference in orbit Wednesday, [space shuttle Atlantis](#) astronaut Mike Massimino credited a colorful relative from Long Island for showing him what a yank will do when a part just won't budge.

During five consecutive - and at times frustrating - spacewalks to repair the 19-year-old [Hubble Space Telescope](#), [astronauts](#) revived two dead science instruments, installed a more powerful camera and a second [spectrograph](#), and replaced batteries, [gyroscopes](#) and insulation.

But the job that gave astronauts the most trouble was a stuck hand rail on Hubble's once-dead spectrograph.

Massimino was trying to unscrew a bolt on the hand rail during Sunday's [spacewalk](#). After more than an hour with no luck, NASA engineers on the ground told Massimino to just pull it off. So Massimino recalled his Uncle Frank, a balky car oil filter, a big screwdriver, and some brute force.

"Out of all the education I've had, it was thinking of my Uncle Frank and I won't tell you what he was saying," Massimino said. "I didn't use that language, but he yanked on that thing until he broke that thing free."

"That pretty much was my experience that helped me with that (spectrograph) repair," Massimino said.

Also Wednesday, Mission Control told Atlantis that its heat shield was safe for landing, but stormy weather in Florida could force Friday's landing to be rescheduled. Astronauts have started conserving power in case they have to stay in space a day or two longer.

If landing attempts are scrubbed Friday, [NASA](#) can try again in Florida on Saturday and if that doesn't work, they have several options for a Sunday landing.

Astronauts had Wednesday off after releasing the Hubble a day earlier. They told reporters they were looking forward to coming home after the 11-day mission.

"I really can't wait to bring Atlantis home to Kennedy Space Center," Commander Scott Altman said before Mission Control alerted him about the weather.

They said their upgrades of the telescope showed how important it is to have humans and machines work together in space.

"What we've done is give Hubble five or maybe 10 more years of life," chief Hubble repairman John Grunsfeld said.

Later Wednesday, President Barack Obama was expected to make a private phone call to Atlantis.

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