

Astronauts surprised by holiday turkey dinners

November 26 2009, By MARCIA DUNN , AP Aerospace Writer



This image from NASA TV shows the Space Shuttle Atlantis doing its fly around passing behind the Russian segment of the International Space Station shortly after undocking from the International Space Station early Wednesday Nov. 25, 2009. The Poisk can be seen at right. The shuttle is scheduled to land at the Kennedy Space Center, Friday morning. The (AP Photo/NASA)

(AP) -- Space shuttle Atlantis' astronauts thought they were going to give thanks with pantry leftovers Thursday as their mission drew to a close, but found turkey dinners awaiting them.

The meal switch was revealed Thursday morning when a TV interviewer brought up the absence of turkey dinners aboard Atlantis. "That's not going to be on your menu today, is it?" the interviewer asked.

"Shockingly, yes, I think it will be," commander Charles Hobaugh said as some of his crew members grabbed the still unopened pouches of turkey and trimmings, and let them float around.

Hobaugh, a no-nonsense Marine, had made it clear before the 11-day flight that he did not care what he ate on the holiday, be it beef brisket or tofu. He made no special meal requests.

But somehow turkey ended up on Atlantis - smoked and irradiated - along with pouches of candied yams and freeze-dried cornbread stuffing and green beans - just add water and bon appetit.

A NASA spokesman, John Ira Petty, said "the only conceivable thing" that could have happened is that the crew of the [International Space Station](#) sneaked the meals into the shuttle before it departed Wednesday.

"Thanksgiving to me has not always been about the food you eat, but the company you keep, and I'm keeping some outstanding company here," Hobaugh said Thursday.

Hobaugh said he can't wait to get home and share a late Thanksgiving meal with his family. "But in the meantime, I've got a great group of friends and I'm really thankful for that," he said.

Weeks if not months ago, NASA had stocked the space station with turkey dinners and all the trimmings, knowing there would be at least one American in orbit over the holiday. Jeffrey Williams is the lone U.S. resident, sharing the outpost with two Russians, one Belgian and one Canadian.

Williams - the station's new skipper - was likely responsible for the Thanksgiving surprise. It wasn't known, on Earth anyway, whether any of the [shuttle astronauts](#) were in on it.

Hobaugh and his crew spent most of Thanksgiving getting ready for Friday's landing. The pilots checked Atlantis' flight systems and reviewed their procedures. Good landing weather was forecast for the scheduled 9:44 a.m. touchdown.

Atlantis is coming back with an empty payload bay after delivering nearly 15 tons of pumps, storage tanks and other big spare parts to the space station, enough to keep the complex running for another five to 10 years. NASA wants the station well stocked so it can function long after the shuttles are retired next fall.

Returning from a three-month space station mission is Nicole Stott. She's already put in a request for a slice of New York-style pizza and some Coca-Cola with crushed ice in a plastic foam cup.

Astronaut Randolph Bresnik has been off the planet just 1 1/2 weeks, but he missed his daughter's birth. Abigail Mae Bresnik was born Saturday night, just hours after his first spacewalk.

Bresnik said Thursday that he's thankful, this Thanksgiving, for his healthy daughter.

"Fortunately, she is just as beautiful as her mother," he said. "I always said, if our daughter got her looks and her brains, we'd be OK."

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