

Astronauts go from Elton John salute to trash duty

July 13 2011, By MARCIA DUNN , AP Aerospace Writer



In this Tuesday, July 12, 2011 photo made available by NASA, astronaut Ron Garan rides on the International Space Station's robotic arm as he transfers a failed pump module to the cargo bay of space shuttle Atlantis. Garan and fellow Expedition 28 astronaut Mike Fossum's over six-hour spacewalk performing upgrades and maintenance on the orbiting outpost was the final scheduled spacewalk during the final shuttle mission. (AP Photo/NASA)

(AP) -- The astronauts making NASA's last shuttle flight turned into moving men and garbage haulers Wednesday with no time to dwell on their place in space history, after enjoying a special salute from the original "Rocket Man," Elton John.

When asked by a journalist how the mission was going, Atlantis' pilot, Douglas Hurley, replied: "I've got one word for you. Really busy."

OK, two words.

In their first news interviews from orbit, Atlantis' four astronauts said they were satisfied to go from Tuesday's last spacewalk of the 30-year shuttle era to more mundane matters - unloading supplies and hauling trash. At least they didn't have to deal with a loud and smelly toilet on the International Space Station; a station resident handled that.

"We've got some great station hosts up here, and we're just trying to get them all stocked up for the next year," Hurley said.

Atlantis delivered several tons of food, clothes and other household goods. The space station is supposed to operate for another decade, and unmanned craft from multiple countries will keep up supply runs once NASA's shuttle program ends.

The astronauts have spent their lives focused and goal-oriented, Hurley said, and it's no different now as they go from task to task on this mission.

"It keeps us so focused that we tend not to, I think, look at the big picture as much," he said. "We're kind of all telling ourselves that we'll have time (later) to kind of reflect on this whole event."

In honor of this last shuttle flight, NASA beamed up a prerecorded message by the British superstar, as well as a half-minute of his Apollo-era 1972 song "Rocket Man," which was inspired by space exploration.

"Good morning, Atlantis, this is Elton John. We wish you much success on your mission and a huge thank you to all the men and women at NASA who worked on the shuttle for the last three decades."

"Elton John. Music legend. Wow. That is absolutely fantastic," replied

Atlantis' commander, Christopher Ferguson. "I think it just illustrates ... the amount of people globally who have been affected by the shuttle program itself."

"Rocket Man" has awakened previous shuttle crews and was on NASA's Top 40 list of wake-up music for public voting earlier this year. It garnered more than 4,300 votes for 17th place.

NASA hopes to whip up even more interest Thursday by inviting the public to a virtual all-American meal with the last shuttle crew and their station colleagues. The astronauts will enjoy grilled chicken or barbecued beef brisket, Southwestern corn, baked beans and for desert - Hostess apple pie.

The recipes - formulations as NASA's food scientists call them - are online: <http://tinyurl.com/NASAMEAL>

Both crews - 10 astronauts strong - spent Wednesday unloading the cargo carrier that flew up on the shuttle. They will fill it back up with station trash and discarded equipment for return to Earth next week.

Space station astronaut Ronald Garan Jr. got stuck working on the stinky toilet.

The stench from the American-made station toilet was so bad Monday that the astronauts had to shut it down as spacewalk preparations were under way; that work was taking place close to the bathroom.

While the smell eased, the toilet had a loud motor noise and poor suction.

Flight controllers believe the odor problem is associated with the urine-processing system. Urine is recycled aboard the space station into water

for cooking and drinking.

The Russian space station toilet was working fine; so was the one on Atlantis.

Atlantis' 13-day mission is the last ever for a space shuttle. After that, the three surviving shuttles will become museum displays.

More information:

NASA: <http://www.nasa.gov/shuttle>

NASA on meal: <http://tinyurl.com/NASAMEAL>

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