

New space station crew will bid farewell to shuttle

31 May 2010, by Alexander Osipovich



US astronaut Doug Wheelock (L), Russian cosmonaut Fyodor Yurchikhin (C), and US astronaut Shannon Walker (R), the crew of Soyuz TMA-19 space vehicle, clasp hands near a Soyuz flight simulator on May 26. The crew voiced nostalgia Monday for the retiring US space shuttle, which will make its final visit to the ISS this year.

One Russian and two Americans set to fly to the International Space Station voiced nostalgia Monday for the retiring US space shuttle, which will make its final visit to the ISS this year.

Russian cosmonaut Fyodor Yurchikhin and US [astronauts](#) Douglas Wheelock and Shannon Walker are due to blast off from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan on June 16 and spend half a year aboard the orbiting station.

"Of course, one would like the shuttle programme to continue," Yurchikhin told reporters at the Star City cosmonaut training centre near Moscow.

"But if the programme is going to end, at least we'll get to see the last shuttle to dock with the station," he said, seated alongside his two US crewmates at a pre-departure press conference.

NASA's iconic [space shuttle](#) has only two more scheduled missions before its retirement: a flight by Discovery in September and a flight by Endeavour in November, with both set to dock with the ISS.

Yurchikhin, Wheelock and Warner will reach the space station by a [Russian Soyuz rocket](#), which unlike the shuttle cannot repeat missions.

Their expedition to the space station is also notable because one crew member, Walker, is married to an astronaut who will be cheering on his wife as she launches into space for the first time.

Walker's husband, Australian-born [NASA](#) astronaut Andy Thomas, said he wished he could join her in space.

"I would like to go with them," he said on the sidelines of Monday's press conference.

"Twelve years ago I was here before I flew, and I know what it's like to be given this opportunity, and it's pretty exciting," said Thomas, who in 1998 spent over 100 days aboard Russia's now-defunct Mir space station.

Walker, who lists cooking as one of her interests, admitted that the cramped quarters of the ISS would not provide her with many opportunities for haute cuisine.

"Unfortunately I don't have much opportunity to cook since all the food is provided and it's a standard menu," she said.

"But hopefully we can create things with some of the condiments we have to make it a little more interesting and varied."

Wheelock, a US Army colonel who wore his uniform to the press conference, said the personal items he planned to take into space would include medals from his military service, as well as

photographs of his loved ones.

Yurchikhin said he would take a toy dog which has accompanied him on previous spaceflights.

The three are due to spend 164 days in space, during which they will carry out five spacewalks and conduct experiments on subjects such as zero-gravity crystal growth and the effect of long-term spaceflight on human health.

The United States decided to retire its space shuttles by the end of 2010 in the wake of the 2003 Columbia disaster, in which seven astronauts were killed as the shuttle was re-entering the atmosphere.

Once the shuttle programme ends, the United States will rely on Russia's Soyuz rockets to carry its astronauts to the space station until a commercial US launcher can be developed. That is scheduled for 2015.

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