SLATE: What were your first thoughts when named to the last space shuttle crew?

Chris Ferguson, Commander, STS-135: I don't know, very honored, I feel very honored and very lucky.

It was something that built over time because it was never supposed to be an actual mission. It was going to be a rescue mission and then the rescue mission kind of built into becoming a regular mission.

The first thing I remember is feeling very lucky because no one had clearly targeted me or our crew to fly the last mission, we just kind of backed our way into it.

It doesn't make you feel any less honored because you backed your way into it and we're going to do our best to go out and put the absolute best foot forward that the astronaut office to put just a wonderful cap on the program.

Doug Hurley, Mission Specialist, STS-135: I was asked originally to potentially be the pilot for this flight back in January of last year and as this flight kind of came to being,
it was a rescue mission to start with, so I knew in January and the flight wasn't officially assigned until September, so obviously I was excited, thrilled.

When the chief of the office, Peggy Whitson, asked me originally, you know it was kind of one of these things, you know,

we think maybe it's a 50/50 chance that this thing will even happen.

So there was a little bit of, you know, nervousness about that and wondering if it's actually going and spending all this time training and working and then find out that it might not happen,

but it was just, I was tremendously honored.

Rex Walheim, Mission Specialist, STS-135: For a while there I knew I was kind of getting close to the front of the line to being assigned again but I was just wondering whether they'd close the line down before I got there, so I really had gone through the process going,

line down before I got there, so I really had gone through the process going,

well, when they didn't have a 135 I thought, well,

I missed my chance to fly on the shuttle again and then 135 came up and it rekindled my hopes and then when I found out I was on the mission I was really,
really excited because I really wanted to be a part of this mission.

I wanted to be a part of the last mission whether I'm helping out at the Cape, or doing something at Houston or working at one of the abort sites.

I just want to be a part of it and the chance to actually fly on it, to be on board from the last launch to the last wheel stop is a great opportunity and I'm really thrilled about it.

Sandra Magnus, Mission Specialist, STS-135: I guess surprise was probably the main one. I was actually working in D.C. at Headquarters at the time and I got the call to come back and start training and I never even thought that I'd be part of the last shuttle crew and I'm working with a great team and it's really a lot of fun, but surprise was definitely the first thought.

SLATE: Will you be focused much on this being the last space shuttle flight?

Rex Walheim, Mission Specialist, STS-135: I think we will. I mean we're going to concentrate on our job, obviously, and so there will be certain segments of the mission where you're just concentrating, doing your job, especially during launch and landing.

But every once in a while, especially during quiet phases on orbit.
and I'm sure we'll look out and go,

44 00:02:55.770 --> 00:02:57.080
   Well this is the last time one of these vehicles is going to fly,

45 00:02:57.080 --> 00:03:02.260
   and then of course after the mission it's really going to sink in but it's one of those things where

46 00:03:02.259 --> 00:03:04.819
   you want to enjoy every last drop of it.

47 00:03:04.819 --> 00:03:06.750
   Doug Hurley, Mission Specialist, STS-135: We are very tightly scheduled and I think we are

48 00:03:06.750 --> 00:03:10.960
   going to be really busy. I think there might be a few moments to reflect, but I think, frankly,

49 00:03:10.960 --> 00:03:18.990
   it'll be on the runway, ideally on the runway here at KSC, and wheels stop and then I think it's

50 00:03:18.990 --> 00:03:24.680
   going to all come rushing in, you know, at one moment, I think.

51 00:03:24.680 --> 00:03:26.560
   Chris Ferguson, Commander, STS-135: We're not going to dwell on it too much until after

52 00:03:26.560 --> 00:03:30.219
   landing and then we'll get a chance, hopefully following a great and successful mission,

53 00:03:30.219 --> 00:03:34.240
   to kind of bask in the achievements of the program overall and really reflect

54 00:03:34.240 --> 00:03:39.129
   SLATE: What does the STS-135 crew patch symbolize?

55 00:03:39.129 --> 00:03:41.579
   Rex Walheim, Mission Specialist, STS-135: We wanted to make it a celebration,

56 00:03:41.580 --> 00:03:45.070
   we wanted to make it a happy patch that really encompasses the history of the Space Shuttle

57 00:03:45.069 --> 00:03:51.819
   Program so in some respects it mirrors the STS-1 patch with the full shuttle on there and we
also wanted to honor the whole NASA/contractor team, the whole team that has made the space shuttle possible and we did that by putting a portion of the NASA emblem in the middle with the swoosh on there. And then we also wanted to signify that it was the last mission.

We did that with the omega. Omega is the last letter of the Greek alphabet so that was kind of our way of symbolizing the last mission.

The STS-135 logo was designed by Margie Walheim, Rex Walheim's wife.

Music