



STS-131, April 5-20, 2010

1
00:00:00,020 --> 00:00:00,319

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2
00:00:00,320 --> 00:00:01,320

Music

3
00:00:20,360 --> 00:00:20,886

(slate: When did you want to be an astronaut?)

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00:00:22,900 --> 00:00:25,679

James P. Dutton Jr.: Well, for me, I was one of those kids that wanted to do it from a

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00:00:25,680 --> 00:00:26,946

pretty young age. I had that goal. I'm not sure exactly where it was, somewhere in grade

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00:00:30,280 --> 00:00:35,480

school. And at that time, it was really one of probably many, you know, career

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00:00:35,840 --> 00:00:36,643

aspirations. Along with playing in the NBA, or something like that, which didn't work out

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00:00:40,970 --> 00:00:47,103

at 5-foot-9. But, about junior high school, I started to get a little more serious about the

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00:00:48,540 --> 00:00:48,853

idea. Had a librarian from my middle school who on the career day helped me to look up

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00:00:53,960 --> 00:00:54,893

NASA's address and write to NASA asking about how to become an astronaut. And I got

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00:00:58,560 --> 00:00:59,340

a brochure back from them telling me that, you know, you need to study math, science or

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00:01:03,580 --> 00:01:05,193

engineering. And talked about the requirements for a pilot astronaut, which is what

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00:01:07,500 --> 00:01:08,683

appealed to me the most. And, so, that's when I really started to set my sights on one of

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00:01:12,250 --> 00:01:16,983

the service academies and just kind of took it step by step from there.

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00:01:17,420 --> 00:01:20,216

(slate: Is there a difference between landing the shuttle and the training aircraft?)

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00:01:20,290 --> 00:01:23,339

James P. Dutton Jr.: Well, the little bit that I got to fly the shuttle, which was just about

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00:01:23,340 --> 00:01:24,440

30 seconds flying around the heading alignment coming prior to rolling out on final, it

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00:01:28,040 --> 00:01:34,106

flew almost exactly like the STA. Just felt like I was back in that airplane. You're partly

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00:01:34,150 --> 00:01:35,423

so focused on the task, that by the time we were wheels down, I sort of went, 'I can't

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00:01:38,610 --> 00:01:39,070

believe we just did all that for real.' But at the same time, I remember as we were coming

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00:01:44,150 --> 00:01:44,643

around, looking down toward the, we had some clouds down below and toward the

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00:01:48,790 --> 00:01:51,209

Vehicle Assembly Building, and trying to pick out the runway and just thinking, 'I can't

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00:01:51,210 --> 00:01:53,290

believe this is like the real one,' because I had seen that picture so many times from the

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00:01:55,130 --> 00:01:56,196

shuttle trainer.

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00:01:56,870 --> 00:01:58,870

(slate: What was launch like?)

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00:02:00,970 --> 00:02:01,200

James P. Dutton Jr.: As far as the actual launch, a couple things surprised me. One was

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00:02:06,540 --> 00:02:08,466

the engine start. I thought it seemed a little bit more chaotic in the vehicle in terms of the

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00:02:10,880 --> 00:02:11,800

vibration when the engines started than I remembered from our sim (simulator). So, that

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00:02:15,760 --> 00:02:21,893

initial startup from to 100 percent on the engines is about six seconds prior to launch, and

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00:02:21,930 --> 00:02:24,319

so I remember noticing that. The vehicle just shook in a different way than I had

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00:02:24,320 --> 00:02:24,570

expected. And then when the solid rocket boosters lit, it felt like a bomb had gone off

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00:02:29,870 --> 00:02:31,323

under your seat, you know. And basically, that's what happened, 6 million pounds of

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00:02:33,950 --> 00:02:37,283

thrust, you know, instantly it's an immediate hit.

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00:02:38,190 --> 00:02:39,096

(slate: Describe the solid rocket boosters dropping away.)

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00:02:41,150 --> 00:02:41,813

James P. Dutton Jr.: They're small jets that fire as the SRBs come off, but also, we have

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00:02:46,420 --> 00:02:46,823

forward jets that fire to protect our windows from any debris coming off the solid rocket

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00:02:51,950 --> 00:02:53,183

boosters. So, you see this big flash out the front windows once they come off and then it

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00:02:56,650 --> 00:03:02,583

gets really smooth. It's pretty rumbly inside the vehicle while you're on the solids, and

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00:03:02,900 --> 00:03:03,223

then once you get off them, you're sort of on railroad tracks. It's quite a ride, the 3 g's,

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00:03:08,710 --> 00:03:11,173

you weigh three times what you normally weigh. Then, of course, you've got the suit on

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00:03:11,980 --> 00:03:13,210

with different valves and things, so stuff's poking into you. It's really not bad, but you're

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00:03:16,950 --> 00:03:18,160

aware that you're heavy. And then you go instantly from weighing three times your

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00:03:21,140 --> 00:03:21,956

normal weight to weighing nothing. And floating up in your seat, and straps and all kind

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00:03:26,190 --> 00:03:31,990

of stuff, you know, books floating up and dust comes up. So, it's really neat how quick

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00:03:32,040 --> 00:03:33,040

that happens.

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00:03:33,220 --> 00:03:33,776

(slate: Did living in space meet your expectations?)

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00:03:36,130 --> 00:03:37,603

James P. Dutton Jr.: Well, I had high expectations and they were all exceeded. They

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00:03:40,190 --> 00:03:46,390

really were. There's very little that I felt really surprised by. I think the veterans on our

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00:03:47,230 --> 00:03:47,373

crew made a real effort to every time we were in the simulator talk about what's going to

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00:03:53,020 --> 00:03:54,790

be like living up there, what it's like operating in zero-g, things that surprised them on

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00:03:57,250 --> 00:03:57,906

their flights. So, we were, I think, really well prepared by those folks.

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00:04:01,460 --> 00:04:03,260

(slate: Describe re-entry.)

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00:04:05,050 --> 00:04:07,506

James P. Dutton Jr.: And then we were fortunate enough on our return, we came back

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00:04:08,060 --> 00:04:13,660

over the U.S. for our landing. So, we hit sunrise on orbit somewhere around the West

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00:04:13,840 --> 00:04:15,370

Coast, but we really couldn't see the ground because it was still dark on the ground. And,

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00:04:18,310 --> 00:04:18,643

about the time we were over Wyoming, we picked up the sunrise on the ground looking

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00:04:23,510 --> 00:04:24,393

right down on the Rockies. It was absolutely gorgeous and we were at 40-miles-high.

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00:04:28,160 --> 00:04:29,463

We'd been at 200 miles for 16 days, so it looked really low and fast at 40-miles-high,

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00:04:32,590 --> 00:04:34,190

which was kind of funny.

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00:04:35,790 --> 00:04:38,056

(slate: Take nothing for granted.)

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00:04:39,480 --> 00:04:41,286

James P. Dutton Jr.: I mean, it's very fulfilling to have been blessed to go up and fulfill

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00:04:43,740 --> 00:04:46,196

that dream. You know, to have experience what I had hoped to experience all these years,

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00:04:47,150 --> 00:04:47,470

knowing that each step of the way, you're just very fortunate to make it to the next gate.

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00:04:52,830 --> 00:04:53,563

You know, there's health issues, there's professional career things that can come up that