

A portrait of Conrad Nagel, an older man with thinning hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and patterned tie. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a view of Earth from space, showing blue oceans and white clouds. A blue, stylized graphic element is at the bottom of the frame.

Conrad Nagel
First Flow Director of Atlantis

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00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:19,350
Music.

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00:00:19,350 --> 00:00:24,730
SLATE: What were you thinking and feeling the first time Atlantis launched?

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00:00:24,730 --> 00:00:30,820
My emotions were very high. Just to be a part of the team that,

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00:00:30,820 --> 00:00:37,270
sitting in the firing room that day, you know, as the assistant launch director.

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00:00:37,270 --> 00:00:47,760
And to watch her light up that day was so exciting. And, of course, lifting off the pad, you know, it just like took

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00:00:47,760 --> 00:00:52,220
It was very exciting. I will never forget that moment.

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00:00:52,220 --> 00:00:57,260
SLATE: Do you feel like a proud parent of Atlantis?

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00:00:57,260 --> 00:01:02,720
I have that, I have had that proud parent moment for a lot of years with Atlantis.

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00:01:02,720 --> 00:01:07,940
You know, we're looking at roughly 25 years ago when it came to Kennedy Space Center.

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00:01:07,940 --> 00:01:15,790
And I think about, well, I had 13 of those 25 years that I had days, nights and weekends with Atlantis.

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00:01:15,790 --> 00:01:20,040
So, yes, I feel like a parent to Atlantis.

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00:01:20,040 --> 00:01:25,200
SLATE: What did you think when you were assigned as flow director for Atlantis?

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00:01:25,200 --> 00:01:34,790

When I was selected as the flow director for OV-104, Atlantis, that was probably one of the most exciting days

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00:01:34,790 --> 00:01:38,850

I can tell you, it was, it was just like a dream come true.

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00:01:38,850 --> 00:01:43,710

SLATE: What do you think about when you see Atlantis?

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00:01:43,710 --> 00:01:49,210

I was just over in the OPF a few weeks ago and walking around the vehicle.

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00:01:49,210 --> 00:01:59,270

And it is just awesome to have that feeling, you know, of a relationship with a machine.

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00:01:59,270 --> 00:02:06,270

And a lot of people can't understand that. But when you spend as much time as I spent around that machine,

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00:02:06,270 --> 00:02:15,250

which is a beautiful spacecraft, it is a great relationship that I think I had with both the spaceship and

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00:02:15,250 --> 00:02:24,550

with the team that was taking care of her constantly over those times that I was in charge of that.

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00:02:24,550 --> 00:02:30,300

SLATE: What are the astronauts like to work with?

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00:02:30,300 --> 00:02:42,350

When you get to know these guys and gals, you are just amazed that we have this level of people that are repr

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00:02:42,350 --> 00:02:46,960

That to me was one of the highlights of my whole career.

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00:02:46,960 --> 00:02:52,390

SLATE: What are your memories when Atlantis returned to flight after the Challenger accident?

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00:02:52,390 --> 00:02:57,800

But that first flight after Challenger for Atlantis, that was an experience.

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00:02:57,800 --> 00:03:07,050

And the flight crew was just so courageous and so willing to give.

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00:03:07,050 --> 00:03:13,240

The commitment that everybody made to step up to the next level of safety.

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00:03:13,240 --> 00:03:21,870

I think you listen a little closer, you're a little more attentive, and then, of course, when engines light up,

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00:03:21,870 --> 00:03:30,460

you know, and the vehicle rocks back, you know, that seemed like a lot longer time than for a normal mission.

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00:03:30,460 --> 00:03:35,990

It's just a few seconds, but those few seconds seemed like forever.

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00:03:35,990 --> 00:03:41,460

SLATE: How should the space shuttle be remembered?

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00:03:41,460 --> 00:03:54,430

If we look back on the shuttle program, I think we're going to recognize that this has truly been a milestone in A