

Astronaut Frank Lee CULBERTSON speech

I'M LUCKY MAN

It is a true honor to be invited to receive this high honor from such a remarkable institution.

I would like to begin by congratulating my fellow awardees, Cosmonaut Vladimir Dezhurov and General Dumitru Prunariu, for their selection to this level. They are both highly deserving professionals and outstanding representatives of the best in human spaceflight. Dumitru was a pioneer in opening the doors on work aboard a space station, the Salyut, and a respected leader as the President of the Romanian Space Agency. Vladimir was the commander of the first Soyuz to carry an American to the Mir, the Commander of the first joint mission in the Shuttle Mir Program, which set the stage for international cooperation that enabled construction of the current Station, and one of the men brave enough to fly with me on a mission in space – a true challenge! I am humbled to share the stage with them, and I wish I could participate in what promise to be very enjoyable festivities. I regret very much that I cannot be there in person, and I appreciate the efforts to include me electronically.

It is also an honor for me to share a few thoughts with you today about my experiences and aspirations. I have been fortunate to have spent most of my career in aviation and spaceflight, both as a pilot and a manager. I love the technology of flight, I enjoy the speed and altitude, and I've been privileged to view some amazing sights, but what I enjoy the most are the people I have been able to work with in this career. People who participate in the various space programs of the world are very special. From those who develop the systems and train the crews, to those fortunate enough to be chosen to fly, all specialists in this field have a sense of purpose that provides strong motivation to remain dedicated no matter what the challenge. Success in this field is difficult, so complete commitment to mission success, safety of the crews, and quality of work is mandatory. We all depend on professionals who graduate from universities

such as the Technical University of Moldova for successful missions and a bright future, whether we are talking about spaceflight or medicine or economics. A strong education is the key.

As for myself, I grew up in a very small town in the southern United States, in a very rural area dominated by agriculture. My father was the town physician, who had also been a pilot in the Second World War, so I had a natural interest in science and in flying. At an early age, I decided that trying to enter this new field of space flight was the best way to combine these interests in one career, so I began to plan my education and my goals to match my dreams; that is, to try to eventually achieve what the early astronauts and cosmonauts were already doing: to live and work in space. I was blessed with parents and teachers who encouraged my dreams, who challenged me to excel, and who picked me up when necessary...but always encouraged me to spread my own wings to fly.

After childhood, I trained to become a Naval Officer and a pilot, and eventually, after four attempts, succeeded in being selected for training as a test pilot. I learned early that persistence is sometimes one of the most important factors in achieving goals. Working as an active test pilot qualified me to apply for selection as an astronaut pilot, and

after two attempts, I was selected in 1984 by NASA to begin astronaut training. Throughout these first 13 years in the Navy, I learned to stay focused on my goals, to always do my best at every assignment, and to be willing to take on responsibility and leadership positions. I encourage all of you to do the same.

My first flight on the shuttle Atlantis was in 1990, followed in 1993 with command of the shuttle Discovery. From 1994 to 1999, I had the privilege of working with our Russian partners on the Shuttle-Mir program, including time as the program manager when my friend Vladimir was commanding the Soyuz that took the first American to live aboard the Mir station. After helping welcome him home from that mission in 1995, I felt especially fortunate to later join him and Mikhael Tyurin in training as the crew for the



Third Expedition to the International Space Station. My biggest challenge was convincing my boss at NASA to release me from management duties so I could fly again! We eventually launched in the fall of 2001 and spent four months living and working together in space, one of the high points of my professional life...and cer-

tainly a dream come true for me.

Every one of us has dreams and goals we want to achieve. Likewise, our children have dreams and goals, but they need to be guided and nourished. We should encourage them and help them and teach them to work hard, to not be afraid of mistakes and setbacks, but to always press forward for the things they know in their hearts they can achieve. The challenges and difficulties of today bring them success tomorrow. They should finish school with that ability. We are all teachers, even you who are students, because someone is always listening to us or following our example, so we should follow that principle in guiding those who follow us. People are sometimes surprised that so many around us watch and learn from our own example.

In small towns all around the world, there are students who dream of being able to do what Dumitru, Vladimir, and I have been able to do; who dream of floating in space and maybe of being able to explore new worlds. Who wonder if they can achieve those goals, and how they can make it possible. I hope that the reality is that someone in their generation, young men and women who are in school today, will be the first humans to inhabit Mars and other parts of our solar system. I firmly believe that this is possible, but it will only happen if nations continue to work together to explore space and to advance science. It will only happen if international cooperation is more important than international conflict. It will only happen if our generation prepares the next generation to lead with vision and with courage.

Again, I want to extend my congratulations to General Prunariu and to Colonel Dezhurov; my sincere thanks to the Senate of the University for this great honor; and my respect and appreciation to the good people of Moldova for including me in this important event.

Thank you...