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THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF REMARKS  
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT  
AND  
THOMAS P. STAFFORD  
DONALD SLAYTON  
AND  
VANCE D. BRAND  
THE CREW OF THE  
APOLLO SPACE MISSION

THE OVAL OFFICE

6:15 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Tom and Deke and Vance, welcome home. On behalf of your fellow Americans -- about 214 million of them -- congratulations and thanks for a very successful and extremely productive flight in space.

We are delighted to have you back safely and we are very, very proud of the great job that you did.

Your safe return marks the close of the Apollo program and you and all of the rest who have been participants should be extremely proud of its success, from the beginning to the present, and as you know better than all of us, your particular flight also adds a new dimension, that of international cooperation, and that is extremely vital now and in the days ahead.

I understand from the technicians that your new docking system offers a foundation on which to build future cooperative efforts, and in the next decade could be a very valuable tool for space rescue.

I know, of course, that all three of you are darn glad to get home, or almost home, and that your wives -- Faye, Marge and Joan -- are probably listening to this conversation, at least I hope so because I want them to know we are all proud of their husbands who have done a superb job on behalf of our country.

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Tom, if I might add a lighter note, I understand that as soon as you get checked out you are going to spend a little time in the next few days helping Vance with his Russian.

MR. STAFFORD: Maybe it was an Oklahoma accident, Mr. President. Vance was superb at his Russian.

THE PRESIDENT: Tom, since this was your fourth mission, I understand you have spent more than 500 hours in space. Would you tell us how this mission compares with your previous one?

MR. STAFFORD: Mr. President, it was extremely different in one phase, as far as the international part of it. The other parts were somewhat similar, but it was just so meaningful to us to have this opportunity to work in both the diplomatic and management areas, besides fly in the spacecraft -- from all three of us.

Deke?

MR. SLAYTON: Yes, sir, Mr. President, I think it was a great honor to be able to fly this flight, and I am glad it came off as well as it did. I am looking forward to doing more.

THE PRESIDENT: I hope it was not so routine that it was dull.

MR. SLAYTON: It was not dull at all. It was beautiful, and we had a lot of work to do and I think we enjoyed it a lot.

THE PRESIDENT: Deke, one of your colleagues that I talked with told me that you are aging a bit to be an astronaut. How does it feel for an old-timer to be in space?

MR. SLAYTON: It feels great, sir. I really can't explain it. I hope we can show you a few pictures when we have an opportunity and that might help to make you appreciate it as much as we did, but I think the only way you are really going to appreciate it is to get up there. I hope some day we can take you up there in the old space shuttle.

THE PRESIDENT: I saw you moving around there a few times. You looked as agile as those younger fellows you were helping out.

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Let me say that the word that I would like to pass on to Deke is that your brother and his wife, who had an unfortunate accident just a day or two before you took off, I understand have come along well, and we certainly wish them all a very rapid recovery following that accident.

MR. SLAYTON: Thank you very much, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Vance, would you mind making a comment or two? You brought the Apollo in. What was your biggest challenge in the encounter on this particular mission?

MR. BRAND: I think probably the last few days, where I had the most to do. The re-entry itself was probably the biggest challenge, and I thought it was real interesting. That fireball was really beautiful and it was exciting looking over the earth at 25,000 miles an hour.

THE PRESIDENT: To all three of you, how will it feel to have an opportunity to sleep in a regular sack for a change?

MR. STAFFORD: Fantastic, Mr. President.

The two cosmonauts said they certainly appreciated the call from you while they were up there, and they were remembering when they were with you down there at the picnic.

THE PRESIDENT: I am sure they were as glad as we were that their recovery went without any incident, without any problem, and I am sure they feel the same way about the successful landing of all of you.

I know you have a lot of important business to do, so let me just say your achievements, that of all three of you, with the two cosmonauts, your achievements are historic. It is part of our history which was written by the recovery forces that have been ready at any time in each case of re-entry.

Before I do hang up, I would like to extend my congratulations for a very outstanding performance to Captain Neiger, Commanding Officer of the USS New Orleans, and to his ship's company. They, of course, were standing by and did a first class job and have achieved an outstanding record.

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The crew, as you know better than I, picked up the Apollo 14 crew in February of 1971 and was responsible for the safe recovery of both the Skylab 3 and Skylab 4 astronauts. We thank them and congratulate them on their performance as a part of this overall team.

Your successful completion of this mission, I say with emphasis, has opened a new era of international cooperation. I strongly hope -- as I am sure the Americans that are listening and watching, and all others do -- we hope that this first international manned flight will provide all of us with an example to remember for many, many years to come.

We are proud of you and we thank you, and good luck. I will see you back in Washington, I hope.

It is nice to wave to you on the screen.

Good luck, fellows.

END (AT 6:25 P.M. EDT)