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SPACE STATIONS: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Space skipper relives the sky show

Japanese kids hear about meteor shower

Astronaut Frank Culbertson operates the international space station's amateur-radio equipment.

AUDIO [Click here to listen to excerpts from Culbertson's Nov. 23 school chat with students from Iruma Children's Center in Japan.](#)



NASA

By Alan Boyle
MSNBC

Nov. 23 — The international space station's commander says he and his two shipmates had an unparalleled view of last weekend's Leonid meteor shower — as the only humans to see the shooting stars from above. NASA astronaut Frank Culbertson talked about his view, Thanksgiving dinner and other facets of life in space Friday during the station's first amateur-radio chat with Japanese students.

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SPACE STATION ALPHA'S amateur-radio setup lets astronauts on the space station chat with acquaintances around the world during their free time, strictly on an unofficial basis. With the cooperation of NASA and other organizations, a volunteer group called Amateur Radio on the International Space Station, or ARISS, has put together a schedule of sessions involving school classrooms.

Even though Friday was virtually a holiday for American students, Culbertson conducted two 10-minute sessions with schoolchildren in other countries — McKenzie Public School in the Canadian city of Almonte, Ontario, and Iruma Children's Center in Iruma, Japan. McKenzie's breakfast chat, conducted at 5:47 a.m. ET, was the second session involving a Canadian school. Iruma's contact was the first Japanese operation for the ARISS program.

Naturally, one of the first questions Culbertson fielded had to do with how Japan looked from space. The 52-year-old astronaut, who lived in Japan during his days as a naval aviator in the 1970s, said the view was "very beautiful ... beautiful islands, you can see Fujiyama, Tokyo, Yokohama."

He also said space provided a great vantage point for seeing the shimmering aurorae around both of Earth's poles. "It looks like you're about to fly through a curtain of light," Culbertson told the children.

The planets and stars also shine brighter above the haze of Earth's atmosphere, he noted. But even by those standards, he ranked the Leonids — an annual meteor shower that peaked early Sunday — as a special treat.

"The Leonids were very spectacular," he said. "As we were coming over Japan, during the highest rate of meteors, we saw three or four a second, maybe 100 a minute, for several minutes. As we approached sunrise, it looked like they were falling vertically all around us. And of course we saw the meteors below us as they entered the atmosphere, since we're above the atmosphere."

Culbertson admitted that he was "sometimes a little bit" lonely for his family, but he said he was getting

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valuable human interaction through his work with his two Russian shipmates — Vladimir Dezhurov and Mikhail Tyurin — as well as through e-mail, ship-to-shore telephone calls and amateur-radio sessions.

He said the crew tried to observe Russian as well as American holidays, such as Thanksgiving Day on Thursday.

“I prepared a big meal like we do at home, with turkey and potatoes and vegetables,” he said.

Culbertson and his Expedition 3 colleagues should soon be celebrating their homecoming. After four months in orbit, the three are due to return to Earth in December aboard the space shuttle Endeavour.

The next crew, arriving aboard the shuttle, will be headed by Russia’s Yuri Onufrienko, with American astronauts Carl Walz and Daniel Bursch completing the Expedition 4 crew.



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Mir’s last school chat

June 12, 2000 — Listen to the last amateur-radio chat from Russia’s Mir space station, when cosmonauts Alexander Kaleri and Sergei Aalyotin talked with students from Schnecksville School near Allentown, Penn.



NASA

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Alpha’s first school chat

December 22, 2000 — Listen to Expedition 1 commander Bill Shepherd conduct the first amateur-radio school chat from the Alpha space station with students from Illinois’ Burbank School.



NASA

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Expedition 2 talks with kids

April 16, 2001 — Listen to Expedition 2 astronaut Jim Voss, shown here at right, chat with students at Admiral Moorer Middle School in Eufaula, Ala.

Perspective on war

A photo taken Sept. 11 from the international space station shows a plume of smoke from the World Trade Center’s ruins, drifting southeastward over Brooklyn.

AUDIO [Click here to hear commander Frank Culbertson discuss Sept. 11 and its aftermath with elementary school students.](#)



More from Expedition 3

AUDIO Oct. 18, 2001 — Commander Frank Culbertson speaks with students from Houston's Armand Bayou Elementary School, where his son and daughter go to school.

AUDIO Nov. 23, 2001 — Culbertson talks about meteor showers and Thanksgiving turkey with students from Iruma Children's Center in Iruma, Japan.

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