

## Interview with the astronaut

On January 25th our school welcomed Jean-François Clervoy, a french astronaut who went three times to space. We took advantage of the situation and organized a meeting with our class so that we could ask a few questions.

We started by asking him about his studies and about his job, what made him choose it and what is the basic profile of an astronaut. He told us that when he was young he already had a passion for operating machines from a distance, and he wanted to do the same but in space and with a far more complicated system. Basically, he wanted to be an operator. He also liked all types of dangerous activities like climbing or diving, where every mistake can be lethal, so when there was a call for astronauts in 1985 he thought that he should try. He explained that every astronaut has another job, for example he studied to become an engineer in aeronautics and spacial and he is also a pilot from time to time. There are no particular studies to become an astronaut, so in space you can find a whole bunch of scientific jobs: seismologists, oceanographers, veterinarians, but also engineers and pilots, so there is no basic profile for an astronaut.

Then we asked him about how does being in space feel. He summarized it into four sensations: the first one is a big push in the back, when the spaceship leaves the Earth; then there is the sky that is as black as ink, even in the middle of the day; then there is the view of the Earth, they were making 16 world tours per day! Finally, there is weightlessness. He explained to us what exactly is this phenomenon: it is when the only force acting on a body is its own weight, it is when you fall without anything stopping you. He told us that when you are in a state of weightlessness you do not feel your weight (although it is still there) and that sometimes, if nothing itches you, you start to forget that you have a body!

We were also interested in whether or not he already had been in danger in space, and he replied that you always are as soon as you leave the Earth. The chances that you die in space are 1/100, which is very high, the biggest risks being when the spaceship goes through the atmosphere because of the energy that is put into it to lift it. Also there are big changes of temperature outside, going from  $-200^{\circ}$  to  $+200^{\circ}$  C. He told us that there already were accidents, fortunately they always managed to save the crew.

Then he told us about the communication and the food in space. He said that since the last time he went to space the methods did not really change. Thanks to satellites you can have an almost continuous link with the ground, you can have internet access, you can even call by Skype. About the food he told us that now you can eat almost anything in space, except for fruits or anything that leaves crumbs.

Finally we asked about his best memories from space, what did these missions change in him and if it is possible to get bored of space. He said that his best memory was definitely the view of the Earth. He told us that they all had tears in the corner of their eyes because it was so beautiful. This journey did not change him, but he knows that he had seen things that only a few people saw, that he has memories that no one else has and this is why you cannot get bored of space. Not after 6 months. Some of his colleagues who stayed for one year did start to think when they came home that it was too long, but if you start to feel just a little bit bored in space, look outside the window and you will stay there with your eyes wide opened.

With this last answer the interview ended. It was a very interesting and rewarding meeting, even though we did not have enough time to ask all the questions we had. We are very thankful to Jean-François Clervoy for accepting to meet us and to our Physics and Biology teachers who organized the whole event.

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