

The Partners in Space Commemorative

Honoring the first U.S.-Soviet Joint Space Mission

More than 200 miles in the distance, the American astronauts in the Apollo spacecraft first sighted their objective—the Russian spaceship Soyuz twinkling like a star in the heavens. The flight commander Brigadier General Thomas P. Stafford briefly fired Apollo's engines to close the gap with Soyuz.

At 11:46 a.m. EDT, as the two spacecraft orbited the earth at 17,500 miles per hour about 140 miles above the coast of Chile, they were close enough for Apollo to transmit television pictures of Soyuz. The light-blue Russian craft with its winglike solar panels grew larger and larger on television screens throughout the world as Apollo flew closer. Vance D. Brand, the Apollo pilot, maneuvered in front of Soyuz and slowly, with great precision, the two ships made contact at 12:09 p.m. on July 17, 1975. As the petal-shaped docking collars met, a slight jolt could be seen by earth-bound television viewers.

"We have capture," Stafford radioed in Russian to Colonel Aleksei A. Leonov, the Soyuz flight commander.

"Well done, Tom, it was a good show," crackled Leonov's voice in English over the radio. This short radio exchange, heard by millions of listeners on both sides of the iron curtain, confirmed a dramatic moment in space history — the first international docking in space. For the next two days the two ships — linked nose to nose — would orbit the earth as their crews performed the mission they had trained for since the joint American-Russian project began three years earlier.

On the Apollo craft, Stafford and Donald K. ("Deke") Slayton prepared the docking module so the two crews could move between ships. In Soyuz, Leonov and Valery N. Kubasov readied themselves for the first meeting in space with their American counterparts. Over the past three years, the five men had spent thousands of

hours preparing for this moment. In both the United States and the Soviet Union, the spacemen trained with equipment they would be using. To ensure precise dialog between the crews, the Americans spoke Russian and the Soviets spoke English during the mission.

Three hours after the two spaceships docked, the hatches were opened and the two flight commanders met in orbit to exchange a friendly handshake symbolizing the cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union that led to this historic mission.

This significant space achievement is honored with the issuance of The Partners in Space Commemorative which combines two special postage stamps with day-of-linkup cancellations and a sterling silver first edition proof medal. The stamp on the left side of the commemorative was issued by the Soviet Union and bears an illustration of the two spacecraft produced from an original painting by cosmonaut Leonov. The 20 kopeck stamp, which also por-

trays the official symbol of the Apollo-Soyuz Test Project, was canceled at the Soviet launching site at Baikonur. This stamp and special cancellation combination appears exclusively on this tribute to the joint mission.

The ten-cent United States stamp on the right portrays the two spacecraft docked in orbit. Artist Robert T. McCall, noted for his designs of previous stamps commemorating the space program, designed the multicolor stamp which was postmarked at Kennedy Space Center in Florida, the Apollo launching site.

The sterling silver medal portrays the five men who took part in this momentous event — Americans Slayton, Brand (top row) and Stafford (center); Russians Leonov and Kubasov (bottom). The inscription "Partners in Space" appears on the medal in both English and Russian. On the reverse of the medal are the names of the five spacemen and the official symbol of their mission.

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