

JESSIE GILMORE

September 1, 1998

Interviewers: Rebecca Wright, Carol Butler, Frank Tarazona

Wright: Today is September 1, 1998. I'm speaking with Jessie Gilmore as part of the Shuttle-Mir Oral History Project. It's Rebecca Wright, Frank Tarazona, and Summer Bergen. Thanks again for taking time out of your busy schedule.

Gilmore: You're welcome.

Wright: We'd like for you to start by just generally telling us what your roles and responsibilities have been with the Shuttle-Mir Program.

Gilmore: I've served [both] as the secretary for the Deputy Director, who was Frank Culbertson at the time who got promoted to Director. Then, I became the Director's secretary. In that capacity, I am responsible for the functions of the [Phase 1] front office.

Wright: How long have you been doing that?

Gilmore: Since November of '94 to the present.

Wright: So you and Frank have been together through many a times through these last few years.

Gilmore: That's true. I started working for him in September of '85.

Wright: So I have to assume that that working partnership helped through the Shuttle-Mir Program, that you developed in the early years.

Gilmore: Very much so.

Wright: What did you do prior to becoming his assistant?

Gilmore: In the Shuttle-Mir Program, or before '94?

Wright: Before '94. Well, before the Shuttle-Mir Program, when you first starting working with Frank.

Gilmore: I was the crew secretary in the astronaut office. I worked with the Shuttle crews, their families, taking care of all their invitations, their guests, their VIPs, went with them to the Capes, saw that everybody followed the procedures down there, and returned.

Wright: And did all those experiences help you?

Gilmore: Immensely.

Wright: Well, tell us, is there an average day in your job? Is there anything that's routine about your job?

Gilmore: Not really. You do the same type things every day, they're just in a different order. There's always correspondence, phones, schedules, but they're very flexible and changing constantly.

Wright: How has it changed, say, from just the time that Frank was deputy director to becoming the program director? Did your duties change quite a bit?

Gilmore: Yes. I became the lead secretary, so therefore that put two to three secretaries under me at the time, which added to responsibilities. Frank's position increased greatly, which caused mine to increase, and the workload to increase.

Wright: What's the hardest part? Is it keeping up with Frank, or is it keeping up with schedules, or keeping up with phone calls? What's the most difficult part of your day-to-day job?

Gilmore: Rearranging the schedule to work both for what he needs and what needs to be accomplished in the office.

Wright: How has your position changed as far as meeting responsibilities? Do you find yourself going to more and more meetings during the last few years with the Shuttle-Mir Program that maybe you did prior to Frank moving into this position?

Gilmore: I've gone to a few more meetings, not necessarily so much the technical side of the Shuttle-Mir Program, but more in like archiving the records, the projects like the Shuttle-Mir Oral History Project I've become involved with. Starting to go to more meetings with the International Space Station now, and getting more involved doing that.

Wright: When you did everything you did prior to Shuttle-Mir, you dealt mostly with American and American families. But, of course, this program had an added benefit that you never had before, and that was dealing with the international partners. Tell us how that came about, and what were some of the first times. Can you remember maybe the first time that you ever met the Russians? Was that here in your office?

Gilmore: No, that was over in the astronaut office. It was Sergei Krikalev was the first one I met, and Pavel Titov.

Wright: Was that part of their STS-60?

Gilmore: STS-60 and STS-63 flights. That was the first exposure and then the Russians starting coming over, and I met some of the flight surgeons. I tried to learn a little bit of Russian, learned not to speak it around them, because once you spoke a few words, they thought you knew it all and just started speaking in Russian. [Laughter]

Wright: How was their English?

Gilmore: Some of them had very good English, and some of them you needed interpreters with completely.

Wright: Was that another part of your responsibility, helping with the translators and the interpreters?

Gilmore: I did the logistics portion of it. I [requested and authorized] them when they were needed, saw they were at the right meeting places, that we had the right numbers of interpreters, sent [information] off to be translated for the documentation, saw that it came back and matched up as much as I could. [I] arranged for that kind of interpretation down at the Cape [in] Florida and anywhere else where they traveled. [I] took some Russian [classes] myself, but it's a difficult language to learn and you have to really stay at it, [and at the time the work load in the office precluded being away, attending class four times a week].

Wright: The trips to the Cape, what all were your responsibilities as far as those? How often did you have to go down to the Cape? Was that every mission?

Gilmore: No, I went to every other mission for the Shuttle-Mir Program. Just logistics, you set up all your Team Zero [meetings], which was a joint working group meeting between the Russians and the Americans. I handled all the meeting places, [coordinating] their meeting schedule, saw to it they got to the places they were supposed to get on time. I set up any of the receptions that were needed down there; took care of them for their tours; their viewing of the launch; saw to it they got from the airport to the airport [by making arrangements with TechTrans Inc. (TTI)]; took care of the Americans that were down there supporting those meetings; making sure that the faxes were sent; the meetings were set up. Some of the [meetings were held at] two or three o'clock in the morning, since they were eight to nine hours ahead of us in Russia. Sometimes it required multiple meetings.

Wright: Meetings upon meetings, right?

Gilmore: Yes.

Wright: Did you have a Russian counterpart? Was there somebody on the other side that you could deal with directly, or did you talk to lots of people when you called Moscow?

Gilmore: We talked to lots of people. There are secretaries over in Star City, Natasha being one of them, [she was very helpful]. We dealt with her some. Mostly it was Americans over in the TsUP and in the Embassy that we dealt with, or our Director of Operations in Russia, who has different people at times.

Wright: Did it take you a while to get used to getting phone calls from Russia, or was that just something that became part of your daily duty as well?

Gilmore: That was just something that became part of the daily duty, because with the Shuttle Program, we had Swedish people, we had French people, German, from different payloads and different astronauts. So that's just something that we've dealt with for a long period of time.

Wright: Is language the hardest part, or was there something else that you felt to be difficult when you had such a variety of international partners, especially the Russians?

Gilmore: The language is a difficulty, but then again you have the interpreters. They have a different way of looking at life than what we do. Whereas we're more linear and time controlled, they're more people oriented. They may be an hour late for a meeting and think nothing of it, because they were doing something with the families, whereas if the Americans are an hour late, they want to know why you're an hour late.

Wright: I guess that just made your job more of a challenge to get those meetings rescheduled.

Gilmore: At times.

Wright: Was there ever a calm time during Shuttle-Mir in your office? Was it busier during the missions than when you weren't having a mission?

Gilmore: Well, we never did not have a mission after Norm [Thagard] went up, because we had continuous American presence on board the Mir; therefore, we were always active. We did have some busier times than others, especially when some function is going on on the Mir, but it stayed pretty busy for

the last four years.

Wright: Just like one continuous day.

Gilmore: One very long day.

Wright: You had so much experience when you took on these additional responsibilities, but knowing how much must happen in this office, I'm sure there was lots of things that you were able to learn. Did you find yourself being able to move into different directions, or learning different areas that helped make the job easier or more efficient?

Gilmore: This is true, yes. I took a lot of different courses in the Russian culture. That helped a lot, made it more easier to get along with some of them, look at things from their point of perspective instead of just ours, which is a little bit different. I'm trying to think of some good ways of putting it. It's just a continual learning experience. The more you get to know them, the more you are involved in things. You just learn by a process of trial and error.

Wright: The Russians, I guess, too, after a while, learn that they could come to you and get information. Did you feel like your family of astronaut extended family just grew?

Gilmore: To a certain extent. There's quite a few of them that would do that. A lot of the managers that were over here quite frequently, they'd get to know you, and they'd realize that it was easy to talk, and they'd come over and communicate. After a while you'd kind of get to be like a big family.

Wright: Your time that you spent was not just in the office. Did your days continue when you left, and were you getting the phone calls at different hours of--

Gilmore: There were times we got them late at night or early in the morning. Sometimes faxes needed to be sent so that they would have them at the proper work time in Moscow, so there were a few times you were up here at midnight or one in the morning sending or receiving faxes.

Wright: And that was from and to Americans as well as the Russians?

Gilmore: That's correct, in Moscow and here.

Wright: When Frank's here, I'm sure that you're busy on a continuous communication effort with him, since he's right around the corner, but how was it with communication when he was over in Russia doing

business over there?

Gilmore: As continuous as it is over here pretty much. [Laughter] There's always telephones, cell phones, pagers. In every office you go to, they had phones. He has Moscow cell phones, so you could keep continuous communications no matter where in the world he's at.

Wright: I guess you have plenty of helpers if you needed to find him.

Gilmore: We had people in the MOST, people in the TsUP, people at Star City, so he was never out of touch.

Wright: I guess that was helpful for you. At least you knew if there was something that came up here, that--

Gilmore: If there was something that came up here, we had instant ability to get hold of him, then if something over there he needed here, he could contact us either through our office, through our pagers, or at our homes. Everybody here kind of worked together as a family. It wasn't an eight-to-four job. If he needed something, nine, ten o'clock at night, he can call anybody, and they came in and got it done.

Wright: That team effort, do you feel like that was one of the ingredients that made the program so successful?

Gilmore: I think it's a big factor that made the program work so well, is everybody was willing to set aside personal things and work together to see that this got accomplished.

Wright: Can you remember any incident during the program itself that you saw the team pull together that kind of sticks out in your mind?

Gilmore: Well, there was the fire, there was the collision, and then there was a IG investigation where everybody worked together to see that Mr. Culbertson was adequately prepared to go before that.

Wright: Was there ever a time that you felt that you would pick out as like the proudest moment of the program, or even something that you were able to do that you felt that you were glad you were here to make sure that this happened?

Gilmore: Well, I think STS-71, when we actually did the docking over at Mission Control, that was really fantastic, and then watching Shannon [Lucid] rotate with her knees in those little pink socks looking out the

window when we were getting ready to retrieve her, was just fantastic.

Wright: That's maybe a story that you could share with us. What was it like being in Mission Control during STS-71? Were there lots of people there?

Gilmore: The control room, yes. Mission Control had just an enormous amount of people. Everybody was there wanting to see us dock. It was a perfect docking, the Russians were there, everybody was just watching what was going on. It was a spectacular moment.

Wright: Could you feel the--

Gilmore: Tension in the air? Yes. And celebration. When the hatch doors opened and they got together, everybody was just jumping and yelling. It was nice. It was really worth being there for.

Wright: Then Shannon, with her pink socks.

Gilmore: [Laughter] Yes. She was rotating in front of the windows. You've probably seen that picture a million times where she's looking out the glass, but that was really great seeing her up there where she was coming home.

Wright: Were all the missions the same to you, or did they all seem different?

Gilmore: They were all different. They all have their high marks and everything else, and exciting. You get very familiar with the crews. They're very important to you.

Wright: Were you able to communicate with them at all while they were on board, the actual Mir residents from America?

Gilmore: Through a method that we call COS, where you put things on digital CDs, and they're sent up for special treats like at Christmas, Valentine's, or something. We did send up personalized messages to them. You could e-mail to them and get responses back and forth. Actual voice contact with them, management had that, some of the family members had it, but you needed to save that time for their families, not for the outside people.

Wright: At least you were able to visit with them on occasion.

Gilmore: That's correct.

Wright: When they come through here, I'm sure they get a chance to give you at least a few more pieces of information that you were looking for.

Gilmore: Yes, they do. We stop and visit, and we see quite a bit of each other.

Wright: How did you facilitate some of the areas that go on? We know that there were nine different working groups that were part of the Shuttle-Mir Program, and that meant more than nine chairs, since there were Russian counterparts. So how were you able to get all those people where they needed to be? Can you give us some of your secrets of how this all came about?

Gilmore: A lot of that was handled by the program support specialists at the time, which was Susan Anderson and Lindy Fortenberry, eventually. I'm not quite sure. Once meeting times were set down in Florida, we just made all the hotel arrangements and room arrangements and conference room arrangements, and all the interpreter requirements down there. Since we picked them up from the airport and carried them around through TTI all the time, everybody was pretty much where they needed to be. There were occasionally instances where meetings got postponed or had to be rescheduled due to something else coming up, but for the main part, it just flowed as a normal workday office.

Wright: It's almost a little scary, isn't it? You put all that together and it's normal. [*Gilmore laughs*] What were some of the Russian perceptions of being in America? Did they share anything with you of what it was like to work here? Are there differences that they felt being here, even in Houston compared to even Kennedy, what they saw, or anything that you can think of, because I know that they talked to you more on a personal-type basis, where it was less formal, I guess, is what I'm looking for. Some of their perceptions that they might have had.

Gilmore: Most of them thought of it, I think, as a really big shopping opportunity. [*Laughter*] The first groups that came over, we would take them out to the stores, they were just amazed at the variety in the stores that we had, without the lines and the wait, did quite a lot of shopping. They liked having their own personal time where they could travel and see and do things here. I think they really enjoyed it over here. Couldn't wait to go home and show off what all they had done.

Wright: Were they here often in your office? Or did that become a routine after a while as well?

Gilmore: Not really. The counterparts of the various teams came down here when we had just huge team meetings, so it wasn't that often, usually once or twice a year. Mr. Ryumin, of course, was down here

training for the crew, so he was here quite a lot, and he got to be a routine in the office, and his wife Elena Kondakova, who's also a woman cosmonaut, so we got to be very friendly with them and their daughter, who went to school here.

Wright: We had a Russian liaison office here as well.

Gilmore: We have a Russian liaison office here where we have representatives from Russia, Energia, also from RSA, which is the Russian Space Agency that stays on site here, and we have a director of America, which is a counterpart to our director of Russian operations, and normally those are cosmonauts and then astronauts over in Russia.

Wright: Did you work closely with that group, too?

Gilmore: To some extent we had dealings with those. They worked a lot more with International Space Station and with the international partners. They were over here for weekly meetings. They did have tag-ups with the crews on the Mir. There was quite a bit with them. I didn't have a lot of just day-to-day work with them.

Wright: Since you've lived this program over the last four years, almost as one long continuous day, you witnessed almost everything that happened. Can you share with us some of the benefits or some of the value that you see has come from working with these international partners and the success of the program as a whole?

Gilmore: I think it's going to help put everybody into a cohesive group for the International Space Station. We're learning that there are various cultures out there, various ways of doing business, not necessarily just one way. We're going to have to have that for the International Space Station. No one nation can do it by themselves. I've heard it said by the other astronauts, when you look back at this planet from space, there are no fences; it's all one big globe. We're going to have to work together. I think in the long run is going to be great for our children and our grandchildren.

Wright: You've worked in the space program for fifteen years. Do you see over the last year more changes than you ever saw before, or was this kind of running on a routine basis of changes?

Gilmore: No, I've seen some major changes. Most of my work had been done with the military-type people in DOD [Department of Defense], and things are getting a lot lighter, a lot more lenient. People are working together better. They're aiming for a long-range goal rather than a short-range goal. They want

the world, like I said, to be one big place. I think our children are going to think it's normal just to have Russians next door, or Japanese, and speak various languages. We're learning that no longer is just one language sufficient. You should have multiple languages, start teaching them at a much earlier age than what we were taught.

Wright: You have children. Do they think it's really neat for their mom to have so many interactions with Russians, or have they made any comments at all?

Gilmore: My daughter thinks it's very unique and neat. My son has grown up in this, and he thinks it's normal. [Laughter] He doesn't see that it's thing special. But it's like anything else, if you're around it all the time, it's the routine, and something else is different. I think some day they will see the benefits from it much more than I will. They'll live that long. We get a lot of medical benefits from it; we learned a lot from our exposure to the times on the Mir; we learned what we should and should not do to some extent on the International Space Station; we're going to learn different ways of building it, different ways of how things should function on it from this experience, that we would have learned ourselves on our own, but at a much, much higher cost and a longer duration, whereas now we can go right to it and bypass some of the preliminary.

Wright: Although you weren't in direct contact with the Mir residents, you must have had some contact with their families. Were you able to help the families, the folks that were on the Mir, as well as the people that were over in Russia for a while? Did that fall into your realm of responsibilities as well?

Gilmore: To some extent it did. We saw to it that special packages got sent over to Russia to go up on the Progresses for the resupply vehicles, so they could get little special treats for holidays or birthdays, information packets with cards, letters from their families. Sometimes we arranged for communication passes where they could go out to our "ham shack" out back and speak with their mothers, dads, whoever happened to be up there at that time. Occasionally we helped out with things like getting the voting in space, so they could vote from on orbit.

Wright: Tell us about that. Tell us who the astronaut was who got to vote.

Gilmore: We were originally doing it, I believe, for Dave Wolf and John Blaha. I'm not sure if either one of them actually voted from space. Wolf may have, but that's what got the President started and got a bill passed. So now we do have that bill, so on the International Space Station that will be handled in that manner. Susan Anderson was the project manager for that, and she could go into much greater detail.

Wright: The families or the team members that were over in Russia, they were there for extended periods of time. Were you able to help them work out what they needed?

Gilmore: We saw to it that their supplies got over there, some people for their furnishings and luggage and stuff, to get [unclear] over there, their visas and passports to make sure they could go, and occasionally when they took their families with them, we had to see to it, or we helped out with the process of doing those, since that was extended family, we saw to it that they got everything, all the paperwork done, so that they wouldn't have any difficulties in getting there.

Wright: Your life was never the same from one day to the next, and I'm sure you were never bored, but are you glad that you were here the last four years?

Gilmore: Very much so. Very much. It's going to be one of the proud moments of my life as I look back on it, some day when I'm in that rocking chair. [Laughter]

Wright: No time soon, though, I hope.

Gilmore: No time soon. We've got a few more projects ahead. I'd love to see us get to Mars.

Wright: Is that what you're hoping to be a participant in at some point, somehow?

Gilmore: Well, it would be nice. I think that's going to be long after I retire, but I would love to live to see us get there.

Wright: What was the first mission that you ever worked on?

Gilmore: That was with [Major General] Joe Henry Engle, 51-I back in '85.

Wright: I understand that you still support him in a way, because he's involved in the Shuttle-Mir Program as well.

Gilmore: Right. He's on the Stafford Task Force, and he does a lot of work there, so he's in and out of the office quite frequently. So I still have a lot of contact with him, and General Stafford, who was also a former astronaut.

Wright: Where do you plan to be in the future? Do you know what your plans are as part of the International Space Station as well?

Gilmore: Right now I'll go into it as the same duties I had under the Shuttle-Mir Program as Frank Culbertson's secretary and assistant. I hope to work into the family support plan on that, that's down the road a little ways, but it's being set up and worked because they will need special support for the long-duration crew members and their families. Normally on a Shuttle mission, you're up from anywhere from one week to two weeks, and you see to it that their families are taken down to the Cape and escorted around, and brought back into mission control. For people that are going to be on orbit four to six months, they're going to need a lot more extenuating circumstances. They may need help for things going on at home, seeing to it communications are set up and established, and just all kind of things can be visualized for that.

Wright: I think, if nothing else, that we can assume is that your expertise in communications is well known throughout the center and well appreciated.

Do you have anything you'd like to add? We're just going to make a note that Ms. Gilmore has been extremely helpful in this project for the last six months. As we have come in and out of her office, she has pushed us in the right direction and given us direction on who we needed to speak to, so we were glad that she found time to visit with us, and certainly offer anything. It's the time now for you to say anything you'd like to about the Shuttle-Mir Program as a whole.

Gilmore: I think it's been a very great learning experience. I've been proud to be part of it, and I think it's going to help out greatly in my future. I've enjoyed working on the Shuttle-Mir Program, because it's going to be part of history, and I think it's an important thing to have done.

Wright: We are glad that you were able to take time out of your busy schedule so we could get you on record as well. So we thank you for your time.

Gilmore: Thank you.

[End of interview]