

PART 1. Early on the morning of 20 January 2003 (STS-107 Flight Day Five), at approximately 2:50 AM CST (8:50 GMT), Shuttle Pilot Willie McCool called Houston Mission Control to report that he was seeing a "BRIGHT OBJECT " which he said seemed to be moving WITH Columbia. McCool's actual words are transcribed from the original VHS tape. He conversed with Capcom Linda Godwin during the exchange.

M = Shuttle Pilot Willie McCool Aboard Columbia

G = Capcom Linda Godwin in Houston

C = The NASA Commentator who remarks on events as they unfold

All italics mine for emphasis, CAPITALS reflect the voiced emphasis of the respective speaker. Hesitations and grammatical errors are left in as originally spoken. JC.

M: Houston, Columbia...

G: Go ahead, Willie...

M: A real odd question to ask Linda, but it would, would it be possible to see Space Station from my given attitude? We see a bright, uh, object that seems to be moving *WITH* us... This is, this is *NOT* a long distance satellite Linda.

G: OK Willie, uh, we'll double check that, and get back to you...

PAUSE...

G: OK Wille, uh, we just had that ground track added... up here to our screen and, uh, station's very close to you guys right now, *tracking right along with you..* as you go toward sundown, so that could be it.

C: Willie McCool, uh, pilot of *Endeavour* is saying he saw a bright object...

G: (garbled) we copy...

C: and asked Shuttle Capcom Linda...

G: One more comment for Willie, and uh, sighting of...*potentially* sighting the ISS, uh, *if that's what it is*, it should be, uh, *moving north* relative to you.

C: This discussion about a possible sighting by, uh, Endeava...by Columbia pilot Willie McCool of the International Space Station... Shuttle Capcom Linda Godwin telling, uh, McCool that, uh, indeed the Station is, uh, also over Australia. Station's at a somewhat higher altitude, uh, than Columbia. Station's at about..two th...240 statute miles (384 km - JC) above the Earth, and it's moving over, uh, central Australia now on a *northeasterly* heading. Columbia's just moving down the Australian coast, the Australian east coast, about Townsville by now, uh, headed *southeast*, and its altitude's about 180 statute miles (288 km - JC).

PART 2. DAMAGE CONTROL

One orbit, and an hour and a half later, things really begin to get twisted, as Mission Control practiced what might be termed "Damage Control". The NASA commentator even goes so far as to state a blatant LIE, putting words in McCool's mouth that he never said. It is interesting that in this part of the story, McCool himself contributes **ONLY 8 WORDS. The commentator does almost **ALL** of the talking and is (in this writer's opinion) trying very hard to set any possible controversy firmly to rest. Let's read and hear what they all had to say in this second part of the story.**

Transcript of "Damage Control"

M = Shuttle Pilot Willie McCool Aboard Columbia

G = Capcom Linda Godwin in Houston

C = The NASA Commentator who remarks on events as they unfold

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G: Columbia, Houston, uh, don't know if you can see it on this pass, but we show...show you're fairly close to, uh, the station again. If you'll

look out the overhead window, uh, kind of toward the starboard side, you might get a glimpse.

M: We're looking, thanks for the heads up Linda.

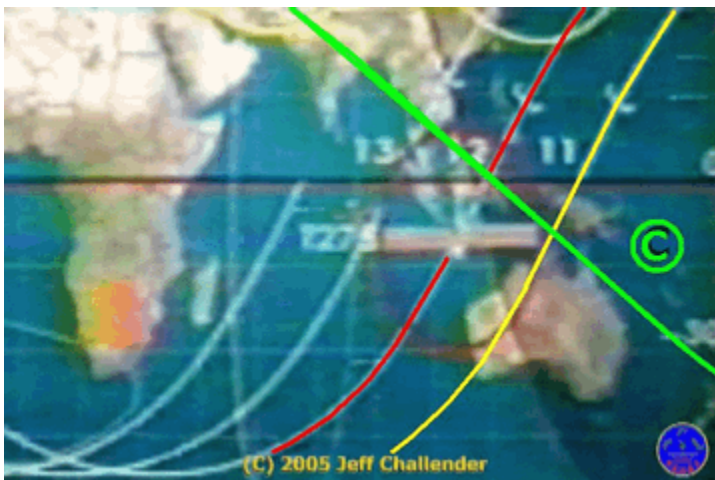
C: Shuttle Capcom Linda Godwin giving Columbia's crewmembers a heads up that they might, uh, be able to see the station. Columbia's in, uh, shadow and darkness, moving down across the... eastern coast of Australia, not far from the Sydney area, while the International Space Station is, uh, on a... northeasterly heading, uuh, off the northwestern coast of Australia.

The station's about 242 statute miles (384 km - JC) in altitude, while Columbia's, uh, altitude is about 182 statute miles (288 km - JC).

One orbit ago, about , uh, 2:50 AM, *McCool*, uh, radioed down saying *he, sthrap, saw what he believed to BE the International Space Station*, uh, that was a similar sighting, except the two spacecraft were, um, a bit closer together than they are now. Columbia was just, uh, off the... northeast coast of Australia, while the station..., uh, was, uh, moving over the central part of that island continent.

As in this pass, the station, uh, at its higher altitude, was in sunlight while Columbia was in the Earth's shadow, in darkness.

Both the International Space Station flight control room, and the Shuttle flight control room..., believe that, uh, that was in fact a sighting on the last pass, but we've heard nothing from the Columbia crewmembers about whether they, uh, believe they can see the station this time around.



This is a 200% enlargement of the relevant part of the map shown at the time by NASA Mission Control. The green line is the path of Columbia at the time of the incident. Shuttle's position during sighting marked by ©. ISS orbit is represented by the red and yellow lines. Red is the "Damage Control" orbit, and yellow the "Sighting" orbit.

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