

The Historic Flight of the Dragon

This is the VOA Special English Technology Report.

A rocket designed and built by a privately owned company has made history by bringing a supply capsule to the International Space Station. It was the first private spacecraft to carry out such a mission.

The company SpaceX launched its Dragon space capsule last week on the company's Falcon 9 rocket. It launched from Cape Canaveral, Florida.

NASA LAUNCH COMMENTATOR: "Three, two, one, zero and the launch of the SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket, as NASA turns to the private sector to resupply the International Space Station."

SpaceX mission controllers celebrated when the rocket had reached orbit and its solar panels had deployed. Three days earlier, a launch attempt was cancelled at the last second when a computer found a problem with the engine.

Charlie Bolden is the head of the American space agency, NASA. He spoke to reporters at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida after the rocket was launched.

CHARLIE BOLDEN: "The significance of this day cannot be overstated. A private company has launched a spacecraft to the International Space Station that will attempt to dock there for the first time. And, while there is a lot of work ahead to successfully complete this mission, we are certainly off to a good start."

The head of SpaceX watched the launch from company headquarters. Elon Musk told reporters:

ELON MUSK: "There is so much hope riding on that rocket, so when it worked, and Dragon worked and the solar arrays deployed, and people saw their handiwork in space and operating as it should -- I mean it was tremendous elation. I mean, it is like, I guess, for us, it is like winning the Super Bowl."

The rocket successfully linked with the International Space Station on Friday. Astronauts on board the Space Station used its robotic arm to secure the capsule.

SPACE STATION: "Capture is confirmed."

MISSION CONTROL: "Station, Houston, congratulations on a wonderful capture. You've made a lot of folk happy down here and over in Hawthorne and right here in Houston. Great job, guys."

NASA has invested about four hundred million dollars in SpaceX to help it develop space flight technology. And the agency also has a contract with SpaceX for twelve flights to resupply the space station.

NASA wants private companies to carry out operations in low-Earth orbit. The agency wants to center its attention on developing the next generation of spacecraft that can travel to asteroids or Mars.

The Falcon 9 rocket brought more than five hundred kilograms of supplies to the space station. But it also carried the remains, or ashes, of three hundred people. Among the remains were those of astronaut Gordon Cooper and actor James Doohan. Doohan played Chief Engineer Scotty in the popular television and movie series "Star Trek. "

The remains will orbit the Earth for about a year until burning up in the atmosphere.

And that's the VOA Special English Technology Report. Transcripts, MP3s and podcasts of our reports are at voaspecialenglish.com. I'm Steve Ember.