

# Gibson: Space efforts good for peace

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**PENANG:** When retired Nasa astronaut Robert "Hoot" Gibson shook the hand of his Russian counterpart Vladimir Dezhurov in space more than 12 years ago, it was the official end to the Cold War.

Gibson, who spoke at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) yesterday, did not know that at the time, but newspapers later reported that the handshake officially ended the war.

Gibson said space efforts were a good way to get nations to work together for something that was peacefully orientated.

"When you work together, you'll find that we're more alike than different. In the end, we're all earthlings," he said with a smile.

In July 1995, Gibson commanded a seven-member crew from the United States to dock with the Russian space station Mir.

As was customary, both commanders met at the hatch and shook hands.

The 10-day mission, which was Gibson's last and longest,



**Astronaut tales:** Gibson talking about his experiences in space at USM yesterday.

was the first time Russian and American crews were allowed to roam around each other's spacecraft.

"We were docked at Mir for five days and during that time, the Russian crew were free to explore the *Atlantis* unsupervised as we

were allowed to do the same on the Mir.

"It was funny, because as a fighter pilot in the army, I was trained to shoot down Russian pilots and there I was meeting with people who were probably trained to shoot me down as well," said the Vietnam War veteran.

Yesterday's talk was organised by the Mimos and supported by the National Space Agency and USM.

Besides his personal experiences, Gibson spoke on various facts about space missions.

"It doesn't matter if you sleep on the ceiling, upside down or on the walls, because it all feels the same," he said.

He also added that many astronauts just swallowed their toothpaste due to the lack of gravity and sinks in space.

Along with his presentation, Gibson showed the audience pictures of life in space (some of which were taken by him); the Aurora Borealis as well as images of Paris, Russia and Africa from space.