

# NASA JOHNSON SPACE CENTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

## EDITED ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

ANNE C. MCCOMBS  
INTERVIEWED BY JENNIFER ROSS-NAZZAL  
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ROSS-NAZZAL: Today is March 22nd, 2012. This interview with Anne McCombs is being conducted at the [Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum] Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center in Chantilly, Virginia, for the JSC Oral History Project. The interviewer is Jennifer Ross-Nazzal, assisted by Rebecca Wright. Thanks again for taking time to join us this morning.

MCCOMBS: Thank you for the invitation.

ROSS-NAZZAL: It's a pleasure to finally meet. I wanted to ask how you became involved in the preservation of the [OV (orbiter vehicle)-101] *Enterprise*.

MCCOMBS: It was one of the projects that I wanted to work on. We had spent most of 2003 preparing the aviation side of the Hazy Center for opening, which occurred in late December, near the 100th anniversary of powered flight. It was not on the exact date, December 17th, because of the festivities down at Kitty Hawk [North Carolina], and we didn't want the two to interfere.

Once we had opened the aviation hangar to the public we were ready to proceed with getting the space hangar ready. Of course *Enterprise* was going to be the centerpiece of the hall, as it is up until now. And next month we'll swap it out for [OV-103] *Discovery*. I was among the people who preferred to work at Hazy rather than returning to [Paul E.] Garber [Preservation,

Restoration, and Storage Facility, Suitland Maryland]. Given the choice, I was assigned to the crew. Ed [Edward M.] Mautner was the crew chief, and we also had Steve Kautner and Tony [Anthony W.] Carp, and others joined the team later on.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Tell us about *Enterprise* when you first got a chance to go up and examine what you'd be working on. What was the state of affairs at that point?

MCCOMBS: When I first started working for the Smithsonian back in 1988, one of the ones I asked about was *Enterprise* because I had not seen it, and we already had it in our possession. It was at that time in a storage building on [Washington] Dulles [International] Airport. Having not seen it, I said, "Well, how big really is it?" and they said, "Anne, when we moved it, it was like watching an apartment building coming down the road." I did have a chance to see it in that storage building before we moved it here, and then the next time I saw it was as it was being towed into the building in 2003. Things were pretty hectic during that year, as you might imagine.

It was being towed by a crew that volunteered from United Airlines [Inc.]. Of course they move big airplanes over at Dulles all the time, and we were very grateful for their assistance. They had the big tug that was able to pull an aircraft of that size over from Dulles Airport. They pulled it in, they centered it very perfectly on the centerline of the building, and then there it waited until we were ready to start working on it in 2004.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did you find she was in good shape, having been in storage for so long?

MCCOMBS: The paint was chipped, and externally it was dirty; the paint looked rough. Otherwise it looked pretty good. Certainly, as restoration specialists, we see ones that are in a great deal worse condition than that. Our first reaction was, “Boy, we’re going to have to climb to work on anything on this ship.” The only thing you could reach from the ground were the tires. Even the landing gear, once you got above eye level we were looking at ladders, and then small lifts. We used those for quite some time. We detailed all of the wheel wells, cleaning them thoroughly, cleaning the landing gear, the tires, the accouterments of the wheel well. That was all we could reach.

We had smaller lifts, but we had put out the call to our management saying, “You have got to get a scaffolding contractor in here. We aren’t going to be able to do this without scaffolding.” It took a while to put that together, but in the meantime we were working from personnel lifts, cleaning the aircraft. I keep calling it an aircraft because most of what I work on is that. It has wings, it does fly in the atmosphere, and *Enterprise* technically would not be a spacecraft.

We were cleaning the painted surfaces, which are the mock tiles. *Enterprise* does not have the real thermal [protection] tiles, something I have explained to many many many many visitors. They had been painted. The reports that we got was that it was latex house paint, and it had weathered and chalked. The big problem we had was that when you washed it, the chalking would come off and we had to have two sets of buckets, two sets of rags, two sets of sponges, because the white would run into the black, the black would run into the white.

We had to very meticulously wipe right at the paint line between the black and the white, because either one would mark the other badly. I remember spending a lot of time just cleaning it up. We did not repaint the tiles, they are as received. We did of course clean them up, but the

paint was, although very chalky, certainly acceptable for display. That was what we worked on until the scaffolding contractor showed up.

ROSS-NAZZAL: About how long did it take for scaffolding to get set up around the vehicle?

MCCOMBS: I don't remember how long between the time that we made the request and the time that they actually showed up. They set the scaffolding in like two days; it went very quickly. It was a company called East Coast Rigging [& Scaffolding], very competent people that do this sort of thing all the time. At that point we could start in on the sides of the ship that do not have the mock tile on them, and the payload bay doors. Those we knew we were going to be repainting, so we were prepping that for repainting.

We got to the lettering—the name *Enterprise*, the NASA logo—and our curator pointed out that NASA's logo has gone through changes. It had the “worm,” and then it went back to the “meatball” was what she told us the colloquial names for them were. She said, “This is one of the few places in the world that still has the NASA worm logo on it,” so we really wanted to preserve that. But since we were going to be painting over it we had to document that. We had tracing paper up there, we traced it very carefully.

We found that at least the name *Enterprise* had been painted on it at least twice in slightly different positions, slightly different lettering. We felt we needed to record that quite exactly and then give the curator the choice of version one or version two. To do that, I traced the upper layer and then very carefully hand-sanded down to the lower layer so that I could trace that as well. It sounds more difficult than it actually is, but does take some care.

We did get a tracing of each of those, and then we ended up using the one that was as received. That was the curator's choice, Valerie Neal. We did repaint that, and we found as we worked on it that that had been painted by hand. So we said, "Hey, this is great. We get to paint it on by hand." That was one of the most enjoyable parts of the whole process, hand-painting the lettering *Enterprise* and the NASA logo onto the ship.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You mentioned that you worked with a lot of aircraft. Can you tell us a little bit about some of the other projects you worked on before working on *Enterprise*?

MCCOMBS: The first one I worked on when I came here was the Hubble Space Telescope Structural Dynamic Test Vehicle, which is on display in our downtown museum, our flagship museum. After that, I've worked on the Hughes [H-1] Racer [aircraft], I've worked on the Enola Gay [B-29 aircraft that dropped the atomic bomb over Hiroshima, Japan, in World War II]. Done a lot of fabric repairs on our [Curtiss JN-4D] Jenny [aircraft]. So really covered a lot of the range of the history of flight.

In fact just recently we had something of an emergency in the Wright [Brothers & The Invention of the Aerial Age] gallery, and so I did some minor work on the [Wright] Flyer itself, mainly in the process of protecting it while we did the gallery repairs. Pretty much the entire history of air- and spaceflight there. I'll get these odd stray calls like "Hey, the Nike-Ajax Missile is leaking again. Can you take care of that?" so I'll go out and take care of the leaking missile.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did you apply any lessons learned from those previous projects to this effort, or did you think it was something entirely new?

MCCOMBS: Most of what we do, it's whatever each artifact calls for. We get in there and we say, "Okay, if it's dirty it needs to be cleaned," that's pretty obvious. We figure out what is the mildest cleaner that is not going to do any further harm and is going to in fact do the job and get it clean. With *Enterprise* it was mostly cleaning, getting ready for the repaint, and doing the repaint.

One of the peculiar things that I remember finding as we were cleaning, was there was one small section on the wing that had—it appeared to be hundreds of dead ladybugs, in one spot on one wing. Why, who knows? But that was one of the peculiar things we found. I'm told that they're a kind of Japanese beetle, but they look just like ladybugs.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I understand that you split up the vehicle into sections, and you did some work on the interior.

MCCOMBS: Yes, I did a fair amount of cleanup in the interior, and Ed helped with that as well. I spent a lot of time in the cockpit, which was infinitely great fun. One thing I found in the middeck area, is as it sits on the ground the floor slopes a little bit. The nose is a little bit lower than the tail. That is surprisingly not just tiring, but disorienting. You're working on a slightly tipped floor, and it's just enough to throw your equilibrium off to where you kind of stagger around until you get used to the fact that you're working on a tipped floor.

I pretty much detailed all the surfaces in there, cleaning them up, dusting, and giving them a wipedown with a damp cleanser and getting them dry. All very routine work except for where you are, and the fact that you do have a really great view from the windows.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Was the middeck fully outfitted, and the cockpit?

MCCOMBS: It is not at all; it is stripped. Every single person that comes up here from [NASA] Kennedy Space Center [Florida] to prepare *Enterprise* for its flight to [the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum in] New York [City], the first thing they say is “Oh, she is so different from the flying ones.” Of course since it’s the only one I’ve worked on, to me that’s what Shuttles are like. When we get *Discovery* that’s going to be the big shock for me. I’m going to be the one saying, “Oh, it is so different than *Enterprise*.”

It’s very very empty, very roomy. Has no space toilet. We get to the upper level of where the pilots would sit—we, up until recently, had this awful old ladder that was pretty much *Enterprise*’s ladder—and it has no seats because after it did its flight testing it was used for various vibration studies, so they put masses in there. There’s just basically the big chunks of steel where the seats ought to be. There is absolutely no cockpit instrumentation, maybe three instruments in there. I’ve told many people that you could not legally fly a Piper [J-3] Cub [aircraft] with the instrumentation remaining in there.

The most common question we get from the public after “Is it a real Shuttle?”—and the answer is yes, it’s a real Shuttle but it never flew in space—the next question is, “Can I go in it?” No, because a) it’s really awkward to get in and out of, and b) there’s really not much in there

once you do get in. There's no cockpit equipment, there's no seat, there's not really much of anything. It's still really neat to get up in there, but it's not very much like a flown Shuttle.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Tell us about working with NASA and USA [United Space Alliance]. I understand that they were up here doing some work.

MCCOMBS: They've been up here four trips to get *Enterprise* ready. The first one was to evaluate it, a thorough inspection to see if there would be any problems in a potential flight. At that time no one had any idea whether it was going to be relocated and if so, where. The second trip was more inspections and they started correcting discrepancies. The third trip was all about correcting discrepancies. The fourth trip, which was just completed in February, was the really long one to put the tail cone and the ALTA [Approach and Landing Test Article] pods on to prepare it for flight.

At that point virtually all, not 100%, but virtually all of the discrepancies had been taken care of. For the most part they found her in pretty good shape, and I'm sure they made their reports. They found some minor corrosion issues here and there and corrected a whole bunch of other things, most of which I don't know the details of.

Wonderful, wonderful people to work with. Very technically skilled, very much problem solving oriented. The first time they came up we had a little bit of difficulty unloading a truck, and they seemed to be absolutely ecstatic at the idea that they had a nice tough problem to sink their teeth into.

Boy, they hit it with everything they had. We were saying, "Guys, we really need to take a lunch break. We've been going at this for hours." "Yeah, okay. Right, right, just a minute."

And an hour later we would repeat this process. I don't remember how long it took to actually tear them away, but they were very intense. It was really enjoyable.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Tell us about painting the vehicle.

MCCOMBS: I mostly helped with the preparation for that, getting the old paint down to a surface where it would be ready for paint. The painting took place overnight. We needed somebody to be here during the day as well as overnight, so the overnight crew that did the actual painting would leave us a list of "please get so-and-so ready." That was mostly what I did, and of course a lot of the prep work of getting the old paint off and/or ready to repaint.

ROSS-NAZZAL: What sort of things would you have to do?

MCCOMBS: Oh, touching up, masking, moving things from one place to another. The painting was not the big part of it. Like any homeowner knows, it's not the painting, it's the prep work. A lot of time spent stripping the paint in various ways. We used scrapers, we used heat guns. We tried to be as gentle as we could, but still we had to get in there and get the job done.

The paint was donated. PPG [Industries] came in and very graciously formulated a special paint, because we could not spray because it's in an exhibit space. At that time the hangar was closed, but on view to the public. The public could come to the entrance of the hangar and they could look from overhead mezzanines, but they couldn't enter the hangar. We had that space to move around our equipment, but we were on view at all times. Because of that we had to have paint formulated that couldn't be sprayed, couldn't be horrendously toxic in any

way, and had to be applied with rollers. They were gracious enough to formulate paint specifically for that purpose.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Tell us about doing this preservation work in front of the public. What was that like? Was that different from the other projects you've worked on?

MCCOMBS: It is more like what we're going to be doing when we move our restoration shop out here. I have worked both in public view and out of it, so it doesn't rattle me particularly. They were far enough from us that they couldn't really talk to us directly and distract us from our work. We were generally wearing harnesses up on a scaffold. When we came down, we generally would make a point of talking to them as we went in and out of the hangar, but we weren't doing it on an ongoing basis.

One of the situations that arose that we had to correct rather quickly—it was done in innocence, but the docents are in the habit of using laser pointers to point out details on the exhibits, because of course a lot of times what they want to talk about is some ways away from where their tour is. We had to ask them to not use laser pointers on us. There's nothing quite like being six inches away from a surface that you're concentrating on, and all of a sudden there's a dancing little red or green light impinging on you.

They were real nice about it once we brought this to their attention, but boy, we came off of the scaffold kind of upset when this first came up. "What on earth are you thinking, aiming a laser pointer at us?" That's a safety issue for us. We were a little skittish about being up on the scaffold anyhow, and then to have a distraction like that, that was kind of exciting.

The public was great. They would ask questions, from ones that were far too advanced for me to answer, down to one memorable person that came in that was standing there just staring at it for a while. I said, "Can I answer any questions?" He said, "What is it?" I said, "It's the Space Shuttle *Enterprise*." It was obvious that the man had no idea in the world what a Space Shuttle was.

I'm thinking okay, we have an adult American in the 21st century that does not know what a Space Shuttle is. How do I explain this? Honestly, the man did look like he just fell off the turnip truck, but I cannot imagine where he had come from that he didn't know what a Space Shuttle was. I thought for a second and I said, "It's basically a big truck that goes into space and carries cargo into space." He said, "Oh, okay." That was one of the weirdest questions I think I've ever been asked. It was easy to answer, but it was definitely not a question I was expecting to hear.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Tell us about some of the safety measures that you undertook as you were working on the vehicle. You mentioned that you were tethered.

MCCOMBS: We wore the same kind of harness that anyone wears when they're doing high lift work, as your NASA people do. It has a body harness plus a lanyard that you attach to the nearest thing that you devoutly hope will not collapse when you fall off, generally some part of the scaffold. We were skittish because none of us had worked on scaffolds before. After a while, we were climbing around on it. Like anything, you get used to it. We used lifts, which we're all pretty much used to operating from personnel lifts. Tony did most of the highest high lift work because he did most of the tail repairs.

We would be scrambling around on the scaffolds, and we did find that we had to redesign the scaffold as we went along to get the access. Maybe once a week we'd stop and say, "Okay, have we taken the scaffold apart to the point that it's too scary for us? Maybe we ought to put those cross braces back in." About once a week we'd do that when we started thinking this is too scary even for us. I'm sure that it would have been pretty alarming to the people from Kennedy who have the really sturdy platforms that they're accustomed to using.

These are the kind of scaffolds that are used in building work, not anywhere near as steady. They're platforms and tubing, so we would stop every now and then and say, "Okay, the scaffold is looking a little bit not quite the way we'd like it. We'll reset everything." Every one of us, we'd grab a great big hammer, wham, wham, wham, take the scaffold apart, move a diagonal brace here and there, wham, wham, wham, put it back in, and keep on going.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I understand some of the windows had to be replaced. Did you have any involvement in that?

MCCOMBS: Yes, that was I think second trip or third trip. The windows had been removed as part of the *Columbia* [STS-107] accident investigation. There was some thought that debris had struck the windows, and they were doing some kind of testing and they had to take those windows out. Our involvement was mostly arranging for equipment, which again the very nice people at United Airlines were kind enough to loan us to get access. We really didn't have a good way of moving these panes of special glass, which weighed well over 100 pounds.

The folks from USA and NASA did the actual physical work, but we were doing a lot of the arranging to get the special trucks over here that had the lift platforms that could be driven

into place and so on. They were a lot shakier than what they're used to down at Kennedy, but the USA and NASA folks were real troopers and said, "Well okay, it's shaky, but this is what we got, let's go with it."

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did you have any involvement with the OMS [orbital maneuvering system] pods?

MCCOMBS: Oh my gosh, the OMS pods. We went to take the OMS pods off, which had to be done because we knew eventually the ALTA pods would be replacing them. Our OMS pods are mostly wood construction with fiberglass, and the way we lifted them was nothing like what was brought up here from Florida. We basically used some cables and a strongback. We had figured out how to rig it so that we could lift it with our crane. We started to make the lift, and it made a sound that you never ever want to hear from a suspended load. It made this horrendously loud crack. We all started screaming, "Put it back, put it back, put it back, put it back, put it back!"

We said, "Okay, we're going to rig that differently." A couple days later we came up with some slings. The wood was very very badly deteriorated and it just was not a sound load to lift. We're talking about something that's a little bit bigger than a Volkswagen bus, it's larger than a van. It's up at that altitude, and it makes this horrendous noise, and we don't really want that to get any worse. So we rerigged it with some rigging slings and were able to bring it down, and then brought the other one down much more successfully since at that point we knew how to rig it. That was highly memorable.

The pods went back to the Garber facility where our workshops are, until such time as we get moved out here. Another team refurbished them, and that was just an absolutely wretched

job. They didn't smell good, they were full of mold, the wood was in horrible condition. We had the head of a mannequin, the decapitated head, sitting around nearby. He was wearing a hard hat, safety glasses, and a little caption that said "Ready for another day in the pod?" His name is Stanley, by the way. There's a story behind that, but that's not related to *Enterprise*. Old Stanley was our little mascot for the pods.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I understand that you had several notable visitors that came to see the *Enterprise* while you were working on her.

MCCOMBS: We did, we had various astronauts who had flown it or had flown into space. I don't retain too many clear memories honestly, beyond coming down and shaking their hands and being very honored that they had come. And then back up on the scaffold.

One thing that I remember hearing about was that one of the astronauts—they took her over to our Shuttle simulator that we have for the visitors and said, "Why don't you land the Shuttle?" Of course she managed that rather nicely on the first try, having done it on shall we say much more realistic equipment. She said, "Yes, it's pretty good realistic simulation." That's a good note, to know that we're doing that properly.

ROSS-NAZZAL: When you heard that the *Enterprise* would be going up to New York what were your thoughts?

MCCOMBS: As I recall, the day the announcement was made I was at home for some reason, but I got onto the NASA web broadcast and so I heard the announcement. We had actually been told

ahead of the announcement that *Discovery* was going to be coming here. However, we had not heard at all where the other ships were [going], so my greatest interest was in where *Enterprise* would be going. We had been following the stories, so we had a pretty good idea who the contenders were, but nevertheless I didn't really know. It was quite a surprise.

It's good for New York, we're sure they'll take good care of her. We've done our part, and now it's their turn. I'm very happy for them. I'm of course sad that there couldn't be more Shuttles, because there were some very deserving candidates that were disappointed. It's a shame that there couldn't be enough for every museum that made the request. I know NASA made a considerable effort to send [everyone] something suitable as best they could. I'm really glad that it wasn't my decision to make, because that was a very tough decision.

ROSS-NAZZAL: There's been some heat about that, that's for sure.

MCCOMBS: Oh yes. We all read the newspapers, and I know there's been some heat. We of course had been sworn to secrecy, even though we had gone from strong suspicion to certainty ahead of time. We were always very careful to say, "It's NASA's announcement. We have requested *Discovery*. We hope that we are fortunate enough to get her, but we don't know for sure until the announcement is made." We were very careful to respect that request, because it was important that it come from the appropriate source.

ROSS-NAZZAL: What are you doing to prepare for *Discovery*'s arrival and *Enterprise*'s move?

MCCOMBS: I have been a liaison, assisting with the crews that have been coming up from Kennedy since their first visit. I expect it'll be more of the same. I and my colleagues are basically available to assist with whatever they need, and they make requests as they need them. "Can we get a forklift here? Can you unlock this door? Can we get a conference room? Can you help us with making connections with IT [information technology] support? Can you get a fax [facsimile] sent?" Small things, but they're necessary. A lot of setting of stanchions to provide as much access as we can while still providing safety, so I expect that will continue during the festivities.

Of course when *Discovery* arrives and *Enterprise* departs, the order of magnitude goes up by several times in the number of people who are paying attention, the number of important people who are going to be involved in the celebration. It's going to be a very very busy time. I expect my job is still going to be, "Can you get this door open? Can you get us into the locked bathroom? Can you go get us a mop?" Things like that, just because there's always somebody that needs to find these detail things.

The job doesn't go forward sometimes until you get a mop. I mention the mop because they needed a dry floor mop to close the nose gear door on *Enterprise* when they were cycling the landing gear. We found that absolutely hilarious and absolutely necessary at the same time. There was this frantic search for where can we get a good floor mop, because we have to close the doors of the landing gear.

ROSS-NAZZAL: This morning I understand you were moving a flag.

MCCOMBS: Yes. We had a garrison-sized flag hanging behind the tail of *Enterprise* in the space hangar. That has been on display since before we opened this museum, first in the aviation hangar, and then in the space hangar. It's a very beautiful flag. It's also very very large, 25 by 35 feet as I recall, so it needed to be removed. That's another question that we often get asked, how do you get the Shuttle in and out. People are looking at the back and thinking it's not going to fit through the door. So I tell them that's right, it doesn't fit through the door. There's a part of the building that we remove.

The flag hangs in front of that cutout that clears the tail fin. We could see that when one goes out and the other comes in, that flag is going to have to be out of the way. That's just another detail that we needed to take care of. We had our Office of Protection Services Honor Guard come to handle the flag once it got to where a person on the ground could reach it. Jeannie Whited and I went up in a 120-foot lift and detached it from its hanging bar and lowered it.

It all went really well, except for the part where the lift decided to throw a temporary hissy fit. We finally got that sorted out, and once it got down to where the Honor Guard could get ahold of it they took it from there and did a fine job. We had spent quite a lot of time discussing various scenarios for how to do that. Even though it's a small detail, it had to be done correctly.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Rebecca, did you have any questions for Anne?

WRIGHT: Looking back at its time here, is there a special memory that you have since you've worked with *Enterprise*?

MCCOMBS: I've gotten a real kick out of the times that we've taken the group photos with the NASA people—NASA and USA and [the] Boeing [Company], etc. Among us, we just tend to call them the NASA people, as in, "They're coming on such and such date." Those have been a lot of fun, "Everybody get together; we'll get the picture now." They're a great group of people and I've enjoyed working with them.

This last trip, as they were getting ready they were all staying at a certain hotel nearby, who graciously said, "Can we do something special for you?" They said, "Yes, let's have a Super Bowl party." So we had this tremendously fine Super Bowl party. I and my husband and one of the other escorts and their wife came out. That was a really good time. It was just a nice everybody get together, have a good time, and feel like part of the team for that.

WRIGHT: We understand that *Discovery* is supposed to be arriving on April 17th.

MCCOMBS: Weather permitting.

WRIGHT: Weather permitting and if all goes to plan, at what point will *Enterprise* come out of the building?

MCCOMBS: It will be either the morning of the ceremony or the night before. I think it'll be the morning of the ceremony, early in the morning we'll have the building ready to go. The panel that I mentioned will have been removed and it'll go outside. It'll be sitting outdoors, and when

the ceremony begins *Discovery* will have been towed from where it was demated to our “haul road,” basically our taxiway that goes over to Dulles Airport.

It’ll all be lined up and ready to go. It will be towed in, but *Enterprise* will already have been placed in position that morning. I imagine it’ll be a long day that day. We’ll start early early in the morning, and we’ll be going with great enthusiasm all day. It’ll be a lot of fun, and we’ll be really tired at the end of the day.

WRIGHT: Then *Enterprise* will make its way to New York.

MCCOMBS: *Enterprise* will be towed immediately to—right now it’s called Apron Bravo. It’s a large paved pad over on Dulles Airport. It’s an absolutely wonderful location for everything except access, but it is a huge concrete pad that has plenty of room and is not in anybody’s way as far as the airport operations. *Enterprise* will go there immediately that evening, and the mating procedure with the 747 [Shuttle Carrier Aircraft] will start right away.

WRIGHT: She has to spend the night outside for a few days.

MCCOMBS: She’ll be outside for a few days, as *Discovery* will be outside for a couple of days. The reason we keep emphasizing so heavily “weather permitting” is they’re going to be looking at a weather window of about a week to try to prevent or minimize any chance of exposing it to anything other than beautiful clear skies and sunny days. Of course weather being what weather is, we’ll get what we get. But that will be determined as we get closer to the date and they can get better weather forecasts. Certainly we’re all keeping our fingers very much crossed for good

weather because that's the one thing that we can't plan ahead for. We just have to take what Mother Nature gives us.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Is there anything that we haven't covered that you thought you'd like to talk about, or any other anecdotes that you remember?

MCCOMBS: I will mention one other thing. We talked about the interior, and I did work in the cockpit area, but actually I did work also in the payload bay, and that's really my favorite part. That is a marvelous space to be in. I was not part of the crew that did this, but we put a catwalk inside there because otherwise moving around in there is really really awkward. I just loved going into the payload bay and walking on the catwalk. Spent a lot of time in there cleaning too, mostly vacuuming.

There was one thing that was amusing when I was in there one day. The way we got in there, there's a hatch in the right wheel well. We climb up the ladder and go through this hatch and into the area. I heard voices, and I poked my head out, and there was a couple people right below me, one of the curators and a visitor. I said, "Hi, can I help you with anything?" which surprised them, because they didn't expect that. It was the head of space history, Roger [D.] Launius. The visitor looked up and said, "Can I go in there?" I said, "If it's okay with the curator, it's okay with me." He said, "Yes sure, go ahead."

The guy came on up, and turned out it was a reporter from the Washington Post. I told him how to climb in. There's a little bit of a trick to it. He got inside, and the very first question he asked was "Why is it green in here?" which just amused me. I explained that's a corrosion-

preventive coating. It's always that color because that's the color that chemical is, it's a zinc chromate compound.

He wrote this lovely article and it started out, "Here I am standing in the absolute pinnacle of human technical achievement, and here is Anne McCombs, running a vacuum cleaner." I thought that was hugely entertaining. Still have that clipping somewhere, it's one of my favorites.<sup>i</sup>

WRIGHT: Well, thank you.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Thank you very much for your time.

MCCOMBS: Thank you.

[End of interview]

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<sup>i</sup> See Neely Tucker, "Ready for Liftoff; The Space Hangar Opens With a Wing of Wonders" Washington Post, November 1, 2004. It is also available at: <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=prUNAAAIBAJ&sjid=AnIDAAAIBAJ&pg=3672%2C291438>