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Skylab astronaut Owen Garriott jokes with NASA physician Paul Buchanan as he enjoys his first earthbound meal after spending nearly two months in space.

NASA Doctors 'Impressed' At Physical State of Astronauts

By Richard Saltus

SAN DIEGO, Calif., Sept. 26 (AP)—The Skylab II astronauts, back on earth after a 59½-day space mission, were "much improved and all in very good spirits," space doctors said today.

Astronauts Alan Bean, Jack Lousma and Owen Garriott spent their first morning back on earth sleeping late in their quarters aboard the prime recovery ship, the USS New Orleans. They awoke about 10 a.m. EDT, just as the ship was entering port at San Diego.

After the ship tied up at a dock, the spacemen started a six-hour medical examination, their second since they splashed down in the Pacific on Tuesday.

Dr. Carter Alexander, a space agency doctor, said they were already showing signs of readapting to the gravity of earth. He said they awoke very hungry, but breakfast had to wait until doctors could draw blood samples.

Afterward, the astronauts ate and began the long series of medical tests.

Despite history's longest ex-

posure to the deconditioning effects of space weightlessness, the astronauts made a remarkable showing in medical tests, doctors said.

"We're impressed," said Dr. Paul Buchanan, one of the space agency physicians on board.

Garriott, he said, "looks very good."

Buchanan said, "The other two are slightly down. Owen has more bounce to the ounce. Jack trails him a little and Al is just a notch behind Jack."

He said their excellent condition may be "a real landmark in medical history. We are unbelievably happy with this data."

Weightlessness has the effect of permitting muscles to decondition or weaken. Since the muscles don't have to work against the constant tug of gravity, they waste away.

Intensive exercise by the astronauts during their marathon mission apparently halted the progressive deconditioning, Buchanan said, adding, "The personal exercise was the saver."

Buchanan said the tests on Tuesday showed the astro-

nauts experienced a 10 to 20 per cent loss of heart conditioning and all were experiencing a feeling of heaviness.

About three hours after splashdown, however, he said, Bean and Lousma reported that the feeling of heaviness began to disappear.

Doctors, anxious that the astronauts not be exposed to germs or to unnecessary exercise, kept the spacemen isolated.

They were not permitted to walk the decks or wander the passageways of the ship, but went directly from their quarters to the medical laboratory for the tests.

Doctors are concerned that the astronauts may be highly susceptible to disease because the long confinement of the space mission has caused them to lose some of their natural immunity to infection.

Bean, Garriott and Lousma will remain aboard the New Orleans until Thursday afternoon. Then they'll go to an air field for a flight to Ellington Air Force Base near their homes. They are expected to arrive at Ellington about 7 p.m. EDT Thursday.