

# NASA opens exhibit on 50th anniversary of Apollo 1 fire

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This Tuesday, Jan. 24, 2017 photo provided by NASA shows part of the Apollo 1 exhibit at the Kennedy Space Center in Titusville, Fla. On Jan. 27, 1967, a fire during a test on the launch pad killed three astronauts at the start of the Apollo moon program. (Kim Shiflett/NASA via AP)

NASA opened an exhibit Friday honoring the astronauts in the Apollo 1 fire—50 years to the day they died.

The hatch from the burned spacecraft is the main draw. It had been concealed, along with the capsule, for a half-century. On Friday's anniversary, the hatch that trapped Gus Grissom, Ed White and Roger Chaffee inside their capsule at the launch pad finally went on display.

The exhibit at the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex also includes the redesigned hatch used on the spacecraft that carried men to the moon. Twenty-four Americans flew to the moon during the late 1960s and early 1970s, and 12 walked its surface.

"It is really fitting for those three wonderful individuals: Roger, Ed and Gus. I knew them well," said Apollo 10's Tom Stafford.

Apollo 1 was America's first space tragedy. It was overshadowed in the decades ahead by two more disasters: the 1986 Challenger and 2003 Columbia shuttle accidents. NASA officials acknowledged at the ceremony it was about time Apollo 1 got properly recognized with its own exhibit.

Families of the Apollo 1 crew were at Friday's opening; they got a private tour Wednesday. They had one last event: an early evening ceremony at the abandoned pad where the flash fire occurred at 6:31 p.m. on Jan. 27, 1967.



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The relatives filled four long rows of black-draped chairs in front of the exhibit, along with Stafford and Apollo 16 moonwalker Charlie Duke, and NASA dignitaries. Astronauts from the space shuttle and station era stood on the sidelines, along with space center workers, past and present.

Four tourists from Wisconsin who got on the wrong tour bus ended up at the ceremony.

"You almost can feel their spirits are here," Patty Most said as she gazed up at the large glass painting of the Apollo 1 men in their white spacesuits, their orange launch tower in the background. The three

astronauts "got the space program to where it is today," friend Ron Meyer noted.



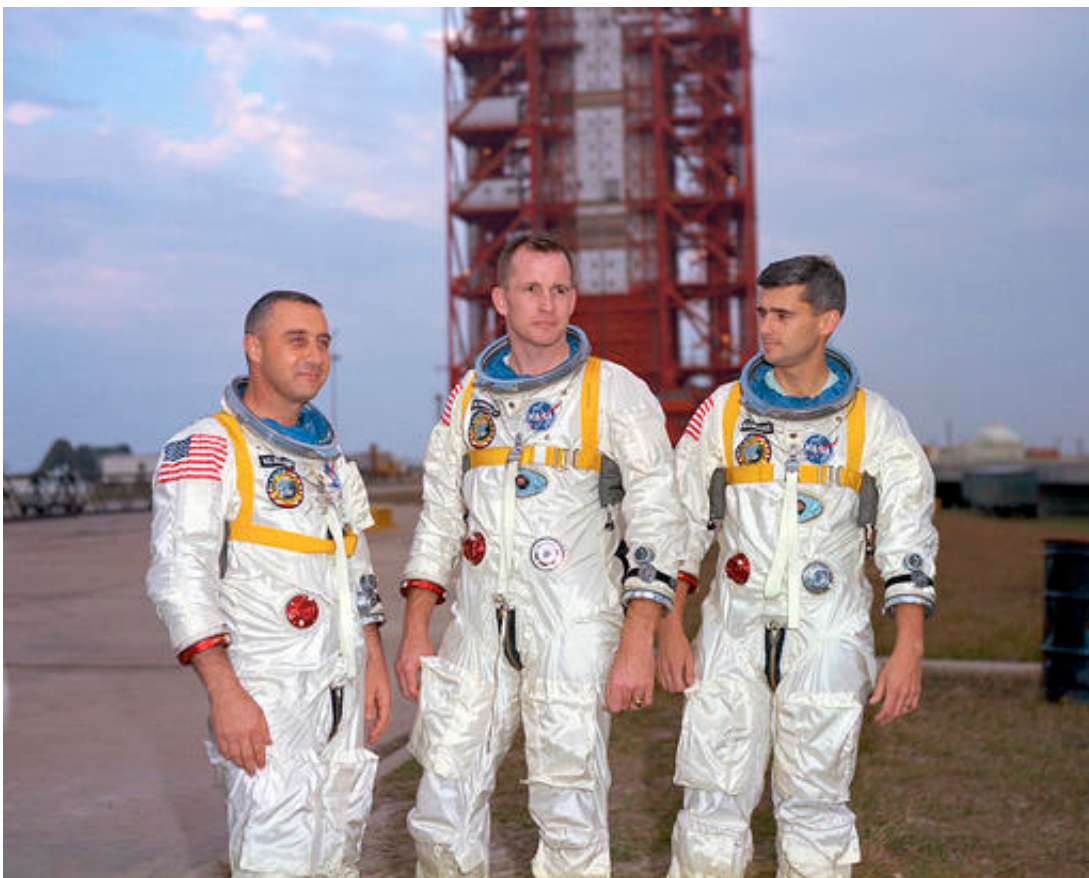
This Tuesday, Jan. 24, 2017 photo provided by NASA shows the Apollo 1 capsule hatch on display in an exhibit at the Kennedy Space Center in Titusville, Fla. On Jan. 27, 1967, a fire during a test on the launch pad killed three astronauts at the start of the Apollo moon program. (Kim Shiflett/NASA via AP)

The exhibit also provides a look at the Apollo 1 astronauts, not just as

pilots, but as husbands and fathers, too. It also remembers the launch pad workers who risked their own lives attempting to pry off the three-part hatch and save the crew.

As he joined others in walking through the exhibit, Kennedy's associate director Kelvin Manning said the message still rings true these many decades later, as NASA looks ahead to the commercial space effort and eventual journeys to Mars.

"We want to honor the crew," he said. "We also want people to pause ... we want to understand the risks so we can ensure our astronauts' safety."



In this undated photo made available by NASA, from left, veteran astronaut Virgil Grissom, first American spacewalker Ed White and rookie Roger Chaffee, stand for a photograph in Cape Kennedy, Fla. During a launch pad test

on Jan. 27, 1967, a flash fire erupted inside their capsule killing the three Apollo crew members. (NASA via AP)

**More information:** NASA: [www.nasa.gov/](http://www.nasa.gov/)

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