

Space Shuttle Columbia launched for the last time 20 years ago in mission that ended in tragedy

January 17 2023, by Richard Tribou



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

It was a cool Thursday morning in Cape Canaveral as the nation's first space shuttle was about to make its last ever trip into space.

Space Shuttle Columbia lifted off at 10:39 a.m. Eastern time on Jan. 16, 2003, from Kennedy Space Center's Launch Pad 39-A with a crew of seven.

"The Lord has blessed us with a beautiful day here," mission commander Rick Husband said over the radio just before liftoff. "We appreciate all of the hard work everyone has put into this, and we are ready to go."

Husband's crew were shuttle pilot William McCool, Michael Anderson, David Brown, Kalpana Chawla, Laurel Clark and Ilan Ramon, who was the first Israeli to go into space.

All seven died 16 days later when the shuttle disintegrated on re-entry, the result of a chunk of insulating foam that had broken off from the external fuel tank and hit the left wing of the orbiter during the launch. The damage was fatal as the [extreme heat](#) would be the vessel's demise as it streaked across the skies over Texas.

Columbia's final mission was the orbiter's 28th overall, the 113th mission for the [shuttle program](#). It was the first of five space shuttles, launching on its first mission April 12, 1981, with the late John Young on board as commander along with pilot Robert Crippen.

Over 22 years, Columbia traveled more than 125 million miles orbiting the Earth 4,808 times while in space more than 300 days.

It ferried 160 astronauts over its career including Shannon Lucid, Story Musgrave, Eileen Collins, Charles Boldin and Sen. Bill Nelson.

The [tragedy](#) is one of three major ones in NASA's history, all occurring

in the early part of the year. The seven deaths aboard Columbia, seven deaths from the explosion of Space Shuttle Challenger in 1986, the deaths of three Apollo 1 astronauts in 1967 and others lost in the pursuit of space will be honored on NASA's Day of Remembrance later this month.

Kennedy Space Center Visitor's Complex will hold a ceremony Jan. 26 with events starting at 10 a.m.

2023 Orlando Sentinel.

Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

Citation: Space Shuttle Columbia launched for the last time 20 years ago in mission that ended in tragedy (2023, January 17) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-01-space-shuttle-columbia-years-mission.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--