

European space freighter is destroyed after mission

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Handout photo shows the Automated Transfer Vehicle-2 (ATV-2) Johannes Kepler. A robot freighter was destroyed on Tuesday in a scheduled operation after a successful mission to supply the International Space Station (ISS), the European Space Agency (ESA) said.

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The [Automated Transfer Vehicle](#) (ATV), named after the German mathematician [Johannes Kepler](#), was sent on a steep descent from [orbit](#) to burn up over the South Pacific, it said.

Any [debris](#) that survived atmospheric friction should land in an

uninhabited zone in the South Pacific about 3,000 kilometres (1,800 miles) east of New Zealand, the agency said in a blog.

"End of mission. ATV fragmentation predicted to have started by now. Kepler's gone...", it said at 2043 GMT.

The Johannes Kepler was the second of five ATVs that ESA is contributing to the ISS.

Launched from the European [space](#) base in Kourou, French Guiana, the ATVs are designed to navigate their way to the ISS and dock with it automatically, providing up to 6.6 tonnes of food, water, oxygen, experiments and other essentials.

Once emptied of their cargo, the 10-tonne craft becomes useful extra living space for the ISS crew.

Its onboard thrusters are used boost the altitude of the ISS, which is persistently dragged by atmospheric molecules in low Earth orbit.

At the end of the mission, the ATVs are laden with rubbish, human waste and unwanted hardware before undocking from the station and then "de-orbiting."

In its suicide plunge, the Johannes Kepler was to make a "last phone call home" to help improve controlled destruction operations of this kind.

A recorder was to gather data on the ferry's location, temperature, pressure and attitude as it disintegrated and then eject from the dying spacecraft, transmitting the information back home via the Iridium satphone system during its descent.

The Johannes Kepler, launched on February 16, is named after a

German mathematician of the Age of Enlightenment.

The first ATV, named after the 19th-century French trailblazer of science fiction Jules Verne, flew in 2008.

The third ship, due to be launched in February 2012, has been named after 20th-century Italian physicist Edoardo Amaldi, and the fourth honours Albert Einstein. The fifth ATV has yet to be named.

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