

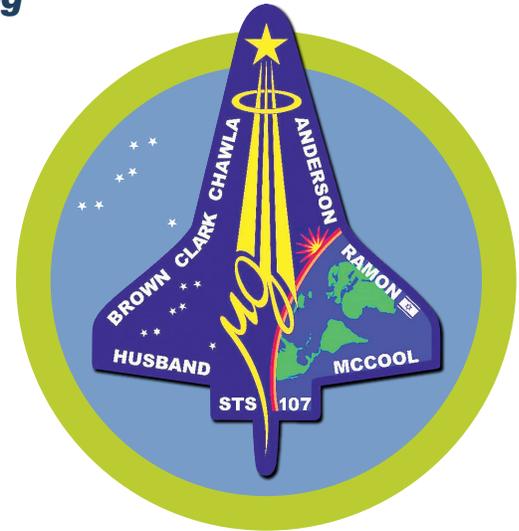


TOUR AND OVERVIEW

Columbia Room in the Kennedy Space Center Vehicle Assembly Building

COLUMBIA ROOM

On Jan. 16, 2003, NASA's flagship orbiter Columbia thundered into orbit on STS-107, a 16-day science mission. On board were Commander Rick Husband; Pilot Willie McCool; Payload Commander Michael Anderson; Mission Specialists Kalpana Chawla, David Brown and Laurel Clark; and Payload Specialist Ilan Ramon, Israel's first astronaut. On Feb. 1, 2003, following an otherwise successful mission the orbiter broke apart in the skies above east Texas as it re-entered Earth's atmosphere on the way to a planned landing at Kennedy Space Center. Seven lives were lost. Although no one was killed or injured on the ground, all seven members of the Columbia crew were lost.



To learn what happened, NASA joined with other federal agencies and state, county and local authorities, for what became the largest ground search and recovery in United States history. After recovering the astronauts' remains, attention turned to the melted and mangled fragments of the orbiter that were strewn over miles of forest- and swamp-covered land. Some 84,500 pieces of Columbia were located, identified and ultimately delivered to NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida, where they were first used in a reconstruction of the vehicle to help investigators determine the cause of the disaster. They were then moved into an archive located on the 16th floor of the Vehicle Assembly Building (VAB), the same facility where Columbia had been prepared for its 28 launches.

The dedication of the "Columbia Room" inside the VAB took place on the first NASA Remembrance Day, Jan. 29, 2004. In the same timeframe, the Columbia Research and Preservation Office was established to conserve the debris and support loans of the material to government, academic and scientific organizations to further the research on how to build safer components for future spacecraft and further knowledge about the effects of re-entry.

The 7,000 square foot room, converted from engineering office space, is divided into two major areas. At the front are the larger, more recognizable pieces, including frames to the cockpit windows, remnants of the crew hatch, and the support skeleton of the vertical stabilizer "tail." Also on display are the reconstructed leading edge panels from Columbia's left wing and the orbiter's data recorder.

Further into the repository, behind a room-wide banner signed by Columbia's STS-107 launch team, are rows of large boxes, each filled with debris that comprises the majority of the 84,147 pounds recovered. Each piece is individually numbered and catalogued, with manifests attached to each box. The debris is also visually indexed within a computer database.

In recent years, the program has grown to fulfill another mission – to teach and inspire. The mission of the Apollo, Challenger, Columbia Lessons Learned Program (ACCLLP), which now includes the Columbia Research and Preservation Office, is to "innovatively and effectively share the lessons of the past to make the future more successful." The ACCLLP organizes periodic panels and discussions about failed missions and has expanded the Columbia room to make it a place for learning.