

The Pioneer Spirit of “The Columbia”

By Dave Lugo, W5TAZ

Ever since the dawn of time the pioneer spirit has been alive and well in the human race. From our earliest ancestors who struck out across a hostile savanna on the continent of Africa with their quest for food, fire and the raw materials to feed, keep warm and make tools that were essential for their families survival, to the pioneers of our own country who helped tame the wild and savage lands that we now call home.

From the first Spanish explorers who entered our country to the Lewis and Clark expedition which set out to find a passage to the west coast. Even the early flyers that proceeded Lindbergh on the attempted flights across the Atlantic ocean.

Some of these pioneers lived to become legends and some perished on their journey's. Those that are remembered for their pioneering spirit live forever in our history books, memorials are built to some to immortalize them and still others are folk and urban legends told to our children.

Being a pioneer is a dangerous business, this fact become quite evident on the 1st of February as the world watched in horror and disbelief the tragic events that unfolded on our television sets in the early morning hours over Texas.

This was the day the Space Shuttle Columbia was making it's final approach heading for the end of a successful mission and it's landing at the Johnson Space Center in Florida.



It was a clear and beautiful day over the southern United States as most of the country started it's weekend. Right at 8:00 am the Columbia was scheduled to make it's pass over head.

None of us was prepared for the sites we would be witness to this day.

First noticed in California, a couple of astronomers were watching through telescopes as the first visible signs of trouble were noticed. Eyewitness accounts were that 2 flares were seen in the trail of the Columbia .

Later we would here that mission control in Florida would report of temperature variations in the left wing had started to show up about 15 minutes prior to this time.

With the temperature rising and the stress on the inside components, vital sensors started to fail. From this point things went from bad to worse. The last contact with the Space Shuttle was reported to be around the top of the 8:00 am hour.



Most who witnessed the site stared in disbelief. Some were watching because they had heard that the Shuttle was to be flying over, others were just in the right place at the right time. Little did anyone know they were bearing witness to such a dark day in our history that would test the strength of our pioneering spirit.

Most of us within the ham community who follow the N.A.S.A. missions due so on a regular basis. Some of the astronauts who fly these missions are hams themselves. On a rare occasion we are presented with the opportunity to work these astronauts.

We watch the missions on our ATV systems with great interests. It seems we have a stake in the missions themselves from time to time. The installation of antenna's on the International Space Station where the amateurs work back here to Terra Firma and let's not forget the Hubble Space Telescope.

These modern marvels are just a few of the valuable advances we get from our space programs. Everyday items are attributed to the exploration of space. Smoke detectors, condiment packs, bullet proof vests, WD-40, various medical advances and oh yea, Tang. This is just a few that are direct everyday things we take for granted that come directly from our space program.

The Columbia mission was one such mission. Scientific experiments was the main reason for this mission. After what the cost to the nation was, is it worth it? You Bet!

From the dawning of time we have had those rare individuals around that are always willing to pay the price of being a pioneer. These people live their lives with a dream, a quest for something they can contribute to the advances of their society.

Like everyone from the caveman who had the intestinal fortitude to strike out onto that hostile savanna and seek food and make the tools for the survival of his people to the noble flyers that crossed the Atlantic. They all had it.

They wanted a little more than they had, they wanted to share it with the world, they wanted to bring it to the society that would make the most of it.





STS-107 Crew from left to right.

Israel's first astronaut, Ilan Ramon, highlights the members of this diverse, seven-member crew who flew the space shuttle Columbia on a 16-day science research mission in Earth orbit.

The crew was split up into two teams to facilitate a 24-hour operation. Of the group, William McCool, David Brown, Laurel Clark and Ilan Ramon are rookies. Rick Husband, Kalpana Chawla and Mike Anderson round out the crew as veterans of the space program.

The Red Team is Husband, Chawla, Clark and Ramon. The Blue Team is McCool, Brown and Anderson.

Over the last couple of days I have heard the exploration of space come into question. Is it worth it? Should we continue? In my opinion, Yes We Should!

The pioneer spirit is what got us to where we are today. The technological advances we have, and continue to make come to us with a price. Not always money, but with the lives of our heroic pioneers and explorers.

These people don't have to be forced into these situations, they go gladly because of the spirit. They know the risks going in and gladly take the chance to do what they must. Weather or not they are Americans, black or white, rich or poor they push the envelope for that which is just beyond reach.

It is in this spirit that we call these people hero's. Could you be one? Could I be one? I think I lack the courage that that this seven had. I heard one of the past astronauts describe a ride on the Columbia as being like "A beautiful Butterfly bolted to a bullet". Not quite my cup of tea but thank god it is someone's.



The Space Shuttle Columbia, STS-107 Crew



May they live in our hearts forever.