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Apollo 1's 55th Anniversary in 2022 - January 27, 1967 @ 6:31 pm EST

1 message

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NASA's last moonbound program for astronauts lifted off under the shadow of a fatal incident on the Apollo 1 spacecraft, 55 today (Jan. 27).

[space.com](https://www.space.com)

Apollo 1 was expected to fly to Earth orbit later in 1967 with astronauts Gus Grissom, Roger Chaffee and Ed White on board. During a test on the launch pad, however, a fire erupted and rapidly asphyxiated all three astronauts.

Some of the contributing factors to their deaths included a pure oxygen atmosphere that accelerated a fire, and a hatch that was impossible for the astronauts to open quickly, although the causes were complex.

The cause of the fire was never fully determined, although NASA and its contractors took numerous measures to fix the technical culture problems associated with the incident. Their efforts allowed Apollo to fly astronauts into space 18 months later and to complete the program's missions, achieve success. (The exception was the near-fatal Apollo 13 in 1970.)

As NASA prepares to send humans to the moon again with the Artemis program, the agency will need to bear the lessons from its past space incidents, especially those involving fatalities.

[history.nasa.gov](https://www.history.nasa.gov)

On January 27, 1967 at 6:31 pm EST, tragedy struck the Apollo program when a flash fire occurred in command module 012 during a launch pad test of the Apollo/Saturn space vehicle being prepared for the first piloted flight, the AS-204 mission. Three astronauts were killed: Virgil I. Grissom, a veteran of Mercury and Gemini missions; Lt. Col. Edward H. White, the astronaut who had performed the first U.S. extravehicular activity during the Gemini program; and Roger B. Chaffee, an astronaut preparing for his first space flight. The incident was a tragic accident.

A seven-member board, under the direction of the NASA Langley Research Center Director, Dr. Floyd L. Thompson, conducted a comprehensive investigation to pinpoint the cause of the fire. The final report, completed in April 1967, was subsequently submitted to the NASA Administrator.

More Details On Cape Tragedy...Pages 4-A, 5-A

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Orlando Sentinel

Tis a Privilege to Live in Central Florida

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OPENING AT
ORLANDO AFB
JULY, 1968
NAVY RECRUIT
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3 Astronauts Killed

Chiefs Vow Continued Space Push

WASHINGTON — The nation's space leaders expressed determination Friday night to press ahead in space exploration despite the tragic deaths of all three members of the Apollo space crew at Cape Kennedy.

Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, as President Johnson's special agent in the space field, joined the President and James E. Webb, administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, in expressing sorrow for the loss of the three astronauts.

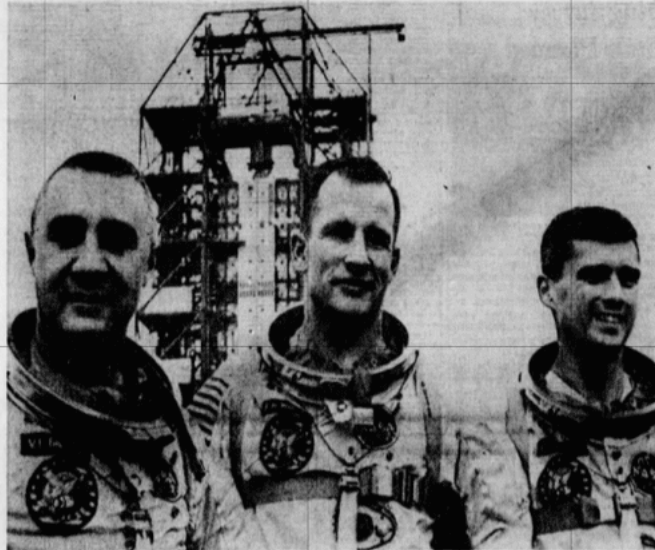
"THREE VALIANT young men have given their lives in the nation's service," Johnson said in a statement. "We mourn their great loss and our hearts go out to their families."

"The United States will push ever forward in space and the memory of these men will be an inspiration to all future spacefarers," said Humphrey, chairman of the National Aeronautics and Space Council.

Webb, similarly said, "We in NASA know that their greatest desire was that this nation press forward with manned space flight exploration, despite the outcome of any one flight. With renewed dedication and purpose we intend to do just that."

SOME MEMBERS of Senate and House committees that deal with space, while expressing shock at the deaths, commented that they do not believe that it will slow down the U.S. space effort.

Humphrey, who often visits the Cape Kennedy space center to observe its operations, said: "The deaths of these three brilliant young men, true pioneers and



Astronauts Virgil Grissom, Edward White, Roger Chaffee

Flash Fire Hits Craft On Ground

By DICK YOUNG

CAPE KENNEDY — The prime crew for the first manned flight of Project Apollo died at 4:31 p.m. Friday in a flash fire inside the three-man spacecraft atop its Saturn booster at Complex 34.

Gus Grissom, Edward White and Roger Chaffee — scheduled to ride the nation's 17th manned spacecraft into orbit on Feb. 21 — were inside the spacecraft's command module during the countdown of a simulated flight test.

THE ACCIDENT occurred at the 17-minute 18-second mark of a planned simulated lift-off.

Some early reports indicated that the fire started in the service module and then spread to the command module.

A NASA spokesman denied this, however.

THE FIRE, the spokesman said, started in the interior of the central command module and was confined within the cabin section. Speculation immediately arose as to the fire's origin but NASA shut the door as details pending a formal inquiry.

"There was a flash and that was it," said a spokesman watching the screen in the blackhouse a few hundred yards away. The screen went blank "and there were no communications from the crewmen at that time."

THE SPACECRAFT WAS in a simulated-flight position and the astronauts were breathing the pure oxygen used as a spacecraft environment.

Apollo 204 was to have been a mission lasting up to two weeks. The Space Agency had no information on spacecraft damage or

Apollo Smoke Falls 27 Men

Cape Workers' Families Seek Reassurance

Blast Report Brings Terror To Kin

By JEANNE GOLD

and stated, "The fire on 24 had us usually horrified and called our

en.wikipedia.org

Apollo 1, initially designated **AS-204**, was the first crewed mission of the United States Apollo program, the undertaking to land man on the Moon. It was planned to launch on February 21, 1967, as the first low Earth orbital test of the Apollo command module. The mission never flew; a cabin fire during a launch rehearsal test at Cape Kennedy Air Force Station Complex 34-27 killed all three crew members—Command Pilot Gus Grissom, Senior Pilot Ed White, and Pilot Roger B. Chaffee—and destroyed the command module (CM). The name Apollo 1, chosen by the crew, was made official by NASA in their honor after the fire.

Immediately after the fire, NASA convened the Apollo 204 Accident Review Board to determine the cause of the fire, and both chambers of the U.S. Congress conducted their own committee inquiries to oversee NASA's investigation. The ignition source was determined to be electrical, and the fire spread rapidly due to combustible nylon material, and the high pressure, pure oxygen cabin atmosphere. Rescue was prevented by the plug door hatch, which could not be opened against the internal pressure. Because the rocket was unfueled, the test had not been considered hazardous, and emergency preparedness for it was poor.

During the Congressional investigation, Senator Walter Mondale publicly revealed a NASA internal document citing problem prime Apollo contractor North American Aviation, which became known as the Phillips Report. This disclosure embarrassed Administrator James E. Webb, who was unaware of the document's existence, and attracted controversy to the Apollo program. Despite congressional displeasure at NASA's lack of openness, both congressional committees ruled that the issues raised had no bearing on the accident.

Crewed Apollo flights were suspended for 20 months while the command module's hazards were addressed. However, the development and uncrewed testing of the lunar module (LM) and Saturn V rocket continued. The Saturn IB launch vehicle for SA-204, was used for the first LM test flight, Apollo 5. The first successful crewed Apollo mission was flown by Apollo 1's backup, Apollo 7 in October 1968.