



William "Willie" C. McCool

S.S. William "Willie" C. McCool

NG-23 Cargo Delivery Mission to the International Space Station

Northrop Grumman is proud to name the NG-23 Cygnus spacecraft in honor of astronaut William "Willie" C. McCool. It is the company's tradition to name each Cygnus spacecraft after an individual who has made significant contributions to human spaceflight. McCool was an astronaut and naval aviator who piloted the 2003 Columbia spacecraft and lost his life during the mission.

McCool was born on September 23, 1961, in San Diego, California. He attended the United States Naval Academy, where he graduated in 1983 with a Bachelor of Science degree in applied science. Continuing his academic journey, McCool earned a Master of Science degree in computer science from the University of Maryland in 1985, followed by another Master of Science degree in aeronautical engineering from the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School in 1992.

Willie McCool completed his flight training in 1986 and went on to serve in Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadrons 129 and 133, conducting operational deployments aboard the USS CORAL SEA and later serving as a test pilot at Patuxent River, Maryland. His naval career included over 2,800 flight hours in 24 aircraft and more than 400 carrier arrestments.

After being selected by NASA to be an astronaut in April 1996, he reported to the Johnson Space Center in August 1996. He completed two years of training and evaluation and was qualified for flight assignment as a pilot. Initially assigned to the Computer Support Branch, McCool also served as Technical Assistant to the Director of Flight Crew Operations and worked on Shuttle cockpit upgrade issues for the Astronaut Office. He logged 15 days, 22 hours and 20 minutes in space.

Willie McCool's space flight career reached its pinnacle with his role as pilot of STS-107 aboard Space Shuttle Columbia. The mission, which launched on January 16, 2003, was dedicated to scientific research, with the crew conducting approximately 80 experiments over a 16-day period. Tragically, the mission ended abruptly on February 1, 2003, when Columbia disintegrated during re-entry, just 16 minutes before the scheduled landing, resulting in the loss of McCool and his fellow crew members.

In recognition of his exemplary service and sacrifice, McCool was posthumously awarded the Congressional Space Medal of Honor, NASA Space Flight Medal, NASA Distinguished Service Medal, and the Defense Distinguished Service Medal (DDSM). Willie McCool's legacy endures through his contributions to aviation and space exploration. His dedication to his career and passion for discovery continues to inspire future generations.