

COLUMBIA

Search & Recovery



A team of search and recovery workers combs a field near Corsicana, Texas.

jsc2003-00155 Photo by James Blair

OneNASA responds to tragedy in East Texas

The NASA family came together as cohesively as it ever has in East Texas this spring as workers from virtually every NASA center helped organize and conduct the search for clues to *Columbia's* demise.

"In all my years with NASA, I have never seen this Agency's people band together as effectively as they have in responding to this tragedy," said Astronaut Jerry Ross, who took turns with fellow Astronaut Dom Gorie to coordinate the day-to-day search efforts. "These people worked very long days for weeks at a time away from home without fighting, complaining or shirking their duty. They set an example that our entire country should strive to emulate."

Based in cities like Lufkin, Corsicana, Palestine, Nacogdoches and Hemphill, Texas, as well as Shreveport, La., employees from NASA and its contractors worked shoulder-to-shoulder with friends from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Forest Service, Texas Forest Service and others. In all, more than 90 local, state and federal organizations responded to the challenges of searching a 10-mile-wide, 240-mile-long corridor in East Texas and West Louisiana by land, air and water.

They stretched those efforts as far west as the California coast, using ingenious methods to predict where Shuttle material might have landed as *Columbia* broke up during reentry on February 1. And then they shipped the pieces back to Kennedy Space Center, where their colleagues began

reassembling them and working with the Columbia Accident Investigation Board to determine the cause of the accident.

Many of the NASA workers were friends of the seven Astronauts lost after their ambitious 16-day science mission. All of those involved, whether they were in Mission Control on that fateful day or had no previous connection to America's space program, dedicated themselves to the cause of "bringing *Columbia* home."

"We owe this to the children of this world who will pick up the torch and carry it into the future."

"While we are saddened by the events that have led to this activity, we are all pleased with the cooperation, coordination, dedication and hard work that are being exhibited," said Johnson Space Center's Allen Flynt, one of three NASA Oversight Managers directing efforts from the Lufkin

Command Center. Flynt took turns overseeing the effort with Dave King of Marshall Space Flight Center and Mike Rudolphi of Stennis Space Center. "We're also thankful for the new friendships we've forged as our various centers, agencies, organizations and personnel have come together to perform this difficult task."

"We owe this to our seven brave colleagues who died on their way home," said JSC's Dave Whittle, who led the initial Mishap Response Team mobilized just minutes after Mission Control declared a contingency, and spent time in both the Barksdale Air Force Base, La., and Lufkin Command Centers. "We owe this to the children of this world who will pick up the torch and carry it into the future."