



NASA JSC 2001e44517 Photo by Robert Markowitz

**A. Mission Control held a moment of silence concurrent with a ceremony aboard STS-108 on Dec. 11, 2001, which was the three-month anniversary of the terrorist attacks.**

**B. IMPASS contractor Sean Collins, graphics lead, helped attach the flags flown aboard STS-108 to certificates designed by the JSC Graphics and Publications Department.**

**C. JSC Cooperative Education students inserted the flags and certificates into envelopes with a letter of support from Administrator O’Keefe. The packets were sent to the Office of the Mayor of the City of New York; and, on June 17, 2002, they were mailed to the families of the victims.**



NASA JSC 2002e02320 Photo by Bill Stafford

## Flags for Heroes and Families

NASA honored the victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks by sending nearly 6,000 small U.S. flags into orbit as part of the “Flags for Heroes and Families” campaign aboard Space Shuttle *Endeavour* during STS-108.

Once the flags returned to Earth, members of the Johnson Space Center team assembled packets containing the flags. The packets were later given to the survivors and the families of the victims of the attacks in New York City, the Pentagon and United Airlines Flight 93, which crashed in Pennsylvania.

“The tradition of carrying American flags into space dates back to the very beginning of this historic Agency,” said NASA Administrator Sean O’Keefe. “From the surface of the Moon to the uncharted regions of our galaxy, NASA has flown the American flag as a patriotic symbol of truth, honor and justice.” 



NASA JSC 2002e23346 Photo by Robert Markowitz

## Crossing paths with danger

During a routine work assignment, Johnson Space Center’s Dominic “Dom” Del Rosso crossed paths with an American tragedy.

For this special issue, the Test Director aboard the KC-135 shared a letter he wrote. It details his experiences of flying in NASA’s Weightless Wonder over the shores of New York on Sept. 11, 2001.

“Yesterday still seems unreal. Being in the air over western New York at the time of the attacks was something I will always remember,” wrote Del Rosso in the letter dated Sept. 12, 2001.

During a routine reduced-gravity mission over Lake Ontario, the KC-135 cruised back and forth along the New York shore. The mission of climbing and descending creates a freefall condition to simulate microgravity.

“To think that this type of maneuver might ever seem threatening never crossed my mind until yesterday,” Del Rosso wrote. “Many things have changed since yesterday.”

On that Sept. 11 morning, the crew was advised that a large plane was intersecting their flight path less than a thousand feet below their aircraft, instead of the usual 2,000-foot minimum distance. They later learned the plane was hijacked United Airlines Flight 93, which crashed in Pennsylvania.

“After the unwanted flyby, we landed having no idea why or what was going on,” Del Rosso wrote.

Once news began trickling in, the people on board began to assess the situation in a new light. Del Rosso was worried about his friends and family, especially his sister in Manhattan who was going to the World Trade Center that day. Luckily, he later learned all were safe.

That day’s events were like no other for Del Rosso. “I will never forget the unprecedented complete silence of the air traffic control radios, empty runways, locked gates, roadblocks and, of course, our first look at the devastation of our country on television much later that day,” he wrote.

He concluded his letter with: “I am so thankful that I live in the U.S. and have had all the blessings that go along with that.” 



NASA JSC 2002e33640 Photo by David DeHoyos

*Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Roundup published an issue focusing on JSC’s reaction to the national tragedy. Featured in that issue was the powerful photograph that is pictured here. The image was so striking it was chosen as the inspiration for artist David M. Russell’s cover artwork for this special issue. The man featured in that photograph is Jerry Woodfill, a Technical Manager’s Representative in the Automation, Robotics and Simulation Division. For this issue, he wanted to share the story behind the photograph.*

**By Jerry Woodfill**

“You are invited to attend the Johnson Space Center noon prayer service for the victims of the attack on America” was the e-mail message received Friday morning, Sept. 14, 2001.

The designated site, beneath the American flag near the NASA Road One entrance, was often chosen for commemorative meetings.

Memories returned of the 1987 *Challenger* anniversary fly over held there. I could almost hear the deafening roar of those low-flying T-38 jets, piloted by astronauts in honor of their fallen friends.

Reaching still further back another score of years, I recalled a similar gathering for Gus Grissom, Ed White and Roger Chaffee of the Apollo 1 accident. They, like those who died on September 11th, were taken from us so suddenly and tragically.

I’d recently recreated President John F. Kennedy’s Rice Stadium Moon Race Speech at the annual JSC Open House. As a Rice student, I’d been present on that day, Sept. 12, 1962.

The purpose of the open house dramatization was to inspire youth as I had been inspired so long ago. The American flag used as the speech’s backdrop remained in my office.



NASA JSC 2001e26828 Photo by David DeHoyos

Patriotism speaks of “the Voice of America” and “the Spirit of America” as vague terms describing our nation’s strengths. But at 11:45 a.m. on Friday, Sept. 14, 2001, I heard the Spirit of America’s voice. It said in my mind, “Jerry, I am telling you to march across the Space Center with that flag held high for all to see!”

Immediately, I argued: “But everyone will see me and think me strange.”

And the voice countered: “That’s exactly what I want everyone to see.”

It then added: “Just to assure you this is me, toss a coin – heads you go with my flag, tails leave it here.”

Of course, I found exactly one coin – a Jefferson nickel. Catching the flip in my left hand, I slapped it down on the back of my right hand. Heads it was! When I looked closer it said, IN GOD WE TRUST. There was no question whose Spirit was speaking and, likewise, whose was the Voice of America.

I burst onto the NASA site with the flag held high. What I felt is too wonderful for description. Certainly those soldiers on Iwo Jima felt it, Astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin felt it at Tranquility Base and millions of Americans have felt it since September 11th, joining those who felt it that Dec. 7th of 1941 when Pearl Harbor was bombed.

Tears flowed freely as I half ran and half walked to the prayer service, but the voice said, “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” 