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YITZHAK MAYO - ISRAELI ASTRONAUT CANDIDATE

Abstract

In 2003, Col Ilan Ramon became the first Israeli citizen to go to space on the (ill-fated) space shuttle Columbia mission STS-107. Despite the tragedy, the mission was an inspiration for many people around the world, Israelis, Americans and others; Jews and gentiles alike. Col. Ramon's flight was one major milestone of Israeli space efforts and the culmination of a journey that began in 1995, when President Bill Clinton announced that a future space shuttle mission would include an Israeli crewmember. In 1998, two Israeli Airforce officers, Ilan Ramon and Yitzhak Mayo, began their astronaut training at NASA's Johnson Space Center. While Ilan Ramon was selected as a payload specialist, Yitzhak Mayo trained as his back-up. Ramon and Mayo trained for the mission that would eventually become STS-107. Among the experiments they rehearsed for, was the Mediterranean-Israeli Dust experiment (MEIDEX). In 2000, Mayo quit astronaut training. Sometimes personal reasons were given for this. Being trained as a back-up and having quit training before the actual mission, (then) Lt. Col Yitzhak Mayo (born in 1954), an experienced aviator, having accumulated numerous flying hours on F-4 and F-16 aircraft, has often been overlooked, when discussing the Israeli space program, but never forgotten. In 2014, Israel again discussed sending an astronaut on a space mission, preferably to the International Space Station. Yitzhak Mayo's name again hit the headlines, along with speculations that he might be one of those being "the right stuff" for such an endeavor.