

Challenger Anniversary

A&M researchers keep up race for space



Photo by Lee Schexnaider

This Silver Taps notice was posted immediately after the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger.

By Jeff Pollard
Staff Writer

Jan. 28, 1986 — A ball of fire and a cloud of smoke were all that remained of the space shuttle Challenger and its crew of seven. The excuses were quick to come. "It was the weather." "It was the design." Engineers blamed management for not listening to their warnings. Management blamed Washington for trying to move too fast. Many people lost their jobs, but who was at blame was never decided.

Now, two years later, the shuttle disaster is looked upon in a different light. Although the memories of the Challenger still are riddled with sorrow, the crash is seen by many as having a positive effect on the worldwide race into space.

At Texas A&M, the leader of that race is Oran Nicks, research engineer and director of the Space Research Center at A&M.

Nicks feels that even though most of the short-term effects of the accident were bad, the long-term effects may actually turn out quite well.

"The entire nation has been shocked into a reassessment of where we are, how we are doing and where we are going," Nicks said. "That was needed about this time, because we are on the threshold of a new space era."

A&M's part in this "new era" is centered in the Space Research Center, a part of the Texas Engineering Experiment Station (TEES).

The center is focusing its efforts on more long-term projects now that the shuttle program has slowed up for a time, Nicks said.

There are important, long-term problems that must be overcome before a space program can successfully operate. They are, according to Nicks, transportation to and from space, power in space and life support systems necessary to long-term space travel. All three of these problems are being studied by the center.

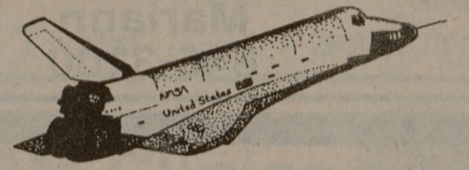


Illustration by Carol Wells

Experiments here on the ground have proceeded at almost the same rate now as they did before the accident, Nicks said.

The main problem lies in research that requires testing in space. The tests must either be put off or simulated in a lab, he said.

"There is so much to do here on the ground," Nicks said, "that we have not been stopped cold by the lack of flights."

Other experiments at A&M have come about specifically because of the accident, Dr. Fredric Godshall, manager of A&M's wind tunnel, said.

Godshall said the wind tunnel had a major part in the testing of a drag chute that will allow the shuttle to land on shorter runways, saving wear on the break system, and an escape system to help prevent disasters like the Challenger explosion.

"The escape system study was actually a series of four experiments to measure the airflow around the hatch and the trajectories of the astronauts," Godshall said. "Both of these were important to the selection of a mode of escape."

Nicks said research is necessary to be able to compete in space.

"All of these things are needed if we are going to stay in the space game," he said. "It's quite obvious that they (NASA) intend to stay in the space game, because they are spending an awful lot of money on an awful lot of different things."

Challenger commander honored for support of education

By Jeff Pollard
Staff Writer

The Challenger disaster not only represented a major loss to the scientific community, but its emphasis on teaching also meant a loss to the educational community, especially at Texas A&M.

Francis R. "Dick" Scobee, commander of the last mission of the Challenger, was looked upon as a friend of all teachers, said Dr. Dean C. Corrigan, dean of education, in a

Battalion interview shortly after the explosion two years ago.

"It was interesting that they selected him to command the mission with the first teacher on it," Corrigan said. "He would have made a great teacher — and he had so many connections to teachers."

Scobee became involved in the A&M education department while his wife, Dr. June Scobee, was getting her Ph.D. in education.

Scobee eventually became one of the founding members of the College of Education's Council on De-

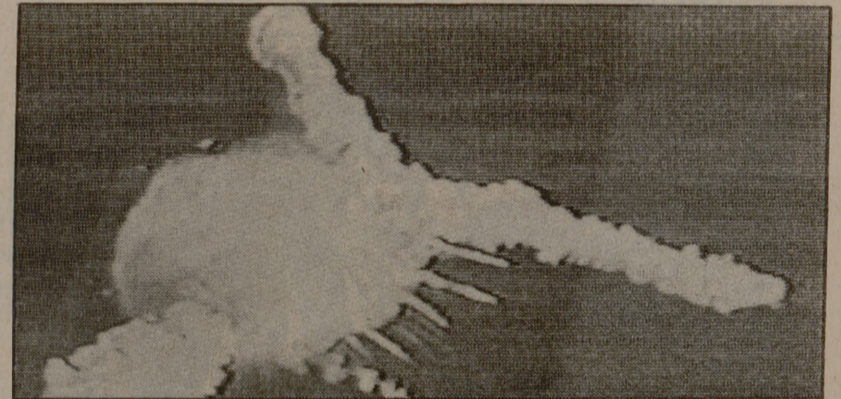
velopment. As a council member, Scobee helped organize the Mathematics/Science Teaching Scholar Loan Program. The program's goal is to provide loans to outstanding students committed to teaching secondary math and science.

As a means to honor the man who helped them so much, a group of these scholars created the Dick Scobee Memorial Scholarship Fund in October 1986. These students raised \$16,000 to endow a \$1,000 per year scholarship in his name to a student committed to the teaching of math

and/or science. Cynthia Kraemer of College Station was the first recipient of the scholarship.

Scobee and the other families of the Challenger seven are working on the Challenger Center for Space Science Education. Scobee said that the \$50 million project is meant to be the first hands-on space education center of its kind in the nation.

It also is meant to be a lasting memory of the five men and two women who died in the pursuit of knowledge and better understanding of space.

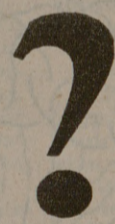


Battalion file photo

The space shuttle exploded seconds after liftoff on Jan. 28, 1986.

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