

Space Shuttle blasts off on 14-day medical research mission

The Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — Columbia and its seven astronauts blasted off on a belated mission Monday, carrying 48 rats that will be poked, prodded and in some cases decapitated by guillotine and dissected in orbit. All in the name of medical science. The astronauts quickly got started on their 14 days of space checkups, drawing

blood from one another, measuring their blood pressure and noting any symptoms of motion sickness. The mission — the longest ever planned for a space shuttle — is intended to help scientists develop measures for counteracting the debilitating effects of space travel. Despite the tests, everyone was flying high. "As you can well imagine, there are seven very happy people up here," commander John Blaha said.

Astronaut-physician David Wolf was the first one to enter the pressurized laboratory module in the cargo bay, followed by the crew's other medical doctor, M. Rhea Seddon. NASA needed three countdowns to get Columbia off the ground. Equipment failures halted last week's attempts. "Guys, the third time's a charm," orbiter test director Brian Monborne assured the crew before liftoff. Delayed 10 seconds by a stray Navy

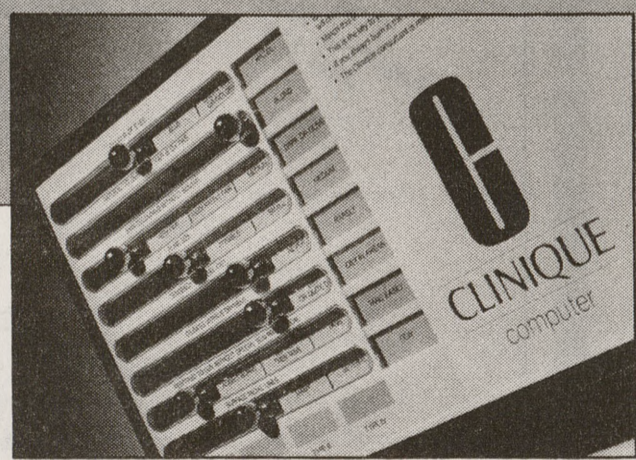
plane, the 2,000-ton spaceship rose from its seaside pad at 10:53 a.m. and passed through three decks of clouds on its way to a 176-mile-high orbit. It is only the second mission in the shuttle trips focused entirely on medical research. Scientists say they need more tests before they can draw any conclusions about avoiding such effects of space travel as shriveled muscles, weakened bones and weakened immune systems.

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Severe weather sweeps through North, West Texas

The Associated Press

SAN ANGELO — San Angelo High School principal Jim Hundley found his campus in a disarray Monday, ripped up by a tornado produced by overcast storms that pummeled parts of North and West Texas.

Two metal pit covers on a wooden building from the school's track area were swept away by high winds. The pit covers were blown across the campus, tearing off sections of the school's roof and ruining a neighbor's fence, Hundley said.

Similar destruction — blown out windows, toppled power lines, broken roofs — occurred Sunday night and early Monday when several severe storms swept across the state. No injuries were reported.

Brownwood was another town hit city. The arms at a rail crossing were ripped loose, a fence at Howard Payne University's baseball field was destroyed and one hotel lost part of its roof to high winds.

Few students at Lakeside High were affected by the damage. Three classes were canceled for much of this week and others swapped rooms for missing classes Monday.

"We're very fortunate to have more damage than we had and that it was at night when nobody was here," Hundley said. Hundley described the damage as moderate and estimated it will cost several thousand dollars to repair.

Some items that must be replaced include the pit covers on the wooden building, which Hundley said was obliterated, and athletic equipment that had been stored in the buildings.

"We're in the process of getting it picked up and stored," Hundley said. "Some of it probably won't ever find. We are bringing back athletic equipment they find, a football, some track equipment."

Another storm hit near Lampasas County on Monday. Harris, a sheriff's department patcher, said there were no reports of age or injury reports.

In north Central Texas, winds as strong as 70 mph hit electrical lines and trees Sunday night, leaving residents in West Texas outside Waco, without power.

"We had just mostly limited tree damage," said a dispatcher for the West Police Department.

Large hail also fell in Stephens and Palo Pinto counties in north west Texas, and in several counties in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Funnel clouds were reported in Johnson County.

In West Texas, the National Weather Service said golfball-sized hail fell at Eden and Carlisle. Large hail also was reported in Lohn, San Angelo and Green Creek.

Haiti

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Army Lt. Col. Jean-Robert Gabriel urged Haitians to remain calm. Speaking on Radio 104.5 FM, he told Haitians not to leave the capital and said the army would maintain control.

An aide at army headquarters said Cedras was not available for comment on the U.S. Embassy statements.

"We accuse the Aristide-led government of having threatened this government with armed forces," said former Sen. René Georges.

Georges congratulated Cedras for not resigning and thanked U.S. Sens. Robert Dole, R-Kan., and Sam Nunn, D-Ga., for opposing greater American involvement in Haiti.

A group behind peace demonstrations last week kept a U.S. warship from docking as part of a U.N. mission sought to present a gentler side Monday by handing out flowers to foreign reporters at a news conference.

Later, far-right sociologist Jacquelin Montalvo-Despeignes said he had a message for Washington: "If you send boys, they will go back, in bags."

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