

Astronaut reveals Mir fire was worse than reported

Blaze occurred last February aboard the 11-year-old Russian space station

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — NASA and Russian space officials insisted it was no big deal, just a nuisance really, a minor fire aboard space station Mir that was extinguished in 90 seconds.

Only now, with astronaut Jerry Linenger's recent return from Mir, is another, terrifying story emerging about the fire last February.

The fire raged for 14 minutes, Linenger says. Flames shot out 2 feet, smoke choked passageways and chunks of molten metal spewed from a burning canister, blocking one of two routes to Soyuz escape ships.

Six men and one lifeboat capable of evacuating no more than three — the situation had seemed too farfetched for flight controllers to consider seriously. Until it happened Feb. 23 on the world's only space station, 250 miles above the Earth.

The fire is receiving new scrutiny in light of Wednesday's collision between Mir and a docking cargo ship. Both incidents highlight the increasingly precarious condition of the 11-year-old space station, designed to last only five.

Linenger, a doctor and two-time space flier, told The Associated Press he considers the Mir blaze the worst spacecraft fire since the Apollo 1 inferno killed three astronauts on the launch pad in 1967.

"Apollo 1 is the worst fire because of the consequences," he said in the interview last Friday. "In flight, there's nothing approaching that fire (on Mir). For an in-flight fire, that was the worst. You don't want to be any more severe."

In Wednesday's accident, the cargo ship missed its docking port and crashed into a solar panel then punctured or tore a hole in one space station module, which rapidly lost pressure and was sealed off by the crew.

"Serious stuff again," Linenger said Wednesday as U.S. and Russian officials sorted options. "Decompression and fire are big things you have to worry about, and we've had both of them."

Linenger suggested that poor communications between ground controllers and Mir — rather than any desire to obscure the truth — led to confusion over the fire's duration and severity.

"Yes, we think now that it lasted much longer than 90 seconds," Jim Van Laak, deputy director of NASA's shuttle-Mir program, said Wednesday.

“For an in-flight fire, that was the worst. You don't want it to be any more severe.”

**Jerry Linenger
Astronaut**

It's possible, Van Laak said, that the crew may have reported a 15-minute fire to Russian Mission Control and that a decimal point was later inserted, making it 1.5 minutes, or 90 seconds. No transcripts exist of the space-ground conversations, he said.

aboard Mir in subsequent weeks — failures of oxygen generators, malfunction of the carbon dioxide removal system, the near-miss of another cargo ship — pushed concern about the fire into the background.

Details of the fire weren't known until Linenger returned to Earth on May 24 and began a series of NASA debriefings, Van Laak said.

Here is Linenger's chilling account of what happened:

Late that Sunday evening, Linenger was working at the computer when the master alarm sounded. He'd heard countless alarms during his month aboard Mir, most set off by minor equipment failures.

Then came the cry, "Seryozny!"

"It's serious!"

In the central passageway Linenger saw dense smoke pouring from the Kvant 1 module, where the solid-fuel, oxygen-generating canister was ablaze. Smoke began filling the station. The four Russians, one German and Linenger swiftly donned oxygen masks.

Linenger and two cosmonauts fought

the fire; the three others prepared a Soyuz for evacuation. The second Soyuz was of reach, beyond the fire.

"The flame was maybe 2 feet flying off and molten metal flying," Linenger said. "It almost looked like SRBs (solid-fuel rocket boosters on the space shuttle) — you most can't look at them they're so bright was a hot fire."

Mir's fire extinguishers were used against the burning lithium perchlorate. The crew could only let the fuel burn out. They turned the extinguishers on the module's walls instead; they knew if Mir's aluminum hull ignited and burned through, the station would decompress. "Quick-get-into-your-Soyuz-vehicle" station — at best.

Mir was out of contact with Russian Mission Control when the fire erupted, Linenger was ready to use a ham radio to alert the Russians through the Johnson Space Center in Houston that "an evacuation is a possibility and be ready for it." He never made the call. He had no time

Princess Diana sells royal 'rags'

NEW YORK (AP) — They're not your average hand-me-downs.

Eighty gowns and cocktail dresses in everything from black taffeta and ivory satin to deep green sequins — all of them castoffs from Princess Diana's closet — were sold at auction Wednesday evening at Christie's.

The most talked-about celebrity auction since Jackie Onassis' heirlooms were up for bid raised \$3.25 million for AIDS and cancer charities.

"I hope that people will enjoy this, that they'll buy the dresses to wear, to have fun in them," Christie's International chairman Charles Hindlip said in announcing the auction. "Diana, Princess of Wales, has got superb taste, and I think many people will want to emulate it."

The auction is the first such sale of royal discards. Used dresses usually are passed on quietly to discreet upper-crust friends.

It will take a certain body type to wear the clothes of a princess. The custom-made gowns have no formal sizes and are roughly equivalent to an American size 6 or 8.

The bidding was quick as the sale got under way. The first gown, a wrap-around white silk chiffon evening dress by Gina Fratini, sold for \$75,000.

The princess, who is divorced from Prince Charles, reportedly decided to auction the gowns for charity at the suggestion of her 14-year-old son, Prince William.



Princess Diana

Swiss banks to release Holocaust account information

Jewish groups claim there are billions of dollars in unclaimed deposits from victims

BERN, Switzerland (AP) — Swiss banks will publish the names on unclaimed Holocaust-era accounts around the world next month, they said Wednesday. For the first time, they also agreed to let an outside body decide the claims.

Swiss banks have been under international pressure to release what Jewish groups claim are billions of dollars in unclaimed deposits from Holocaust victims. The steps announced Wednesday were proposed to make it easier for victims and their survivors to reclaim their money.

The procedures, which also set deadlines for claims

to be made, were agreed to by Switzerland's banking commission, the Swiss Bankers Association, and an international panel led by former U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker.

The goal is to provide "prompt and final results with full justice for the claimants," said a joint statement released by the banking commission.

The banking commission said it is sending a letter to all Swiss banks, requiring them to report by July 7 the details of all foreign-owned accounts that have been dormant since 1945. The banks will have to give the names, addresses and other identifying data on each account.

By Sept. 15, the banks will have to report all Swiss-owned accounts dormant since 1945.

On July 23, Swiss banks will start publishing the names on the unclaimed accounts in a number of countries, including Israel and the United States, and put the lists on the Internet for maximum exposure.

Anyone who is the rightful heir of the owner of an account will have six months after publication to file with the accounting firm ATAG Ernst and Young, the joint statement said.

Deserving cases should be honored even if the claims are filed late, the joint statement said.

Republic of Congo's militia accused of targeting civilians

BRAZZAVILLE, Republic of Congo (AP) — A leading member of President Pascal Lissouba's party resigned Wednesday over allegations that militiamen loyal to the president are deliberately killing civilians in the capital.

Hundreds of civilians are believed to have been killed since fighting broke out June 5 between the forces of Lissouba and former military dictator Gen. Denis Sassou-Nguesso.

Some civilians were victims of stray bullets or shells. There have been repeated allegations that many others were killed in their homes by members of Lissouba's private militia.

The victims hail originally from the country's north, a Sassou-Nguesso stronghold, a military source said, speaking on condition of anonymity. Lissouba has denied the allegations.

But the persistence of the reports drove Sen. Odiki Ekoto Eyenga to resign Wednesday from the ruling Union of Action and Social Democracy.

"I refuse to be implicated in these acts of tyranny," he said. "I firmly condemn the abuses committed by the president's militia in outlying neighborhoods, where many deaths have been reported."

An International Red Cross official condemned attacks on civilians but did not pin either side with responsibility for the killings.

"Warfare should involve only the combatants," Christel Darki said in a statement televised Tuesday in Brazzaville.

Darki also urged both sides to permit aid workers to clear corpses from the streets of the capital, a task frequently interrupted by fighting.

GOP, Gingrich defend prospected tax cuts

WASHINGTON (AP) — With a showdown looming, House Speaker Newt Gingrich touted GOP-crafted tax cuts Wednesday as designed to help more Americans "move toward prosperity." A leading Democrat dismissed such claims as "claptrap" designed to obscure a windfall for the rich.

"They have been after tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans for 15 years," charged Rep. Richard Gephardt of Missouri, the House Democratic leader. "That's what they want to do," he said of Republicans. "That's what they think their mission in life is."

Despite the rhetorical clash, there was little doubt that both the House and Senate were on track for passage of the biggest tax cuts since Ronald Reagan sat in the White House.

While the two bills differ widely in detail, each would extend tax breaks totaling roughly \$135 billion over five years to families with children, investors, students, estates and others. The centerpiece of both bills is a \$500-per-child tax credit for families, a remnant of the "Contract With America" that helped fuel the GOP rise to power two years ago.

Both bills would also raise other levies, including a 20-cent-per-pack increase in the tobacco tax in the Senate measure.

In the House, where a vote was set for Thursday, Gingrich and the GOP high command expressed confidence they would prevail over strenuous Democratic opposition.

The political dynamic was different in the Senate, where a bill drafted with Democratic support in the Finance Committee was expected to come to a vote by week's end. There, Republicans were equally confident of success, and an aide said Sen. Tom Daschle of South Dakota, the Democratic leader, was weighing a vote in favor of the measure.

In both the House and Senate, the tax cut grew out of a balanced budget accord negotiated between President Clinton and congressional Republican leaders. And in a matter of political positioning designed to build support for the GOP majority in both the House and Senate held the tax cut legislation off the floor until legislation containing politically painful spending cuts had first been approved.

The run-up to the vote was marked by clashes that bore resemblance to political campaigns. In the House, Gingrich spoke at a pep rally-style meeting of the party and file, standing in front of a banner that read: "Tax relief for every taxpayer at every stage of life."

In his remarks, the Georgia Republican spoke of a "historic moment" for the Republican majority that came to power in the 1994 election. "It provides economic opportunity for more growth, more jobs, and more wealth creation, so more Americans can move towards prosperity."

A brief while later, Gephardt and other Democrats renewed their attack on the same measure.

"The Republican plan gives a big tax cut to the wealthiest Americans and hurts everyone from kids to low-income workers to seniors in the process," said Gephardt.



Gingrich

MIR

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The laboratory module is equipped with four electricity-producing solar panels, none of which is working now, and contains much of American astronaut Michael Foale's belongings, including his bed, clothes and half his science research. Many of his experiments were probably ruined.

President Clinton was receiving frequent updates from NASA and said through his spokesman, Mike McCurry, that he remained committed to the shuttle-Mir program.

THOMAS

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"We've got a lot of challenges, and we hope we can live up to them," Thomas said.

Thomas served as interim director of PEAP the last two semesters.

Joining Thomas on the World Championships staff will be Lloyd Brown, head coach; Sherri Rhodes, team leader; and Lisa Francine, sports psychologist.

Rhodes acted as head coach of the Olympic team in 1996 and is in charge of transportation, meals and other management during this year's competition. Rhodes and Brown are from the ARCO Olympic training center in Chula Vista, California.

REVEILLE

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When she is not traveling, Reveille stays with Bailey at his San Antonio home. He said she likes to go outside and play with Frisbees for fun.

Traditionally, Reveille may sleep in any bed in the house, Bailey said, although she prefers the couch.

Bailey became the mascot corporal during Parent's Weekend last April. He said it is the responsibility of the E-2 sophomore class to care for Reveille, and one sophomore is chosen from the outfit each year to be mascot corporal.

Jay Boynton, a sophomore cadet in Company E-2 and a business administration major, said Bailey is Reveille's main caregiver, but the rest of the class is there to help him.

"He'll leave her with one of us when he has to go somewhere he can't take her, or we'll take her to a function when Jeff can't go," Boynton said.

In an April 1990 issue of The Texas Aggie, Jerry C. Cooper, Class of '63, wrote in an article titled "Comnas' Story Adds Details to Reveille Narrative" that Aggies have told many stories about how a dog became A&M's mascot. The most popular one was written by A&M Assistant Information Director H.B.

McElroy, Class of '38.

In 1940, McElroy wrote that a group of Aggies returning to College Station from Navasota late one night in 1931 hit a small puppy with their Model T Ford. Worried they had killed it, they checked and found that the puppy was fine and decided to bring her back to their residence hall with them.

In the April 1944 issue of Our Dumb Animals, in an article titled "Beloved Mascot of a College," G.B. Winstead wrote that not long after she was found, Reveille "roamed over the entire campus," eating at Sbis Dining Hall, sleeping in any bed she wanted and walking in and out of the Aggie Band formation.

Bailey said because Reveille does not run free across campus anymore, students think she is just the E-2's mascot or the Corps mascot. But he wants everyone to remember she is the mascot of the entire student body.

Bailey said that when he was doing research on the history of Reveille in the A&M archives at Cushing Memorial Library, he found a quote by General Thomas Darling, the Corps Commandant before Major General M.T. "Ted" Hopgood Jr., that motivates him to give Reveille the respect she deserves.

"Reveille symbolizes the spirit, camaraderie and pride in this University," Thomas said. "It's the spirit that Reveille brings out in people."

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