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# Astronauts wind up unexpectedly difficult flight

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Eager to come home, space shuttle *Columbia's* astronauts yesterday began winding up a flight that proved to be more demanding than expected, right from the start.

Engineers are anxious to get their hands on *Columbia*, due back tonight. They want to know whether hydrogen fuel was leaking from an engine during liftoff, as photographs suggest, and what caused a short circuit five seconds into the flight.

Air Force Col. Eileen Collins, the first woman to command a U.S. space flight, had one last challenge ahead of her: a tricky nighttime landing. Space shuttles have landed in darkness only 11 times out of 94 flights.

NASA said neither equipment problem will affect *Columbia's* return.

"I can't wait to get home and get back to a normal life again," Collins said in a TV interview that linked her with her airline-pilot husband. "We do like to travel and I think being up here in the

shuttle is the ultimate travel. It's a lot of work, though. I wouldn't exactly call it a vacation."

Pat Youngs told his wife that their 3 1/2-year-old daughter, Bridget, missed her. "She's had enough time with Dad," he said.

If the five-day mission ends late today as planned, it will be the shortest shuttle flight in nine years, excluding one cut short in 1997 by defective equipment.

That is all the time Collins and her crew needed to drop off the Chandra X-ray Obser-

vatory, with a few days left over in case of problems with the telescope.

Chandra's release Friday went smoothly and the \$1.5 billion telescope was in good condition in an orbit up to tens of thousands of miles high.

*Columbia's* launch, by contrast, was twice as long and then marred by more problems. The shuttle and five astronauts made it to orbit, though a slightly lower one, because of leaking fuel.

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