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A country in mourning

Space Shuttle Columbia disintegrates over eastern Texas

By Sarah Walch
THE BATTALION

Space Shuttle Columbia broke apart in flames over Texas Saturday morning, taking the lives of the seven astronauts on board and leaving the U.S. space program reeling.

NASA Associate Administrator for Space Flight Bill Readdy said Mission Control at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas, received its last transmission from Columbia around 8 a.m. central standard time, and then lost all vehicle data.

Readdy was close to tears at a press conference at 2 p.m. Saturday.

After several failed attempts to reestablish communication, and after

NASA compiled reports of the explosion and subsequent debris coming in from across the state, NASA workers finally realized that they "had a bad day," Readdy said.

It has been 17 years since the space shuttle Challenger exploded at lift-off due to a faulty O ring in the solid rocket booster. The Columbia is the first space shuttle to be destroyed upon reentry.

Columbia was only 16 minutes from landing at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla., when it exploded in midair in the skies over Texas.

In Nacogdoches, Texas, officials said they had more than 800 confirmed reports of debris from the space shuttle on the ground.

Emergency Management Coordinator and Nacogdoches County Judge Sue Kennedy said that there were 500 pieces of debris inside the city and 300 outside the city.

"The space shuttle debris can be found in a straight line, in an area roughly 100 by 10 miles, from southeast to northwest," said Todd Staples, state senator for District 3 which encompasses Palestine, Texas.

Staples said Nacogdoches County holds the bulk of the debris, but parts of the space shuttle have also descended to earth in Sabine, San Augustine and Anderson Counties.

Kennedy said NASA has instructed her office to send law enforcement officers out to every site where debris is reported and leave officers

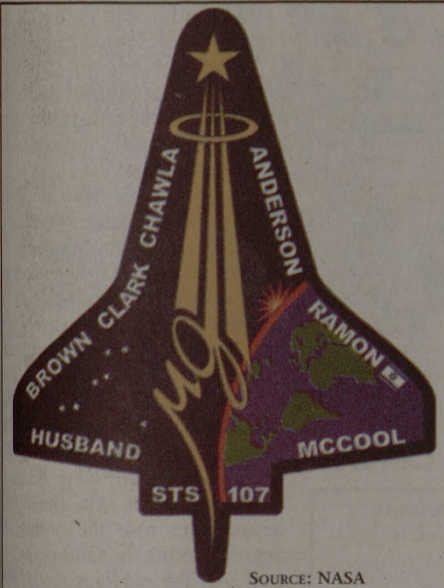
at the site until its significance to the space shuttle has been determined.

"We don't have enough people to put someone out there with every piece," she said.

Two NASA astronauts, Greg Johnson and Mark Kelly, were in Nacogdoches to help inspect the fragments.

The National Guard was on hand, the Department of Public Safety called in more than 100 officers, and the Texas Bureau of Alcoholic Beverages Task Force recruited 60 members to assist the Nacogdoches County Sheriff's Department in recovery and containment of the

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SOURCE: NASA



Michael P. Anderson
Payload commander
Lieutenant Colonel,
U.S. Air Force
Born Dec. 25, 1959
Plattsburgh, N.Y.
Married
Astronaut since 1994,

previous mission to Russia's Mir space station in 1998



David Brown
Mission specialist
Captain, U.S. Navy
Born April 16, 1956
Arlington, Va.
Astronaut since 1996,
first space mission



Kalpana Chawla
Mission specialist
Aerospace engineer
Karnal, India
Astronaut since 1994, previous mission as robotic arm operator on STS-87, 1997



Dr. Laurel Clark
Mission specialist
Commander, U.S. Navy
Racine, Wis.
Married, one child
Astronaut since 1996, first space mission



Rick Husband
Commander
Colonel, U.S. Air Force
Born July 12, 1957
Amarillo, Texas
Married, two children
Astronaut since 1994,
previous mission on STS-96 Discovery, 1999



William C. McCool
Pilot
Commander, U.S. Navy
Born Sept. 23, 1961
San Diego
Married
Astronaut since 1996,
first space mission



Ilan Ramon
Payload specialist
Colonel, Israel Air Force
Born June 20, 1954
Tel Aviv, Israel
Married, four children
Astronaut since 1997,
first space mission

SOURCE: AP



SOURCE: KRT CAMPUS COLUMBIA CREW



RANDAL FORD • THE BATTALION

A red cross with flowers stands in front of a police line near a piece of fallen Columbia debris in downtown Nacogdoches on Saturday.

Temperature rose before explosion

By Paul Recer
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Just before it disintegrated, Space Shuttle Columbia experienced an abnormal rise in temperature and wind resistance that forced the craft's automatic pilot to make rapid changes to its flight path — possible evidence that some heat-protection tiles were missing or damaged, NASA said Sunday.

Engineers began assembling a grim puzzle from debris recovered in Texas and Louisiana, and disclosed computerized data showing that the unusual events before Saturday's accident occurred on

the left side of the shuttle — the same side hit by a piece of fuel-tank insulation during the launch 16 days earlier.

Shuttle Program Manager Ron Dittemore cautioned that data was preliminary but said the combination of events and data suggest that the thermal tiles that protect the shuttle from burning up during reentry may have been damaged on Jan. 16.

"We've got some more detective work. But we're making progress inch by inch," Dittemore said, adding that engineers are trying to extract 32 seconds more of

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Shuttle held A&M tests

By Melissa Sullivan
THE BATTALION

Texas A&M graduate and aerospace engineering major Maria Puente, Class of 2002, worked side-by-side with NASA astronauts and officials on an A&M experiment housed in the space shuttle Columbia days before the shuttle exploded upon reentry over Texas.

Puente was active in one of A&M's several experiments, StarNav I, which ran a series of tests for a new navigation system aboard the shuttle that takes pictures of stars to calculate a space craft's position.

During a period of 10 days, two to three students rotated in shifts and worked 24 hours a day at Houston's

Johnson Space Center's mission control on the system's experiment with NASA astronauts and officials.

"It was a little intimidating, but we rose to the occasion," Puente said. "Most of us were students and there were things we had to know, like acting professional."

Even though the experiment ended Jan. 28, the computers kept recording data from the shuttle, said David Boyle, director of the Commercial Space Center for Engineering.

Boyle said the team had enough information saved on its computer to make the experiment a success.

The A&M professor who conducted StarNav I said officials deemed the experiment a success based on the

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Shuttle debris falls in East Texas

By Sarah Walch
THE BATTALION

NACOGDOCHES—Debris was found scattered across East Texas this weekend from the first NASA space shuttle to ever break apart during its re-entry to earth.

Area residents were visibly shaken by the explosion of space shuttle Columbia, and by Saturday afternoon, Nacogdoches County residents were fielding questions from reporters from all across Texas.

Darlene Johnson, a Nacogdoches resident, said that around 8 a.m. she felt the ground shake "just like an earthquake." Johnson works at the Yako Fritz Restaurant in downtown Nacogdoches.

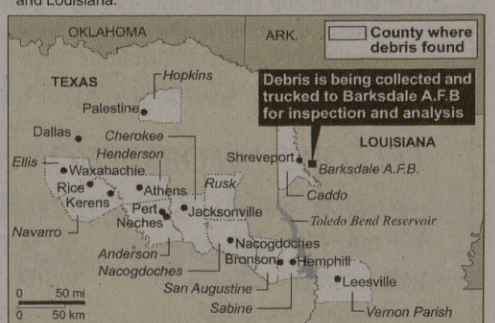
Johnson echoed several other resident's accounts that the explosion sounded like rolling thunder, but when residents looked up, the sky was crystal clear.

Bill and Lisa Payne were at the scene of one debris site in downtown Nacogdoches.

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Debris scattered across Texas, Louisiana

Since the explosion of the space shuttle Columbia Saturday, there have been hundreds of reports of debris throughout parts of Texas and Louisiana.



SOURCES: Associated Press, ESRI