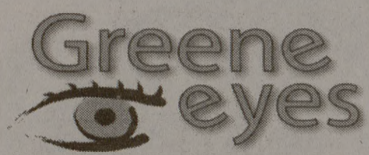


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Thursday, Feb. 13th: "Aggie LUV Lines"
Ask Questions, Get Answers from experts and student guest celebrities.
Rumors Café, 8:30 - 9:30pm

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Investigators trying to identify object spotted near Columbia

By Marcia Dunn
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Investigators are trying to identify an object spotted near Columbia shortly after it reached orbit as they try to determine what caused the shuttle to break apart.

Retired Adm. Harold W. Gehman Jr., who is leading an independent board investigating the disaster, told reporters Sunday that the tracking data from the U.S. Space Command Center in Nebraska could potentially be water that is routinely dumped from the shuttle, which then turned to ice.

"It could well have been an on-orbit piece associated with the shuttle which was supposed to have been there," Gehman said. He stressed that the report still needs to be analyzed.

Meanwhile, investigators continued to study a 2-foot section of Columbia's wing and a 300-pound object that appears to be a door panel from one of the shuttle's wheel wells found in Texas.

The wing includes the carbon-covered edge designed to protect Columbia's insulating tiles during re-entry and could provide hard evidence of what went wrong, NASA Administrator Sean O'Keefe said Saturday.

Gehman would not comment Sunday on whether the wing piece was from the shuttle's left side, which could prove significant because Columbia's troubles began in the left wing.

In the shuttle's final eight minutes the morning of Feb. 1,

temperatures surged in the left landing gear compartment, and the brake lines began overheating one by one. Sensors began showing overheating across other areas of the left wing and adjoining fuselage before Mission Control lost all contact.

Every possible scenario is still being considered, from the impact of a large chunk of hard insulating foam that hit the shuttle seconds after liftoff Jan. 16, to a strike from a piece of space junk, to a lightning-like electrical phenomenon.

data" that had just been turned over to investigators and that it was too early to speculate.

Imagery experts also are poring over a high-resolution photo taken by an Air Force telescope a minute or two before Columbia broke apart during re-entry. Some have suggested the leading edge of the left wing looks as if it could be damaged, and the photo shows a gray streak that could be a fiery plume trailing the wing.

NASA continues to gather evidence through an extensive debris search, centered primarily in Texas and Louisiana.

Meanwhile, about 1,000 people gathered Saturday in a church across the street from the debris search command center in Lufkin to remember the astronauts as a fun-loving but heroic group.

NASA astronaut Jeff Ashby, who recalled visiting the crew's lively table at the NASA Christmas party, said the crew was a generous, caring bunch with a great sense of humor. "They actually baked cakes for their training instructors on their birthdays," he said.

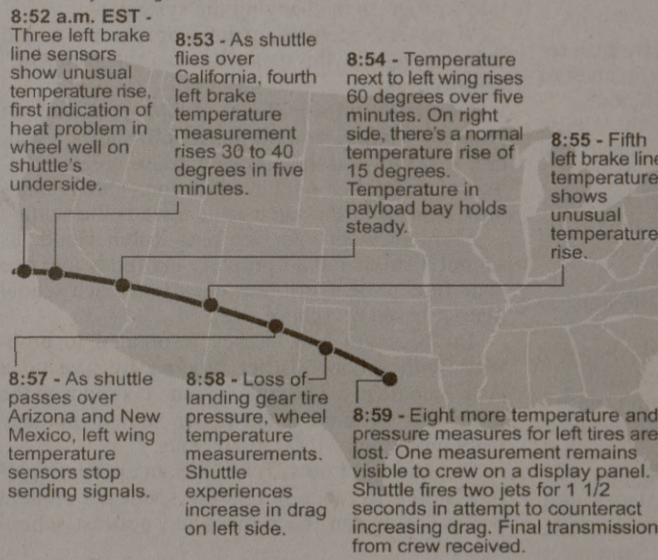
Gov. Rick Perry told the group at the First Baptist church that the astronauts "remind us that the future belongs to the brave and the bold."

In Hemphill, searchers also paused to observe the exact moment the shuttle broke up a week before. "There was total silence in the room, about a minute, and then we went on with life," said Marq Webb, U.S. Forest Service spokesman.

Columbia's final flight

NASA announced Friday the recovery of a leading edge of one of Columbia's wings. The find could be the break investigators have been in search for. NASA wants to know what caused the increased temperature readings and final interruption in data from the left wing just before the disintegration of the Columbia last Saturday.

Preliminary investigation times



SOURCE: NASA

AP

O'Keefe spoke following a memorial service at Louisiana's Barksdale Air Force Base, where pieces of the shuttle are being stored. Searchers have recovered remains of all seven astronauts and more than 12,000 pieces of debris that rained down across two states.

Late Saturday, NASA said the U.S. Strategic Command apparently tracked something flying near Columbia after it had reached orbit. Space agency spokeswoman Eileen Hawley said it was possible the object came from Columbia, but stressed "this is very raw

American Columbia astronauts had no special life insurance, NASA says

By Theresa Ago Vino
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Americans who died aboard space shuttle Columbia were eligible for the standard life insurance offered to military personnel and federal employees, but NASA carried no special coverage specifically for astronauts, officials say.

"There is a limit on what type of benefits the federal government provides," said NASA spokeswoman Eileen Hawley.

"We look at this as larger than a monetary issue," she said. "We are committed to helping these families and we have a support network. They are ... going to be part of the NASA family."

Five of the astronauts were members of the U.S. military and eligible for coverage under Service members Group Life Insurance, which has a standard death benefit of \$250,000. The monthly premium ranges from \$20 for the maximum coverage to 80 cents for a reduced coverage of \$10,000. There is no

increased payment for military members if the death is work-related.

The military does provide the surviving spouse \$935 a month, plus an additional \$234 per child until age 18. It also provides other benefits such as \$6,000 in cash for immediate needs and up to \$6,900 for burial costs and housing allowances. These benefits are provided regardless of how the service member died.

NASA provides the surviving spouse half the deceased's salary, plus \$24,354 annually, but that applies only to the lone civilian astronaut, Kalpana Chawla. NASA is not disclosing salaries of the victims, but the agency says an astronaut's salary can range from \$56,247 to \$86,974.

As a NASA employee, Chawla was eligible for coverage under Federal Employees Group Life Insurance, which provides basic coverage equal to the individual's annual salary, plus \$2,000. It allows the worker to increase coverage up to \$200,000 by paying more in premiums.

NASA officials said they believe Israeli

astronaut Ilan Ramon, the only non-American aboard Columbia when the shuttle broke apart Feb. 1, would have had life insurance coverage through his service in the Israeli Air Force, but had no details. Israel's Defense Department declined comment.

Both the Defense Department and the Office of Personnel Management cited privacy considerations in declining to discuss the specific insurance coverage of any individual.

After the 1986 Challenger explosion, the families of that shuttle's seven astronauts received legal settlements in addition to any insurance payments. Four families shared a \$7.7 million settlement from rocket manufacturer Morton Thiokol Inc. and the government. The three other families received an undisclosed sum from Morton Thiokol.

The family of Christa McAuliffe, a teacher who was on the Challenger, received the proceeds of a \$1 million policy that had been donated to her by Washington insurance broker Corroon & Black Inspace Inc.

4.0 & GO

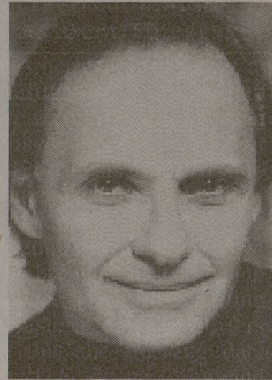
The week of February 9 - February 13

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Econ 322	Test Review Sun Feb 9 7pm-10pm	www.4.0andGo.com	www.4.0andGo.com	www.4.0andGo.com	www.4.0andGo.com
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Math 152	Part 1 of 4 Sun Feb 9 7pm-10pm		Part 2 of 4 Mon Feb 10 8pm-11pm	Part 3 of 4 Tue Feb 11 7pm-10pm	Part 4 of 4 Wed Feb 12 9pm-12am

Tickets go on sale Monday at 4:30 p.m. 4.0 & Go is located on the corner of SW Pkwy and Tx Ave, behind KFC next to Lack's. Check our web page at <http://www.4.0andGo.com> or call 696-8886 (TUTOR)

When you buy tickets at 4.0 and Go, you will receive a 4.0 stamped card for a free Chick-fil-a Chargrill Deluxe Chicken Sandwich at Post Oak Mall. (Chick-fil-a closed on Sunday).

Valentine's Eve

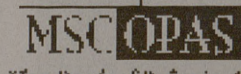


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