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COLUMBIA LOST

'COLUMBIA IS LOST'

Seven astronauts perish just 16 minutes from home



MICHAEL P. ANDERSON



DAVID BROWN



KALPANA CHAWLA



LAUREL CLARK



RICK HUSBAND



WILLIAM MCCOOL



ILAN RAMON



Debris from the space shuttle Columbia streaked across the sky over Tyler, Texas, yesterday morning in an image captured by Scott Lieberman, an amateur photographer. Associated Press

Over Texas, craft breaks up, burns

THE BOSTON GLOBE and NEW YORK TIMES NEWS SERVICE

PALESTINE, Texas — Watching the shuttle pass overhead had become something of a ritual for Larry Watley. Five times in as many years, he had taken his binoculars to a local park to follow the spacecraft's path overhead.

He spotted the shuttle again yesterday morning, and it looked just as it always did, "like a flashlight coming at you, with a tail of smoke," he said.

Then the image lost its familiar form. "Once it got over the top of me, I saw a big old fireball," he said.

He continued watching as smaller fireballs and a large piece of silvery metal peeled off.

For those who didn't see it, they almost certainly heard it and felt it.

It sounded like a freight train, like a tornado, like rolling thunder — and then a gigantic boom.

It fell from the sky in 6-inch chunks

SEE **Debris, A10**

Space shuttle had re-entered atmosphere, was 39 miles up

By Marcia Dunn and Pam Easton
ASSOCIATED PRESS

High over Texas and just short of home, space shuttle Columbia disintegrated yesterday, raining debris over hundreds of miles of countryside. Seven astronauts perished — a gut-wrenching loss for a country already staggered by tragedy.

The catastrophe occurred 39 miles above the Earth in the last 16 minutes of the 16-day mission as the spaceship re-entered the atmosphere and glided in for a landing in Florida.

In its horror and in its backdrop of a crystal blue sky, the day echoed one almost exactly 17 years before, when the Challenger exploded.

"The Columbia is lost," said President Bush, after he telephoned the families of the astronauts to console



A small flag at half-staff was placed near what was believed to be a piece of the Columbia. Associated Press

SEE **Columbia, A11**

More inside on Columbia lost

- America's space missions have brought triumphs and tragedy. **A5**
- NASA officials speculate on what caused Columbia to fall apart. **A5**
- Profiles of the seven members of the space shuttle crew. **A6**
- Israeli astronaut was a symbol of hope for his troubled land. **A7**
- Crash brings back memories of Challenger explosion in 1986. **A9**
- Contrail seen in San Diego County's skies probably not linked to shuttle's breakup. **B1**

Aviation museum fitting site for grief

By Dwight Daniels
STAFF WRITER

Lt. Diallo Wallace, a Navy helicopter pilot with a lifelong ambition of becoming an astronaut, headed straight to the San Diego Aerospace Museum yesterday morning after seeing the news of Columbia's demise.

He knew his friend, the flight's pilot, Cmdr. William McCool, was gone, and he wanted to honor his fellow Navy aviator by finding a patch commemorating the space shuttle.

Wallace remembered meeting McCool on a two-week stint at the Johnson Space Center in Houston.

"I was in awe of all the astronauts there. But as busy as they all are, Willie took the time to sit down and talk to me," Wallace said. "He asked me where I was from, what I flew, and what my interests were. He was just a really personable, friendly guy. And he didn't have to do any of that."

SEE **Museum, A10**

Inspectors set talks in Baghdad, hope to break deadlock

Scientist interviews, U-2 flights in dispute

By Charles J. Hanley
ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Iraq — The two chief U.N. weapons inspectors will return to Baghdad on Saturday for last-minute talks before they report again to the Security Council on the hunt for banned weapons in Iraq, Iraqi and

U.N. officials said yesterday. Arms monitors Hans Blix and Mohamed ElBaradei are seeking concessions to remove obstacles to U.N. reconnaissance flights and to allow private interviews with Iraqi scientists.

They prefer to see such issues resolved before their visit, said ElBaradei's spokeswoman, Melissa Fleming.

Neither Iraq's U.N. ambassador, Mohamed al-Douri, nor Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz said anything about new proposals to end the deadlocks.

Aziz said the top U.N. weapons inspectors would not meet with President Saddam Hussein.

Meanwhile, Iraqi officials sent new signals of defiance.

A senior Iraqi official threatened that Iraq will carry out suicide attacks against Americans in Iraq and the region if the United States strikes Iraq.

"Martyrs, perpetrators of suicide attacks, are our new weapons, and they will not only take action in Iraq," Taha Yassin Ramadan, a vice president who is considered among the nation's top

two officials after Hussein, is quoted as saying in the new issue of the German magazine *Der Spiegel*. "The whole region will be set ablaze. This part of the world will become a sea of resistance and danger for Americans."

Hussein repeated warnings that American soldiers would be killed before they could enter Baghdad.

The inspectors' next report, on Feb. 14, could swing the diplomatic balance toward or away from military action against Iraq, the "last resort" threatened by the United States and Britain.

A report by Blix to the Security Council Monday criticized the Iraqis as not having cooperated fully in the first two months of arms inspections.

The Iraqis on Thursday invited Blix and ElBaradei back to Baghdad, just 10 days after they completed discussions in Baghdad over practical problems in the inspections.

The chief inspectors responded with a letter to the Iraqi government proposing talks Feb. 8-9, but also ask-

SEE **Inspectors, A28**

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LOCAL

A slow path

● The Stephanie Crowe case returns to court Wednesday, more than five years after the 12-year-old Escondido girl was stabbed to death. **B1**

SPORTS

Flannery rallies

● Former Padres third-base coach Tim Flannery, saying he was tired of losing and probably needed a break, talks about his firing. **C1**

CURRENTS

Friends at the zoo

● They call themselves zoo regulars — individuals who come nearly day and develop personal relationships with the animals. **E1**



ARTS

'Quiet' Caine

● Veteran actor Michael Caine discusses his role in "The Quiet American," a film that opens in San Diego on Friday. **F1**

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