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Debris from the space shuttle Columbia streaks across the sky Saturday over Texas. Amateur photographer Dr. Scott Lieberman shot a series of photos showing the breakup from his back yard in Tyler, Texas. DR. SCOTT LIEBERMAN / Tyler Morning Telegraph via The Associated Press

SHUTTLE DISASTER

- **SEVEN DIE:** Craft breaks up about 40 miles above Earth and just minutes from landing
- **DEBRIS:** Chunks of materials rain across hundreds of miles of Texas and Louisiana
- **CAUSE:** Officials consider piece of insulation that fell loose on takeoff 16 days earlier

INSIDE By DAVID E. SANGER
The New York Times



Columbia lifted off on Jan. 16.

WASHINGTON — The space shuttle Columbia broke up Saturday morning on re-entry into the Earth's atmosphere, killing all seven astronauts aboard and sending fiery debris over Texas in the second loss of a space shuttle in 17 years.

There was no immediate explanation of what caused the disintegration of the oldest shuttle in NASA's fleet, but there were some tantalizing clues. By late Saturday afternoon, space agency engineers were describing a cascading series of failures of sensors on the left side of the craft.

That led to speculation that some kind of structural damage took place — perhaps caused by insulation that fell loose when the Columbia lifted off 16 days ago, perhaps from some other cause — that triggered a failure about 5 a.m. AST. But at a news conference Saturday afternoon, NASA officials said that had been analyzed and found not to "represent a safety concern."

The accident occurred roughly 40 miles above Earth as the shuttle slipped into the netherworld between outer space and the upper atmosphere, just as it was slowing to 12,500 mph and was minutes from its destination, Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

Yet as the countdown clock at the landing site reached zero at 9:16 a.m. EST, with an eerie silence and no sign of the shuttle, flaming debris was already falling in East Texas, then in Louisiana.

'THE COLUMBIA IS LOST'

President Bush, informed of the disaster at Camp David by chief of staff Andrew Card, rushed back to the White House, his motorcade speeding down the mountain and then racing through suburban Maryland. He appeared



NASA archive

drawn and stricken as he addressed the nation five hours after the shuttle broke up.

"The Columbia is lost," he said from the Cabinet room. "There are no survivors." But as President Reagan did 17 years and four days ago, when the shuttle Challenger exploded, Bush vowed that the American space program will go on.

"The same creator who names the stars also knows the names of the seven souls we mourn today," he said. He told the nation that while the astronauts had not safely returned to earth, "we can pray they are safely home."

Just minutes before the spaceship was lost, flight specialists in Houston had been communicating with the crew, talking about tire pressure on the Columbia. Nothing appeared wrong.

Then mission control in Houston said, "We did not copy your last."

"Roger, uh —" came the reply from the shuttle, and then there was silence, as if the astronaut had been cut off in mid-sentence, and then just static.

By the time Bush spoke at 2 p.m., the nation knew the fate of the crew. Much as viewers around the world knew the meaning of the terrifying images they saw on Jan. 28, 1986, when the Challenger exploded, they understood instinctively that there was no chance any of the five men and two women aboard the Columbia could survive a disintegration so high in the sky.

The silent confirmation of their deaths came around noon Saturday as the White House lowered its flag to half-staff.

FIRST ISRAELI ASTRONAUT DIES

The best-known member of the crew was the first Israeli to go into space, Ilan Ramon, a colonel in the Israeli air force who more than two decades ago had participated in Israel's attack on a nuclear reactor in Iraq and has long been a national hero in his country.

Because of Ramon's participation in the mission, security was extraordinarily tight. Experts said it is extremely unlikely that the shuttle was deliberately struck, noting that it was so high in the atmosphere that it was out of range of anti-aircraft systems and missiles. A review of satellite data detected nothing untoward.

Bush called Prime Minister Ariel

REACTION



Space Shuttle Columbia crew, left to right, front row, Rick Husband, Kalpana Chawla, William McCool; back row, David Brown, Laurel Clark, Michael Anderson and Israeli astronaut Ilan Ramon are shown in this undated crew photo.

"The same creator who names the stars also knows the names of the seven souls we mourn today. The crew of the shuttle Columbia did not return safely to Earth, but we pray they are safely home."
— President Bush



"People realize there's a hazard to this, just as there is to any exploration. Whether it's ... Columbus bobbing across the Atlantic Ocean or Lewis and Clark."
— John Glenn, former astronaut

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PRICE-FIXING CONSPIRACY?

Stakes are huge as salmon fishermen's lawsuit goes to trial

Processors, importers deny they set out to keep prices low

By WESLEY LOY
Anchorage Daily News

Alaska's commercial salmon industry has been bloodied in recent years fighting legions of foreign fish farmers.

Beginning Monday in an Anchorage courtroom, industry players will start fighting each other.

Lawyers for 5,000 commercial fishermen at Bristol Bay, scene of the state's richest salmon fishery, will argue that seafood processors and Japanese importers conspired to cheat the fishermen on prices paid for their catches during the 1991-95 seasons.

The fishermen's lawyers, led by a Texas antitrust specialist with a national reputation for winning big against foes like Microsoft, want more than \$1 billion damages.

The processors and importers steadfastly deny they set out as a group to keep dock prices low and shortchange the fishermen. Market demand for sockeye salmon in Japan set the prices, they argue, simple as that.

"There was no conspiracy," said Jeff Feldman, an Anchorage attorney for Trident Seafoods Corp., one of the defendants.

The stakes are huge. The pro-

cessors say they simply couldn't pay \$1 billion, particularly at a time when some packers already are folding for lack of profits. The dominance Alaska's wild sockeye once had in the key Japanese market has been supplanted by cheap, manufactured salmon from aquatic farms in Chile and other countries.

The looming trial has mustered the industry like little else in its history.

Presidents of the processing companies — several are sub-



JIM JAGER / Daily News archive 1996

Fishing boats jockeyed for position as they made their first sets during the 1996 opener in Bristol Bay.

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