

The Day

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DISASTER IN SPACE

'We trust the prayers of the nation will be with them and with their families. A more courageous group of people you could not have hoped to know.'

NASA Administrator Sean O'Keefe

NATION MOURNS COLUMBIA

Debris from the space shuttle Columbia streaks across the sky over Tyler, Texas, early Saturday. Columbia broke apart in flames 200,000 feet over Texas, killing all seven astronauts just minutes before they were to land at Cape Canaveral.



DR. SCOTT LIEBERMAN
Tyler Morning Telegraph/AP

SPACE SHUTTLE DISINTEGRATES, CREW OF 7 DEAD

By DAVID E. SANGER
New York Times News Service

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 catastrophic failure about 9 a.m. ET. But at a news conference Saturday afternoon, NASA officials said that had been analyzed and found not to "represent a safety concern."

The disaster 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, the Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

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

The loss of the Columbia, coming nearly 18 months after the terrorist attacks on New

See SHUTTLE page A12



The crew of Columbia, left to right, front row, Rick Husband, Kalpana Chawla, William McCool, back row, David Brown, Laurel Clark, Michael Anderson and Israeli astronaut Ilan Ramon.

NASA File Photo/AP

Shuttle mission specialist worked in subs



Cmdr. Laurel Clark trained at Groton base

By ROBERT A. HAMILTON
Day Staff Writer

When he took over command of Submarine Squadron 14 in 1991, Capt. Ronald D. Gumbert's medical officer was a woman, one of the first to qualify as a diving medical officer.

The young Midwesterner dived with Navy Seals, arranged medical evacuations from submarines, and inspected the boats before

every deployment to make sure all health standards were maintained for the Groton-based crews.

"She was a leader in every sense of the word," Gumbert said Saturday. "She wanted to be there, she wanted to be recognized for what she could do, and she gave 100 percent all the time. She recognized there were still some hard and fast lines, but she pushed them as much as she could."

The woman doctor was Cmdr. Laurel Blair Salton Clark, one of seven NASA astronauts killed when the shuttle Columbia broke up during re-entry Saturday morning.

See CLARK page A9

Crash inquiry focusing on protective tiles



Ron Dittmore, space shuttle program manager

Debris had struck wing as Columbia lifted off

By WILLIAM J. BROAD
and JAMES GLANZ
New York Times News Service

Although it could take months for NASA officials to learn what caused the destruction of the shuttle Columbia, they focused Saturday on the possibility that some of its protective tiles had failed, dooming the craft.

A small piece of speeding debris hit tiles on Columbia's left wing during the shuttle's

blastoff, space agency officials said. Though the incident was analyzed at length and dismissed as unimportant, they and other experts said it might have set off a train of problems that ended in the destruction of the spacecraft and the death of its seven crew members.

Ron Dittmore, shuttle program manager, said at a NASA briefing Saturday that the impact had been analyzed by experts around the United States who concluded that "it did not represent a safety concern."

"The technical community got together and across the country looked at it and

See INVESTIGATION page A9

ADDITIONAL COVERAGE OF THE SPACE SHUTTLE COLUMBIA DISASTER:

Sean O'Keefe, a graduate of Wheeler High School in North Stonington, took the reigns at NASA a year ago. He now faces the agency's biggest dilemma since the Challenger explosion. **A3**

The seven astronauts — four of them on their first mission — who lost their lives in the space shuttle Columbia were all driven professionals who had a passion for space flight. **A4**

Debris rained down over hundreds of square miles of Texas and Louisiana, smashing a rooftop, splashing into a reservoir and sending emergency crews on a far-flung hunt. **A6**

The space shuttle program was envisioned as a successor to the proud Apollo project. But almost from the start, it was plagued by design failures, fraud and other troubles. **A7**



TIM COOK / The Day

Shepard Hill Elementary School third-grade teacher Brenda Bourque uses a microphone in class to help keep her students focused.

SCHOOLS HELPING KIDS ESCAPE LABELS

'Learning disabled' numbers drop in state

By JUDY BENSON
Day Staff Writer

IN PLAINFIELD, kindergartners get extra help if they keep mismatching letters and their sounds, or stare blankly at simple words the teacher has shown them dozens of times.

Several times a week, small groups of these children meet with an early literacy teacher, Sally Janetatos, to practice naming letters and their sounds, or to write the alphabet in sand.

CLASSROOM CURRENTS

"We do it through games and play, and try to make it multi-sensory," Janetatos said.

A few years ago, extra lessons like these weren't standard procedure for struggling kindergartners. Parents,

teachers and school administrators typically were more relaxed when young children fell behind their peers in acquiring the building blocks of literacy. They might assume the children would catch up eventually. Problem was, many never did.

"Now we put the emphasis on prevention, versus being reactive," said James Blair, who oversees special education programs in Plainfield schools as the district's pupil personnel services director. "(Before) kids had to fail before

they'd get services."

Too often under the old "wait-to-fail" model, as state and national experts call it, those children would muddle along until third or fourth grade, then end up labeled — and frequently mislabeled — as "learning disabled." They'd start receiving special education services, but never catch up to their peers academically.

Over the last few years, however, fewer children in Connecticut have

See 'EVERYONE' page A8

Drug suspect story rescheduled

Due to today's extended coverage of the space shuttle Columbia disaster, a story on suspected drug dealer Robert Venturini Jr. of Stonington, which was scheduled to run today, has been postponed to next Sunday.

02.02.03

Off the desk and on the road

With traffic enforcement in mind, state police unleash the brass to help nab speeding drivers. **Daybreak**



Region: Niantic looks to enliven Main Street

Perspective: Malpractice system in need of overhaul

State: Iraqi war could harm state aerospace firms

Travel: An unforgettable voyage on the Delta Queen

Marketplace: Surprise your sweetie on Valentine's Day

WARMING UP

Today, morning clouds, afternoon clearing, mild. High 44. Monday, increasing cloudiness, shower possible late. High 44. **B8**

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