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Pilot



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Payload specialist

WHAT HAPPENED?

SHUTTLE COLUMBIA DISINTEGRATES; SEVEN ASTRONAUTS LOST



AP / Tyler Morning Telegraph, Dr. Scott Lieberman

Pieces of the space shuttle *Columbia* streak across the sky 200,000 feet over Tyler, Texas, on Saturday. Astronauts were about 16 minutes from landing in Cape Canaveral when the shuttle broke apart in flames.

NASA left with tragic puzzle as nation mourns

BY DAVID BALLINGRUD, MARTIN WEALEN, ALISA ULFERTS and ANITA KUMAR
Times Staff Writers

CAPE CANAVERAL — Seventeen years after a tragedy that shocked and humbled a nation, NASA again must divide its time between grieving and investigating a terrible failure.

The space shuttle *Columbia* disintegrated 39 miles over Texas on Saturday, raining debris over hundreds of miles of countryside. All seven astronauts were killed in a catastrophe that echoed the *Challenger* explosion of 1986.

"The *Columbia* is lost," a solemn President Bush said after telephoning the families of the astronauts. "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 can pray they are safely home."

Television footage showed a bright light followed by white smoke plumes streaking across a brilliant, blue sky. Debris appeared to break off into separate balls of light as it continued downward.

The disaster jarred a nation still dealing with the scars of 9/11 and contemplating a possible war against Iraq. It also raised anew questions about a space program struggling to redress management and budget problems.

NASA had no immediate explanation for the tragedy, but said it was checking the possibility that a piece of insulation that broke loose had damaged *Columbia*'s left wing during liftoff Jan. 16.

NASA confirmed the loss just after noon. Flags at the agency's launch pad at the Kennedy Space Center were lowered to half-staff. The families of the astronauts were hurried away and later taken to Houston.

Please see **COLUMBIA 18A**



ABC News

Land smolders where debris from *Columbia* was believed to have fallen north of Palestine, Texas. The National Guard deployed to protect charred machinery that rained over hundreds of square miles of Texas and Louisiana. **Story, 21A**

LANDINGS ARE PERILOUS

Between falling like a meteor and landing like a glider, every shuttle faces a dangerous return. **3A**

THE MEN AND WOMEN LOST

A look at the seven astronauts aboard *Columbia*, including quotes from each. **4A**

SHIP HAD FLAWED RECORD

Columbia had just five trouble-free flights in 22 years of service, but its history was storied. **8A**

GASPARILLA GOES AHEAD

Many showed up with heavy hearts, but the party went on, drawing about 550,000 people. **1B**



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