

Investigators issue scathing report on Columbia disaster

BY MARCIA DUNN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — NASA's overconfident management and loss of focus on safety "were as much a cause" of the Columbia accident as the chunk of foam that dealt a deadly blow to the space shuttle's left wing, investigators concluded Tuesday, warning that without drastic changes, another disaster is likely.

In a scathing 248-page report coming almost seven months to the day after the spacecraft disintegrated over Texas, the Columbia Accident Investigation Board said the shuttle was not "inherently unsafe," but issued a series of recommendations that it insisted must be implemented for a safe return to flight.

"The board strongly believes that if these persistent, systemic flaws are not resolved, the scene is set for another accident," the investigators wrote.

They added: "NASA's blind spot is it believes it has a strong safety culture."

Board member John Barry put it this way: "NASA had conflicting goals of cost, schedule and safety. Unfortunately, safety lost out."

NASA Administrator Sean O'Keefe, prepared in advance for the sharp criticism, pledged to make the necessary changes.

And President Bush declared, "Our journey in space will go on."

The board concluded that safety engineers used "sleight of hand" tactics even before the Feb. 1 Columbia tragedy to play down the frequency of strikes by fuel-tank foam insulation and managers pressed ahead because of intense pressure from high up to stay on schedule.

Even shuttle managers said their rationale for continuing to launch in the face of foam strikes was "lousy."

The mission managers missed numerous opportunities to check

Columbia's wing for damage, the report noted, and didn't even bother asking the astronauts if they had any extra camera views of the fuel tank as it peeled away following liftoff — which the board feels sure the astronauts had.

In all, the Columbia investigators issued 29 recommendations to NASA, six of them focusing on organizational change.

Dr. Jonathan Clark, a NASA flight surgeon whose wife was Columbia astronaut Dr. Laurel Clark, said the report "hit right on the money" and noted that changing the space agency's culture will be "the real challenge."

The board agreed. "The changes we recommend will be difficult to accomplish and will be internally resisted," the report said.

"We know how hard it is for big organizations to change," said retired Navy Adm. Harold Gehman, the board's chairman.

The cause of the Challenger accident, in which all seven astronauts were killed, also was attributed in part to management failures.

The technical cause was different, however. In the case of Challenger, O-ring seals on the booster rockets failed in the bitter cold.

NASA's space shuttle fleet, now reduced to three, has proven difficult and expensive to operate — and more dangerous than expected, the report stated. "It is the board's view that, in retrospect, the increased complexity of a shuttle designed to be all things to all people created inherently greater risks than if more realistic technical goals had been set at the start."

At the time of Columbia's doomed launch, the board said, NASA retained too many negative aspects of its traditional culture: "flawed decision making, self deception, introversion and a diminished curiosity about the world outside the perfect place."

High gas prices on tap for Labor Day drivers

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Gasoline prices for the Labor Day weekend will be just six to eight cents less than the highest ever recorded in North Carolina and South Carolina, the AAA Carolinas motor club said Monday.

But gasoline prices aren't expected to keep people at home.

A near-record number of Labor Day drivers are expected to be on the road, with 800,000 North Carolinians and 394,000

South Carolinians planning to drive more than 50 miles from home.

That figure is up 2.2 percent over last year.

In the past month, gasoline prices have increased 11 cents in North Carolina, reaching \$1.574 cents per gallon of self-serve unleaded, still 8 cents below the state record of \$1.634 set March 19.

In South Carolina the average is \$1.499, the lowest in the nation, but only 8 cents from the all-time

high of \$1.576 on March 14. South Carolina's state gasoline tax is 8.2 cents lower than North Carolina's.

The blackout in the Northeast, low inventory in refineries, the Arizona pipeline break and continuing problems in Iraq have contributed to a fragile energy supply system, said AAA president David Parsons.

Myrtle Beach has the highest gas price in South Carolina at \$1.526 per gallon. Fayetteville has

the highest in North Carolina at \$1.602, AAA said.

Parsons said travelers should know that less expensive fuel sometimes can be found two to three miles away from an interstate highway while some of the most expensive is at highway exit ramps.

The least expensive self-serve unleaded gasoline in North Carolina was in Charlotte at \$1.547 per gallon and in Spartanburg, S.C., at \$1.470, AAA said.

U.S. soldiers storm northern Iraqi town to crush crime ring

BY ANDREW ENGLAND
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

KHALIS, IRAQ — Hundreds of U.S. soldiers raided a northern town Tuesday in a bid to smash a crime ring wanted for murder, gunrunning and a terrorist attack on a police station that killed an American soldier earlier this month.

Separately, the toll of U.S. troops killed in postwar Iraq surpassed the number killed in major combat on Tuesday, reaching 140 with the death of a soldier in a roadside bombing and another in a traffic accident.

In Tuesday's raid, soldiers backed by tanks, helicopters and Bradley fighting vehicles stormed Khalis, 42 miles north of Baghdad, hunting for the gang's notorious leader, Lateef Hamed al-Kubaisat — known as Lateef by U.S. forces, said Col. David Hogg, commander of the 4th Infantry Division's 2nd Brigade.

Soldiers caught 24 members of the "terrorist organization" but Lateef appeared to have eluded capture, Hogg said.

"Their primary focus is probably criminal activity, but they have attacked coalition forces through direct and indirect means," said Hogg. "As long as he (Lateef) is in place we will not

be able to establish the conditions for the Iraqi police to establish law and order in the area."

The gang claimed responsibility for a bomb that exploded outside the police headquarters in nearby Baqouba on Aug. 10, killing one U.S. military policeman, U.S. forces said. Lateef is also accused of selling weapons, burning down the Baqouba courthouse to destroy criminal records and murdering a prostitute whom he accused of providing services to U.S. troops in the area.

U.S. Army officers in the area have said they are being attacked by Baath Party loyalists, Fedayeen Saddam militia fighters and criminal gangs who simply want the region to remain unstable so they can carry out their activities unhindered.

When President Bush declared an end to major combat on May 1, the death toll of Americans stood at 138. Since then, 140 more soldiers have died, counting both deaths announced Tuesday. The total number of soldiers killed since the Iraq war began on March 20 is 278.

One of the soldiers killed Tuesday was riding in a support convoy hit by a bomb in the town of Hamariyah, 16 miles

northwest of Baghdad, the military announced. Two other soldiers were wounded in that attack.

The other U.S. fatality was a soldier who was struck by an Iraqi motorist while changing a flat tire in a convoy from Tikrit to a forward base, the military said.

A third soldier, in another incident, was taken to a military hospital with an apparently self-inflicted gunshot wound.

In Baghdad, thousands of Shiite Muslims protested peacefully Monday night outside the headquarters of the U.S.-led coalition, charging the occupation force was lax on security and did too little to stop a weekend of ethnic bloodshed in the north and the bombing at the house of an important Muslim Shiite cleric in the south.

The Baghdad protest moved, after about an hour, to the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan office in Baghdad. The protesters alleged the Kurdish organization started the fighting Friday night in Tuz Kharmato and continued attacks on Turkomen tribesmen the next day in Kirkuk, 115 miles north of Baghdad. Eleven people died.

The protesters dispersed quietly, ahead of the 11 p.m. Baghdad curfew.

Two pilots presumed dead after crash

BY MATT PITTA
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

YARMOUTH, MASS. — A commuter plane with just two pilots aboard crashed Tuesday off Cape Cod after the crew reported an emergency and tried to return to the airport, authorities said. The pilots were presumed dead.

Recovery efforts were suspended for the night at about 7:30 p.m. without any bodies being recovered, said Mark Foley, a spokesman for the Yarmouth Fire Department.

The Federal Aviation Administration said the Colgan Air crew declared an emergency shortly after takeoff and was returning to land when the crash occurred about 3 miles off the coast. The plane was a Beechcraft 1900D, a 19-seater, the FAA said.

The pilots were on a routine flight to return the plane from Hyannis to the airport in Albany, N.Y., Colgan Air spokeswoman Mary Finnegan said. Colgan Air, based in Manassas, Va., is a carrier for US Airways Express that serves Cape Cod.

Television images from the

♦ PLANE, SEE PAGE 5

WELCOME BACK FACULTY AND STUDENTS

On behalf of the members of Student Government, we would like to welcome all of our Faculty and returning students back to campus. I would also like to welcome the Class of 2007 to the Carolina Community! Our University has gone through many wonderful changes this summer.

Improving campus life for every student at the University of South Carolina is an ongoing objective of Student Government. Student Government exists to respond to student needs and concerns on a variety of topics. Over the years, SG has addressed issues ranging from visitation privileges to campus safety to obtaining representation on the Board of Trustees. Student Government is designated as the official voice of the Students through authorization vested in a Constitution approved by the Board of Trustees of the University.

Student Government has been working all summer long on projects that will benefit the Student Body.

Take a look at a few of the topics we wish to tackle this year:

1. Getting Online Teacher Reviews, or a system to check reviews of teachers.
2. Newspaper Readership Program, to provide our students to access to USC Today, the state and other various papers.
3. Working to improve the Clemson ticket distribution process.
4. The addition of a sign language class.

Student Government is a very large organization. There are more than three hundred students who currently hold some type of SG position. We would love to have you join us in our efforts! If you are interested in becoming apart of Student Government, please feel free to visit our new office, located on the second floor of the Russell House. You can also contact us by phone at 777-2655.

Take a minute to get to know your elected Executive Officers:

The Student Body President: Katie Dreiling

- The Student Body President is elected to act as the official representative of Student Government and the University. The President appoints a cabinet, student members of University Committees and other officials deemed necessary.

The Student Body Vice President: Zachery Scott

- The Student Body Vice President serves in lieu of the President in her/her absence or disability. He also serves as presiding officer of the Student Senate.

The Student Body Treasurer: Benjamin Edwards

- The Student Body Treasurer records all receipts, expenditures and appropriations of funds from Student Government. The Treasurer prepares and presents the Student Government budget with the assistance of the Student Body President.

Bush pledges 'no retreat' in U.S. war against terror

BY DEB RIECHMANN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ST. LOUIS — On a day when the postwar U.S. death toll climbed past the number killed in major combat, President Bush pledged "no retreat" in the war on terrorism and defended his actions in Iraq amid calls for more international help.

"We're on the offensive against terror, and we will stay on the offensive against terror," Bush told about 6,000 people Tuesday in a graying audience at the American Legion's 85th national conference.

"We've adopted a new strategy for a new kind of war: We will not wait for known enemies to strike us again. We will strike them ... before they hit more of our cities and kill more of our citizens."

Bush faces tenuous situations on several fronts.

In Afghanistan, U.S.-led troops

are meeting with an increasingly well-organized Taliban fighters. Rising violence between the Israelis and Palestinians has rocked the U.S.-brokered road map for peace.

In Iraq, reconstruction work has been dealt a major setback by the bombing of the U.N. headquarters in Baghdad, and coalition forces still face persistent resistance from Saddam Hussein loyalists and terrorists.

A grim milestone was reached Tuesday when the U.S. death toll in postwar Iraq surpassed the number killed during major combat. When Bush declared aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln on May 1 that major combat operations had ended, the death toll was 138. Since then, 140 have died, including two on Tuesday.

Although no weapons of mass destruction have been found and some analysts point to loose links between Saddam and al-Qaida,



PHOTO COURTESY OF KRT CAMPUS

Bush spoke to the American Legion in St. Louis, Mo., on Tuesday.

Bush insisted that the United States was right to invade Iraq.

He said U.S.-led forces removed a brutal dictatorship that built, possessed and used weapons of mass destruction, sponsored terror and persecuted its people.

While the president was in St. Louis, L. Paul Bremer, the top U.S. official in Iraq, was at the White House talking about the situation in Iraq with Bush's national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice.

Bush cited progress in Iraq: More than 8,200 tons of ammunition seized since May 1. Forty-two of the 55 most-wanted Iraqi leaders captured or killed. "The more progress we make in Iraq, the more desperate the terrorists will become," he said.

He cited progress in Afghanistan too: Roads being built. Medical clinics opening. Young girls attending school for the first time. Nearly two-thirds of known senior al-Qaida leaders, operational managers and other key figures have either been captured or killed.

On the rising violence between Israel and the Palestinians, Bush called on every leader in the Middle East and the Palestinian people to cut off all money and support for terrorists and actively fight terror on all fronts.

This was Bush's 12th presidential trip to Missouri, a swing state in next year's election that Bush narrowly won in 2000.

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