MIT watches as shuttle into space begins

By Jack Link
Cheers and sighs of relief were heard in the student center when a live broadcast appeared on television monitors throughout the institution and commander John Young's voice came over the speakers, marking the end of a communications blackout and the successful reentry of the world's first reusable spacecraft.

In dormitories, lobbies, offices and classrooms, student and professorial staff that was watched as astronauts John Young and Young executed a perfect landing on an undamaged runway at Edwards Air Force Base in California.

Free television monitors were set up in the Space Systems Laboratory and dormitory lobbies to allow viewers to select between networks, which gave varied quality of coverage, particularly in the area of technical accuracy.

Comments by some broadcasters, produced laughter and ridicule by MIT viewers.

Students David Akin appeared behind the camera as WCVB- TV's local expert on its early morning Good Day program. "It was interesting to be on—once," said Akin of the experience.

The SSI has several projects planned and funded that will be launched with the shuttle when it becomes operational, "although neither has yet been scheduled," according to Akin. The projects include experimenting with the flammability of gases aboard Space Lab, and investigating space construction materials and methods.

The latter research is currently being conducted in underwater tanks by MIT students at the Marshall Flight Center in Alabama.

The ability to refurbish the orbiter and launching equipment quickly is crucial if such payloads are to be launched in the near future. A spokesperson for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA's) Dryden facility at Edwards Air Force Base, where the shuttle is currently undergoing inspection said, "It appears that some of the black tiles on the orbiter have fallen off, and we expect Columbia to be flown [aboard Boeing 747] back to Florida by next Saturday at the latest."

According to Kennedy Space Flight Center spokesman Rocky Rauch, launch pad 39A, from where STS-1 began its flight in a fiery lift-off Sunday, should be ready for use in "another two weeks. It's in good shape—there's minimal damage, about as much as we expected."

A New York Times report called the pad a "scene of devastation," and compared the aftermath to that of an "atomic bomb blast." Rauch denied the report, calling it inaccurate "from the byline on."

He compared the aftermath to that of a Saturn V lift-off, saying it was "very difficult to discern any difference from pre-launch conditions. The only unexpected damage was to the gantry elevator; two removable guard rails came loose and slammed into the elevator doors, said Rauch.

Some members of the MIT community were intimately involved in the flight. Jonathan Goldman '82 "gave his all, putting in twelve-hour shifts in the Mission Support Room monitoring the Auxiliary Power Units (APUs)" as a co-op student at Rockwell International's Space Division, according to his supervisor. Rockwell is the shuttle's prime contractor.

There are three APUs aboard the shuttle, providing power for flight control surfaces and landing gear. One of the few malfunctions reported during the flight involved the heater on the APU, necessitating a cold "fire-up" of that unit, which then performed normally, according to Goldman.

Goldman was relieved to see the landing gear extend just before Columbia touched down as he watched the final approach in Rockwell's Downey, California, assembly room.

The Drop Date is April 24—
the Registrar's Office would like to remind students that correction cards will not be accepted without all of the necessary signatures. You are urged to obtain all signatures well before deadlines to avoid having to petition the CAP for approval to make a late change. If your advisor is unavailable, contact your under-graduate office or department headquarters. Freshmen should go to the Undergraduate Academic Support Office, Room 7-103.

Registration material for the 1981 Summer Session will be available Wednesday, April 22, at the Registrar's Office, E19-335. The registration forms must be filled in and returned to the Registrar's Office by Friday, May 1.

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