

Taikonaut lands safely



Chinese astronaut Yang Liwei waves after landing on the Inner Mongolian grasslands of northern China Thursday. China's first astronaut in space returned safely when his craft touched down on time and as planned after 21 hours in orbit. Beijing's mission control declared the country's landmark debut flight "a success." *Xinhua/Associated Press*

BEIJING (AP) — China's first astronaut in space returned safely to Earth on today, when his craft touched down on time and as planned after 21 hours in orbit.

The craft carrying Lt.-Col. Yang Liwei landed by parachute on the grasslands of Inner Mongolia in northern China at dawn today local time, China's Xinhua News Agency said. Minutes later, he emerged from the capsule without help and waved at rescuers, though footage showed him appearing a bit dazed.

Shenzhou 5 landed at 6:23 a.m., the government said. "The mission was a success," said Li Jinai, the head of China's manned space program.

He called Yang a "space hero."

The completion of the mission was the crowning achievement of an 11-year, military-linked manned space program promoted as a symbol of national prestige both at home and abroad. China's premier, Wen Jiabao, immediately spoke with Yang from Beijing and offered his congratulations.

The government said Yang's condition was "good" and the Web site Sina.com said he would have an immediate physical exam.

Yang, a 38-year-old former fighter pilot, landed just five kilometres from his target, the government said.

The flight came four decades after the former Soviet Union and the United States pioneered manned spaceflight. Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin orbited the Earth in 1961. Less than one month later, the United States launched Alan Shepard.

Shenzhou 5 orbited the Earth 14 times. Though the Chinese government has been very secretive about its space program, it offered frequent glimpses of Yang throughout the trip and repeatedly said everything was going fine.

The Beijing Aerospace Command and Control Centre sent a message at about 5:35 a.m. Thursday to Shenzhou 5 instructing it to return as planned, Xinhua said. Shenzhou 5, shown on a screen in the mission control centre, made a gentle turnaround upon receiving the order, the news agency said.

After the landing, helicopters and trucks rushed to retrieve Yang. Earlier reports said the astronaut would be armed with knives and possibly a gun to protect himself against wild animals and other threats in the Inner Mongolian grasslands where the ship touched down.

While in orbit, Yang spoke to his family, telling them space looked "splendid." He also had a conversation with the country's defence minister, unfurled the flags of China and the United Nations and took a nap.

Rescuers feel let down

When paramedics and volunteer firefighters reached Charles Douglas, they realized they couldn't pluck him off the rocks on their own.

He was down by Cabin Point in East Sooke Park, a nice place to hike, but as craggy and rugged as Charles Bronson when it comes to hauling out a guy with a broken leg.

"There was no way I was walking out of there, and there was no way anybody was picking me up and just carrying me out," says Douglas, who suffered a compound fracture while rock-hopping along the water's edge.

So they called in the search-and-rescue team, which tied some ropes to the stretcher and rigged some others for the volunteers to hang on to as they pulled the Victoria man 40 metres to level ground.

That was in May. Douglas is getting around OK now. He still uses a cane when doing a lot of standing or walking, but can run the stairs two at a time. He remains grateful to those who came to his aid.

"The fact that there were that number of people available — local, equipped and willing to help — I was really impressed by that."

That's the kind of story that wasn't told in the little legal ad that appeared in the newspaper recently, the one informing the 4,800 residents of the CRD's Juan de Fuca Electoral Area that they could, if they so wished, petition against a tax to support the search and rescue team.

The levy would work out to \$15 a year for an average homeowner in the Juan de Fuca area, a sprawling patchwork of rural, unincorporated lands. They alone would pay, as the 30-member Juan de Fuca Search and Rescue Service — formerly Sooke Ground Search and Rescue — is on its own, having been orphaned when the village of Sooke developed its own emergency program.

The tax, which would raise \$63,000 a year for equipment and training, has some residents grumbling about carrying the entire cost of hunting down tourists too brainless to find their own way back to Starbucks. Search manager Bill Meikle says that has some team members feeling downhearted. People don't seem to realize what the volunteers do.

They are the boots that do the walking for the Provincial Emergency Program in the area covered by the Sooke RCMP. That can mean packing out tourists who come to grief on the Juan de Fuca Trail, or finding locals who disappear in the vastness between Port Renfrew and Shawnigan Lake. The volunteers do not duplicate the work done by other services, Meikle says.

Although PEP provides money for training and travel, it never seems to be enough. Members have been dipping into their own pockets and raising funds to keep the team going. Robin Penwam, one of those who helped pull Douglas off the beach, has been a volunteer for seven years. "Over those seven years, I've put a good \$3,000 to \$4,000 of my own money into helping people get out of the woods," she says. That's money for outdoor clothing, gear, gas, recertification...

You can argue that no one is putting a gun to her head. But British Columbians should also appreciate what a good deal we get from people like Robin. B.C. has 4,700 volunteers in 77 search-and-rescue teams. We also have 10,000 volunteer firefighters.

In addition, PEP can rely on 1,500 amateur radio operators, 600 airborne volunteers — pilots, navigators and spotters — and 700 people dedicated to the grim task of highway rescue. About 5,500 social service workers give emergency aid, as was the case this summer when they provided forest fire victims with food, clothing and shelter. On the water, the Coast Guard Auxiliary has 1,400 volunteers in 48 units, including seven on southern Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands. Good for them.



JACK KNOX

Three Americans killed in Gaza attack

BY SHELDON ALBERTS
CanWest News Service

WASHINGTON — President George W. Bush blamed the Palestinian Authority for a deadly attack on a U.S. diplomatic convoy in the Gaza Strip that killed three security officials Wednesday and sparked fears that Americans are now targets in the Palestinian uprising.

The FBI is sending a team of investigators to the Gaza to probe the surprise attack against U.S. personnel, who were based at the American Embassy in Tel Aviv and travelling to interview Palestinian students applying for scholarships in the U.S.

A fourth person was wounded in the explosion.

The State Department ordered Americans to leave the area for their own safety.

Only hours after the attack, American investigators were beset by stone-throwing Palestinian youths who forced them to cut short early probes into the roadside bombing.

"I'm outraged by the murder of three Americans and the wounding of one other," U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell said in a statement. "They were helping the Palestinian people. They were murdered by terrorists, the same terrorists who have killed so many others and who are killing the dreams of the Palestinian people."

The attack took place near the northern Gaza town of Beit Lahiya just after the three-vehicle U.S. convoy — which included members of Middle East envoy John Wolf's office — passed through a security checkpoint from Israel. A witness said the U.S. vehicles had diplomatic plates and were being led by Palestinian police vehicles.



Palestinians gather to watch the removal of the wreckage of a U.S. Embassy car near the village of Beit Lahiya in the northern Gaza Strip Wednesday. A massive explosion ripped through the U.S. diplomatic vehicle, killing at least three Americans, Palestinian officials said. The vehicle was part of a U.S. convoy driving to the Erez crossing between Israel and the Gaza Strip.

Hatem Moussa/Associated Press

A remote-controlled bomb ripped through a silver armoured vehicle and spread body parts and debris for several metres, leaving a deep crater in the road.

The terrorist groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad both denied responsibility for the attack, the first on a U.S. target since the Palestinian uprising began three years ago.

The groups have, in the past, avoided

targeting U.S. personnel for fear of angering Palestinian Authority officials seeking U.S. support.

State Department officials had not drawn any conclusions about the motives for the attack, but spokesman Richard Boucher said "the assumption one has to make" is that Americans were deliberately targeted.

Bush, in a statement, blasted the Pales-

tinian Authority and leader Yasser Arafat for failing to rein in terrorists and provide proper security.

"The failure to create effective Palestinian security forces dedicated to fighting terror continues to cost lives," Bush said. "There must be an empowered prime minister who controls all Palestinian forces — reforms that continue to be blocked by Yasser Arafat."

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