

FAMILY ANXIOUS ABOUT ASTRONAUT'S RETURN TO EARTH

By Larry A. Still

(WASHINGTON, D.C.-NNPA) - Although over 200 close relatives and friends cheered fervently as astronaut Frederick D. Gregory became the first black pilot to guide a space shuttle into orbit, his mother and family waited anxiously at home for the missile landing at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., after seven days of circling the earth (pril 29-May 6).

"The only headline I wanted to read is 'Challenger Lands Safely,'" Mrs. Nora Gregory of the District of Columbia told family and associates of the National Aeronautical and Space Administration (NASA) just before her 44-year-old son piloted Challenger Spacelab 3 on the hectic, historic 17th shuttle mission.

The pilot's wife, Barbara, and two children, Heather and Fred Jr., witnessed the "picture perfect" liftoff at the Kennedy (Fla.) Space Center, but they were not scheduled to be at the alternative desert landing site. NASA officials said the wife may attend after the landing was switched from Florida to California because of possible weather conditions.

The mother and wife headed a contingent of district citizens and educators from throughout the nation invited to observe the launch by NASA as Gregory established a landmark in the space program. He is a former U.S. Airforce and space test pilot.

Gregory is one of four black astronauts, including Guy Bluford, Ron McNair and Charles Bolden who is scheduled to pilot another space shuttle in January, 1986. Bluford and McNair served as mission specialists on previous flights with Bluford being the first black man in space in 1983.

Washington councilwoman Charlene Drew Jarvis represented the district government in wishing the Challenger crew Godspeed on its scientific mission with a several thousand pound payload, including two monkeys, 24 rats and scores of scientific material.

"It is with a sense of extraordinary pride that we observe Freddie's accomplishments," she said in introducing about 50 members of the Drew-Gregory family present for the launch during a banquet in nearby Orlando. The astronaut is the son of

the late Francis Gregory, an associate school superintendent and the nephew of the late Dr. Charles Drew, founder of the blood plasma bank credited with saving thousands of lives in emergency cases.

D.C. School Supt. Floretta McKenzie paid tribute to Gregory as a former public school pupil who made

dreams come true. "He is a role model for all of us," she told the teachers from New York to California who participated in a two day educator's seminar before the launch.

NASA Administrator Curtis Graves urged the teachers to encourage their pupils to become interested in the space program so "they

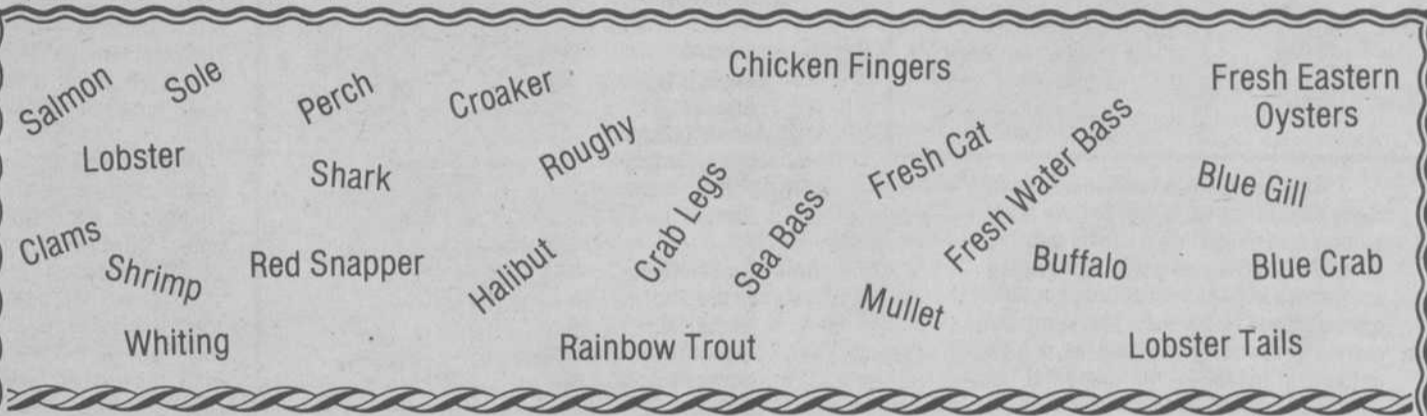
could be working on the moon," someday.

"Fred was a role model for me, too," astronaut Bolden told the NASA visitors. "But, I don't want to be the first in anything. I'd rather be second or third because I know we have arrived and continued to carry on," he added emotionally in reference to the historic Gregory mission.

The mother, Nora, cried with joy and relief as the shuttle broke the sound barrier with a roar following the fiery blastoff.



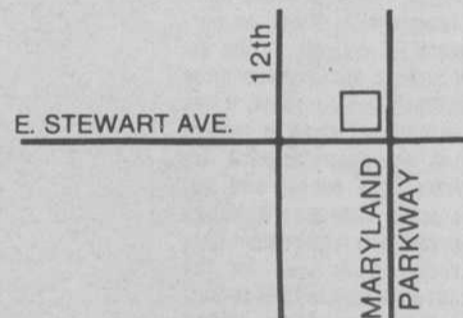
Alexander R. Jones, a 1975 graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has accepted the position of Director of Minority and Third World Affairs for the Church of Scientology International's Office in Washington, D.C.



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