

Gemini-5's Meteor Strikes -- Thrills and Chills for the Audience

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Cooper's LEAP OF FAITH:

"We were told by astronomers to expect front-row seats for a regular meteorite shower that occurs in the latter part of every August... We knew there was a chance that a meteorite might strike our spacecraft...But we were not prepared for what it sounded like when one actually did hit. A hard metallic BANG! It sounded like a major league fastball hurled against the side of our spacecraft, but we knew it was no bigger than a grain of sand. ... Over the course of the next couple of days, we were struck four or five times. When the spacecraft was dismantled upon its return to the Cape – every returning spacecraft was taken apart piece by piece as part of a total engineering report to assess how it handled the stresses of flight – impressions were found in the outer wall, as if somebody had driven home an ice pick with a hammer. The meteorites had actually reshaped the outer titanium wall of the spacecraft, pushing in the toughest metal known to man as much as a quarter-inch..."

-- from "LEAP OF FAITH", page 125-126

Just for the record, the Gemini outer skin was made of Rene' 41. The pressure hull skin was made of titanium.

John Fongheiser, President, Historic Space Systems (<http://www.space1.com>) was able to check out the final authority on such matters, the Gemini V Mission Report. This multi-hundred page report details everything that happened on the mission, and results of post-flight analysis of the spacecraft.

The pilot's report makes no mention of any meteorite strikes. Nor does any NASA document on space debris describe these events. Nor have manned spacecraft which have flown through the same meteor shower every year for the past three decades reported any subsequent sounds of impacts during these showers.

The report's Section 5.1.1 discusses the spacecraft structure. It details launch and parachute deployment stresses, reentry heating effects (mostly heatshield analysis), nose fairing separation during launch, and a small amount of water found in the Environmental Control System bay.

Regarding the condition of the spacecraft: "The Gemini V spacecraft was recovered in excellent condition after reentry heating.... Afterbody shingles are clean and undamaged and in excellent condition, but show slight discoloration in the area behind the most windward spacecraft-adapter interconnect fairing as on previous flights."

The Gemini V spacecraft, still intact, is hanging from the ceiling at the Space Center Houston museum. There aren't any dents in them there shingles.

How can Cooper's words be reconciled with the historical and physical record and with the experience of dozens of subsequent space travelers who passed through the SAME meteor storm without a single bang?