

Concorde remnants open to reporters

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DUGNY, France — Every day in a dusty military hangar outside Paris, experts wearing gas masks sift through all that is left of the destroyed Concorde: severed twists of wire, half-melted tires, jagged white fragments of the supersonic jet's once sleek body.

For the first time Tuesday, investigators opened the site to reporters where specialists are working to reconstruct the plane's left wing, which they hope will tell the final story of what caused the jet to plunge to the ground in flames in July, killing 113 people.

Experts say the painstaking process of identifying the bits of rubble and piecing together the evidence will take at least six months.

"Imagine setting fire to a puzzle and throwing the pieces off the fifth floor, and afterwards someone tells you to put it back together," said Lt. Stephane Chery, a spokesman for the investigators. "It's terribly difficult."

In the dark hangar, a cloud of acrid, metallic-smelling dust rose up around a group of police investigators in white jumpsuits and yellow gloves who brushed off a slab of debris and peered at it with flashlights.

All around them, the pride of French aviation lay in junk heaps draped in police tape: deformed plastic ribbed pipes, charred

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scraps of foam insulation, and a mud-coated fragment of the fuselage displaying only the letters "nce" — once part of the "Air France" logo.

Out of the debris, British and French police officers already have identified and tagged 2,000 pieces of evidence, some of which has been moved to another hangar where experts are piecing together the wing and part of the body, where the airplane caught fire before the crash.

That hangar was not open to media for fear of compromising the inquiry.

"In the end, we will have the parts of the fuselage and wing in question placed on the ground as though it was opened in half, so we can see what happened inside," said Capt. Xavier Mulot, director of the judicial inquiry.

Nelson takes Senate race in his second attempt

NELSON from page 1

The early returns showed Nelson with a five-point advantage, but later returns cut that margin to 51-49, then to 50-50. At one point, Omaha TV stations showed Stenberg with a slight lead.

The election returns were complicated by computer problems in Douglas County that delayed the reporting of many of the county's votes.

At 11:05 p.m., still uncertain of the outcome, Nelson entered the ballroom to speak to supporters. He recalled the 1990 Democratic gubernatorial primary, which he won by a mere 42 votes.

"Every 10 years, we have to have one of these," he said, laughing.

He left his supporters with an upbeat thought.

"We believe we've cleared the hurdle," he said.

"We believe when the final numbers are counted, we'll be there. You know me, and I'm cautiously optimistic."

The next few hours were difficult for Nelson, who watched the returns in his hotel room. At 12:05 a.m., as returns flowed in from the heavily Republican 3rd District, Omaha TV stations showed Stenberg had gained a slight edge on Nelson.

At some points during the evening, Nelson said, "I thought I knew how it was going, and I didn't like it."

When he saw the numbers showing a surge by Stenberg, he said, he didn't realize immediately that those numbers were miss-

ing about half of Douglas County's votes because of the computer glitches. Nelson performed well in Douglas County, so those missing votes probably made it look as though Stenberg was performing better than he was.

Throughout the evening, the Senate race and the presidential race provided interweaving story lines.

At 1:18 a.m., CNN and other national TV stations announced Republican George W. Bush had captured Florida, ensuring his election as president over Democratic Vice President Al Gore. The mood was somber among the gathered Democrats, but less than two hours later, realizing Florida would organize a recount, the networks withdrew their declaration of Bush's victory.

At 1:30 a.m., the election returns showed Nelson with a 6,000-vote lead.

Gathered with his closest supporters and advisers in the dim light outside his poolside room, Nelson raised a glass of champagne to his lips. He lit a cigar and puffed away.

He wasn't ready to claim victory categorically, but he felt confident he had built a margin that would hold up. He hadn't yet heard from Stenberg, and he said it would be "appropriate" to wait for a concession call before speaking to supporters in the ballroom.

Shortly after that, an adviser handed Nelson a cell phone. The caller was Sen. Robert Torricelli, D-N.J., chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee. Like Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle, D-S.D., who called earlier, Torricelli had called to congratulate Nelson.

"I look forward to it, and it'll be a real honor and pleasure to serve," Nelson told Torricelli.

When Nelson learned Stenberg would not concede the race in the early hours of Wednesday, he was unsure what to do. He held a five-minute, closed-door meeting with advisers in his hotel room.

When they emerged, they had decided to descend to the ballroom.

Nelson said he felt awkward claiming victory at that point without having heard from Stenberg, but he noted that CNN and CBS had declared him the victor.

"I'm proud of my campaign because we moved forward with an agenda to do positive things for all the people," he said. "If this margin holds and I am in fact elected, I pledge my support to make sure the process in Washington works for all of us and all the people in the country."

"Until there's more news, my advice to you is to go home and get some sleep," Nelson told the beary-eyed crowd. "That's what I'm going to try to do. And I thank you very much."

Anne Boyle, chairwoman of the Nebraska Democratic Party, took the opportunity to gloat a little, mocking Stenberg's approach of aligning himself with a GOP team of Bush, Sen. Chuck Hagel, Gov. Mike Johanns and other Republicans.

"Tonight the Hagel-Johanns-Stenberg team lost one of their players," Boyle crowed.

In the end, Nelson said, his opposite approach — he claimed to be an independent voice who could work across party lines — had broad appeal for Nebraska voters.

"I think the biggest difference was the bipartisan message and the individual voice I promised," he said. "I would go to Washington and truly represent the people, rather than the party."

With Nelson's apparent victory, the Democrats will hold onto the last remaining statewide elected office they now hold. Nelson would replace retiring Democratic Sen. Bob Kerrey.

But Nelson said he never viewed his campaign as a crusade to save the Democratic Party in Nebraska.

"I didn't really look at it as that kind of mission," he said. "It's important to have a two-party system in Nebraska, but I was focused on being elected to the United States Senate."

Nelson said he was excited about the prospect of serving in a Senate split evenly between Democrats and Republicans. It appeared early this morning that the Senate would be split 50-50.

If Bush is elected, Vice President Dick Cheney would cast the tie-breaking vote. If Gore is elected, his running mate, Sen. Joe Lieberman, would have to resign his Senate seat, and Connecticut's Republican governor would appoint a GOP senator to replace him. Then the Republicans would have a 51-49 advantage.

"I think it would be exciting if it works like that (a 50-50 split)," Nelson said.

"It certainly gives a person the opportunity to be able to get things done because the administration will have to look to Democrats."

Stenberg scheduled a 10:30 a.m. press conference today to discuss his reaction to last night's results.

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