

Weather rocket kills man and blows up his body at cremation

A Chinese man originally thought to have been struck by lightning was in fact killed by a small weather rocket whose existence was only discovered when his body exploded during his cremation.

By Richard Spencer in Beijing

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The body of Wang Diange, from the Chinese province of Inner Mongolia, was found in the wreckage of a house where he had been overseeing the wake of a previous family funeral, after mourners felt a loud explosion which took off half the roof.

As it was raining and thundery, they decided that the house, and Mr Wang in particular, had been struck by lightning. The police came to the same conclusion.

Further inquiries were made a few days later after Mr Wang's own funeral. As his body was being put into the cremation chamber, it blew up spectacularly, bursting the doors off the oven.

When the fire had been put out, the only clue as to what had happened was a small twisted piece of metal, which seemed to be the glowing remnants of a screw.

At first, local metallurgists were unable to determine what it was, though they noted it bore a military serial number. After a lengthy investigation, however, it was suggested it might be part of a shell casing.

Inquiries revealed that the rainfall on the day of the original disaster was triggered by the local weather bureau, which had been firing shells into the atmosphere to break up hail in order to protect the local tobacco crop.

Inside the shells were silver iodide, a chemical that helps to break up hail into rain.

Their own investigators concluded that one shell must have failed to explode, hit the house, and lodged in Mr Wang's body. There it passed unnoticed because of his extensive injuries, according to local newspaper reports.

As a result, and three years after Mr Wang died, his family have now received 80,000 yuan (£8,000) in compensation from the weather bureau.

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