



Space Log

SPECIAL BULLETIN***SPECIAL BULLETIN

Volume 16

SHUTTLE MISSION 51-L

January 1986

CHALLENGER EXPLODES....CREW OF 7 KILLED

Houston Mission Control announced..."We have a malfunction, the vehicle has exploded." Space shuttle Challenger had achieved liftoff at 11:38 a.m. EST and climbed normally away from the launch pad, but less than 72 seconds later, the shuttle, with fuel-laden booster rockets still intact, exploded 10 miles up and 8 miles out over the Atlantic. The date was January 28, 1986.

Killed instantly were Francis R. Scobee, commander; Michael J. Smith, pilot; mission specialists Judith A. Resnik, Ellison Onizuka, and Ronald E. McNair; payload specialist Gregory Jarvis, and Christa McAuliff, space flight participant.

It is doubtful that ever was there a more representative American spaceflight crew than this one for mission 51-L. It was composed of a school-teacher, a laser expert, two fighter pilots. One member had a Ph.D. from MIT. One was a night school graduate. There was a Japanese-American, a Jew, a black. Yankees and Southerners. Men and women; fathers and a mother. These seven Americans, and explorers of space, came to Houston, volunteering to be members of the team aboard mission 51-L.

These seven who died knew and accepted the risks that come with exploring new frontiers. These seven were from among the best that our country can muster.

President Ronald Reagan, in his speech to the nation late in the afternoon of January 28, 1986, said it best in his moving tribute to the crew of Challenger. "The future does not belong to the fainthearted. It belongs to the brave. The Challenger crew was pulling us into the future, and we'll continue to follow them. I've always had great faith in and respect for our space program. And what happened today does nothing to diminish it."

He continued, "We don't keep secrets and cover things up. We do it all up front and in public. That's the way freedom is, and we wouldn't change it for a minute. We'll continue our quest in space. There will be more shuttle flights and more shuttle crews, and yes, more volunteers, more civilians, more teachers in space."

President Reagan then added, "Nothing ends here. Our hopes and our journeys continue."

51-L CREW CHOSEN...

Originally chosen as the crew were five members. These were Francis R. Scobee, commander; Michael J. Smith, pilot; and mission specialists Judith A. Resnik, Ellison Onizuka, and Ronald E. McNair.

Gregory Jarvis had originally been chosen for an earlier flight but was "bumped" when NASA had Senator Jake Garn fly on his original mission. He was then slated to fly on mission 61-C but his place was taken by Rep. Bill Nelson. In October, 1985 Jarvis was then added to Challenger's 51-L crew.

Christa McAuliffe was selected on July 19, 1985 as the first "Private Citizen in Space" and added to the 51-L crew on that date. (A cover for this event was previously offered by SCCS back in August 1985).

THE APOLLO 1 TRAGEDY...

Death by fire is nothing new to the U. S. space program but, thankfully, it has been 19 years and one day since it last happened.

It was on January 27, 1967 when the first designated Apollo crew perished in a flash fire in the Apollo spacecraft atop an unfueled Saturn 1 rocket. The three were Air Force Col. Virgil I. "Gus" Grissom, Air Force Lt. Col. Edward H. White, and Navy Lt. Cmdr. Roger B. Chaffee.



The time was 6:31 p.m. EST. One of the three yelled, "Fire, I smell fire." White, the first American to walk in space, shouted about two seconds later, "Fire in the cockpit." Three more seconds passed when one of the three hollered, "There's a bad fire in the spacecraft!" For the next six seconds there were sounds of pain, of clawing and pounding, and more shouting; this time the shouts were unintelligible. Four seconds later, Chaffee uttered the last words from the spacecraft...."We're on fire! Get us out of here."

In Houston, several collectors called each other, each one asking whether covers should be serviced or not. One said "no"; the others said that even such a tragic event should be historically recorded by cancelled covers and that collectors in the future would appreciate it.

The story has been told previously of how we at the Space City Cover Society serviced about one hundred covers cancelled Houston on January 27, 1967 p.m. After the printer completed the cachet printing the next day, about 90 good covers remained. A story was sent to Linn's and (at that time) Western Stamp Collector letting collectors know about these covers. They were priced at 50¢! Over 1,000 collectors wrote in...910 were disappointed. The 90 covers were gone in the first day's mail after the story broke in the papers for collectors. The last time one of these was offered (about two years ago) it went for just under \$400.

51-L TRAGEDY COVERS BY SCCS

On all space shuttle missions, the Space City Cover Society has been servicing covers for collectors postmarked Houston. These have been both machine cancel and MPP hand cancel. (The SCCS has permit #1 for the Mailer's Postmark Permit. It was issued to us back in 1972).

Houston is home of Mission Control and as soon as any manned spacecraft rises above the launch tower, Houston Mission Control takes over. Houston is also home of the astronauts. This is why, over the years, collectors have more and more turned to the SCCS for these Houston covers; not only for launch and landing, but especially for the mission events.

In the April 1985 issue of The American Philatelist, published by the 50,000-member American Philatelic Society, there was an article "Using Mailer's Postmark (MPPs) to Document Important Events." We at SCCS have been doing this since 1972 and presently these covers have become even more desirable than the regular machine cancelled covers. However, we still service about the same number of each style so that each collector can choose.

For the tragic 51-L mission we have both machine cancelled and MPP hand cancelled (January 28, 1986) for the first cover in the set. The cachet of it features the mission emblem. Then we have 7 other covers in the set...each one with a matching cachet but featuring the individual crew member. Since we have the only MPP in Houston used for space events only, you will not find such a set offered by anyone else. This set of seven covers will be all MPP hand cancel unless the first cover is requested to be machine cancel.

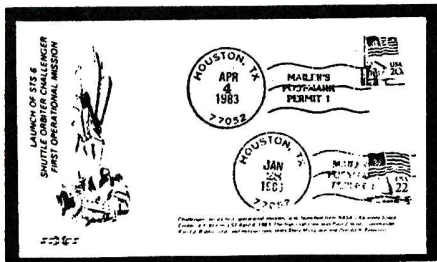
We have in the past missions offered MPP covers for mission events and we had our covers ready for the 51-L events. Those planned events were (1) TDRS-B (Tracking and Data Relay Satellite) launch, scheduled for the first day of the mission; (2) launch of the Spartan-Halley satellite, which was to have been launched on day three of the mission and at the end of the mission, recaptured by the Shuttle robot arm and placed back in the payload bay; and (3) first school lesson from space to have been conducted by Christa McAuliffe on flight day six. It would have been beamed back to hundreds of thousands of students sitting in classrooms around the entire United States.

Not one of these events had a chance to take place but our covers are appropriately cancelled on January 28, 1986, cacheted as to intended event and additionally rubber-stamped with wording "Challenger Explodes on Launch January 28, 1986" in two lines.

CHALLENGER DOUBLE CANCELLED COVER...

Challenger's first flight began with its launch on April 4, 1983. This was its first operational mission and launch was at 1:30 p.m. EST. The four-man crew was Paul J. Weitz, commander; Karol J. Bobko, pilot; and mission specialists Story Musgrave and Donald H. Peterson.

Challenger's last flight began on January 28, 1986 at 11:38 a.m. EST and ended about 72 seconds later when it exploded into bits and pieces. We took some of our MPP covers of April 4, 1983, added a 22¢ stamp to lower right hand corner and had these hand cancelled (MPP) on January 28, 1986. Then the additional wording by rubber stamp reads "Challenger Explodes on Launch January 28, 1986" in two lines.



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