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Challenger explodes moments after liftoff

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — The space shuttle Challenger exploded into a gigantic fireball 75 seconds after liftoff Tuesday, apparently killing all seven crew members, including schoolteacher Christa McAuliffe.

Fragments of the \$1.2 billion spacecraft, one of four in the National Aeronautic and Space Administration's shuttle fleet, fell into the Atlantic Ocean 18 miles southeast of the Kennedy Space Center launch pad. (See related stories, photo on Pages 4 and 28.)

More than two hours after the accident, officials said no announcement on the fate of the crew would be made until all search-and-rescue efforts were exhausted. But it seemed virtually impossible that anyone could survive such a cataclysmic explosion.

No American astronaut ever had been killed in flight.

The explosion occurred as Challenger was 10.35 miles high and 8.05 miles downrange from the cape, speeding toward orbit at 1,977 mph.

The shocking spectacle was witnessed by family and friends of the astronauts who had gathered at Cape Canaveral and by millions more around the country who viewed the launch on television.

President Reagan postponed Tuesday night's State of the Union speech for one week and sent Vice President George Bush to the cape to observe the investigation.

Reagan told reporters at the White House: "It's a horrible thing all of us have witnessed. I can't rid myself of the thought of the sacrifice of the families

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Shuttle's crew of 7 feared dead

The seven crew members of the space shuttle Challenger pose for their preflight portrait. They are (from left, front): pilot

Michael J. Smith, commander Francis R. Scobee, astronaut Ronald E. McNair; (from left, rear): astronaut Ellison S. Onizuka, schoolteacher Christa McAuliffe, mission specialist Gregory Jarvis and astronaut Judith A. Resnik. All crew mem-

bers were feared to have died. The moment of explosion is shown at right, leaving a cloud of smoke in the Florida sky.

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AP photos