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In this NASA photo we see Flight Directors Jay Greene (in the foreground) and Lee Briscoe in the aftermath of the explosion. Their faces reflect the emotions they are feeling when they realize the mission, and the *Challenger's* crew, are lost.

Months later, NASA released a transcript of the last words recorded by *Challenger's* crew. At 73 seconds (T+1.13) into the mission, someone (most likely the pilot, Mike Smith) said:

Uh-oh

Those were the last recorded words before all communication with the shuttle was lost. It was breaking apart and encountered multiple system failures almost simultaneously. (Scroll down on this link to view the data. Look, especially, at events beginning at 72.204 seconds.)

At first, people on the ground who saw parachutes believed the crew had ejected. But unlike the comparatively primitive Mercury space capsules 25 years before, there was no escape method for the shuttle's crew. The parachutes were intended to safely carry the solid rocket boosters to an ocean landing (so they could be reused during future flights).

Disengaged, the parachutes were flying on their own, with nothing attached.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/THE-LAST-WORDS-Challenger-Disaster>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/THE-LAST-WORDS-Challenger-Disaster>



Structural breakup of the vehicle began at approximately 12 seconds. The emergency crew later the nose of the Orbiter, suggesting sufficient and serious of the structural failure. Action control system disengaged. At left, the two Solid Rocket Boosters thrust away from the Orbiter, disengaging to form a "V". The right booster—disengaged by its failure plume—rose to the left of its counterpart. At right, the boosters diverge further, the External Tank, wreckage, is obscured by smoke and vapor. The Orbiter engine plume, a vertical at bottom center.

Shuttle Breaking Apart Photos

Image online, courtesy NASA.

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