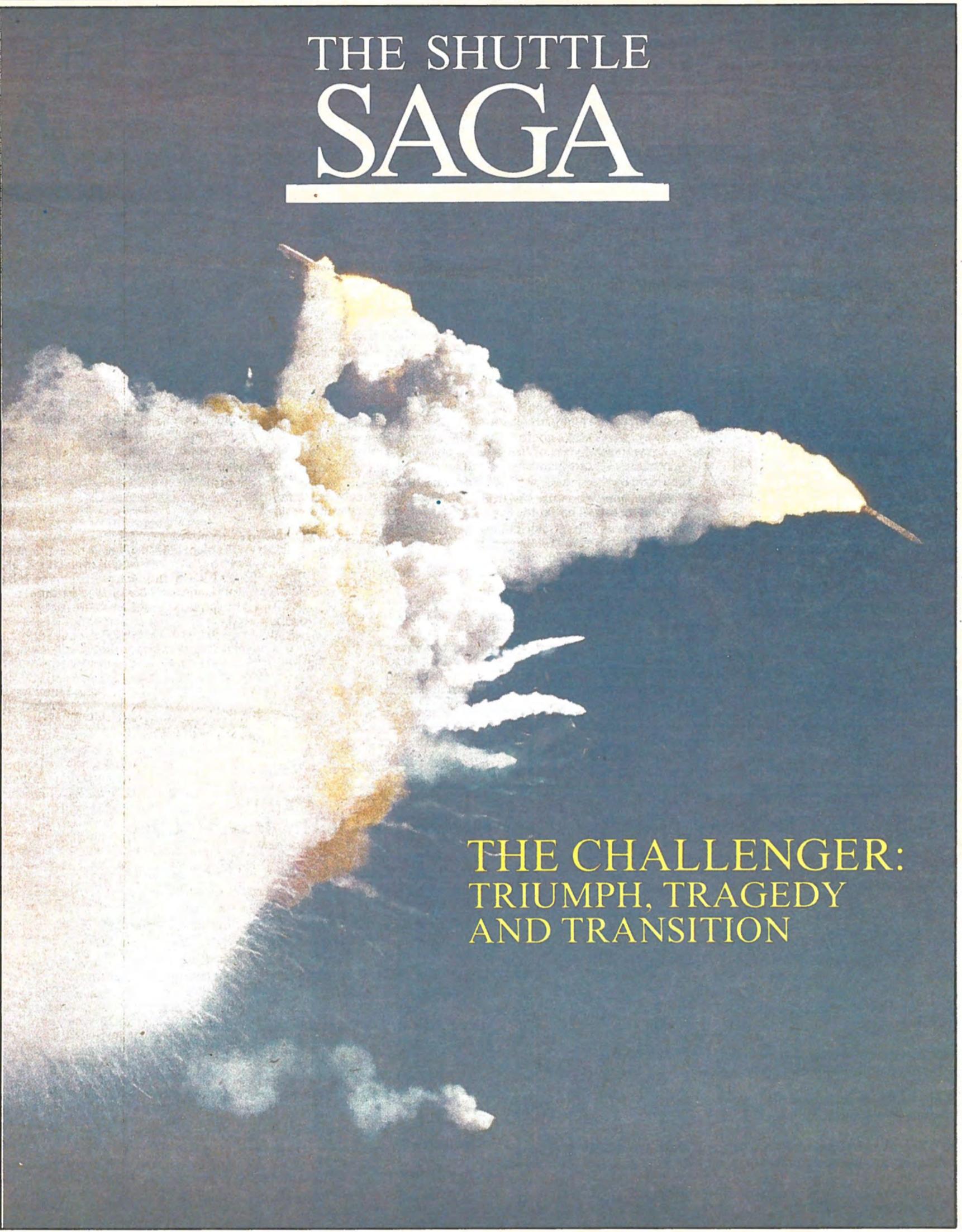


BOOK ONE

# THE SHUTTLE SAGA



THE CHALLENGER:  
TRIUMPH, TRAGEDY  
AND TRANSITION





CHAPTER 3

Challenger

7

THE SHUTTLE SAGA

'All he ever wanted to do was fly'

Dick Scobee's love of flying machines shaped his life, from boyhood airplane collections to air combat missions in Vietnam to a week in orbit in 1984 on a Space Shuttle mission

By Joan Heller

"Make it go!" the little boy implored from the safe heights of the sofa.

Waving chubby arms at the windup airplane Santa had brought, 16-month-old Dick Scobee wanted to see it again — but from a safe distance.

Patently twisting the windup key under the lights of the Christmas tree, Francis and Edlynn Scobee were seeing a glimpse into their son's future.

The rest of Dick's 46 years would be filled with flying machines. And they would get a lot faster and a lot bigger.

As each new model airplane came into the family's Auburn, Wash., home, Edlynn wondered again where her son would put it. They were dangling from the ceiling and hanging from the walls, and still they kept coming.

Breaking long enough to tend to his schoolwork and to play basketball, Dick toiled away on his latest winged treasure. Hour after hour, day after day, he glued, trimmed, painted — and dreamed.

Meanwhile, Edlynn was building a collection of her own — countless small gifts bought from her son's after-school lawn-mowing enterprise. "Whenever he had any amount of money, he'd buy his mom a present," she said. "I have all kinds of knickknacks all over."

Even before his 1957 graduation from Auburn Senior High School, Dick was thinking about college.

The salary his dad made as a railroad engineer was enough to pay for college, but Dick

remained firm. He was going to pay for it himself. And just as he never wavered in his love of airplanes, he never wavered in his decision to pay for his own education. His schooling began as he raised his right hand and swore allegiance to the United States and to the Air Force.

The ink barely dried on his enlistment papers, Dick was stationed at Kelly Air Force Base in Texas. He was an engine mechanic by day, a college student by night — and he was in love with June Kent of San Antonio.

Impressed with his determination to succeed, Dick's superiors recommended him for the Airman's Education and Commission Program. The next seven years would take him from the flatlands of Texas to the jungles of Southeast Asia.

Everything would change.

The bachelor would become a husband. The husband would become a father of two. The mechanic would earn a bachelor's degree in aerospace engineering, the enlisted man would become an officer, and the landlocked Air Force veteran finally would fly.

Pinned with the coveted pilot's wings in 1966 — at the height of the Vietnam War — his immediate future was inevitable.

He was dispatched to Southeast Asia for a year, where he fought air combat missions. June Scobee waited at home with 5-year-old Kathy and 2-year-old Richard.

The end of his Vietnam tour didn't mean an end to the risks.

Returning to the U.S., he promptly signed on for the Air Force's famed Aerospace Research Pilot School at Edwards Air Force Base in California.

Days off were for family, recreational flying, oil painting, woodworking, motorcycling, racquetball and jogging. Saturdays were pancake days.

"All his life, he cooked pancakes on Saturday mornings," Edlynn said. "He did it from the time he was 10 or 11. After he grew up, he'd still get up on Saturday morning and say, 'It's my day to get breakfast.'"

At the office, tens of thousands of feet in the air, Dick would spend the next six years learning to fly 45 different planes and teaching others to do the same.

In January 1978, NASA called, and Air Force Maj. Dick Scobee became astronaut candidate Dick Scobee. At Johnson Space Center in Houston, Dick underwent a year of training, and in August 1979, he was formally accepted into the ranks.

His pilot's wings now 13 years old, Dick waited for his first spaceflight and busied himself learning to fly the NASA/Boeing 747 used to take the Space Shuttles on transcontinental piggyback jaunts.

First a student, then a teacher, Dick trained with NASA pilots to take to controls of the specially outfitted 747 workhorse.

His 4½-year wait ended April 6, 1984, with the rumble of rocket engines at Kennedy Space Center.

After hurtling into the heavens with fellow astronaut Bob Crippen and mission specialists Terry Hart, G.D. "Pinky" Nelson and James van Hoften, he spent a week in orbit. The group made headlines as it plucked an ailing satellite from space, repaired it in the Shuttle's cavernous cargo bay and returned it to orbit.

As Dick waited in Houston for another flight, the family was changing.

Intent on following in his father's footsteps — at least as far as pilot training school — his son was studying at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo.

And on Jan. 31, 1985, his daughter and her Army captain husband became the parents of a baby daughter. And Dick became the only grandfather in NASA's astronaut corps.

Three days short of his granddaughter's first birthday, Dick took his last flight aboard the doomed Space Shuttle Challenger.

Back home in Washington state, Edlynn remembers the little boy with the windup airplane. "When he was growing up, all he ever talked about was airplanes. He drew airplanes. All he ever wanted to do was fly."



The Associated Press

ALL SMILES: Astronaut Dick Scobee shows off the New Hampshire T-shirt given to him by Christa McAuliffe, the Concord, N.H., 'teachernaut.' Scobee and the other crew members of Mission 51-L arrived Jan. 23, 1986, at Kennedy Space Center to prepare for the launch of Space Shuttle Challenger.



NASA

READY TO FLY: Co-pilot Scobee, center; pilot Joseph Algranti, left; and engineer Louis Guidry prepare July 5, 1982, to fly a modified Boeing 747 passenger carrier transporting the new Space Shuttle Challenger from California to Florida.