

# NASA astronaut, first to fly untethered in space, dies at 80

December 22 2017

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This Feb. 7, 1984 photo made available by NASA shows astronaut Bruce McCandless II, participating in a spacewalk a few meters away from the cabin of the Earth-orbiting space shuttle Challenger, using a nitrogen-propelled Manned

Maneuvering Unit. The Johnson Space Center says McCandless died Thursday, Dec. 21, 2017 in California. (NASA via AP)

NASA astronaut Bruce McCandless, the first person to fly freely and untethered in space, has died. He was 80.

McCandless died Thursday in California, NASA's Johnson Space Center announced Friday. No cause of death was given.

He was famously photographed in 1984 flying with a hefty spacewalker's jetpack, alone in the cosmic blackness above a blue Earth. He traveled more than 300 feet away from the [space](#) shuttle Challenger during the spacewalk.

McCandless said he wasn't nervous about the historic spacewalk.

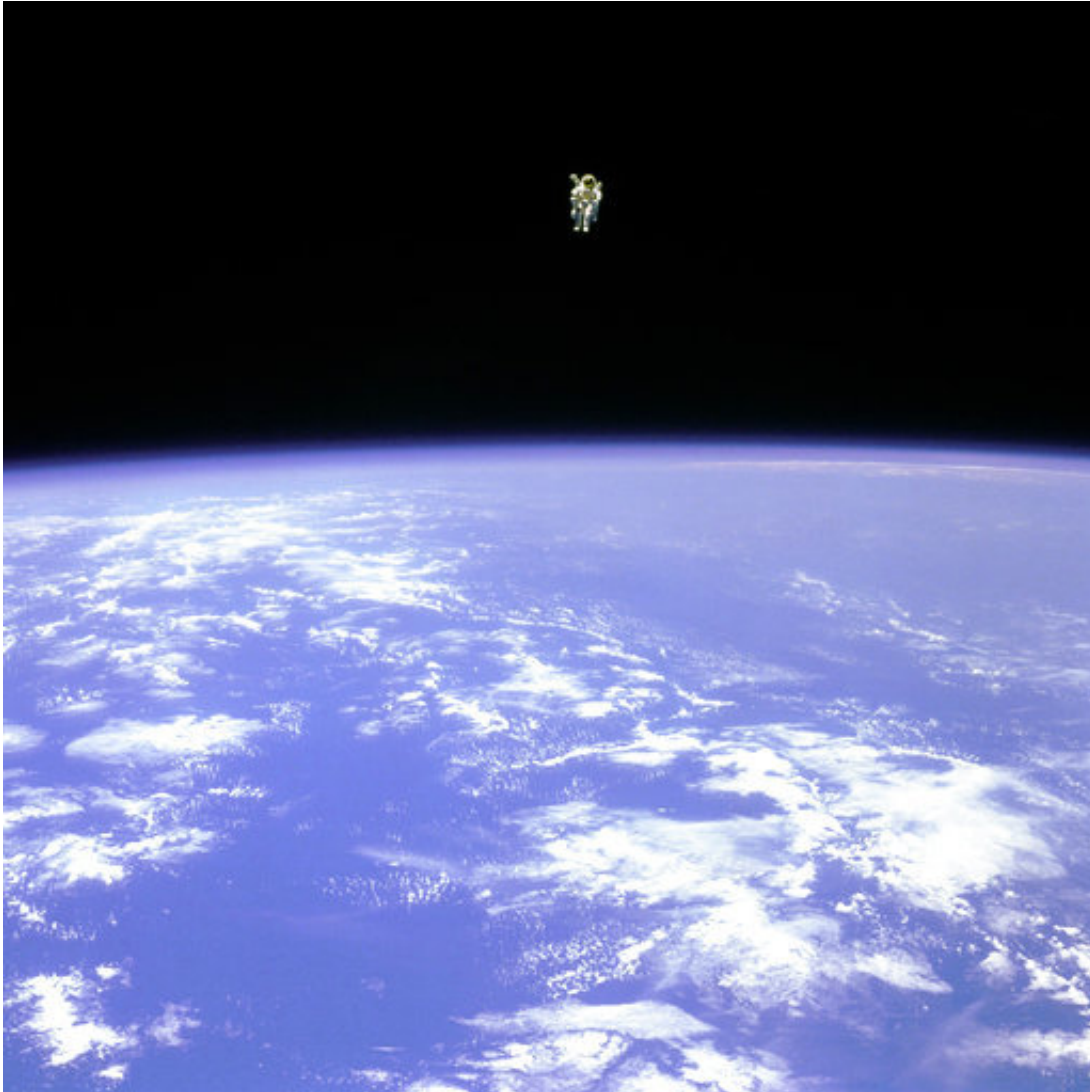
"I was grossly over-trained. I was just anxious to get out there and fly. I felt very comfortable ... It got so cold my teeth were chattering and I was shivering, but that was a very minor thing," he told the Daily Camera in Boulder, Colorado, in 2006.

McCandless helped develop the jetpack and was later part of the shuttle crew that delivered the Hubble Space Telescope to orbit.

McCandless also served as the Mission Control capsule communicator in Houston as Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walked on the moon in 1969.

Born in Boston, McCandless graduated from Woodrow Wilson Senior High School in Long Beach, California. He graduated from the Naval Academy, earned a master's degree in electrical engineering from

Stanford University and a master's degree in business administration from the University of Houston at Clear Lake in 1987.



In this Feb. 12, 1984 photo made available by NASA, astronaut Bruce McCandless uses a nitrogen jet-propelled backpack, a Manned Manuevering Unit, outside the space shuttle Challenger. The Johnson Space Center says McCandless died Thursday, Dec. 21, 2017 in California. (NASA via AP)

He was a naval aviator who participated in the Cuban blockade in the

1962 missile crisis. McCandless was selected for [astronaut training](#) during the Gemini program, and he was a backup pilot for the first manned Skylab mission in 1973.

Survivors include his wife, Ellen Shields McCandless of Conifer, Colorado, two children and two grandchildren.



This April 29, 1990 photo made available by NASA shows astronaut Bruce McCandless aboard the space shuttle Discovery. The Johnson Space Center says McCandless died Thursday, Dec. 21, 2017 in California. (NASA via AP)



This 1982 photo made available by NASA shows astronaut Bruce McCandless II, wearing a Shuttle Extravehicular Activity (EVA) Suit with Manned Maneuvering Unit (MMU) in Houston. The Johnson Space Center says McCandless died Thursday, Dec. 21, 2017 in California. (NASA via AP)

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