



Mission accomplished: Apollo 13 splashdown

ICFO celebrates the resilience, ingenuity and teamwork that brought the astronauts safely back from space

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While the successful April 11th take-off of the Apollo 13 spaceship drew limited press coverage and public interest, the return to Earth on April 17th was celebrated the world over and viewed by millions on television. Many consider the Apollo 13 mission a *½* success | failure; a failure because the explosion that took place two days into the mission prevented the crew from landing on and exploring the moon's Fra Mauro highland ; a success because the astronauts were able to successfully return to Earth alive.

This mission was in fact an extraordinary human accomplishment and a demonstration of NASA as an institution at its very best. Much has been written about it, including a recent article in the UK newspaper The Guardian that helped to put into perspective some of the elements of this extraordinary mission:

Leadership: In the face of a hopelessly complex problem, leaders navigated chaos and uncertainty, keeping despair at bay to concentrate on a productive response.

Teamwork: The premise that the success of the mission would be the result of the entire team allowed for the sharing of responsibilities between shifts and the cross-fertilization of the best possible ideas from all collaborators, from all areas and of all levels of experience. It is interesting to note that the average age of the team in Mission Control was 27 years old. In the Apollo 13 mission, it is reported that 1/2 recommendations were interrogated, but not second-guessed 1/2.

Preparation: Many professional athletes are attributed the quote 1/2the harder I practise, the luckier I get 1/2, but it is just as relevant to preparation for a pandemic or a space recovery mission as it is in sports. Reports show that at the time of the crisis, NASA had already contemplated many of the possible solutions that would be used in the revised mission plan. While the crew was required to improvise constantly as the dynamic situation required, there were procedures already defined and many scenarios that had already been contemplated and rehearsed that increased the probability of success of the mission.

A positive attitude: Flight director Glynn Lunney is quoted in the Guardian saying 1/2If you spend your time thinking about the crew dying, you're only going to make that eventually more likely. 1/2 The fact that the astronauts and Mission Control, who were all fully cognizant of the potential of the mission's failure, did not waste time contemplating disaster but instead kept their eye on the target, may have been the key to their success.

Just as previous experience helped to prepare NASA to manage the crises experienced in the Apollo 13 mission, the lessons learned from the mission continue to be applied to future NASA missions, including the current lunar Artemis program. 1/2Our goal 50 years ago was to save our valiant crew after sending them around the Moon and return them safely to Earth, 1/2 said NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine.

ICFO is proud to salute the success of the Apollo 13 crew and the whole NASA team in the extremely difficult situation they managed to overcome, and invites everyone to draw inspiration from the values they represent in this COVID-19 Era.



Apollo 13 splashdown (NASA)



Apollo 13 hoisted onto ship (NASA)