

Apollo 13

Blast-Off

On April 11th 1970, three astronauts climbed aboard the Apollo 13. They blasted off from the Kennedy Space Centre in Florida, USA. The crew was made up of Commander James Lovell and pilots Fred Haise and Jack Swigert. Lovell had already been to the moon and was the most experienced onboard.



The mission suffered bad luck from the beginning. One of the original pilots was replaced by Swigert just two days before blast-off. This was because he had been exposed to a virus. NASA

decided it was too big a risk for a virus to go into space, so Swigert had only a couple of days to be ready for the mission.



Odyssey and Aquarius

The Apollo 13 was made up of two different spacecraft, the Odyssey and the Aquarius. They were connected to each other by a tunnel. Odyssey was where the crew

lived. The Aquarius was designed

for landing on the moon. At first, the Apollo 13 mission went perfectly. Their mission was to explore the surface of the moon by taking photographs and getting samples of the moon's surface. The crew were also going to film videos in space for television.

An Explosion

On the evening of 13th April, disaster struck. An explosion rocked the spacecraft. Swigert reported the explosion to mission control in Houston. He exclaimed, "Houston, we've had a problem here."

An oxygen tank had exploded and caused serious damage. From the window, the astronauts could see oxygen escaping into the atmosphere.

The crew were stranded in space with a damaged spacecraft.

It would take a huge amount of teamwork and bravery to get the crew safely home.

The crew moved into the much smaller Aquarius. It became their lifeboat. The Odyssey was shut down to save as much power as possible for the journey home to Earth.



Difficult Conditions Onboard

Life in space was very difficult for the crew. All power was turned off, except for the radio to mission control. This made the space craft extremely cold and caused condensation.

Water and food were strictly rationed, as some food had become inedible due to the cold. The cramped conditions made it hard for the crew to sleep as they couldn't lie down. The crew were anxious but they felt supported by mission control. Mission control worked hard to rescue them. When the spacecraft had too much carbon dioxide, mission control helped. Over the radio, they helped the crew build a special filter using plastic bags, cardboard and a sock. Mission control also had to help the crew stay on the right path back to Earth. If their calculations were wrong, the Apollo 13 would never return home.

Returning Home

To return to Earth, the crew had to return to the Odyssey. They hoped there was enough power to get them home. As the crew detached the Odyssey and floated back down to Earth, they could see the damage from the explosion. They had been lucky to survive.

On 17th April, the Apollo 13 crew splashed into the Pacific Ocean, near Samoa. The US Navy was waiting for the crew to land, picking up the exhausted men from the spacecraft by helicopter. Millions of people followed the Apollo 13 journey and watched on television as they landed. The whole world celebrated the crew's safe return, feeling joyous the astronauts had returned home.

Apollo 13 is thought of as a 'successful failure' for NASA. Although the mission failed to reach the moon, the crew returned home safely, making it a huge success. Apollo 13 showed the world that, by working together, even when miles apart, any problem can be solved.

1. Where was the Apollo 13 launched from? Tick **one**.

- Kennedy Space Centre
- Houston Space Centre
- Washington Space Centre
- New York Space Centre

2. Which member of the Apollo 13 crew had already been to the moon? Tick **one**.

- Jack Swigert
- James Lovell
- Fred Haise

3. Why did NASA stop one of the original Apollo 13 pilots going into space?

4. Find and copy one word that means a serious accident.

5. What did Jack Swigert say at the time of the explosion?

6. How do you think the crew might have felt when they saw oxygen escaping into space from their window? Explain your answer.

7. Teamwork was very important between the Odyssey crew and mission control. Do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.

8. Millions of people watched the Apollo 13 splash land in the Pacific Ocean on television. Why do you think they were so interested in the Apollo 13 story? Explain your answer.

9. Describe **two** qualities you think the astronauts would have needed to help them through the scary situation onboard the Apollo 13.
