

APOLLO

**NATALIE
GOODSON**

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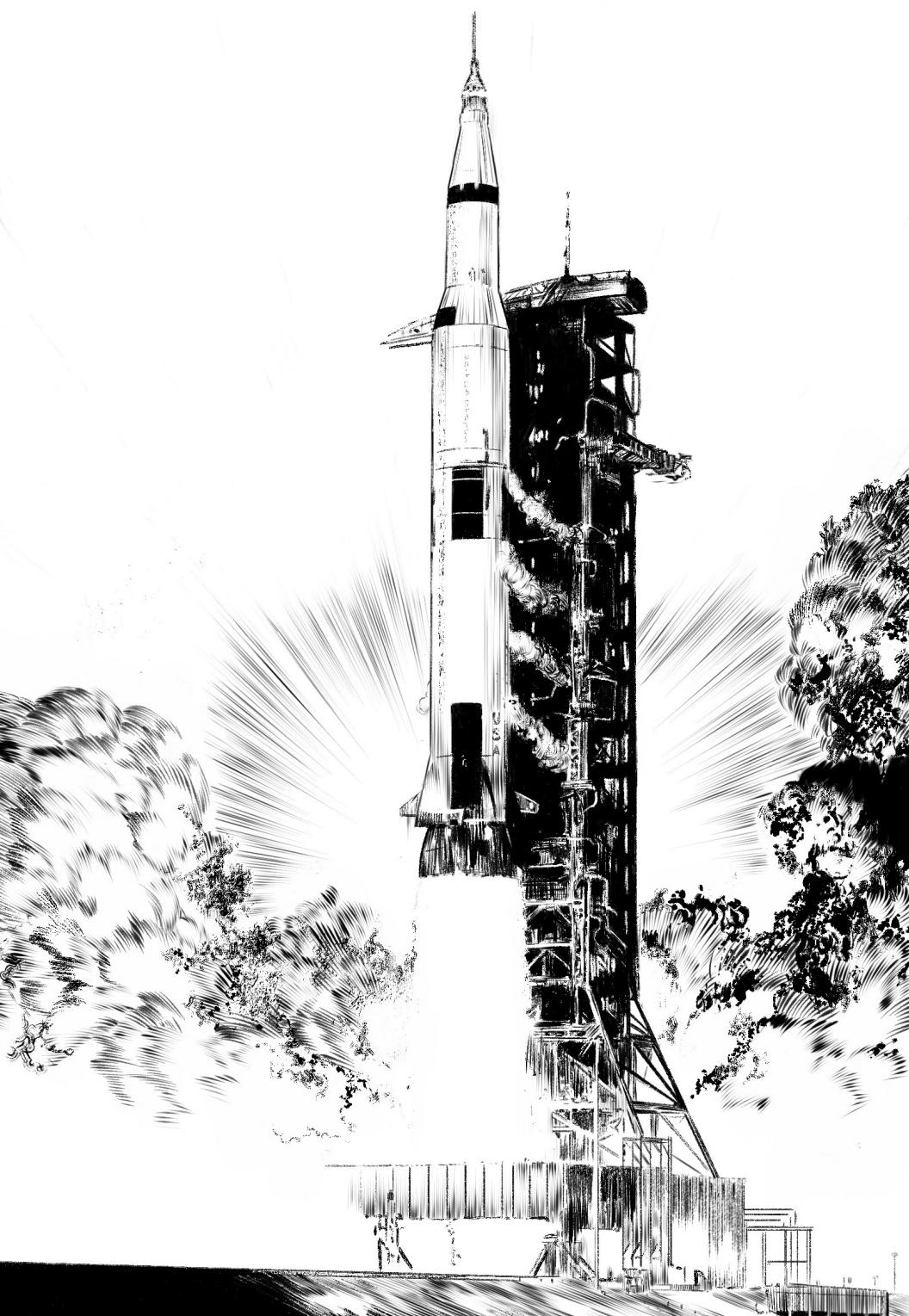


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01

INTRODUCTION

Space travel sounds glamorous, but the reality is uncomfortable and incredibly dangerous. The first manned space missions forced intrepid astronauts to spend days inside a cramped metal container, hurtling across space away from Earth. If anything went wrong, there was little anyone on the ground could do to assist the crew. Today, although newer spacecraft are slightly more comfortable than earlier versions, anyone who travels to space still accepts extremely high levels of risk and poor odds of survival should equipment fail or become damaged.

The history of American spaceflight is marked with tragic events in which astronauts lost their lives, but not long after the United States first began sending humans to space, the unbelievable occurred. A spaceship suffered a terrible accident, yet the three men inside survived and made it safely back to Earth. Their story needs no exaggeration; the facts are incredible. What makes this account even more compelling is what allowed them to prevail over a seemingly inevitable disaster. Their survival is a testament to ingenuity, perseverance, teamwork, and the bonds of trust between the three astronauts and with their ground support team. This is the story of Apollo 13, NASA's "successful failure."





BEFORE APOLLO 13

"We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win." These words were spoken by President John F. Kennedy on September 12, 1962, as he called on the American people to share his vision of beating the Soviet Union in a race to explore space. It was the height of the Cold War, and the two countries competed against each other in science and technology. President Kennedy wanted the United States to lead the world in space exploration, and he set a bold goal of the United States being the first nation to put a man on the moon. With Kennedy's focus and additional funding, NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) expanded the Apollo program. Only eight years after becoming president, Kennedy's dream would come true, although he didn't live to see it.

On July 20, 1969, the Apollo 11 space mission achieved Kennedy's goal of landing on the moon. Over a million people had gathered in Florida to watch the launch, including former president Lyndon B. Johnson and the current vice president, Spiro Agnew. Later, over six hundred



million people around the world watched on television as Neil Armstrong stepped onto the lunar surface. However, less than a year later, when Apollo 13 began its mission, public excitement had died down. What was once extraordinary had quickly become commonplace. Apollo 12 had successfully repeated a moon landing only four months after Apollo 11, and lunar expeditions had become routine.

Soon, however, the entire world would be watching the Apollo 13 mission. It made its astronauts famous in a way they would never have imagined, and their ordeal would prove that lunar missions are anything but routine.



President John F. Kennedy

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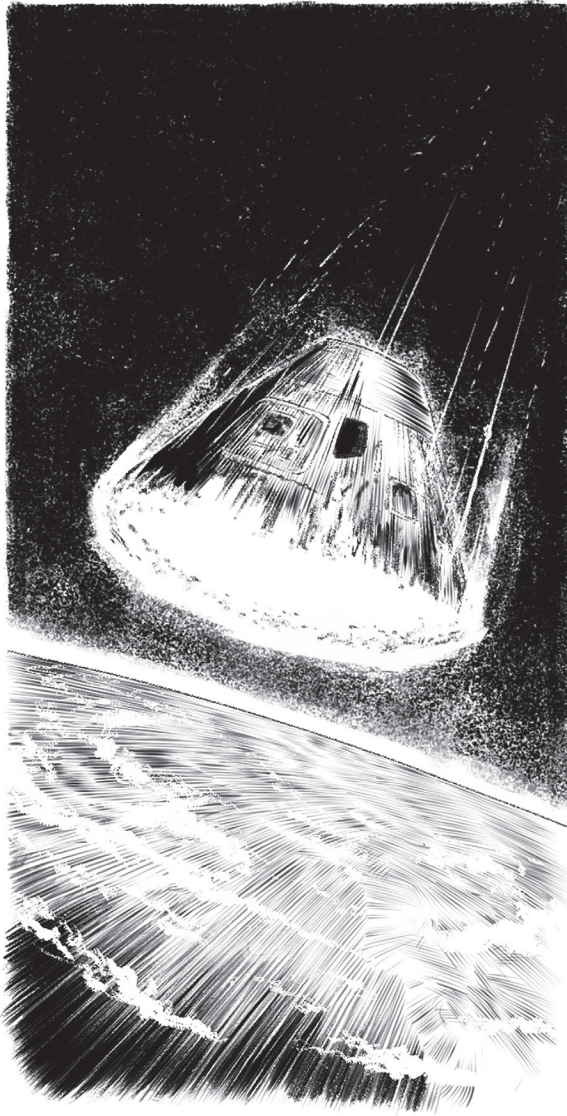
SHEDDING THE
SERVICE MODULE

Four hours before their scheduled landing, the crew disengaged the damaged service module. They had not done so before because having it attached helped protect the vital heat shield on the command module. Because the command module enters Earth's atmosphere with the base of the cone-shaped vessel experiencing the most heat, this base was attached to the service module in flight so that the shield would not be exposed to the harsh conditions of space any longer than necessary.

When the service module drifted away from them, the astronauts could finally see the damage caused by the explosion. Commander Lovell remarked in amazement, "There's one whole side of that spacecraft missing." An entire panel was gone, and broken pieces were hanging out of the service module. Fred Haise Jr. echoed Lovell's surprise: "It's really a mess. . . . Man, that's unbelievable!"

Seeing the extent of the damage made them realize how close to death they had come and how miraculous it was that they had been able to recover from the explosion and head home. It also raised a new worry that the explosion might have damaged the precious heat shield on the command module. If it had, there was nothing they could do about it.

Neither the astronauts nor the ground crew could let anxiety distract them from the job they still had to do. Flight Director Kranz's philosophy was universal: "In our line of business, you only worry about those things that you can do something about."



APOLLO 13

After an explosion rocked the Apollo 13 spacecraft, astronaut Jim Lovell and his flight crew faced a life-or-death situation as their vessel began to lose power and leak precious oxygen into outer space. Rather than giving in to fear or dismay, the crew needed to find a way to survive and return safely to Earth. One of the most heroic tales of all time, this incredible true story demonstrates the undeniable power of hope, teamwork, discipline, and perseverance.




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