Poison Pills and Apollo 13

On the 12th of April, 1970 - one day after the launch of Apollo 13 - the astronauts were faced with a major malfunction onboard their spacecraft. Later, people wondered: Did the crew ever contemplate taking "poison pills?"

Jim Lovell always laughed at the stories about "poison pills." Who, he wondered, would actually take a poison pill if something went wrong during a space mission?

As he wrote in his book, *Apollo 13*:

> *Poison pills! Forget about it! There just weren't any situations in which you'd ever really consider making, well, an early exit. And even if there were, you had lots of easier ways to do it than poison pills.*
>
> *The command module did have a crank for the cabin vent, after all. One turn of the handle and the 5 pounds per square inch of cozy capsule pressure would instantly be exposed to zero pounds per square inch of nasty space pressure.*
>
> *As the atmosphere inside rushed out and the vacuum outside rushed in, whatever air was left in your lungs would explode out in an angry rush, your blood would instantly - and literally - boil, your brain and body tissues would scream for oxygen, and your traumatized system would simply shut up shop.*
>
> *The whole thing would be over in just a few seconds. It was no slower, really, than some ridiculous poison pill ...* (*Apollo 13*, by Jim Lovell and Jeffrey Kluger, page 1.)

Lovell should know. During the flight of Apollo 13 (the link takes you to rare NASA photos of the mission and its aftermath), he and his crew members endured a life-threatening situation where the outcome could easily have been death.

This video presents highlights from NASA's film - "Houston, We've Got a Problem" - and includes the moment when a rupture, in oxygen tank number two, occurred nearly 200,000 miles from Earth.

Also featured are trouble-shooting efforts, by the flight and ground crews, to address the malfunction - and - admonishments to keep calm, and think clearly, to avoid a fatal mission.

Real-time NASA communications, and historical footage, are included in this video - as are news-media clips which kept the world informed about the astronauts' situation.

The successful outcome of this very-dangerous situation is a credit to the impact of collaboration among people all working toward the single goal of solving the problem and returning the astronauts safely to Earth.

See, also:

Apollo 13 - Launch Sequence

Apollo 13: Houston, We've Got A Problem, Part 2

Credits:

Quoted passage, from Jim Lovel and Jeffrey Kluger (1994) - *Apollo 13* (previously published [1994] as *Lost Moon*), page 1. Online, courtesy Google Books.

Highlights from NASA Film HQ-200 - "Houston, We've Got a Problem."

Producer

Don Wiseman

Production Company

A-V Corporatoin, Houston, TX for NASA

Sponsor

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http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Poison-Pills-and-Apollo-13

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