

have in maneuvering on the surface or the time it will take him to accomplish assigned tasks.⁴⁶

Mueller went on to reassure the AEC Chairman:

The decision not to carry ALSEP on the first mission is due to the time necessary for deployment and not to any concern of operating with the RTG. You have the strongest advance assurance I can give that ALSEP will be carried on the second mission. I also foresee significant RTG use in the future as lunar exploration progresses.⁴⁷

The RTG people and the General Electric SNAP-27 people watched the mid-summer Apollo 11 historical events and Neil Armstrong's "giant leap for mankind," like most Americans, as fascinated TV viewers. By November 1969 some of these people were far more than ordinary spectators as the Apollo 12 mission unfolded. Pitrolo was at Cape Kennedy on November 14 for the launch. It was a rainy day with extremely low clouds that caused the launch vehicle to disappear from view soon after liftoff. Then a half minute into launch a power failure was reported as a lightning bolt struck the spacecraft and opened the main circuit breakers. Pitrolo thought: "My God, we're going to have an abort." But the craft soared into the sunlight as Pete Conrad reported: "We had everything in the world drop out." To which Mission Control replied: "We've had a couple of cardiac arrests down here too."⁴⁸

When the mission reached the lunar surface, Pitrolo was at Mission Control in Houston as astronaut Alan Bean deployed the ALSEP and prepared to activate the RTG. By then America's second pair of Moon walkers had developed a TV audience fascinated by their light-hearted demeanor and "bunny hopping" across the lunar surface. But as the moment of truth of the RTGs approached, the TV transmission went out. Transcripts of the lunar surface dialogue recorded the problem encountered by Bean as he tried to remove the plutonium-238 fuel capsule from its graphite cask in the Lunar Module so that the SNAP-27 could be activated:

Conrad: "It really gets you mad, Houston, ...Al put the tool on, screwed it all the way down and the fuel element would not come out of the kit. He's taking the tool off and working it again."

Bean: "I tell you what worries me, Pete. If I pull on it too hard, it's a