

in the pre-launch safety review accounting for this type of abort. The detached Lunar Module broke up on re-entry, as anticipated, while the graphite-encased plutonium-238 fuel cask survived the breakup and went down intact in the 20,000 foot deep Tonga Trench, as had been projected for an aborted mission in a 'lifeboat mode' situation.<sup>52</sup>

There was no noticeable public concern about a radiation hazard when the nuclear power devices returned to Earth. Carpenter went on national TV with CBS in Houston to reassure the public that there was no danger and that the heat source would not burn up on re-entry and would fall harmlessly into the deep Pacific. Interest in the problem proved limited to "reporters thinking up news" and asking "What about this nuclear thing?" Dix recalled only two inquiries from the public, one was from a dentist in California and the other came from a law school in Australia. Pitolo doubted "that the rank-and-file public was very aware of the nuclear thing on those Apollo missions—and on that one that was aborted. Of course, *we* were very alert and very much aware."<sup>53</sup>

The AEC continued to pay attention to the Apollo 13 abort. A press release by the AEC on 28 April 1970 in response to press inquiries on SNAP-27 re-entry reassured:

Air sampling over the predicted impact area of the SNAP-27 fuel cask freed from the Apollo 13 lunar module showed no traces of radiation above that already present in the atmosphere. The absence of additional radiation indicates that the cask containing the plutonium fuel survived as designed the heat of re-entry, impacted in the South Pacific intact and sank to the ocean bottom.<sup>54</sup>

The nation was showing signs of flagging interest in the race that had now been won. Even before the Apollo 13 launch an assessment in the trade press held that the:

World tour by the Apollo 12 crew is being looked upon as a public relations flop by some National Aeronautics and Space Administration officials, who are arguing against a similar trip by the astronauts of the forthcoming Apollo 13 mission. Crowds at parades and receptions for the three Apollo 12 crew members have been noticeably smaller and less enthusiastic than those during the tour of the Apollo 11 crew....