Three hours after their weather-delayed but near perfect lift-off from Cape Kennedy in Florida on January 31, Apollo-14 astronauts Alan Shepard, Ed Mitchell and Stuart Roosa were scheduled to turn their Kitty Hawk spacecraft around and dock it with the Antares lunar lander. At the time, they were some 8,000 kilometers out on their way to the Moon. The first docking attempt failed when locking latches on the probe malfunctioned. Four more tries were made as engineers on the ground studied the problem with duplicate equipment. On the sixth attempt, nearly two hours behind schedule, the spacemen backed off to give an extra hard shove with their steering rockets and the linkup succeeded. Later examinations inside the spacecraft and via television monitors back on Earth indicated there were no flaws in the docking mechanism. One assumption was that a "foreign body" had interferred with the normally routine docking procedure. The decision was made to continue the mission.

PROBLEM DIAGNOSIS -- Astronauts Eugene Cernan (left), back-up commander of the Apollo-14 mission, and John Young (right) join an engineer at the Manned Spacecraft Center in Texas as they examine a duplicate of the docking mechanism that caused trouble for the Apollo-14 spacemen. (71-845)