"The Eagle Has Landed"

The Eagle sped toward the surface of the moon at more than 3,000 miles (4,800 kilometers) per hour. Armstrong and Aldrin stood side by side, tethered to the floor by elastic cords. While Armstrong looked out the window and piloted the lunar module, Aldrin kept his eyes on the computer and other onboard instruments. Suddenly, at 3,000 feet (923 meters), warning lights flashed on the control panel, and high-pitched alarms rang in their headsets. But Mission Control quickly informed the astronauts that their computer had become overloaded, trying to process too much data too fast. Nothing was wrong with the lunar module, and it was safe to continue with the landing.

Aldrin kept reading out the data: "Seven hundred feet [210 meters]," he said, giving their altitude above the surface. "Down at twenty-one," he added, meaning they were descending at twenty-one feet (six meters) per second. "Six hundred feet [180 meters], down at nineteen [five meters]."

Armstrong could see the landing site their navigation system was steering them toward, and he didn't like what he saw. A crater the size of a football field was directly in their path, and it was surrounded by boulders, some of them as big as cars. The Eagle could be ripped apart if he put it down there. Armstrong took over manual control of the lunar module, slowed down the rate of descent, and skimmed over the crater. As the moon's battered surface loomed closer and closer, Armstrong searched urgently for a better landing spot. Aldrin continued in a steady voice: "One hundred feet [thirty meters], three-and-a-half [one meter] down. Five percent fuel remaining. Quantity light." "Light" meant that they had only sixty seconds of fuel left.

Out of time, Armstrong finally spotted a flat area and set the Eagle down in billowing gusts of moon dust. Armstrong and Aldrin grinned at each other through their bubble helmets, then reached out and shook hands.

Photograph courtesy of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).