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THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON

[redacted]

August 18, 1960

Dear Mr. President:

A summary of progress on the Military Space Projects during March, April, and May 1960 is attached.

During the subsequent period to date, the following events of interest have occurred.

DISCOVERER XIII was launched from Vandenberg Air Force Base and successfully placed into orbit on 10 August 1960. On 11 August, a highly-instrumented data capsule was ejected from the satellite on its 17th orbital pass and was retrieved from the water in the Pacific Ocean recovery area by a helicopter from an on-station recovery ship. Tracking stations reported continuous bearings on the capsule during its half-hour descent and aircraft reported visual sighting of the capsule in the water. Cloud cover apparently prevented airborne recovery. This is our first successful recovery of a data capsule from an orbiting satellite.

DISCOVERER XII was launched from Vandenberg Air Force Base on 29 June. The powered flight trajectories of the THOR booster and AGENA second-stage vehicles were normal. A malfunction, however, apparently occurred in the horizon scanner which resulted in a pitch down attitude and caused the satellite vehicle to re-enter the atmosphere.

The SAMOS [redacted] Projects are, in general, on schedule and are progressing satisfactorily.

[redacted]

With great respect, I am

Faithfully yours,

Thomas Gates

Attachment

The President

The White House

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NOTICE OF REMOVED PAGES

Pages 2 through 3 of summary are not provided because their full text does not contain CORONA, ARGON, LANYARD programmatic information.

SUMMARY

DISCOVERER PROJECT (Research and Development Satellites)

DISCOVERER XI was launched from Vandenberg Air Force Base on 15 April. The powered flight trajectory of the THOR-AGENA launching vehicle and orbital injection were excellent. All program objectives were attained with the exception of capsule recovery. Successful recovery was prevented by capsule ejection on a higher than nominal re-entry trajectory. Intensive testing of recovery system components has been initiated to provide maximum probability of successful recovery on future flights.

All AGENA "A" vehicles and the first AGENA "B" vehicle were delivered during March.

The construction contract for the Vandenberg Air Force Base propellant storage and disposal facility was awarded in April with completion scheduled for September. The conversion of launch pad 5 at Vandenberg Air Force Base to AGENA "B" capability has been started.

SAMOS PROJECT (Reconnaissance Satellites)

Systems checks of the second-stage AGENA vehicle for the first SAMOS flight in September are nearing completion with delivery to Santa Cruz Test Base scheduled for June. The vehicle will be the first of three to carry a dual visual-ferret payload.

Subsystem testing of the first visual (photographic) payload has been completed successfully and payload AGENA capability established. The optical glass for two of the 66-inch, f/5 lenses for the visual recovery system (E-5) payload has been delivered from West Germany.

Subsystem tests of the first two ferret reconnaissance system payloads were completed in March. The first electromagnetic ferret payload was aligned with the visual component test payload and the dual package was installed in the AGENA vehicle. Systems testing of the complete installation was started in March.

The missile assembly building at Vandenberg Air Force Base was completed during March 1960. Construction was started on the technical support and laboratory buildings.

At Point Arguello, launch pad 1 was completed in March and launch pad 2 was completed in May. The construction contract for the launch technical support buildings was awarded in April.