Noted by Mr. Gray

[redacted]

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON

OCT 24 1960

Dear Mr. President:

A summary of progress on the Military Space Projects during June, July, and August 1960 is attached.

A brief review of some events of interest that have occurred subsequently is included in this letter.

DISCOVERER XV was launched from Vandenberg Air Force Base and successfully placed into orbit on 13 September 1960. On the 17th pass, the capsule was separated but, because of an abnormally fast consumption of control gas, the capsule landed in the water some 900 miles south of the intended impact point. Recovery was prevented by a storm. Launch of DISCOVERER XVI is planned during the last week in October 1960.

The launch of the first SAMOS reconnaissance vehicle on 11 October 1960 was unsuccessful as orbit was not achieved. ATLAS booster performance was normal, but, as a result of loss of control gas pressure during launch, the second-stage AGENA vehicle performed abnormally. The next launch of a SAMOS vehicle is scheduled during November 1960.

[redacted]

With great respect, I am

Faithfully yours,

Signed
THOMAS S. GATES

Attachment

The President

The White House

SECRET

SEC DEF CONT NO. [redacted]

SUMMARY

June, July, August 1960

DISCOVERER PROJECT (Research and Development Satellites)

DISCOVERER XIII and XIV were launched into polar orbits on the 10th and 18th of August, respectively. After orbiting the earth for over 26 hours both capsules were recovered. DISCOVERER XIII was recovered from the sea and DISCOVERER XIV was snatched from the air by an Air Force C-119. These events marked the first time in history man-made objects which had been in orbit around the earth were returned and recovered.

Extensive recovery system component system drop tests were conducted at Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico. The capsules containing diagnostic payloads were carried by balloons to 100,000 feet altitude and released. They then went through a normal ejection sequence while the payload transmitted valuable data to the ground station. A full-scale mockup of a biomedical capsule designed to maintain a chimpanzee in orbit for two days was completed in June.

Van type telemetry readout and recording equipment has been installed on Christmas Island to monitor all orbital passes within range of the station and record all telemetry data during re-entry.

SAMOS PROJECT (Reconnaissance Satellites)

The AGENA "A" vehicle for the first SAMOS flight completed system tests at Vandenberg Air Force Base on 17 August. The ATLAS booster flight readiness firing was successfully completed on 23 August. The launch of this vehicle is scheduled for 11 October. The two remaining AGENA "A" vehicles are in the modification and checkout phases in the systems test area. The preseating of major components for the first AGENA "B" vehicle was completed on 23 August. Delivery of the XLR-81Ba-9 engine was made in mid-August.

Checkout and testing of the visual (photographic) and ferret (electromagnetic) first flight payloads is proceeding on schedule at Vandenberg Air Force Base. Final assembly of the visual (photographic) with steerable reconnaissance payload for the fourth SAMOS flight was completed during August. A thermal model of the visual (photographic) high resolution, steerable, recoverable (E-5) payload was completed during August, with delivery programmed for early September. A mid-February 1961 date has been established for delivery of the first E-5 flight payload.

Installation of the visual reconnaissance system operating console, the second set of visual reconnaissance ground construction electronics equipment and two primary record cameras in the Vandenberg Air Force Base data acquisition and processing building was completed in July. Installation of the UHF (ultra high frequency) equipment and the Model 1604 computer at this station was also completed.

Construction of all launch facilities for the first SAMOS flight is complete, and support equipment checkout is proceeding at a rate compatible with the 11 October scheduled launch date.

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